

PRE-ARRIVAL GUIDE

*EXCHANGE
VISITOR
GRADUATE
STUDENT*

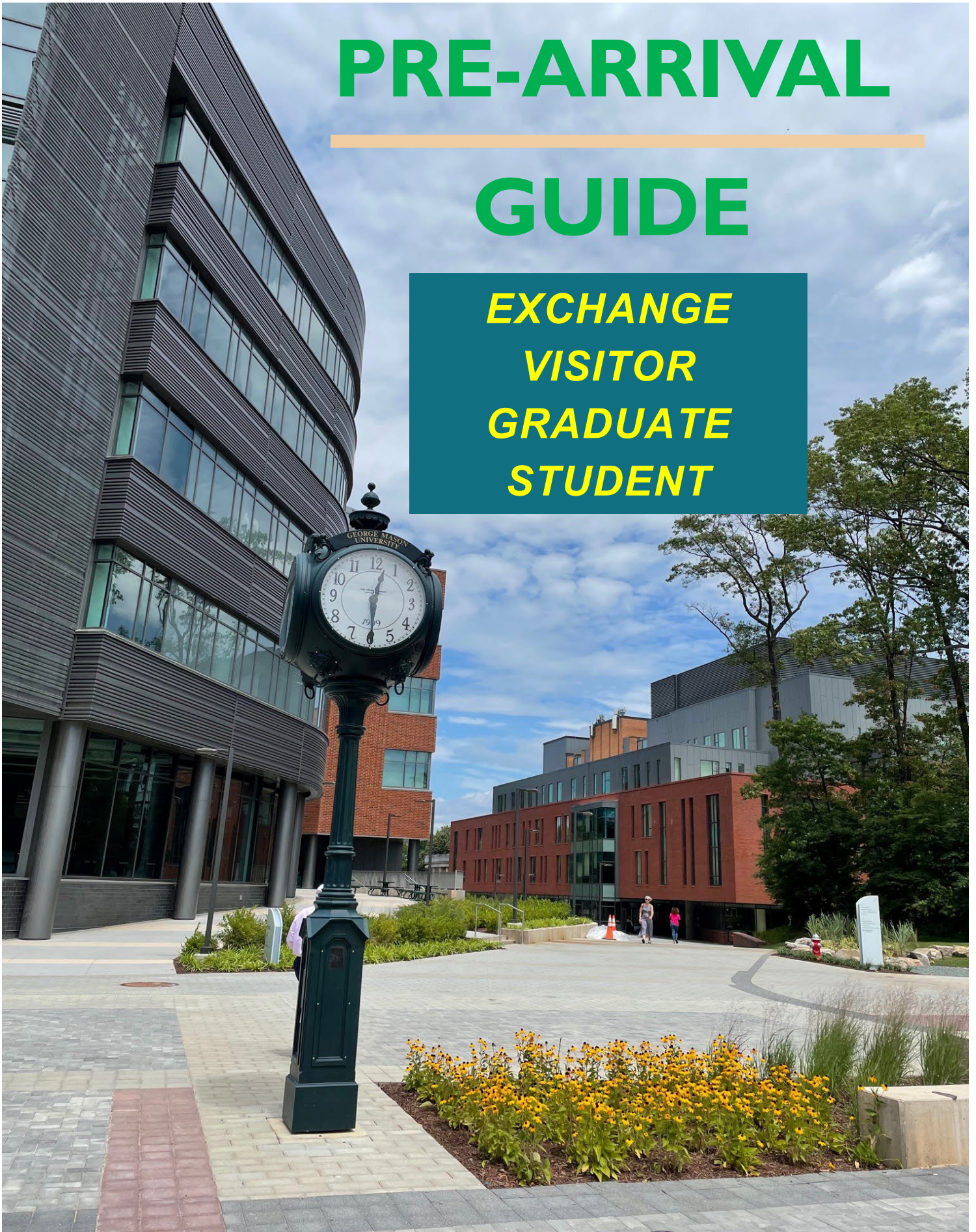


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Photo by Evan Cantwell/Creative Services

OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

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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, also known now as BridgeUSA, operates under the auspices of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Its purpose is to provide you with an opportunity to participate in an educational and cultural program in the United States, return home to share your experiences, and encourage Americans to participate in educational and cultural programs abroad. 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, GMU complies with regulations and compliance administration outlined in 22 CFR Part 62. As a participant, you are expected to comply with 22 CFR Part 62. As the Alternate Responsible Officer for GMU's exchange visitor students, I am writing to provide information that you will need to prepare for your trip to the U.S.

