



International Programs and Services

Dear Exchange Visitor Student,

We are glad to welcome you to our Exchange Visitor Program at George Mason University! The Exchange Visitor Program operates under the auspices of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The purpose of the Program is to provide you with opportunities to participate in educational and cultural programs in the United States and return home to share your experiences, and to encourage Americans to participate in educational and cultural programs in other countries.

Exchange Visitors enter the United States on a J visa. Title 22 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) regulates Foreign Relations. Part 62 regulates the Exchange Visitor Program. As a designated sponsor, George Mason University complies with the regulations and compliance administration outlined in 22 CFR Part 62. As a participant of the Exchange Visitor Program, you are expected to comply with 22 CFR Part 62.

Once you have received your Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (DS-2019 Form), please check the dates and biographical information carefully to make certain everything is correct. You are allowed to enter the United States up to 30 days before the program begin date listed on your Form DS-2019. You also have a 30 day grace period at the end of the program which allows you to stay up to 30 days in the United States after your program end date.

Once you have arrived in the United States, you must complete the online check-in process with the Office of International Programs and Services to have your SEVIS record validated. SEVIS validation is a legal requirement. On the 21st day past your start date your SEVIS record will automatically be invalidated, which will significantly complicate your stay at GMU.

Check List

Paying the SEVIS fee:

The SEVIS fee must be paid at least three days prior to submitting the application for a U.S. visa.

Open an international visitor record in the Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) and pay your SEVIS fee online:

- Go to: <https://www.fmjfee.com/>
- Enter your SEVIS ID (the number at the top right of your DS2019 form that begins with N), Last Name, Given Name (First and Middle names) and Date of Birth. Click submit and follow any additional instructions
- Pay Fee and Print Receipt (receipt is needed for visa interview)

Applying for your visa at the U.S. embassy/consulate: <http://www.usembassy.gov>

Approximate wait time to receive a visa appointment can be found on this site:

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas.html>

Please bring the DS-2019 form and your SEVIS receipt (I-901) and visa fee confirmation page (I-160) to a U.S. Embassy or Consulate when you apply for your J-1 visa.

Tip: Please check the embassy/consulate website to see what additional paperwork you will need to bring with you. Requirements may vary depending on the consulate. For example, you may be asked to show your passport, invitation or admission letter from GMU (if applicable), proof of financial support, proof of strong

ties to your home country, etc. The consular officer will review whether you have sufficient funds to cover expenses. Consular review of financial documentation can range from a very cursory review to a very detailed review of both the form and content of the documentation. The consular officer must be "satisfied" that the funding exists and is sufficient, which means the consular officer has a great deal of discretion in determining whether sufficient financial support exists.

Housing

GMU does not provide graduate students with on-campus housing. We do urge you to begin researching your housing options now. There is a guide about housing with tips from other international students on our website: <http://oips.gmu.edu/housing/>. Of course, please use caution when reviewing private off-campus housing options. Please also remember to read carefully any contracts/leases before signing them. Previous and current exchange visitors have found off-campus housing near our Fairfax campus and on-campus housing on our Manassas Campus (there is a shuttle bus between the Fairfax and Manassas campuses).

Please find below some GMU and non-GMU resources for your housing search:

- **Masonvale Apartments** on the Fairfax campus <http://www.masonvale.com>
- **Beacon Hall** at the Science and Technology Campus (located in Manassas, VA - 30 minute **shuttle** ride to Fairfax Campus)
- **Mason Off Campus Housing Office** (resource for Mason students)
- <http://rent.com/>
- <http://www.apartmentfinder.com/>
- <http://www.apartmentguide.com/zip/22030-Apartments-For-Rent>
- <http://www.suiteamerica.com/>
- <http://www.zillow.com/fairfax-va/rent-houses/>
- http://www.trulia.com/for_rent/Fairfax,VA
- <https://www.airbnb.com>

