

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAM STUDENT GUIDE



Virginia Commonwealth University

TABLE OF CONTENTS



Access this
guide
online!

1. Housing	Page 3
2. Health and Wellness	Page 4
3. Transportation	Page 8
4. Exploring Outside of VCU	Page 10
5. On Campus Resources and Opportunities	Page 11
6. Career Services and Employment	Page 12
7. Contact Us	Page 13

Housing arrangements should be made as soon as possible following your admission. **DO NOT wait until your arrival.** GEO does not have emergency or temporary housing units available for students who arrive in the U.S. without housing assignments.

On-Campus Housing

On-campus housing is limited and assigned in the order in which applications are received. For important information about living on campus and to submit an application, visit the [Residential Life & Housing](#) website. On-campus housing for graduate and upper-class students is reserved for returning students and those admitted to specialized programs. If you are a new graduate or upper-class student, you are encouraged to seek off-campus housing.

Students admitted to the English Language Program (ELP) will not be able to access the housing application online. If you are unable to submit an online housing application through the Residential Life & Housing website, please contact global@vcu.edu for assistance.

Off-Campus Housing

There are a variety of off-campus housing options in the Richmond area - many are located within close proximity of campus grounds or easily accessible via [public transportation](#).

Additional housing resources, including for first-time and international renters, are available through the VCU [Off-Campus Housing](#) website and in our [International Student Housing Guide](#).

Before signing a lease, you are welcome to meet with a GEO staff member to go through the terms of the agreement and ensure that all contract items are agreeable to you. To set up an appointment, please email global@vcu.edu.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Immunizations

All new VCU students are required to submit a [Certificate of Immunization](#).

Prior to your arrival, you should work with a health care provider in your country to:

- Gather your immunization records
- Obtain any outstanding immunizations [required](#) for enrollment at VCU
- Complete the [Certificate of Immunization](#)

Visit the University Student Health Services (USHS) website to submit your [Certificate of Immunization](#) through the online [Student Health Web Portal](#).

Please note that USHS does **NOT** accept Tuberculosis (TB) screenings performed outside of the U.S. If your home country is on the current [High Burden TB list](#), you must get your TB screening no later than the end of the first week of classes. Be sure to check your emails for updates about available on-campus TB screening opportunities offered by USHS.

Health Insurance

Students enrolled in the English Language Program are **not** eligible to participate in VCU's Student Health Insurance program. This means that you are permitted to shop for any insurance plan you like. A simple internet search for "F-1 insurance plans" will show many different options.

Insurance plans designed for international students on F or J visas often include exclusions and limitations such as no or limited coverage for pre-existing conditions, limited coverage for certain services and many plans do not include coverage for routine or preventative medical care. Other important considerations include deductibles, copayments, co-insurance and out-of-pocket maximum coverage.

Dental and vision insurance are not included in American health insurance plans, but you can purchase separate dental and vision plans.

Below are some links that may help you begin your search. This list is not exhaustive, there are many insurance companies that offer international student insurance.

[United Healthcare Insurance](#)

[PSI Insurance](#)

[ISO Insurance](#)

[International Student Insurance \(ISI\)](#)

[Compass Student Insurance](#)

[HTH Travel Insurance](#)

[VISIT International Health Insurance](#)

[PGH Global](#)

NOTE: VCU is not contracted with any of these private companies and cannot advise you on the specifics of any of their current plans. These plans are listed in no particular order and will vary in terms of their pricing based on the amount of coverage that they provide.

You will need to speak to a customer service representative at each of these companies to identify which of their plans meet your unique medical needs and those of any dependents you may have. You can also inquire about any extended or specialized coverage that these plans offer (such as add-ons for dental care, vision care, etc.).

Many of these companies offer assistance in multiple languages. Please visit their websites for access to their language services and contact information for customer service representatives who can provide assistance in your first/primary language.

For more information regarding common insurance terminology, and how to use an insurance plan once it is acquired, please reference the [U.S. Health Insurance 101 Informational Slides](#).

Incoming students should make arrangements for medical, vision and dental checkups prior to departing for the U.S. Vision and dental coverage is generally not included in health insurance, so plan ahead and take care of any concerns at home.

Key Terms and Definitions for Health Insurance:

- **Co-Insurance:** The percentage of cost paid by insurance provider, vs. paid by the patient
- **Co-Pay:** Fixed contribution paid by patient for medical services

- ***Deductible***: Amount that must be paid by the patient before the insurance company will begin to pay
- ***Out of Pocket Maximum***: Maximum amount is per policy year. If the maximum amount is reached, the insurance company will then pay 100% of eligible expenses
- ***In-Network or Preferred Provider***: These are healthcare providers affiliated with your insurance, and generally means cheaper prices.
- ***Exclusions or Limitations***: Conditions or procedures that are omitted from coverage or covered at a benefit lower than the norm.

