



International Student Guide



VCU International Student
and Scholar Programs
Global Education Office



Welcome

The Global Education Office is pleased to welcome you to Virginia Commonwealth University. We're glad that you've decided to pursue your education here. Whether you're here for a semester or for the next four years, our office is here to help you succeed. We have a host of programs and services designed to help you thrive in the classroom, make friends on and off campus, learn about U.S. culture and accomplish your goals, whatever they may be.

International Student Orientation is your first step. Please use this booklet throughout orientation to take notes and refer back to it later to find resources around campus that you need.

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GLOBAL EDUCATION OFFICE PROGRAMS

**Education Abroad • global.vcu.edu/abroad
Room 144 • abroad@vcu.edu • 804-827-7882**

VCU students from every academic discipline are encouraged to extend their educational horizons by pursuing a part of their studies through an international program. Students can choose from a variety of education abroad options including short-term faculty-led study abroad programs, a semester or year abroad at one of VCU's International Partnership Universities, an exchange or direct enrollment abroad in one of 50 countries through the International Student Exchange Program and direct enrollment in non-VCU short- or long-term accredited programs.

**English Language Program • global.vcu.edu/elp
Room 215 • geo-elp@vcu.edu • 804-828-2551**

VCU's English Language Program offers language classes taught by professionally trained language teachers with master's degrees who are fluent in English. The ELP concentrates on academic English and study skills so that students can be successful in their academic and career pursuits.

**International Student and Scholar Programs • global.vcu.edu
Room 221 • issp@vcu.edu • 804-827-9331**

International students and scholars enrich our learning environment with their unique experiences, perspectives, and knowledge. GEO provides a full range of services to our international students, scholars and visitors including academic advising, immigration advising, student engagement advising and special programs.

**VCU Globe, A global education living-learning community • theglobe.vcu.edu
830 W. Grace St. • theglobe@vcu.edu • 804-828-7860**

VCU Globe is the university's living-learning program which prepares VCU students to live and work in a 21st-century global environment. Students in the program come from a variety of academic majors and participate in a specialized, globally-focused curriculum. In addition to the academic component, students in the program live together in the West Grace Student Housing-North residence hall, and together, the group participates in community engagement initiatives and leadership building activities.

Notes:

NEW INTERNATIONAL STUDENT CHECKLIST

Now that you've arrived at VCU, here's what you should do next:

Get your VCU student ID card.

Students must be registered for classes at least 24 hours before requesting a VCU ID card. Take your passport with you! VCU Card Office has locations at:

- Monroe Park campus: 701 W. Broad Street in the Technology Administration Building
- MCV campus: Sanger Hall, room B1-018

Find your eID and create your password to log in to your VCU email and e-Services.

For assistance, visit myeid.vcu.edu for instructions. All university correspondence will be sent to your VCU email address, so CHECK IT DAILY.

Purchase health insurance.

International students should have accident and sickness insurance during their stay in the U.S. Coverage should include medical evacuation and repatriation, and have at least \$250,000 in medical benefits.

Submit the certificate of immunization and complete the tuberculosis screening requirement.

For more information, please visit <https://health.students.vcu.edu/immunizations/submitting-immunization-records/> or visit one of these locations:

- Monroe Park campus: 1300 W. Broad St.
- MCV campus: 1000 E. Marshall St.

Attend New Student (undergraduates only) or Graduate Student Orientation (graduate students only).

All undergraduates must attend New Student Orientation. For more information and to register, visit www.nsf.vcu.edu/orientation. Graduate students should attend Graduate School orientation as well as their departmental orientation. For more information, and to register, visit www.graduate.vcu.edu/student/orientation.html.



ARRIVAL

Richmond International Airport is located approximately 12 kilometers from the VCU campus, a 15-minute ride by car. New students should plan to arrive no later than the weekend before International Student Orientation (ISO).

If you have not already done so, please visit <https://global.vcu.edu/students/started/> to register for ISO.

BANKING

Upon arrival, student engagement staff will assist new students in opening accounts at a local bank. As a non-resident alien, you are not required to have a social security number to open a bank account. In addition to living expenses, tuition and fees, we estimate that you will need at least \$4,000 (U.S. dollars) in cash or traveler's checks for your immediate expenses, including apartment deposit, rent and furnishings, food, transportation and other incidentals. If you are married or have dependents, allow for their additional expenses as well. Please remember that it is your responsibility to ensure that you have sufficient funds to meet your financial obligations.