Off-Campus Apartment Options near to the Fairfax Campus

- Dittmar Cavalier Court Apartments (www.rentdittmar.com)
 - Fully equipped kitchens, washer/dryer in the apartment, balcony, and other features
 - Close to mall and restaurants
 - On Cue Bus line
 - Short-term leases available; you may be able to sign a lease using your visa documentation
- Eaves (by Avalon) Fairfax City (www.eavesfairfaxcity.com)
 - Fully equipped kitchens, washer/dryer in the apartment, balcony, and other features
 - Within walking distance of George Mason University
 - Short-term leases available; co-signer from the US with a good credit score required
- Fairfax Square Apartments (<http://www.fairfaxsquareapt.com/>)
 - Available Furnished, washer/dryer in the apartment, balcony, and other features
 - Less than 2 miles from campus, Cue bus access
 - Short-term leases available; you will sign a lease using your visa documentation

Many other apartment complexes are available in the surrounding Fairfax area that you can find by doing a simple Google search for "Apartments in Fairfax, Virginia"

Helpful Tips

- If your apartment doesn't come furnished there is a company that will rent furniture to you by the month: <http://cort.com/student>. They have rentals starting at \$99 a month that includes living room, dining room, and bedroom furniture.
- The och.gmu.edu website has several information sheets that can help you plan out your living situation in regards to budget and housing search comparisons

Consider Transportation Options when Selecting your Housing

The public transportation system in the U.S. is not as comprehensive as it might be in your home country. For example, the CUE bus runs every half an hour; at the metro, you can wait 3-25 minutes between trains depending on the time of day. Bus schedules may also force you to leave campus earlier than you want to because they might not run late enough or you will have to pay to use a taxi or ride service like Uber or Lyft.

Recommendations:

- Figure out where you want to live in terms of proximity to campus – do you want to walk or bike to campus? Take the bus? Take the metro and the bus? Drive a rental car? Take a private ride service like Uber or Lyft? Use the links below for the GMU shuttle and public transportation options when consider your housing options. They can assist in determining commute times and costs:

<http://shuttle.gmu.edu/>

<https://www.wmata.com/>

<https://www.fairfaxva.gov/government/public-works/transportation-division/cue-bus-system/cue-bus-map-and-schedule>

- Plan to arrive in the States a few days before orientation; book a hotel or a hostel. Then arrive to the area where you'd like to find an apartment and start touring the apartment complexes.
- Be sure to ask about housing specials.

Consider your Budget When Researching Housing

The current minimum figure needed to meet basic living expenses (excluding health insurance) at GMU for a single graduate student is \$20,617 per academic year. Please note that the cost of living in the metro Washington, DC area is one of the highest in the United States. Thus, it is very important that you research the cost of housing and other living expenses before your arrival. It is very common for students to share living quarters in the DC area in order to have enough funds for food, transportation and other living expenses. It is recommended that your monthly housing costs do not exceed 30% of your monthly income to allow for enough funds for other expenses.

Health Insurance

U.S. laws require Exchange Visitors and their dependents to maintain health insurance for the entire period of J-1 status in the United States. Federal regulations require the following:

1. Medical benefits of **at least** \$100,000 U.S. per accident or illness
2. Repatriation of remains in the amount of \$25,000 U.S.
3. Expenses associated with medical evacuation of the Exchange Visitor to his or her home country in the amount of \$50,000 U.S.
4. A deductible not to exceed \$500 per accident or illness

The George Mason University Health Insurance plan is offered by [UnitedHealthcare StudentResources](#) and meets the above mentioned requirements. Along with your DS-2019 you will get a Newly Admitted International Student Welcome letter from the Student Health Insurance office. Failure to pay the health insurance fees by the deadline will result in termination from the exchange program. If you are bringing a spouse or children with you on a J-2 visa, you will need to show proof of health insurance for your accompanying dependents that meets the requirements. You may either select the GMU plan for dependents or enroll in another plan. Please follow the link for the details including student plan benefits and enrollment options for dependents:

<http://shs.gmu.edu/insurance/international/>

Listed below are some outside insurance companies that provide health insurance for dependents or Exchange Visitor Students on post-completion Academic Training:

VISIT® International Health Insurance Program for International Students, Scholars, Spouses, Families & Visitors

Website: <http://www.visitinsurance.com/>

ISO Insurance:

<https://www.isoa.org/>

Tips for selecting a health insurance provider:

There are many health insurance providers available and the options can be overwhelming. When selecting

an insurance plan, you should choose a plan that meets your individual needs and the minimum requirements mentioned above. A plan that worked for your friend or colleague may not be the best option for you. You should carefully review the details of any insurance plan you are considering.

