



**INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS AND
SCHOLARS**
Office of International Affairs

International Student Handbook

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**INTERNATIONAL STUDENT & SCHOLAR SERVICES
OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS STAFF**

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OUR MISSION

The Office of International Students and Scholars (ISS) within the Office of International Affairs is here to support and advocate for UC Merced-sponsored international students, researchers, professors and other visiting scholars. We provide resources of information and assistance with University-sponsored visas and immigration regulations for campus administrators and faculty members, ISS is also UC Merced's primary liaison with the government agencies that interface with international students and scholars.

ISS strives to contribute to a successful experience for every international student and scholar at UC Merced, and to promote international education for its valuable contributions to the campus and global communities. By assisting with the integration of international students and scholars into the UC Merced community, ISS is proud to help facilitate the global exchange of knowledge and enhanced cultural understanding.

LOCATION AND CONTACT

Office of International Affairs (OIA) is located in Kolligian Library, room 101. We can be contacted by phone or email (iss@ucmerced.edu). Come in to see us, call our front desk at 1-209-228-4722 or email to ask general questions. If you need extensive assistance you may be referred to an international student advisor for a “walk-in” meeting or you may need to schedule an appointment to ensure your advising needs are met.

GENERAL OFFICE HOURS

OIA is open year-round, with reduced hours during summer and is closed for official university holidays and breaks. General office hours are Monday through Thursday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Friday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

OIA staff have a hybrid schedule of three (3) days on-campus and two (2) days remote. It is best to make an appointment if you need to see an International Student Advisor to ensure the advisor is available, especially if the meeting will **need** longer than 10-15 minutes. Appointments may be scheduled for in-person or virtually (Zoom). In-person visitors will be seen on a first-come, first-serve basis if an advisor is available.

OUR SERVICES

- Information and advice for international students, scholars, their dependents and university personnel on compliance with United States immigration laws and regulations
- Counseling, assistance and documentation for visa applications and changes in visa status, including non-immigrant and immigrant petitions
- Advice and authorization for employment and travel
- Verification, tracking and submission of visa status notifications through the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS)
- Referral to other offices and services within UC Merced and the Merced community
- Representation of the University to federal and state governmental agencies concerned with international visitors to the United States
- Orientation sessions for new international students and scholars
- Visa workshops and training sessions
- Support and information to help the international population adjust to life in the United States

Note: It is increasingly important that international students and scholars seek guidance and advice from ISS. Do not rely on friends, colleagues, the internet, or anyone who does not have immigration regulation expertise, to give you accurate or up-to-date information that may affect your ability to remain in the US and future immigration benefits.

ADVISING SERVICES

The International Student Advisor is equipped to help provide information for foreign nationals about the following: Academic, immigration, legal, career, financial, personal, and family matters. We also help with cross-cultural adjustment and professional integration upon returning home. One of our goals is to enhance the awareness and understanding of cross-cultural and international issues.

Contact Information for International Student Advisor:

Lacey Long-Vejar
 International Student Visa Specialist
 Phone: (+1) 209-259-8913
 E-mail: llongvejar@ucmerced.edu
 UC Merced Office of International Affairs
 Kolligian Library, Room 101

IMPORTANT IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS

- **I-94 Arrival/Departure Record:** If you arrive by airplane to the US, Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) record your arrival electronically at the US port of entry. You must retrieve your I-94 arrival record on the CBP webpage after each arrival to the US: <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home>

Electronic I-94

The screenshot shows the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) website interface for retrieving an I-94 record. The header includes the CBP logo and the text "U.S. Customs and Border Protection Securing America's Borders". Below the header, there is a search bar with "I-94 FAQ" selected. The main content area displays the following information:

Admission (I-94) Number Retrieval

Admission (I-94) Record Number: 69000888062

Admit Until Date (MM/DD/YYYY): 10/10/2012

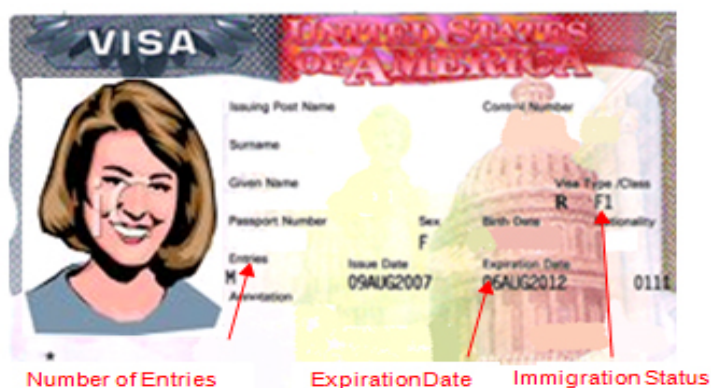
Details provided on Admission(I-94) form:

Family Name:	LI
First (Given) Name:	LYDIA
Birth Date (MM/DD/YYYY):	01/01/1990
Passport Number:	P123123213
Passport Country of issuance:	Mexico
Date of Entry (MM/DD/YYYY):	04/11/2012
Class of Admission:	B1

At the bottom of the form, a blue banner states: "Individuals can visit www.cbp.gov/I94 to retrieve a copy of their electronic Form I-94."