For the Fall 2023 semester, GMU plans to have in-person, hybrid (partially in-person and partially online), and fully online classes. Before March 2020, graduate students were not allowed to have a fully online class for their first 9 credits. These regulations were modified during the pandemic. **Currently, we are waiting for updated guidance which we expect to be released by the end of June 2023.** Please read any emails from OIPS sent to your official GMU email address to keep up on any new OIPS guidance.

Orientation and Arrival at George Mason

The Office of International Programs and Services will host a required in person orientation program. More information is located here: <https://oips.gmu.edu/attend-orientation/> As part of your required orientation program, I will also schedule a J-1 compliance meeting.

I wish you safe travels to the United States!

Sincerely,

Christine A. Bodziak

International Advisor

cbodziak@gmu.edu

OBTAINING A U.S. VISA

Review your DS-2019 form confirming all information is correct. Contact your J-1 advisor if you have any questions. Read the front and back of the DS-2019 form and sign the EXCHANGE VISITOR CERTIFICATION on the bottom of page 1 of the DS-2019 form.

Steps to Obtain a U.S. Visa

- Have on hand your passport and your Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Status (DS-2019 Form)
- Have ready a digital photo that meets the requirements
- Find the website of the U.S. consulate in your country of residence here:
<http://www.usembassy.gov/>
- Confirm if there are any additional documents or fees needed for this particular consulate
- Open a record in the Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) and pay the *required* SEVIS fee (901 fee) at <https://fmjfee.com/i901fee/> Currently, the fee is \$220
Note: Your SEVIS number is the number that begins with the letter “N” in the top right of your DS-2019 form
- Print the SEVIS fee payment receipt
- Complete the Visa Application Form (DS-160)
- Print the DS-160 confirmation page and payment receipt
- If you applied for a US visa before or if your country participates in the Visa Waiver Program, check to see if the in-person interview can be waived. If not, follow the directions on the consulate’s website to schedule your interview
- Pay the MRV/visa fee when you schedule your interview. The fee is \$160 until May 29, 2023 and \$185 starting on May 30, 2023. Please note, the visa and SEVIS fees are valid for a year, but are nonrefundable. Costs are subject to change

Approximate wait time to receive a visa appointment can be found at:

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

However, due to the pandemic, it may or may not be accurate. Read the consulate's updates regarding visa processing on their website and follow the specific consulate on social media.

Bring to your Visa Interview, the following PRINTED documents:

- Your GMU acceptance letter
- Your OIPS welcome letter with OIPS contact information.
- Proof of funding documents
- Printed copies of your DS-160 confirmation page, your DS-160/visa (MRV) fee receipt and your I-901 SEVIS fee receipt
- Your DS-2019 Form
- **Check the consulate's website to confirm if any additional fees or documents are needed per the consulate's requirements**

Be prepared, honest, polite, and confident when presenting yourself to the consular officer during your visa interview. They may ask what you plan to study, why you selected Mason, and what your plans are after your program. You may be asked to show your admission letter from GMU, 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 and confirm your non-immigrant intent. Consular officers have the sole authority to either grant the visa or refuse the visa.

Please note that there is a chance refused applications may be flagged for administrative processing if the consular officer determined they did not have adequate information to verify if you are eligible for a visa. Please notify your J-1 advisor immediately if your application was flagged for administrative processing so we can advise you on next steps.

PLEASE NOTE: As of April 27, 2023, the Department of State no longer requires an original DS-2019 with wet blue ink signature of the Responsible Officer or Alternate Responsible Officer for processing. Thus, scanned DS-2019 forms that are sent electronically (with black or blue ink signature or with a digital signature from the sponsor) and then printed by the exchange visitor are also valid for visa processing, entry, or re-entry to the United States.