* *Medical evacuation and repatriation requirements.* Note the explicit requirement for medical evacuation and repatriation insurance. Most domestic health insurance policies do not include this feature, or include it only for bringing people or remains back to the United States from abroad. You may have to purchase medical evacuation and repatriation coverage separately for your J-2 dependents. Many insurance companies provide this special coverage at reasonable cost.

There cannot be any breaks or lapses in insurance coverage even if one travels outside the U.S for an extended period of time during their Exchange Visitor Student program. Students approved on post-completion Academic Training will need to enroll in health insurance that meets the requirements after their student insurance plan ends.

OIPS must terminate the SEVIS record of an exchange visitor who: 1) does not provide OIPS with a valid health insurance by the start of the Exchange Visitor program at GMU; and 2) does not submit updated health insurance when s/he seeks to extend their program.

The willful failure to carry the required insurance or material misrepresentation of insurance coverage will result in the termination of your program and legal status in the U.S.

Understanding the U.S. Health Care System

THE COST OF U.S. HEALTH CARE

Your health insurance may not cover the full cost of your doctor's visit, hospitalization or medication. Please review the rules related to the plan you choose to understand fully what is covered. Here are some of the terms defined:

Premium

The amount you pay to your insurance company for your insurance policy. This is paid on a monthly or a yearly basis, depending on your insurance plan.

Co-Pay

The co-pay or co-payment, is the amount you are expected to pay directly to the healthcare provider at the time you receive medical treatment. This is usually a small amount and varies depending on your insurance.

Deductible

The deductible is a part of the medical bill that you are expected to pay in addition to the co-pay. Insurance plans usually specify the amount of a medical bill they cover and the amount you must pay. The deductible is usually described as a flat amount or as a percentage, depending upon the policy. Generally high premiums have a lower deductible while lower premiums have a high deductible.

In many cases, the doctor's office or hospital where you seek treatment may not bill your insurance directly. They may require you to pay them directly and for you to be reimbursed by your health insurance company.

Information on the Possible Applicability of the Affordable Care Act

The general rules regarding applicability of the individual mandate of the ACA and availability of ACA-compliant coverage also apply to J nonimmigrants, but that the minimum levels and types of coverage are still required as a condition of J-1 or J-2 status, even if those nonimmigrants are additionally subject to the ACA's individual mandate. For more information please visit: <https://shs.gmu.edu/insurance/resources/>

Safety and Well-Being During Your Exchange Program

Your safety and well-being during your Exchange Visitor Program are among our highest priorities. As you begin your program, we would like to share with you resources offered by GMU and inform you of the requirements for reporting health and safety incidents to OIPS.

GMU has a [Mason Ready website](https://ready.gmu.edu/students/) (<https://ready.gmu.edu/students/>) with links to a variety of campus offices and resources to assist in emergency and disaster preparedness. I highly recommend you register your cell phone number with the [Mason Alert](https://ready.gmu.edu/masonalert/) (<https://ready.gmu.edu/masonalert/>) assistance to receive timely information about campus emergencies.

GMU has a [Mason Ready website](#) with links to campus offices and resources to assist in emergency and disaster preparedness including the university's [Active Threats Awareness and Prevention Video](#). If you have not yet signed up, please register your cell phone number with the [Mason Alert](#) Emergency Notification System to receive timely information about campus emergencies.

Educating yourself about the safety and security of your environment can be different in the U.S. than in your home country. There are a number of campus and local resources that will assist you in understanding crimes in the area and crime prevention. GMU's Department of Police and Public Safety publishes a daily [Crime and Fire log](#) so that you can be informed about the crimes that have occurred on campus. If you are travelling off-campus, other cities and counties provide a similar log often called a police blotter. The [GMU Department of Police and Public Safety](#) has links to other area law enforcement websites and also information regarding promoting awareness and responding to campus violence.