- **Visa & Visa Status:** It is very important to understand the difference between visa and visa status.
 - **Visa** is a sticker or stamp placed in your passport by a visa official at a US Consulate. An F-1 or J-1 visa stamp can only be obtained outside of the US at a US embassy or consulate. Your visa stamp allows you entry into the United States and shows information about the number of times you are allowed entry. If your visa stamp only allows one (1) entry, you must apply for a new visa once you travel outside of the US. Note: The "Expiration Date" on your visa indicates the last date you are allowed entry into the US using that entry visa stamp, but it does not limit the duration of your stay in the United States. Your visa stamp can expire while you remain in valid F or J status in the US.

- **Visa status** is granted by immigration at the port of entry to the United States. Visa status is documented on your I-94, your passport along with your form I-20 or form DS-2019. To maintain your legal status in the US, refer to your program end date on your form I-20 or form DS-2019, retain the I-94 and a valid passport. More information on maintaining status is discussed below.



- **Passport:** The U.S. government requires international students to keep their passports valid for at least six (6) months into the future. If your passport expiration date is getting close, be sure to renew it at least six (6) months before it expires. If you are working on campus, the university Payroll Office may not be able to issue your paycheck if your passport is expired. Only your government may extend your passport, so you may want to contact your country's embassy or consulate in the US to get information about renewing or extending passports. To find phone numbers and addresses for foreign embassies in the US, go to <https://www.embassy.org/>.
- **Form I-20 (F-1 Visa Students):** The form I-20 proves that you are legally enrolled in a program of study in the US. It contains your personal information, the sponsoring school's information, academic program information including the length of your degree program and financial information. Be sure to speak to your international student advisor if your form I-20 is going to expire and you are not able to complete your degree program before the expiration date. Once your form I-20 expires, your 60-day grace period begins, and no changes can be made to this expiration date.
- **Form DS-2019 (J-1 Visa Students):** The form DS-2019 proves that you are legally enrolled in a program of study in the US. It contains your personal information, the sponsoring school's information, academic program information including the length of your program and financial information. For degree seeking students, be sure to speak to your international student advisor if your form DS-2019 is going to expire and you are not able to complete your program before the expiration date or you intend on participating in Academic Training. Once your form DS-2019 expires, your 30-day grace period begins, and no changes can be made to this expiration date.
- **SEVIS I-901 Fee Receipt:** Congress mandated all international students and exchange visitors must pay the SEVIS I-901 (SEVIS Fee). This fee supports the SEVIS program office and the automated system that tracks and records changes of students and exchange visitors. All students or exchange visitors who are issued an initial form I-20 or DS-2019 are responsible for paying the SEVIS Fee. It is very

important for you to keep this receipt and that the payment is attached to your current UC Merced SEVIS ID number. The SEVIS I-901 fee can be paid at <https://www.fmjfee.com/i901fee/index.html#>

KEEP YOUR DOCUMENTS AND INFORMATION SAFE!

- Make a copy of ALL documents
- Store the original and the set of copies in two separate and safe locations
- Carry a wallet-sized copy of your I-94 with you
- Take your original documents with you when traveling outside of the country and even when traveling inside of the United States
- Never carry your Social Security card with you

An F-1 or J-1 nonimmigrant classification is given to students who come to the US, commonly referred to as your “status”. If a dependent comes to the US to be with an F-1 or J-1 student (example: a spouse or an unmarried child under 21 years of age), he or she is given F-2 or J-2 status. F-2 and J-2 statuses are valid as long as the F-1/J-1 student maintains valid status.

MAINTAINING YOUR VISA STATUS

The International Student & Scholar’s office (ISS) helps international students and scholars maintain their nonimmigrant visa status. There are documents required for maintaining F1, J-1, and H-1B nonimmigrant visas that include, but are not limited to, the topics of: travel, dependent travel, changes of degree program, transfer of schools, extension of stay, employment options, and in some cases, for entry into the United States. The international student or scholar advisor will either prepare these documents for you, or assist you in preparing them for yourself.