TRAVELING TO THE UNITED STATES

You can enter the United States up to 30 days before the program start date indicated on your DS-2019 form. Also, you have a grace period that allows you to stay in the U.S. for up to 30 days from the program end date on your DS-2019 form before departing the U.S.

Your visa permits you to travel to a U.S. Port of Entry. For most travelers, this is an international airport in the U.S. where you present yourself to the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer after disembarking from your flight. You will present certain documents and may be asked to show supporting documents. Be prepared, honest, polite, and confident when presenting yourself to CBP officials. Place these important **printed** documents in your carry-on luggage during your flight when you travel so that they are readily available:

- Your passport with valid visa
- Your DS-2019 form
- Your admission letter
- Your OIPS welcome letter that has our contact information
- A print out of your classes from Patriot Web
- Your proof of funding documents
- Emergency contact information both in the United States (if applicable) and in your home country
- The address where you will be staying

Present **your passport, DS-2019 form that was signed by the consulate and entry visa** to the immigration official at the U.S. port of entry. They may ask questions that will require you to show some of your supporting documents. If they have additional questions, they may direct you to a secondary inspection site.

Almost everything in the United States can be paid using a credit card, so you should have one with you when you arrive. You will use it for your living expenses and might need it in an emergency. Do not carry a large amount of cash with you. If you must enter the U.S. with cash, we encourage you to use traveler's checks, which are more secure and can be replaced if lost.

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

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

ARRIVAL AND ORIENTATION

The Office of International Programs and Services will provide a pre-arrival meeting and a required in person orientation program. More information is located here: <https://oips.gmu.edu/attend-orientation/> Please note that there are some separate meetings depending upon if students are F-1 or J-1 students. Please email your J-1 advisor at cbodziak@gmu.edu to let us know your arrival plans in order to facilitate scheduling a required post-arrival compliance orientation meeting. Your graduate department would provide you with information regarding any separate orientation activities.

Once you have arrived in the United States, OIPS will validate your SEVIS record to confirm that you have arrived and started your program. In order for us to do so, each J-1 student must complete the J-1 online check-in process on the OIPS website. For the check-in process, you will need to know your G#, your local address, U.S. phone number (if applicable) and emergency contact information. You should plan to complete the J-1 check-in form as soon as possible after arrival, but no later than August 31st. You can only complete the check-in form AFTER arriving in the U.S. as you need to upload your most recent I-94 record. Please follow this link to start the check-in form:

<https://oips.gmu.edu/international-student-check-in-form-for-j-1-students/>

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: 11/05/2014

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):	03/11/2013
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.

Print

HOUSING

You may want to check the Office of Housing and Residence Life about Fall 2023 opportunities to live on campus. Beacon Hall is an option on the Sci-Tech campus. Graduate students may also have options available on the Fairfax Campus to live in the Townhouses or the Angel Cabrera Global Center or at Masonvale.

In addition, we recommend working with Contemporary Student Services (CSS) for your off-campus housing search: <https://contemporary.gmu.edu> Read the Renter Resources and Renter Education sections of their website. Understand the cost, availability, and schedule for public transportation to and from campus. Housing scams occur, so please read over the CSS and OIPS resources and information about renting in Fairfax and to protect yourself.

You can also find a variety of tips on the OIPS website at: <https://oips.gmu.edu/offcampus/>

Tip: The current minimum needed to meet basic living expenses (excluding health insurance) for a single graduate student at GMU is: \$33,684 per calendar year. The cost of living in the metro Washington, DC area is one of the highest in the United States and actual living costs will vary greatly depending on lifestyle choices. Thus, it is very important that you research the cost of housing and other living expenses before you travel to the U.S. Please pay particular attention on how to avoid housing scams: <https://oips.gmu.edu/scams/>



Photo by Lathan Goumas/Office of Communication and Marketing

HEALTH INSURANCE

Exchange Visitors and their dependents must maintain health insurance for the entire period of J status in the United States. U.S. 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. It meets and exceeds the requirements. Along with your DS-2019, you will receive an International Student Welcome letter from the Student Health Insurance office explaining that international students are automatically enrolled in the health plan and the international student premium is due by the first day of classes. Per regulation 22 CFR 62.14(i) a willful failure to maintain health insurance will result in termination from the exchange program. Sponsored students who receive scholarships that cover the insurance fees must work with the Third-Party Billing Office in Students Accounts to ensure they have a copy of your sponsorship letter. Sponsored students must follow up with their government sponsor to confirm that invoices are received and are in process.