HEALTH IMMUNIZATION RECORD



You are required to submit an official copy of your immunization record to University Student Health Services. Failure to do so will result in a registration hold on your student account. Download the VCU Certificate of Immunization and have a medical professional in your home country complete the form **in English before** you come to the U.S. This record may be submitted electronically or in person after you arrive. If you have questions, contact Ms. Lois Phillips, student health immunization coordinator, at lphillips4@vcu.edu. <https://health.students.vcu.edu/immunizations/forms--documents/>

NOTE: University Student Health Services does not accept tuberculosis (TB) tests given outside the U.S. You can get this test done at Student Health after you arrive.

HEALTH INSURANCE

Medical costs in the U.S. are expensive and are the student's financial responsibility. It is very important that students and scholars have health insurance to help with medical care, hospitalization and medical evacuation and repatriation, if needed. VCU does not have a student health insurance plan, but student engagement staff are here to help you select a plan that meets your individual needs.

Student engagement staff facilitate health insurance workshops during orientation and throughout the semester. During these workshops, staff explain important health insurance terms and how to evaluate various health insurance plans. All students should plan to attend one of these workshops. Student engagement staff are also available to meet with students and scholars who are unable to attend workshops or who have unique circumstances, such as pre-existing conditions.

If you are pregnant, or if there is any chance that you may become pregnant while studying at VCU, please plan to meet with student engagement staff as early as possible to discuss.

International student health insurance rates vary based upon age and coverage details. Students and scholars under the age of 30 can generally find affordable health insurance plans that cover pre-existing conditions. Most inexpensive plans DO NOT cover pre-existing conditions, preventative non-emergency care or maternity costs. However, these emergency plans will pay a portion of your medical bills if you experience an unforeseen medical accident, injury or illness. If you have questions about health insurance, please contact Nichole Dorton, international student engagement coordinator, at nldorton@vcu.edu.

All F-1 students are strongly encouraged to purchase health insurance while at VCU.

F-1 Health Insurance Recommendations:

- The best plans will provide unlimited coverage, but you should aim to purchase at least \$250,000 in coverage per accident, injury or illness.
- The plan should include medical evacuation and repatriation.
- The insurance provider does not need to be an American company, but should have a U.S. office.
- Plan to keep insurance coverage current at all times while studying here and purchase coverage in increments of at least one academic term. Plans that cover pre-existing conditions generally require the purchase of at least 6 months.
- Plan to enroll individually online at the insurance company's website. Student engagement staff are available to assist if needed.

All J-1 students and scholars are legally REQUIRED to purchase health insurance that meets the following guidelines:

- Medical benefits of at least \$100,000 per accident or illness
- Repatriation of remains in the amount of \$25,000
- Expenses associated with the medical evacuation of the J-1 visitor to his or her home country in the amount of \$50,000
- A deductible not to exceed \$500 per accident or illness

HOUSING

On-Campus Housing

On-campus housing is not guaranteed at VCU, and it is assigned in the order in which applications are received. For important information about living on campus and to submit an application, visit <https://housing.vcu.edu>.

International students who have not demonstrated English-language proficiency (passing TOEFL or IELTS scores) will not be able to access the housing application. If you are unable to submit a housing application through the Residential Life and Housing website, please contact Nichole Dorton at nldorton@vcu.edu for assistance.



Graduate and upper-class student housing is extremely limited at VCU. You are welcome to submit an application, however you will be added to the waiting list. We recommend that you seek off-campus housing.

Most first-year residence halls will be closed during Thanksgiving, winter and spring breaks (<https://academiccalendars.vcu.edu>). If you would like to remain on campus during any of these breaks, please select West Grace South, Gladding Residence Center or Gladding Residence Center III when submitting your application. Space in these halls is not guaranteed. If you are assigned to a different hall, please make plans to travel or stay off-campus during the Thanksgiving, winter and spring breaks.

Off-Campus Housing

Around VCU, there are a variety of housing options. Off campus housing resources are available through the VCU Off-Campus Student Services, <https://offcampus.vcu.edu>.

The estimated cost for a one-bedroom, unfurnished apartment is \$900-1,100/month. Two-bedroom, unfurnished apartments rent for \$1,100-1,400/month. Most American apartments do not include furniture.