- **Maintaining status:** Staying in legal visa status is critical to remaining in the United States. If you violate your visa status (lose your status), you risk losing your current immigration benefits and possibly future immigration benefits. If you violate your visa status, you will be required to depart the US or apply for reinstatement from within the US by filing an I-539 application with USCIS. If denied reinstatement, you could receive orders for immediate departure from the United States.
- **When you arrive:** All new international students on an F-1 or J-1 student visa sponsored by UC Merced, must attend the mandatory New International Student Orientation. If you miss this mandatory orientation you must make an appointment with an international student advisor shortly after arriving on campus. Bring your passport and visa, your Form I-20 or Form DS-2019, and I-94 along with your current address in the United States.
- **Full-time enrollment:** Undergraduate and graduate students must enroll in a full-time course load every semester to maintain their visa status. For undergraduate students and graduate students, full-time is 12 units. For graduate students, research related to the academic degree program may also contribute to your full-time status with approval from your Graduate Group faculty members. Students **must** immediately notify the International Students and Scholars Services when considering dropping below full-time enrollment as unauthorized part-time enrollment will violate F-1 and J-1 status.
- **Valid I-20/DS-2019:** Make sure your form I-20 (F-1) or form DS-2019 (J-1) remains valid. Check the “program end date” or “completion date” on the I-20 or DS-2019. If you will not complete your program by the date mentioned on this form, you must speak with ISS and apply for an extension. This must be done no less than 30 days before it expires.
- **Valid passport:** Keep your passport valid at least six (6) months into the future.
- **Work authorization:** Get the appropriate authorization for employment on-campus and do not work for more than 20 hours per week while school is in session. If students want to work off-campus or

participate in an internship, they should make an appointment with the International Student Advisor to receive information about off-campus work authorization options. Do not engage in off-campus employment without prior authorization from the International Students and Scholars office.

- **Tell us when you move:** Update your address in your student portal within ten (10) days whenever you move so your Student & Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) record can be updated as required by law. Also notify your International Student Advisor by email.
- **Report these changes:** Make sure the information on your I-20/DS-2019 form is accurate. If you change your major or degree level, change your name, change your funding sources, or need to shorten or extend your program, you need to inform ISS and get a new form I-20 or form DS-2019.

WHEN DO YOU NEED TO REQUEST A NEW I-20 or DS-2019?

- When you have a change of degree level (e.g. F-1 students changing from a bachelor's to master's or doctorate degree program)
- When your completion date changes, either by early completion or an extension
- When your major (F-1) or field of study (J-1) changes
- When you have a significant change in your financial sponsorship
- When you change your name
- When you are applying for Practical or Academic Training

SEVIS: STUDENT AND EXCHANGE VISITOR INFORMATION SYSTEM

SEVIS is an electronic reporting system that sends information about international students and scholars who hold F, J, and M visa status in the United States to the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS). SEVIS also tracks entries to and departures from the United States. Every change you make in your academic program must be reported to SEVIS daily. Academic status, employment, and residential and mailing address is also reported and updated. All information on your I-20 or DS-2019 must remain accurate and up-to-date. If there are any changes on these forms (if your name has changed or the source and/or amount of your financial support is different, etc.) you must contact your International Student Advisor to produce an updated I-20 or DS-2019 document.

SEVIS REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

The following data must be reported to the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). You must notify the International Student Advisor of any new information and changes.

- Change of student address: New address must be reported to SEVIS within 10 days of move. You may report a change of address through the UC Merced Connect student portal.
- Change of degree level (F-1 students, example: bachelor's to master's to PhD).
- Change of major (F-1) or field of study (J-1).
- Falling below full-time student status. (NOTE: You **MUST** contact your International Student Advisor **BEFORE** dropping below full-time)
- Completion of program/graduation before the program end date listed on your form I-20 or form DS-2019.
- Extension to your program beyond the end date listed on your form I-20 or form DS-2019.

REQUIREMENTS FOR TRAVEL OUTSIDE OF THE US

- You must have a valid travel signature on your form I-20 or DS-2019 prior to traveling outside of the US. Visit the Office of International Affairs if you need a new travel signature at least two (2) weeks before you leave. During your degree program, the signature is valid for 12 months. F-1 visa students on approved Optional Practical Training require a travel signature every six (6) months.
- Verify that the information on your form I-20 or form DS-2019 is accurate.
- Required documents: Passport (valid at least six months after the date of your return to the US), F-1 or J-1 visa, and, if applicable, your Employment Authorization Document (EAD), and I-94.
- Recommended documents: Proof of current semester's registration at UC Merced and proof of your financial support.
- Check your US entry visa to make sure it will be valid the day you return to the United States. If you need to apply for a new visa, review the documents you will need to prepare at <https://iss.ucmerced.edu/visarenewal>. There is always risk involved when applying for a visa: There is no guarantee that your application will be approved. Due to increased Administrative Processing (AP), be sure to plan in advance for delays and lengthy AP processing times.