You can find more information about the plan and how to access your health insurance benefits at:
<https://shs.gmu.edu/insurance/resources/>

If you are bringing a spouse or child 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. Insurance must be valid for the entire program dates listed on the DS-2019 form with no gaps in coverage. Please follow the link below to learn more about enrollment options for dependents:

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

IMPORTANT NOTE: Please review the plan dates when considering your health insurance coverage. J-1 students arriving before the start of their Aetna Student Health coverage may want to purchase supplemental insurance coverage until the health plan start date. Once your program starts, 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:

ISO Insurance:

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

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/>

Exchange visitors and automatic payroll deductions for insurance: If you are employed by GMU with health insurance benefits, 22 CFR 62.14(b) requires that, "If the sponsor provides health insurance, or arranges for health insurance to be offered the exchange visitor, via payroll deduction at the host organization, the exchange visitor must voluntarily authorize this action in writing and also be given the opportunity to make other arrangements to obtain insurance.

Tips for selecting a health insurance provider for your dependents or for post-completion Academic Training:

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 J requirements mentioned earlier. A plan that worked for your friend or colleague may not be the best option for your family. You should carefully review the details of any insurance plan you are considering. Some plans have a higher deductible than others. Some may require you to pay out-of-pocket and submit claim forms for re-imbursement. Consider your budget, the healthcare needs of your family, and the ability to meet the terms of the specific insurance plan.

** 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 a 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. If you have a sponsor that pays your health insurance fee and they do not submit payment in a timely manner, you may be required to pay the fee and then request a re-imbursement when the credit appears on your account.

If you are employed at GMU and eligible for health insurance benefits, please attend the Benefits Orientation in Human Resources (Fairfax campus, Merten Hall, 4th floor).

THE COST OF U.S. HEALTH CARE

Your health insurance may not cover the full cost of your doctor's visit, hospitalization or medication. Review the rules related to your plan to understand fully what is covered. **The GMU Student Health Insurance website has an excellent resource for understanding insurance terms with links to the Aetna website: <https://shs.gmu.edu/insurance/resources/>**

Here are some 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/>

DURING YOUR PROGRAM

The OIPS Website

The OIPS website has many resources regarding J-1 student responsibilities, remaining in status, employment, program extension procedures and much more at: <https://oips.gmu.edu/j-1-students/>

Employment

Many graduate students work on campus as graduate assistants, have on campus employment related to or not related to their field of study, or seek an off-campus experience which must be approved as Academic Training. Any work performed while you are physically in the U.S. must be pre-approved by OIPS. OIPS will review employment options during orientation and also hold an employment workshop at the beginning of each semester.

Online and Hybrid Courses

J-1 students may only enroll in one three credit online or hybrid* course as part of their full-time enrollment requirement. If you are interested in taking more than one 3 credit hybrid/online course, you must first register for the minimum full-time requirement, before registering for any additional online or hybrid courses.

Graduate Assistantships

Assistantships must also be predominately in-person. Thus, 60 percent of the components of the assistantship (teaching classes, research, office hours, department meetings, etc.) should be in-person. This is unique to J-1 international students and you should communicate with your advisor and department about this requirement. If you have an assistantship, please email me to confirm it meets the requirement.

Summer Study and Summer Assistantships

However, please keep in mind that there is still no summer minimum enrollment requirement unless it is your final term. Thus, you could take any number of hybrid/online courses during the summer and a summer assistantship would not need to follow the predominately in-person requirement. Assistantships that count towards full-time credit enrollment requirements during the academic year must be predominately in-person.