Most landlords require tenants to sign a one-year lease and pay a security deposit, usually equal to 1-2 months' rent, although many landlords will request 3-4 months' rent from those who do not have a social security number. Some landlords may also require applicants to have a co-signer, an adult who financially qualifies and assumes responsibility for the apartment lease. The co-signer must live in the U.S. or in the state of Virginia and cannot be another student. **The Global Education Office staff cannot co-sign a lease or make an apartment deposit for a student.**

Note: In the U.S., a person is considered an adult at age 18. A student who is younger than age 18 is, by law, considered a “minor” and is not permitted to sign legal documents, such as an apartment lease. Minors will be required to have a co-signer.

Please be aware that it is difficult to determine an apartment’s true condition, safety of an area or the compatibility of a potential roommate on the Internet. After you sign an apartment lease, you are legally committed for the entire contract period and will not be released if you change your mind after arriving here. If you wish to secure your housing prior to your arrival, please contact either VCU’s Off Campus Student Services or Nichole Dorton (nldorton@vcu.edu) with any questions.

Temporary Housing

The university is unable to provide temporary housing for new students. You may make short-term housing arrangements in one of several ways:

- Make arrangements in advance to stay with a friend or relative.
- Write to one of the international student organizations at their website listed here: <https://vcu.collegiatelink.net/organizations>. Perhaps someone from your home country can offer you temporary or long-term housing.
- Reserve a room in a nearby hotel which offers discount rates to VCU students and their families. Request a VCU rate when making your reservation to ensure a discount room is available.
- You should budget **\$4,000** to cover 2 weeks in temporary accommodations and to pay the substantial security deposit (equal to 1-2 months’ rent), the first month’s rent and furnishings for an apartment.

Area Hotels

There are several hotels within walking distance to the campus and offer discount rates to VCU students and their families. When making your reservation and at check-in, inform the hotel clerk that you are a VCU student to ensure that discount rooms are available. Note: If calling the national toll-free reservation numbers, be sure to specify the hotel by name and street address.

Hotels		
Graduate Richmond	301 W. Franklin St.	(413) 821-3323
Holiday Inn Express - Downtown	201 E. Cary St.	(804-828-0595 toll-free: 1-800-424-6423
Hostelling International - Richmond	7 N. 2nd St.	804-729-5410
The Jefferson Hotel	101 W. Franklin St.	804-788-8000
Linden Row Inn	100 E. Franklin St.	804-783-7000 toll-free: 1-800-687-6667

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

VCU has lots of programs designed to help you make friends and learn about your new home in the U.S. Here are some ways that you can get involved.

Conversation Partner Program

The Global Education Office sponsors the Conversation Partner Program, which provides international students the opportunity to meet with volunteers to practice their English conversational skills, make American friends and learn about places and cultures. Participants meet once per week for about an hour and have great conversations.

Friendship Family and Cultural Exchange Program

The VCU Friendship Family and Cultural Exchange (VCU FFACE) Program provides Richmond community members and international students and scholars the opportunity to develop cross-cultural friendships. We encourage volunteers and students to meet at least once a month to participate in whatever activities they would like. This can include family dinners, sporting events, local food and music festivals, museums, canoeing and many other activities.

Monthly trips and activities

VCU's location in the capital city of historic Virginia affords many venues to learn and enjoy the East Coast of the United States. From the monthly Global Café to popular monthly trips, GEO's student engagement staff provides opportunities for travel and fosters a sense of community among international visitors and Americans. Past and current trips and activities offered include:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| New York City | River rafting |
| Hiking in the Blue Ridge Mountains | Thanksgiving dinners in American homes |
| Washington, D.C. | Jamestown Settlement |
| Virginia Beach | Colonial Williamsburg |
| Snow skiing | Volunteer activities |



Other ways to get involved

Student Organizations: VCU offers more than 500 student organizations in which you can be involved. vcu.collegiatelink.net/organizations

VCU Outdoor Adventure Program: OAP provides low-cost outdoor activity-based trips, including rafting, kayaking, rock climbing, canoeing, caving, hiking and skiing. recsports.vcu.edu/outdoor_adventure

VCU Intramural and Sport Clubs: VCU offer opportunities to learn a new sport, improve existing sport skills, and/or compete at various levels.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic Integrity and the VCU Honor System

"On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment, and I pledge that I am in compliance with the VCU Honor System."

All students must know and understand the Honor System. It is a student's responsibility to ask faculty and advisors to clarify requirements for each assignment if they are uncertain.