EMPLOYMENT IN THE UNITED STATES FOR F-1 AND J-1 STUDENTS

- **On-campus employment:** Limit your work hours to 20 hours per week during the semester. Full-time employment (anything more than 20 hours per week) is permitted during semester breaks. Be sure to provide APO/HR/Payroll with a copy of your actual Social Security card and any updated form I-20 or form DS-2019.
- **Off-campus employment:** All off-campus employment requires work authorization and must be arranged through the International Students and Scholars Office. Off-campus employment for J-1 students is classified as Academic Training and F-1 student off-campus employment can be classified as Curricular Practical Training, Optional Practical Training, Employment due to Severe Economic Hardship or Employment Under the Sponsorship of a Recognized International Organization. Regulations and guidelines differ based on the classification of employment. Do not engage in off-campus employment without prior authorization from the International Students and Scholars office.
- **F-1 Student Practical Training:** F-1 students studying at the college and university level can seek authorization for practical training to engage in temporary employment to gain practical experience in their field of study. Practical Training workshops are offered throughout each semester.

There are two types of practical training:

1. Curricular Practical Training (**CPT**) is done prior to the completion of your program. You must either receive course credit for a CPT internship/job, your degree program must require it, or it must be a co-op program. If you are authorized for full-time CPT for 12 months you lose future Optional Practical Training eligibility. Submit CPT requests at least two (2) weeks before requested CPT start date.
2. Optional Practical Training (**OPT**) can be used either before or after you graduate, generally for a cumulative maximum total of 12 months per degree level, if the subsequent degree is at a higher level. There are three categories of OPT: Pre-completion OPT, post-completion OPT, and STEM extension OPT for students with specific majors in the sciences, technology, engineering or math

fields. Contact ISS to determine if your major is eligible for the 24-month OPT extension available to students with STEM majors.

ISS must recommend OPT in your SEVIS record before you can submit the OPT application to the Department of Homeland Security (US Citizenship and Immigration Services) to obtain an Employment Authorization Document (EAD card). The adjudication of the OPT I-765 application can take 2-14 weeks on average; it is important to start the application several weeks or months before your requested OPT start date.

- **J-1 Academic Training:** J-1 students studying at the college and university level can seek authorization for training to engage in temporary employment. This employment is to gain practical experience in the student's field of study. The regulations state that a student may be authorized to participate in academic training "commencing not later than thirty (30) days after completion of his or her studies." The academic training must be directly related to his or her major field of study at the post-secondary accredited academic institution listed on his or her Form DS-2019; The student must be in good academic standing with the post-secondary accredited academic institution; and the student must receive written approval in advance from their academic dean or advisor and for the duration and type of academic training. The International Student Advisor must evaluate the academic dean/adviser's recommendation, determine to what extent the student has previously participated in academic training, and make a determination of whether academic training can be granted. The training must be approved before the DS-2019 expiration date.

Employment opportunities for international students are strictly limited by government regulations.

Illegal employment is considered a serious violation of status.

Pre-authorization is required from International Students and Scholars office and, in some cases, from the US Citizenship and Immigration Services, for off-campus employment. F-1 and J-1 students must have been in valid status for at least one full academic year (two semesters) before pursuing off-campus employment.

Student Career Center: The UC Merced Student Career Center offers services and programs to assist students with finding a job on- and off-campus. Visit the office, call 209-228-7272, send email to careercenter@ucmerced.edu or log on to <https://hire.ucmerced.edu/> for more information.

WHEN YOUR LEGAL STATUS IS LOST

Failure to follow F-1 and J-1 regulations will result in you losing legal status in the US and all related immigration benefits. Losing legal status means that you will not be eligible for any F-1 or J-1 services, employment, including on-campus jobs, and you will not be able to receive a reentry signature on your form I-20 or form DS-2019. Also, your SEVIS record, as well as those of your dependents, will be terminated in SEVIS immediately after your loss of legal status. There is a possibility you might be asked to appear at an immigration office and can become subject to deportation from the United States.

If you do lose your legal status, immediately meet with your International Student Advisor at ISS to discuss your options.

STUDY/EMPLOYMENT FOR F-2 or J-2 DEPENDENT VISA HOLDERS

There are strict regulations on employment and study for F-2 and J-2 dependent visa holders. Employment under F-2 status is not permitted. J-2 visa holders however, may apply to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services to obtain work authorization. F-2 or J-2 children can attend elementary and secondary school on a full-time basis. F-2 adult visa holders are not eligible for full-time study in the US.

Under new immigration regulations, there is LITTLE ROOM FOR ERROR! NEVER assume anything about the immigration laws of the United States. Ask an advisor in ISS if you have any questions.