Sites of Activity

If you are registered for an online or hybrid course, please let me know. OIPS will need to add your local address as additional site of activity to your SEVIS record. Please also let OIPS know if you are registered for any classes at Mason Square or Sci-Tech so that we can also enter that location as a site activity. If your assistantship is on another GMU campus that is not the one listed on your DS-2019 form, OIPS will also need to add an additional site of activity to your SEVIS record.

All sites of activity must be in the United States. If you have an interest in conducting research while abroad during the academic year, OIPS will need to shorten your J-1 program. Then, you will need to apply for a J-1 program extension so that OIPS can issue you a new DS-2019 form before you can apply for a new J-1 visa in order to return to the United States.

***A hybrid course that meets for 60 percent or more face-to-face may be counted as an in-person course for J-1 student compliance.**

Cultural Activities

Pursuing a degree program at George Mason University as an Exchange Visitor Student is also a commitment to engage in cultural activities in the U.S. and share your culture with Americans. OIPS offers a variety of cultural programming for our international students. Read the OIPS weekly newsletter, follow us on social media, and check out [our website](#) to find out about events and programs. Additionally, your department will also host and share information about a variety of engagement opportunities. We encourage you and your family members to become involved in campus and local organizations and clubs. Mason 360 is a great resource to find campus groups and activities: <https://mason360.gmu.edu/> GMU's Graduate Student Life is also an excellent resource: <https://gradlife.gmu.edu/> as is the Graduate and Professional Student Association: <https://gapsa.gmu.edu/>

If you need assistance to locate any additional resources, please do not hesitate to contact us. We also want to recognize and celebrate your participation in cultural events during your program. Please share with us any significant involvement or achievement. In the past, GMU J-1 students have been involved in student government, OIPS iCafes, GMU club sports, student research symposiums and campus award ceremonies to name a few.



Mason Graduate Bike and Paddle. Photo by Ian Shiff/Creative Services

SAFETY AND WELLBEING RESOURCES

Your safety and well-being during your program are among our highest priorities. We would like to remind you of resources offered by GMU and inform you of the requirements for reporting health and safety incidents to OIPS.

You can also find a variety of resources also on the [OIPS website](#) including important information on the [J-1 Student website](#). There may be situations not listed here 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 and direct you to the appropriate resources. In addition, we want you to understand how a situation may affect your status in the U.S.

Updating your Address and Phone Number

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. If you move to an on-campus address, the Housing office will update your address. If you move off-campus, for the first time or any subsequent time, you must update your own address in Patriot Web. Please remember to have it listed as “off-campus residence” and not “permanent address” as international students only have permanent addresses outside the U.S. In addition, if your permanent address in your home country changes or your emergency contact person either here or abroad changes, please update this on Patriot Web too.

When You Need Personal Connection and Support

- [Mason 360](#): is GMU’s student engagement platform. It has information about a variety of student organizations and campus events.
- GMU’s [Student Support and Advocacy Center \(SSAC\)](#): SSAC offers programming, consultations, and resources in the areas of interpersonal violence, financial wellbeing, personal wellness, and alcohol and drug use [including in person support and recovery groups](#).
- [A GMU Success Coach](#) can act as a resource to assist you with academic, personal, and career goals.
- [TimelyCare](#) offers 24/7 on-demand mental health access from your phone.
- Psychological Services offers the [Stepped Mental Health Care Program](#) providing an emotional support line and counseling.
- [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#): CAPS provides free and confidential short-term mental health services to 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 [virtual workshops](#) focusing on a variety of issues such as healthy relationship advice, managing anxiety, and stress reduction. There [are also in person support groups](#), [Managing COVID-19 Re-Entry Anxiety Resources](#), and a “Relax and Unwind” drop-in space. CAPS provides referrals for off-campus services. Consider making an appointment for their [Mind Spa!](#)
- The CAPS website has [Multicultural Resources](#) with links to [Disability Services](#); [LGBTQ+ Resources](#); and the Center for Culture, Equity and Empowerment. On the [CCEE website](#), you can find information about reporting an incident that was motivated by bias. The LGBTQ+ website has a list of services and resources such as a Support Group, Trans Closet, and an events listing by the [Queer Student Leadership Council](#).
- [Contemporary Student Services \(CSS\)](#): offers resources for off-campus housing, renter rights and responsibilities resources, and a variety of other resources. The office serves off-campus students; pregnant and parenting students; and married, divorced, and widowed students; veterans and military
-

affiliated students; and transfer students. Additional student parenting resources can be found here: [Student Parenting Resources | Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion \(gmu.edu\)](#)

Well-being Resources

As a model well-being university, GMU strives to provide everyone in the campus community with the support to thrive together.