The Honor System prohibits the following acts of academic misconduct as defined below:

- Plagiarism is copying another person's ideas or words without giving him/her credit, pretending that the work is your own.
- Cheating is getting help from someone or something or giving help to someone on a class assignment, quiz, test, etc.
- Lying is not telling the truth to someone, especially your teacher or another university employee.
- Stealing is taking something that is not yours without permission.
- Facilitation is helping someone else doing any of these things.

Questions about the VCU Honor System should be directed to VCU faculty and staff.

All students are responsible for knowing both the rules of academic integrity and the consequences of violating those rules.

Academic Integrity Resources

Students have several resources available for avoiding violations of academic integrity.

- VCU Honor System: <https://conduct.students.vcu.edu/vcu-honor-system/>
- VCU Integrity and Compliance Office: <https://policy.vcu.edu/sites/default/files/Honor%20System.pdf>
- VCU Writing Center: <https://writing.vcu.edu/>
- VCU Libraries' Cite My Sources and Avoid Plagiarism Research Guide: <https://guides.library.vcu.edu/integrity>
- Purdue Online Writing Lab - Avoiding Plagiarism: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/1/>
- Yale Center for Teaching and Learning - Teaching about Academic Integrity and Plagiarism: <https://ctl.yale.edu/writing/wr-instructor-resources/addressing-academic-integrity-and-plagiarism/teaching-about-academic-integrity-and-plagiarism>
- Berkeley Center for Teaching and Learning - Academic Integrity: <https://teaching.berkeley.edu/resources/design/academic-integrity>
- Penn State Rock Ethics Institute - Academic Integrity Vignettes (video): http://rockethics.psu.edu/initiatives/ethics-education/resources/copy_of_academic-integrity-vignettes

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

What do to be prepared for emergencies at VCU:

- Sign up to receive VCU text messaging alerts at vcu.edu/alert/notify.
- Know the emergency phone number for the VCU Police (828-1234).
- Report suspicious activities and objects to VCU Police.
- Identify emergency exits and evacuation routes from buildings at the beginning of the semester.
- Know the safe evacuation route from each of your classrooms.
- In case of emergency, listen for and follow instructions from VCU or other designated authorities.
- Always evacuate during fire alarms.



Fire Alarms

Whenever an alarm sounds in the building, you and everyone else **MUST** evacuate. Once outside you should clear away from the building and await further instructions. You will be notified when it is time to re-enter the building.

Sirens

When a siren sounds, an emergency has occurred or is imminent:

- If you are in a building on campus, remain where you are and seek additional information about what is happening and how to respond.
- If you are outside but on-campus, go to the nearest university building and seek additional information about what is happening.
- If you are off-campus, do not come to campus, but seek additional information about what is happening.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

University Contacts

VCU Police - emergency	(804) 828-1234
VCU Police - non-emergency	(804) 828-1196
Campus Escort Security Service	(804) 828-WALK (9255)
Incident Weather Hotline	(804) 278-1727
Student Health (Immunization)	(804) 828-8828
Student Accounting (Payments and Finances)	(804) 828-8774
University College (Undergraduate Academic Advising)	(804) 827-8648
University Counseling Services	(804) 828-6200

Global Education Office Contacts

Global Education Office	(804) 828-8471
English Language Program	(804) 828-2551
International Student and Scholar Programs	(804) 828-8471
Immigration Advising	(804) 828-0595

Other useful VCU phone numbers to know for specific situations

Poison control	(804) 828-9123
RamSafe	(804) 828-7233 (SAFE)
Sexual assault	(804) 828-1234
Fire (emergency)	(804) 828-1234
Fire, MCV Campus (non-emergency)	(804) 828-7899
Fire, Monroe Park Campus (non-emergency)	(804) 828-0040
Chemical/Biological	(804) 828-1392
Radiation	(804) 828-9131
Insurance/Risk	(804) 828-4989

IMPORTANT REMINDERS



Undergraduates must be registered for at least 12 academic credits or the ELP equivalent (18+ hours); graduate students must register for at least 9 academic credits or the ELP equivalent (18+ hours).



You should be covered by medical insurance the entire time you are enrolled at VCU.



You should make requests for I-20 extensions and change of levels at least 30 days prior to expiration, and you should request I-20 travel signatures at least 15 days prior to travel.



You must take care of any holds – financial, medical, etc. – before you are allowed to enroll.



You should be on campus at least one week before classes begin each term. You should not leave campus before the end of the exam period each term. Plan your travel arrangements accordingly.



Be aware of add/drop and withdrawal deadlines for all courses. The dates are absolutely firm.



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