SOCIAL SECURITY / BANKING / TAXES / DRIVER'S LICENSE

Social Security

What is it? A Social Security Number (SSN) is required for everyone who works in the U.S., even U.S. citizens. However, a Social Security Card is not a work permit. Most non-immigrants should not have Social Security payments (FICA) deducted from their paychecks, just as non-immigrants are not eligible to receive any Social Security benefits. You need to have a job offer to be able to apply for a Social Security Number.

The Social Security Administration has an online publication available for international students:

<https://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10181.pdf>

Eligibility: F-1 and J-1 students with on-campus employment or a job offer and employment authorization are eligible for a Social Security Number.

When to apply: Students are advised to wait at least 10 days after arriving in the United States to apply. In addition, students must wait until ISS has registered their SEVIS record as active. The Social Security card should be mailed to you approximately two weeks after your application is approved. Be sure to provide a copy to the UC Merced APO/HR and Payroll office if you work on campus.

How to apply: Visit a local Social Security Office and bring the following documents: Your passport, form I-20 or form DS-2019, I-94 and job offer letter from the employer. **You must apply in person.** An application form with instructions is available online at <https://www.ssa.gov/number-card/request-number-first-time>

Where to apply:

U.S. Social Security Administration Office
600 West Olive Avenue
Merced, CA
Phone: 209-723-2072

More information online: <https://iss.ucmerced.edu/social-security>

BE SAFE: ONLY SHARE YOUR SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER WITH SOMEONE WHO HAS A LEGITIMATE AND SPECIFIC NEED FOR IT.

Money and Banking

Types of bank accounts: There are two basic kinds of accounts: Checking accounts, for payment of regular bills and shopping needs; and savings accounts where money you do not need to use immediately can earn interest. Banks also offer a variety of other types of accounts and financial services.

Choosing a bank and opening an account: Before you open an account, you should research or visit several banks or credit unions online to compare their services and fees. Opening a bank account is fairly easy - deposit your funds and complete any required bank forms. Most banks will require a minimum deposit. Some banks will want you to have a Social Security Number when you open the account.

Bank of America (BoFA) and Wells Fargo, both of which have offices in downtown Merced, are two banks that do not require a Social Security number to open an account. They do require two forms of identification and minimum deposits. Check with your bank for promotional packages and other possible fees. Chase Bank and Citi Bank are two other popular banks in Merced. Be aware that if you are making a deposit with an overseas check or bank draft, there may be a waiting period of three days to three weeks before your money will be available to you.

Taxes

All international students who work must file their income taxes.

Sales Tax: Sales tax is a state tax added to any item sold, except for certain food items. In the City of Merced, the sales tax is 8.25% at the time of this publication. For example, a product might be marked as \$5.00 on the shelf but will cost \$5.41 at the register. Sales tax may vary by city and county. There are no refunds of sales tax.

Income Tax: The Internal Revenue Service or (IRS) is the US federal agency for collection of national income tax. The State of California also collects a tax on income through the Franchise Tax Board. All tax forms and information cited here can be found on the IRS website at www.irs.gov or the Franchise Tax Board website at www.ftb.ca.gov. Publication 519 is the "US Tax Guide for Aliens" and contains most of the information you might need about payment of federal taxes. If you have spent time in other states, you will need to obtain their state tax information.

Tax Withholding and the W-4 Form: When a person is working in the US, the employer is required to deduct a portion of the salary in each pay period for income taxes. At the start of your job, you will complete a half page W-4 form (Employees Withholding Allowance Certificate). The information on that form determines how much will be withheld from your paycheck for taxes.

Tax Treaties: Some countries have tax treaty agreements with the US in which certain types of income may be exempted from federal tax. General information on tax treaty benefits can be found in IRS publication 901. The actual tax treaty text may also be found on the IRS website.

Social Security and Medicare Taxes: Anyone who works in the US is required to have a Social Security Number to be hired by an employer and for use in completing the tax return form. Social Security (FICA) and Medicare are US government programs that provide benefits for US citizens and US permanent residents, usually for retirement. It is financed by taxes withheld from the paychecks of working people. International students should ask their employers not to withhold these two forms of taxes.

Income Tax Filing Requirement: International students and scholars who have been employed in the US for any portion of a calendar year must file a US annual tax report (also called a "tax return") by the following year's tax filing deadline. Income that is taxed includes wages, scholarships and earnings on investments. A complete list of taxed income may be found in IRS and state tax guides.

UC Merced Tax Services: Tax Services is a campus office that provides guidance and resources regarding taxes and tax filing. You can learn more at <https://bfs.ucmerced.edu/departments/tax-services>

Driver's License and the California ID Card

Who needs a California Driver's License or ID card? If you wish to drive in the U.S., you should apply for a California driver's license (REAL ID). The State of California does not recognize an International Driving Permit (IDP) as a valid driver's license. California does recognize a valid driver's license that is issued by a foreign jurisdiction (country, state, territory) of which the license holder is a resident. Most insurance companies will require a California driver's license, so it is advised you apply for one if you plan on purchasing and/or driving a car.