- [The Center for the Advancement of Well-Being](#): Discover links to online well-being assessments, campus offices, and campus events that promote well-being. Students may want to take advantage of:
 - [Resilience Resources](#): Learn about the importance of resilience for your wellbeing.
 - [Mental Health First Aid Training](#): Next session is in March.
 - [Thriving Together Series](#): a series of articles on diverse well-being topics.

How to Access Healthcare

- [GMU's Student Health Services \(SHS\)](#) provides high quality health care, counseling, health education and prevention services to George Mason University students. 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 800-466-0386 and a list of [after-hours urgent care centers](#) (walk-in clinics) on their website. They also have a webpage with details about [COVID Services](#).
- The [Student Health Insurance office](#) has details about the insurance coverage and fees for international students and links to insurance plan documents. In addition, there are tips on how [to understand your insurance](#) and health education resources.

When You Need Academic Tutoring or Time Management Assistance

- [Learning Services](#) offers online academic coaching and academic success workshops. They have an [online library of video presentations](#) on topics such as: 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! They also have a guide on [how to be a successful online learner](#).

COVID-19 Resources

- [GMU's Safe Return to Campus website](#) has more detailed campus-wide information.

Emergency and Disaster Preparation Resources

- The [Mason Ready website](#): GMU resources to assist in emergency and disaster preparedness.
- [Active Threats Awareness and Prevention Video](#): Educate yourself about these important issues.
- [Mason Alert](#) Emergency Notification System: receive timely information about campus emergencies.
- [National Weather Service Forecast Office](#): resources to monitor severe weather such as hurricanes, tornadoes, floods or wildfires in our area or when you travel.

Public Safety and Crime Prevention Resources

Educating yourself about the safety and security of your environment can be different in the U.S. than in your home country. There are several campus and local resources that will assist you in understanding crimes in the area and crime prevention. 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).

- GMU Department of Police and Public Safety: has information regarding awareness and responding to campus violence. They also have links to other area law enforcement websites.
- Crime and Fire log: GMU's Department of Police and Public safety publishes this daily so that you can be informed about 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.
- Campus Assistance: If you ever feel unsafe walking across campus, call (703) 993-2810 and a police cadet can escort you to your destination.
- Rave Guardian Public Safety App: A free public safety app offering 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.
- Scam Awareness Website: OIPS created this website to educate the international community at Mason about how to protect themselves from losing money and identity theft.

Understanding your Rights and Responsibilities

- GMU Student Rights and Responsibilities: are listed in the university catalog. This section also lists what steps can be taken for various concerns and lists the responsibilities of all students. **It is important that you read through this section so that you can understand the policies and procedures of the university as many policies and procedures may be different than your other university experience(s).**
- The Ombuds Office is a confidential resource for students, staff, and faculty to facilitate communication and acts as a resource to help foster an environment of respect, honesty, fairness, and integrity and to bolster a supportive working and learning climate at GMU.
- The "Know your Rights" Pamphlet: If you have been approved by OIPS to work, it is important that you feel safe and are treated fairly in your work environment. Exchange visitors receive this pamphlet during your visa interview. It details the rights of non-immigrants while working in the United States. Please remember to review approval requirements for on-campus and off-campus employment at the OIPS website.
- Updating Your Chosen Name and Pronouns: GMU supports students who wish to identify in Patriot Web their chosen first name, gender identity, and pronouns.

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
- incident involving litigation or the criminal justice system (incidents with police including arrests or the 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.

