



## 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, 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.

For the Spring 2021 semester, GMU plans to have in-person, hybrid (partially in-person and partially online), and fully online classes. **As a new J-1 Exchange Visitor student, at least 50% of your classes will need to be in-person or hybrid classes.**

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. **Read the instructions on the back of the form.** 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. If not validated in a timely manner, your SEVIS record will automatically be invalidated, which will significantly complicate your status at GMU.

### Obtaining a U.S. Visa

Due to pandemic conditions, you should first confirm that the consulate in your country is open for routine visa processing or will accept emergency appointments for J-1 Exchange Visitor students with upcoming program start dates.

#### 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>

You will also need to pay the fee to accompany your DS-160, Application for Non-Immigrant Visa. Bring to your visa interview: your GMU acceptance letter, this welcome letter that confirms you will be taking some or your classes in person, proof of funding documents, a printed copy of your DS-160 confirmation page, your DS-160/visa (MRV) fee receipt, your I-901 SEVIS fee receipt, your DS-2019 Form, a passport photo that meets Department of State requirements and your passport. As of September 2020, the current SEVIS fee is \$220 and the J-1 non-immigrant visa fee is \$160. These costs are subject to change. Please note, the visa and SEVIS fees are nonrefundable, but are valid for a year.

**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 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

**New Exchange Visitor students will need to live in on-campus housing. Appropriate physical distancing procedures will be in place on-campus as mentioned in the Safe Return to Campus Plan: <https://www2.gmu.edu/Safe-Return-Campus>. More information about on campus housing can be found at: <https://housing.gmu.edu/>**

## 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 [Aetna Student Health](#) 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/>

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 the J program. Below are some outside insurance companies that provide health insurance for dependents or Exchange Visitor Students on post-completion Academic Training:

### Seven Corners Travel Insurance

<https://www.sevencorners.com/student-travel-insurance#/quote>

### **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 select 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.

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/>

## Scams Targeting International Students

There has been an increase in scams targeting international students worldwide. Scams target students to obtain personal information (identity theft) or to obtain money. Scammers could be strangers posing as another student, university official, US or home government official or police. Before you arrive to the US and during your stay, be on the lookout for the following:

- If you see something for sale and the price is too good to be true, it may be a scam.
- A sense of urgency is created; you need to pay a deposit immediately or lose the opportunity.
- A caller demands payment immediately by wire transfer, third party payment site or gift cards.
- A person states you are a victim of identity theft and provides your personal information (which they found on social media or stole before contacting you).
- They offer to “transfer” your call to the police (they will just transfer to another scammer).
- They are demanding or threatening. The caller makes you feel scared, makes you promise not to hang up the phone and not to tell anyone else.
- They ask for your personal ID numbers and passwords.
- They offer to pay something for you, but pay more than the amount and then ask for you to refund them the difference

Scammers also have been known to contact the family of an international student using similar techniques. Please keep in mind that the US government would not demand payment over the phone immediately. If you receive a suspicious call or if you receive a suspicious email or letter, please alert OIPS. It is important you review the OIPS Scam Awareness Website to become familiar these scams: <https://oips.gmu.edu/scams/>

## 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.

OIPS has a website for [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Information](#) for international students and Scholars. It includes a link [GMU's Safe Return to Campus website](#). Please note that throughout the semester, individual offices may change in person and virtual service operations. Please remember to check directly with the office to confirm their most updated services.

The [Mason Ready website](#) has 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 traveling 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. If you ever feel unsafe walking across campus, call (703) 993-2810 and a Police cadet can escort you to your destination. With the worldwide increase in scams targeting international students, OIPS has also created a [Scam Awareness Website](#).

Rave Guardian Public Safety App: This free public safety app offers a variety of features including a virtual safety option and a panic call button to alert GMU Police. It's free at [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 [Center for the Advancement of Well-Being](#) 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, consultations, and resources in the areas of interpersonal violence, personal wellness, and alcohol and drug use.

[Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (CAPS) provides important resources for students. In addition to having counselors on staff for guidance, they also have crisis hotlines available 24/7, a text line and an online chat. They offer online information and workshops focusing on a variety of issues such as stress reduction, suicide prevention and eating disorders. CAPS also provides referrals for off-campus services.

[Learning Services](#) offers online academic coaching and virtual academic success workshops. They have an [online library of video presentations](#) on topics such as: Exam Strategies, Managing Academic Anxiety, Time Management, Notetaking and Studying among others. These workshops are a great resource for international students to also become better acquainted with American academic culture!

The CAPS website 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. The Fairfax location is open. Students need to first call 703-993-2831 to speak to a nurse before scheduling an appointment. For assistance when the clinic is closed, SHS has an after-hours nurse advice hotline at the same number (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 have been approved by OIPS to work, 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 call 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:

- lost or stolen immigration documents (i.e., passport and visa)
- theft of intellectual property or violations of export controls
- serious illness or injury or if you are quarantined due to COVID-19
- incident involving litigation or the criminal justice system (incidents with police including arrests 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. While on-campus, you can report suspicious activity, crimes, and emergencies to Mason Police at 703-993-2810 (non-

emergencies) or 9-1-1 (emergencies). Remember to report to OIPS any emergencies INVOLVING AN EXCHANGE VISITOR'S HEALTH, SAFETY, AND WELFARE by calling (703) 993-2970 or emailing [ichizhov@gmu.edu](mailto:ichizhov@gmu.edu)

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](#).

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

### **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 citizenship or 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](#)." here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/skill-list-by-country.html>

### **How to Fulfill?**

To satisfy the home residence requirement, the individual subject to 212(e) must reside in the country of nationality or last legal permanent residence or be physically present in those locations for at least two years. It can also be an aggregate amount of two years if the person departed and returned to the country at various times. The two-year time period begins after the completion of the J1 program and the Exchange Visitor's departure from the United States. Exchange Visitors who are subject may return to the U.S. while they are still subject in other non-immigrant categories including but not limited to F-1 student, J-1 Exchange Visitor, B visitor and the O-1 foreign national of extraordinary ability. Exchange Visitors that are subject:

- Cannot pursue a change of status in the U.S. (with certain exceptions).
- Apply for H, L, or K visa
- Change status in US to a legal permanent resident/immigrant visa.

Exchange Visitors interested in applying for a waiver of the Two Year Residence Requirement can find more information on the Department of State's website: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study/exchange/waiver-of-the-exchange-visitor.htm>

## 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):	03/12/13
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. Please visit our website at: <https://oips.gmu.edu/oips-is-online/> to confirm the most recent announcements regarding walk-in hours and virtual services.

We look forward to meeting you!

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