The California REAL ID card looks like a driver's license, but it is used for identification purposes only.

When to apply: Wait at least 30 days after your arrival in the US before applying for a driver's license or California ID card. The application requires a Social Security Number but you are exempt from this requirement if you are ineligible for a SSN. You must provide proof of residency when applying for either a driver's license or ID card. Further information on the documentation required can be found here: <https://iss.ucmerced.edu/students/current/driverslicense>

More information and where to apply: For additional information, including the latest California Driver's Handbook, visit the Department of Motor Vehicles at <https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/>. You can make an appointment online or contact the local DMV office:

Merced DMV Office
1313 12th Street, Merced
Phone: 800-777-0133

Transportation Options

UC Merced Transportation and Parking Services (TAPS) is your campus resource for information and services such as parking on campus, bus service, carpooling, alternative modes of transportation and more.

Visit TAPS online at <https://taps.ucmerced.edu/> for additional information.

CatTracks is the official transit system for the University of California, Merced. With service from the main campus to Downtown Merced and select North Merced locations. For additional online information: <https://taps.ucmerced.edu/transportation>

HOUSING / MEDICAL CARE / HEALTH INSURANCE / CATCARD

Housing

On-campus: Undergraduate students can apply to live in on-camping housing. Applications are available online at <https://housing.ucmerced.edu/housing/living-options>. Be sure to pay close attention to application deadlines.

Off-campus: The Student Housing Office also can help connect students with many off-campus housing options. Visit the Off-Campus Housing website <https://housing.ucmerced.edu/off-campus> for more information or our Arrival Guide also provides helpful tips.

Additional assistance: Call 209-228-2293 or e-mail housing@ucmerced.edu for more information.

Medical Care

To understand how the Student Health Insurance Plan (UC SHIP) works, it is important to understand that your health care while at UC Merced consists of two parts:

- * Services through the Student Health Center
- * Services provided through the UC SHIP provider network or your personal major medical insurance.

HEALTH AND ATHLETIC CENTER

The Student Health Fee guarantees you access to the Health Center. The Health Center has primary care providers that serve as your family or primary provider while you are at UC Merced. All registered students may use the services at the Health Center, regardless of what type of major medical insurance you carry. There are fees for some services that are not covered by the Student Health Fee (e.g., immunizations, prescriptions and over-the-counter medications, and lab testing).

STUDENT HEALTH INSURANCE PLAN

The University of California requires both undergraduate and graduate students to have major medical insurance. The cost of this insurance is included in your student campus fees and enrollment in the plan is automatic. UC SHIP covers care outside of the Health Center, including hospitalization, specialty care and out-of-area care while you are traveling. You may waive out of the UC Merced Student Health Insurance Plan if you have comparable medical coverage.

PLAN BENEFIT INFORMATION

For more detailed benefit information about the medical, dental and vision plans students, or for questions, please visit <https://health.ucmerced.edu/insurance>

MANDATORY HEALTH INSURANCE REQUIREMENTS FOR J-1 VISA HOLDERS AND THEIR DEPENDENTS

The US Department of State mandates that all J-1 students and their J-2 dependents have and maintain adequate health insurance. If you are a J-1 student your UC Merced provided UC SHIP insurance may cover these insurance requirements, but you must consult with the Student Health Services to verify adequate coverage (as listed below).

Minimum levels of health insurance coverage must provide:

1. Medical benefits of at least \$100,000 per illness or accident;
2. Deductible not to exceed \$500 per accident or illness;
3. Expenses associated with medical evacuation in the amount of \$50,000;
4. Repatriation of remains in the amount of \$25,000;
5. Coverage for pre-existing conditions after a 6-month waiting period;
6. Provision for co-insurance/co-payment that does not exceed 25% of the covered benefits per accident or illness;
7. Policy underwritten by an insurance company that meets the rating requirements of the US Department of State or backed by the full faith and credit of the home country government, designated sponsor, or Exchange Visitor's employee group plan.

Anyone without insurance must obtain health insurance that complies with the requirements outlined above before ISS can validate your visa. It should be purchased prior to your arrival in the United States.