Remember, for an urgent or life-threatening emergency, call 911 for immediate assistance. If you have a non-emergency health concern that requires medical attention, reach out to Student Health Services. 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

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 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.

NEAR THE END OF YOUR PROGRAM

Program Completion

Your program completion date is generally the date of your last exam or your defense date. Your J-1 program end date on your current DS2019 is the last day of exams for that semester. If your defense date is much earlier in the Fall or Spring semester, OIPS will need to shorten your program end date and your 30-day grace period will begin after your updated J-1 program end date. Students with summer defense dates will have their J-1 program completion date be the defense date or the last exam date of the session their defense is scheduled. Keep this in mind to consider when you need to depart the United States and if you want to attend your graduation ceremony during your grace period.

Program Extension

If you will not complete your academic program by the current end date on your DS-2019 form, remember to apply for a program extension as soon as possible. More information is at:

<https://go.gmu.edu/pgm3>

Note that exchange visitors who are subject to 212(e) are not eligible for an extension of their J-1 program if the Department of State has forwarded a positive recommendation for a 212(e) waiver to the Department of Homeland Security.

Post-Completion Academic Training

If you are interested in participating in post-completion Academic Training, please schedule an appointment with your J-1 advisor as soon as possible. More information about Academic Training can be found at: <https://oips.gmu.edu/academic-training/>

Future J-1 Programs

After you leave the U.S. at the end of your program, if you are considering returning to the U.S., keep in mind there is a 12-month bar on participation that impacts both J1 and J2 participants interested in returning in the J1 Research Scholar or Professor category. Please also check to see if your visa notes if you are subject to 212 (e) if considering returning in certain other statuses.



Photo by Evan Cantwell/Creative Services

THE TWO-YEAR RESIDENCY REQUIREMENT

Some J1 exchange visitors are subject to Section 212(e) in the Immigration and Nationality Act; what is called the Two-Year Home Country Physical Presence Requirement, the Two-Year Residency Requirement or simply, the Two-Year Rule. It applies to 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 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*
- Cannot change status in U.S. 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>. Change of status in the U.S. is not permitted if you are subject to 212(e) unless you obtain a waiver.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Banking and Driver's License Information

Wells Fargo is now the official banking partner of GMU. More information is here:

<https://shopmason.gmu.edu/banking/>

Banks off-campus near the Fairfax campus:

United Bank (10695B Braddock Road/University Mall, Fairfax, VA)

<https://bankwithunited.com>

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

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

TD Bank (11098 Fairfax Boulevard, Fairfax, VA)

<https://www.td.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>

J-2 RESOURCES

Employment

J-2 dependents can find information about applying for work authorization on the OIPS website:

Daycare and Preschools

For information about daycare, private pre-schools and childcare, please visit:

<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/ofc/>

<http://family.arlingtonva.us/child-care/>

<https://www.loudoun.gov/2503/Child-Care-Providers-Resources>

Public School Enrollment for Children

Please visit the appropriate county website of where your local address is located:

Fairfax County Public Schools:

<https://www.fcps.edu/registration/general-registration-requirements>

Arlington Public Schools:

<https://www.apsva.us/registering-your-child/>

Loudoun County Public Schools:

<http://www.loudoun.k12.va.us/site/default.aspx?PageID=1>

Prince William County Public Schools:

[Registration - Prince William County Public Schools \(pwcs.edu\)](https://www.pwcs.edu/Registration)

The GMU Contemporary Student Services Office is also an excellent resource for families:

<https://contemporary.gmu.edu/>

Campus Maps

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

Transportation

GMU provides a free campus shuttle for students who show their GMU ID. Students may also ride the Fairfax CUE buses with their ID. More information on these services along with parking information is located here: <https://transportation.gmu.edu/category/transportation/>

Other local transportation options are [Fairfax County Connector Buses](#) and [WMATA](#) metro trains and buses that serve the greater metropolitan area of Washington, DC.

Our office at the Fairfax campus is located in Student Union Building I (SUB-1), 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 for Fall 2023.

We look forward to meeting you!

Christine A. Bodziak

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International Advisor and Alternate Responsible Officer (ARO)

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