Rave Guardian Public Safety App: This is a free public safety app that used offers a variety of features for safety including a virtual safety option and a panic call button to alert GMU Police. It's free on [iTunes](#) and the [Google Play store](#).

As a model well-being university, GMU strives to provide everyone in the campus community with the support to thrive together. Please check out [Mason's Well-Being University Initiative](#) and discover links to online well-being assessments, campus offices and campus events that promote well-being.

GMU's [Student Support and Advocacy Center \(SSAC\)](#) offers educational programming, one-on-one consultations, and resources in the areas of interpersonal violence, personal wellness, and alcohol and drug use.

GMU [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) provides important resources for students. In addition to having counselors on staff for guidance, they also have crisis hotlines, a text line and an online chat. They offer information online and also workshops focusing on a variety of issues such as stress reduction, suicide prevention and eating disorders. CAPS also provides referrals for off-campus services. On the CAPS website, you can also find [Learning Services](#) for tutoring assistance and academic skills workshops. CAPS has [Multicultural Resources](#) with links to Disability Services; LGBTQ Resources; and the Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Multicultural Education (ODIME). On the [ODIME website](#), you can find information about reporting an incident that was motivated by bias (act of discrimination, harassment, intimidation, violence or criminal offense that appears to be intentional and motivated by prejudice or bias).

[GMU's Student Health Services \(SHS\)](#) provides high quality health care, counseling, health education and prevention services to George Mason University students. They have clinics on the Fairfax, Arlington and Sci-Tech campuses. For assistance when the clinic is closed, SHS has an after-hours nurse advice hotline (703- 993-2831) and a list of after-hours urgent care centers (walk-in clinics) on their website.

[GMU Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) can be found in the catalog. This section also lists what steps can be taken for various concerns including a Student Conflict Resolution Center.

If you are working, either on-campus or off-campus as part of Academic Training, it is important that you feel safe and are treated fairly in your work environment. The ["Know your Rights"](#) Pamphlet you received during your visa interview also details your rights as an exchange visitor. Please remember to review approval requirements for on-campus and off-campus employment at [the OIPS website](#) or visit our office.

In certain cases, we are required to report incidents concerning the Health and Safety of Exchange Visitors. These reports are submitted directly to the US Department of State.

Please inform us if you are involved in any of the following types of incidents:

- serious illness or injury
- incident involving litigation or the criminal justice system (police or court system)
- incidents involving sexual harassment, abuse or exploitation
- other incidents that involve health and safety (e.g. if you are involved in a natural disaster, civil unrest or outbreak of violence)
- if you become aware of a death of another exchange visitor or if another exchange visitor is missing.

There may be situations not listed where we can help you resolve an issue affecting your health or safety. Please reach out to us with any concern or question you have, and we will help you sort it out. **We share the goal of the US Department of State** that you have whatever assistance you need, and that you understand how a situation may affect your J-1 status.

We also need to know how to reach you, and by law you must update your contact information (address and phone number) within 10 days of making any change. In addition, if your permanent address in your home country changes or your emergency contact person either here or abroad changes, please inform us right away.

Remember, for an urgent or life threatening emergency, call 911 for immediate assistance. Report to OIPS any emergencies INVOLVING AN EXCHANGE VISITOR'S HEALTH, SAFETY, AND WELFARE by calling (703) 993-5673 or emailing Responsible Officer, Irina Chizhova, at ichizhov@gmu

The Department of State also provides a 24 hour/7 days a week J-1 Visa Emergency Hotline toll-free number at 1-866-283-9090. The Hotline number is reserved for the use of current J-1 visa exchange visitor participants, or individuals calling on their behalf, in need of immediate contact with the State Department to address a matter concerning their health, safety or welfare. More information about the Department of State and J-1 program can be found at: <https://j1visa.state.gov/> GMU students can also find links to many of these resources on the [OIPS website](#).