CatCard

The CatCard is the official UC Merced identification card. All students, faculty and staff affiliated with the University need to carry the CatCard for identification. The CatCard features a digitized photo, SmartChip and magnetic stripe. When you apply for your CatCard you must provide a government or state issued photo ID, like a driver's license or passport and you must have your UC Merced student identification number handy to verify that you are eligible to receive a card. Visiting scholars need to complete payroll paper work and be entered into PPS before they can receive a CatCard. Learn how to obtain a CatCard here: https://catcard.ucmerced.edu/Obtain_Catcard

The CatCard (on-campus) is used for:

- Identification and status check
- Library card
- Meal plans
- Building access
- Residence laundry access
- Photocopying and printing
- Debit purchases at the bookstore
- Campus dining
- Off-campus student meal plan (Ideal for students who commute to campus)
- Flex dollars prepaid services account
- Admission to the Recreation & Athletic centers

OIA PROGRAMS

Tea & Chat: International students, scholars, study abroad students and community members are invited to a midday tea party to meet and mingle with other UC Merced staff and community members. Students are able to relax and enjoy a variety of teas from around the world. This event once during the semester.

Global Lounge: Network, socialize and enjoy coffee with international students, scholars, study abroad students and any campus members interested in international education. This event is monthly on Wednesdays in COB2-290.

International Education Week: A national event during which campus community engage in international and cross-cultural educational activities. At UC Merced there are various events and educational seminars to give students, staff, and faculty an opportunity to take part in this celebration of international education.

Study Abroad Fair: Several of the study abroad companies located throughout California, including the UC systemwide program "EAP" or "Education Abroad Program", come together to host a Study Abroad Fair at UC Merced. At this fair, students will be able to look at materials and talk to representatives of the various study abroad programs available to them through UC Merced.

Employment Workshops: ISS holds Practical Training workshops in-person and virtually multiple times a semester. The Student Career Center hosts several employment workshops for students to get help and guidance when entering the working world.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTITUTE

Since 1987, the State of California has required “that each campus of the University of California should require all prospective teaching assistants who will be placed in classroom settings to demonstrate competence in oral communication, including those for whom English is not a native language who should demonstrate competence in an oral exam comparable to the written Test of English as a Foreign Language examination, including but not limited to, the Test of Spoken English examination, and demonstrate an ability to communicate effectively before a group.” (Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 41). The English Language Institute (ELI) facilitates the University’s compliance with this state mandate for incoming international teaching assistants (ITAs) through the following services:

- Arrange testing for those students who have not submitted proof of English language proficiency
- Evaluate students upon their arrival to UC Merced by means of an on-campus evaluation and student presentation process
- Recommend whether the ITA may teach without further English support or whether additional workshops and English language coursework is required, based on the results of the test and on-campus evaluation
- Provide semester-long workshops and coursework to enhance English proficiency in speaking and listening comprehension
- Assist in the cultural adjustments sometimes required to teach and study in an American university through workshops and individual consultations
- Videotape ITAs teaching and, from this evidence, assisting ITAs to enhance their instructional skills
- Collaborate with ITAs to develop individual plans for improving English language use
- Coordinate conversation partnerships for students wanting to practice their language skills in an informal arrangement with native speakers of English

For more information contact Belinda Braunstein at bbraunstein@ucmerced.edu, or visit the ELI website at <https://teach.ucmerced.edu/ELI>

TIPS FOR LIVING IN THE UNITED STATES

1. **Use the language**
Make every effort to use English daily. Not only should you try to speak English, but you should try to read American newspapers and magazines, listen to the radio and watch television. This will not only improve your English, but it will also teach you about American culture. It is also a good idea to speak English with other students from your own country! Americans enjoy talking with foreign students, but you may have to start the conversation. Ask them questions about the US to show you are interested in learning more about American culture.
2. **Be honest**
If you do not understand something, admit it. It’s usually best to tell someone you don’t understand something rather than trying to pretend that everything is alright.
3. **Learn to laugh at yourself**
Communicating in a foreign language is difficult, and you may get nervous about making mistakes at first. Laughing at your own mistakes and taking risks are positive ways of dealing with the adjustment process.
4. **Get involved in activities**

You must take the first step in making friends and participating in activities. To get to know your classmates, ask them about their cultures and their experiences. Keeping busy with them and attending activities is a good way to avoid homesickness.

5. **Put yourself in other people's shoes**

Try to look at situations from the perspective of others. Always ask questions and explain what you are thinking. What may seem obvious or reasonable to you may not be for someone else because of cultural differences.

6. **Avoid stereotyping and making snap judgments**

It's natural to judge everything you observe and experience here as "good" or "bad." However, this can block you from understanding American culture. Try not to judge people and situations until you feel you understand why they are acting a certain way. And remember, most things are not really "better" or "worse" than they are in your country. They are just different!

CULTURE SHOCK

People adjust to foreign cultures in predictable ways, but in varying degrees. Some people seem greatly affected by culture shock, while others hardly notice it at all. Some people go through culture shock in the first month, while others don't experience it until months later. No matter where people are from and what culture they travel to, most experience the adjustment pattern below:

The Honeymoon Stage: Everything about the new culture seems exciting and interesting.

Culture Fatigue: You begin to feel uncomfortable and start to see differences between your culture and the new culture. You become tired, both mentally and physically. This stage lasts a few days to a few weeks.