Healthcare Service Locations:

University Student Health Services: Conveniently located on the Monroe Park Campus, students can make an appointment [online](#). Student Health services are covered by a health fee automatically billed to students. Visit the Health Services Center for routine appointments, or general concerns.

Phone: (804) 828 8828

Email: ushs@vcu.edu

Patient First: a medical center that supports walk-in urgent care for routine injuries and illness. No appointment is needed. Visit a Patient First if you need immediate care but are **not** in a life-threatening emergency.

MedExpress: a medical center that supports walk-in urgent care for routine injuries and illness. No appointment is needed. Visit a MedExpress if you need immediate care but are not in a life-threatening emergency.

VCU Health Hospitals: a group of medical centers that offer emergency care for life threatening or serious medical needs.

Phone: (1 -800) 762 6161

VCU Healthcare Services: All English Language Program students pay a health fee as a component of their tuition cost. This allows students to see a medical professional at the VCU Student Health Center for no cost. The cost of lab work, medications or immunizations will incur an additional cost, which you will be informed of at your appointment.

If you are in an emergency situation, please call VCU Police at (804) 828-1234 or the nationwide emergency number, 911

Mental Health Services:

University Counseling: UCS aims to provide comprehensive evaluation and consultation for students on best options for their mental health care. This can include any of the following: Case management, short-term individual and relationship therapy, and consultation.

For more information about mental health services, visit *counseling.vcu.edu*

TimelyCare App: VCU students have free, 24/7 access to virtual care services with TimelyCare. Services do not require insurance, and include on demand crisis support, scheduled counseling, and well-being appointments.

Domestic and Wild Animal Considerations

Wild Animals in Virginia: While VCU is located in a city, there are still a variety of wild animals in the region that you should be aware of. The most common animals you could encounter are raccoons, opossums, squirrels, rabbits, and deer.

DO NOT attempt to pet, or assist a wild animal that you believe appears injured. It is very likely that this animal has rabies, a potentially deadly disease. If you do come into physical contact with a wild animal, **please visit a health care center immediately.**

Domestic Animals: Many residents of Richmond may have pet dogs, cats, birds, or reptiles. You will likely see dogs out for walks with their owners in local neighborhoods! Most residential areas have “leash laws” to ensure dogs are controlled when out in public.

Do **not** attempt to pet a dog unless invited to do so by the owner. While the animal is domesticated, it may have an adverse reaction to strangers!



TRANSPORTATION

Virginia Driver's License and ID

If you have a driver's license from your home country, or an international driver's license, you may legally drive in Virginia for 6 months after you arrive.

When you apply for a driver's license, you must bring the following documents:

- Passport
- I-94
- DS-2019
- Apartment lease, bank statement, **OR** utility statement (to prove residency)

You may be asked to take a test of Virginia's road rules, and an in-car driving test. For more information about requirements based on your country of origin, visit the [DMV website](#).

Information referenced from this [web resource](#) from The University of Virginia.

Car Ownership Responsibilities

If you choose to own a car while at VCU, there are several items you will need to secure and obtain:

- [Car Registration](#): A vehicle's registration proves you have registered it with the state and are legally allowed to drive it.
- [Car Insurance](#): This is an insurance policy that protects yourself, and your property (the car) in the case of accident. A simple internet search will bring up many car insurance options. We recommend you compare prices and coverage before choosing a plan!
- [License Plates](#): Once you have registered your vehicle, the DMV will provide you with license plates for your car. These must be on your car at all times.
- [State Inspection](#): it is required that you have your care inspected annually. This is to ensure that your car is safe to drive! You can get a state inspection at most auto shops, and some gas stations. If your car passes inspection, you will get a sticker to put in your window.
- [Property Tax](#): You will need to pay tax on your car each year as a part of your tax filing requirements.

What to do in a Car Accident

A *car accident* can encompass everything from a minor “fender bender” to larger more dangerous, or even life-threatening situations. **In all accident situations, be prepared to do the following:**

1. If you can, move your car to a safe place off the road. If you cannot, move yourself to a safe location.
2. Call 911 or the local police if the accident is serious enough to warrant medical assistance.
3. Collect your driver’s license and registration information.
4. Exit the car safely and approach the other driver.
5. Provide the other driver with your license and registration information. They may ask to take a picture of your information, or your car. This is a common request in these situations. You should also collect their license and registration information. Take pictures of any damage you can see visible on either car.
6. Determine next steps with the other driver. These could be any of the following:
 - a. Call the police to come to the scene and file separate reports. This is often done in situations where fault is unclear.
 - b. Plan to file separate reports with your car insurance companies, using the information shared from the other driver.
 - c. If the damage is minimal, the drivers may mutually decide to pursue no additional actions. This is rare.

Additional Transportation Services

VCU and the city of Richmond provide several transportation services to make getting around campus and the city convenient.