Understanding the Two Year Home Country Residence Requirement

Some J-1 Exchange Visitors are subject to what is called the two-year home country physical presence requirement. The "two-year residence" requirement applies to J-1 Exchange Visitors in the following situations:

- If you receive any indirect or direct funding (including nominal travel grants) from your home government or a U.S. government agency at any point during your J-1 visa stay in the U.S.
- If your country of permanent residency and field of work are identified by your home government as being in short supply and consequently listed on the U.S. State Department's Exchange Visitor's "[Skills List.](https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/skill-list-by-country.html)" here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/skill-list-by-country.html>

Exchange Visitors are expected to complete their research, teaching or study objective within the time allowed on the J-1 visa. If your objective changes after you arrive in the US, you should know that the return-home requirement is enforced at the time that the Exchange Visitor or J-2 dependent requests an H-1B or U.S. Permanent Resident status. **Please note:** If you are subject to the home-residency rule, then any family members who entered the U.S. as J-2 dependents are also subject.

Exchange Visitors who are subject to this requirement must first return to their country of legal permanent residence for an aggregate of two years (24 months) or receive a waiver of the condition before they can

change to H-1B or a U.S. Permanent Resident. Exchange Visitors who are subject to the return requirement may return to the U.S. in other non-immigrant categories including but not limited to F-1 student, exchange visitor on J-1 visa, B visitor and the O-1 foreign national of extraordinary ability.

What is an I-94 Record?

The I-94 record is the “Arrival/Departure Record” issued by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) whenever you enter the United States. This record confirms that you have been legally admitted to the U.S. in a specific visa status, and for a specific duration of time. For F and J visa holders the amount of time is indicated by the notation “D/S” which means you can be in the U.S. for the Duration of Status of your student program. The CBP officers will enter the I-94 data into an on-line registration system using your passport and visa stamp. You will be able to access an electronic version of the I-94 record by visiting <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/#/home> This record can be printed when applying for immigration benefits, such as a driver’s license or a Social Security Number (SSN).

U.S. Customs and Border Protection
Securing America's Borders

Get I-94 Number I-94 FAQ OMB No. 1651-0111 Expiration Date: 11/30/2014

Admission (I-94) Number Retrieval

Admission (I-94) Record Number: 69001333663

Admit Until Date (MM/DD/YYYY): D/S

Details provided on Admission (I-94) form:

Family Name:	Testing
First (Given) Name:	Monday
Birth Date (MM/DD/YYYY):	05/06/1985
Passport Number:	123000456
Passport Country of Issuance:	Mexico
Date of Entry (MM/DD/YYYY):	03/12/2013
Class of Admission:	J-1

IMPORTANT!
Please check that your online I-94 shows "D/S" and "J-1".
If your I-94 has something different, please contact ISS for assistance.

Banking and Driver's License Information

Banking:

For help with opening a bank account on campus, please visit:

Apple Federal Credit Union (inside Johnson Center)

Website: <https://www.applefcu.org/Appleweb/Locations>

Banks off-campus used by the Mason Community:

Bank of America (10440 Main Street, Fairfax, VA)

Website: <https://www.bankofamerica.com/>

Sun Trust (4020 University Drive, Fairfax, VA)

Website: <https://www.suntrust.com>

Driver's License:

If you plan to apply for a driver's license, OIPS can assist you. The closest DMV office is located inside Fair Oaks mall:

Address: 11805 Fair Oaks Mall, Fairfax, VA

Hours of operation: Monday—Saturday: 10:00 a.m.—6:30 p.m.

Please note that road tests are not given at this location. If the DMV requires for you to take a road test, then you may want to visit another location. DMV offices are also located in other locations in Fairfax, Prince

William, Loudoun counties and Alexandria. Find other locations here:

<http://www.dmv.state.va.us/DMVLocator/>

Requirements for obtaining a driver's license:

<http://www.dmv.state.va.us/drivers/#eligibility.html>

Transportation from airports to George Mason University

Please follow the link to explore your transportation options from Virginia airports:

<http://transportation.gmu.edu/airportservices.html>

Campus Maps

<https://www.gmu.edu/resources/welcome/Directions-to-GMU.html>

Our office at the Fairfax campus is located in Student Union Building (SUB) I Room 4300 and is open from 8:30am – 5:00 pm M-F. Our walk-in hours are Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm (no prior appointment required). Christine Bodziak, J-1 student advisor, has office hours on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.

We look forward to meeting you!

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