Surface Adjustment: You begin to understand the people and their ways; you feel more comfortable. You are able to express basic ideas without fatigue.

Hidden Problems: Although you outwardly seem to be fitting in, you begin to question certain aspects of the culture, get homesick, and possibly have conflicts with friends and host family/roommates. You may feel dissatisfied and think "everything would be better if only...." You may feel isolated, and wish to return to the excellence in performance that you were used to in your own culture.

I Understand and I Feel at Home: You accept the new culture and feel comfortable with the way of living. You may even feel like "one of them."

Going Home: You begin to have mixed feelings about going home. You may feel guilty about not wanting to go home, because you know that others are eagerly waiting for you to return. You are afraid that others may not understand what you've been through and how you've changed and become more aware of the world.

Typical Signs of Culture Shock

- You get easily upset by small things which normally would not bother you
- You sleep more than usual without any reason
- You have trouble concentrating in school
- You cry a lot
- You begin to spend a lot of time alone in your room
- You begin to dislike the US and feel that almost everything in your culture is so much better

If you would like to talk to someone about culture shock or difficulties adjusting to your new home, Counseling Services is here to help. For additional information contact Counseling Services at 209-228-4266 or email: counseling@ucmerced.edu. Website: <https://counseling.ucmerced.edu/>

SAFETY

Although Merced is generally a very safe area, there is some possibility of crime in most areas of the United States. Follow this advice to help with your safety.

1. Always keep your room locked, especially at night and whenever you are sleeping. (In houses, bedrooms usually don't have locks. You should be sure the front door of the house is locked.)
2. When someone knocks on your door, always ask, "Who's there?" before you open the door. If your door has a "peephole," use it to look out before opening the door.
3. Be careful about who you invite to your room or apartment. Also be careful when you go to someone else's room or apartment by yourself.
4. Always keep the telephone numbers of the police, campus police, fire department, and hospital next to your telephone, so that you can find them in an emergency. Know your address. Important phone numbers are listed at the end of this handbook and are also listed in the front of the telephone directory.
5. Make sure you are registered for UCM Alert to receive emergency messages via text and email. <https://emergency.ucmerced.edu/>

FOR ANY EMERGENCY DIAL 911

- DO NOT go out alone at night—always take a friend with you.
- DO NOT get into a car with someone you do not know. DO NOT give rides to people you do not know.
- DO NOT carry large amounts of cash with you—use personal checks, credit cards, or traveler's checks.
- DO NOT leave valuables (jewelry or money) in your room or car.
- If you have a car, always lock it when it is parked. Do not leave valuables in sight.

USEFUL CONTACT INFORMATION

International Students and Scholars:

(209) 228-4722

Email: iss@ucmerced.edu; bmirza@ucmerced.edu; llongvejar@ucmerced.edu

Graduate Division:

Phone: 209-228-4723

E-mail: graddiv@ucmerced.edu; gradresources@ucmerced.edu

Undergraduate Student Advising

<http://advising.ucmerced.edu/>

Phone: (209) 291-9739

Email: ucmadvising@ucmerced.edu or bac@ucmerced.edu

English Language Institute:

Belinda Braunstein

Email: bbraunstein@ucmerced.edu; eli@ucmerced.edu

Students First Center

Administration Building, Room 100
Email: studentsfirst@ucmerced.edu

Office of the Registrar

Phone: 209-228-7178
E-mail: registrar@ucmerced.edu

Housing

(209) 228-2293
E-mail: housing@ucmerced.edu

Transportation and Parking

<https://taps.ucmerced.edu/>
CatTracks
<https://taps.ucmerced.edu/transportation>

Student Life

<https://www.ucmerced.edu/campus-life>

School of Engineering (SOE)

<https://www.ucmerced.edu/school-of-engineering>

School of Natural Sciences (SNS)

<https://www.ucmerced.edu/school-of-natural-sciences>

School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts (SSHA)

<https://www.ucmerced.edu/school-of-social-sciences-humanities-and-arts>

Business and Financial Services: Tax Compliance Information

<https://bfs.ucmerced.edu/departments/tax-services>
209-228-4367
tax@ucmerced.edu

EMERGENCY PHONE NUMBERS

If you need to contact a staff member at the ISS office after regular business hours or on the weekends, contact campus police at 209-228-2677 (209-CAT-COPS) and they will contact an international staff member for you.

UCM Police Department-Emergency: 911

UCM Police Department-
NON-Emergency:
209-228-8273
209-228-2677

Merced Police Department-Emergency and Merced County Fire Department-Emergency: 911

Merced Paramedics-Emergency: 911

Dignity Health – Mercy Medical Center (Emergency Room Services)
209-564-5000
333 Mercy Ave., Merced