- [GRTC](#) is a free local city bus service that can take students to local shopping areas or downtown for dining/entertainment.
- [RamBikes](#) is a service that allows you to check out a VCU-branded bike, helmet, and bike lock so that you can cruise around campus and the city on your own two wheels.
- [RidePingo](#) is a shuttle service that provides transportation between university buildings (and campuses) during evening and early morning hours. This is an option if you do not want to walk alone at night, or if you are just feeling tired and want a ride back to the dorm after a late night of studying.
- [VA Airlink](#) can be hired for transportation to and from the Richmond airport or Amtrak train station (approximately \$70 per group each way).

Local Sites of Interest in Richmond:

Nature and Outdoors:

- James River (hiking trails, walking trails, site of music festivals)
- Brown's Island
- Belle Isle
- Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens
- Historic Church Hill
- Maymont Mansion

Museum District:

- Virginia Museum of Fine Arts
- Virginia Museum of History and Culture
- Science Museum of Virginia
- Valentine History Museum
- Maggie Walker National Historic Landmark
- VCU Institute for Contemporary Art

Shopping:

- Carytown Shopping and Restaurants
- Short Pump Mall Shopping

Sporting Events:

- VCU Rams
- Richmond Flying Squirrels
- Richmond Kickers

Sites of Interest Near Richmond:

- Williamsburg, Virginia
- Washington, D.C.
- Shenandoah National Park
- Virginia Beach

ON CAMPUS RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

GEO's Global Student Engagement team oversees the creation of an annual calendar of engagement programs and events that provide international students the opportunity to connect with their fellow students - international and domestic - and experience campus life to the fullest.

Here is a small sampling of the programs and events you are invited to participate in as an international student at VCU:

- [Global Buddies](#) - Fluent English speakers are paired with international students and scholars for weekly cultural exchange meetings.
- [Family Cultural Exchange Program](#) - Community volunteer families and international students are matched to be “paired” and meet at least once a month to participate in activities such as family dinners, sporting events, museum visits, and more!
- [Global Cafe, Tea Times, and International Coffee Hours](#) - These social events are designed to increase awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity at VCU, and provide the opportunity to meet students from across the globe.
- [Phi Beta Delta](#) - Phi Beta Delta is an honor society dedicated to recognizing scholarly achievement in international education
- [International Student Support Advisory Board \(ISSAB\)](#) - A group of students brought together to share issues of concern for international students at VCU and to offer feedback on GEO-sponsored programs, activities and resources.

For more information about our various programs and events, visit GEO's Student Engagement [website](#).

Additional Resources at VCU:

The VCU Writing Center: Writing Center Staff are trained to work with English language learners and to assist students become more confident writers.

Cary Street Gym: Fully equipped fitness center! Memberships available for a semesterly fee.

James Branch Cabell Library: Free for all community members! Books and computers available to utilize during open hours.

On-Campus Employment & F-1 Students

- All F-1 students are eligible for on-campus employment after they have reported to [Immigration Services](#) for SEVIS check-in and received their Continued Attendance I-20.
- F-1 ELP students may only engage in on-campus employment; they may not engage in any off-campus employment.
- ELP students may work on campus up to 20 hours per week during the Fall and Spring semesters when classes are in session. They may work on campus up to 40 hours per week during academic break periods (Summer, Fall, Winter, and Spring Break).

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

- Need more information about F-1 students and on-campus employment? Check out our [Student Employment Authorizations](#) webpage.
- How do I get a U.S. Social Security Number (SSN)? ? The first step (after completing SEVIS check-in) is to secure an on-campus job offer. After you have your job offer, follow the steps on our [Social Security](#) webpage to get your Employment Offer Letter from your employer and your Employment Authorization Letter from Immigration Services. [Immigration Services](#) will provide instructions for applying for your SSN. (If an F-1 student does not have employment, they do not need an SSN.)
- Aside from Aramark, are there other on-campus vendors F-1 students can look into job opportunities with? The Starbucks counter in the Cabell Library or the Barnes & Noble on Broad Street are examples of other eligible on-campus employment options for F-1 students. Please note that F-1 students are only eligible for employment at these vendors' sites because they are physically located here on the VCU campus and provide services to VCU students. Off-campus Starbucks or Barnes & Noble sites would not qualify.

Please utilize the resources through [Career Services](#), such as [Handshake](#), [meeting](#) with a career counselor, [resume](#) guides, and [interview](#) support, to find other on-campus employment opportunities.



Contact Us

Global Education Office (GEO)
Virginia Commonwealth University
Grace Street Center
912 West Grace Street, 4th Floor
P.O. Box 843043
Richmond, VA 23284-3043

+1 (804) 828-8471

✉ global@vcu.edu
🌐 www.global.vcu.edu



Global Education Office