

# Pre-Arrival Guide for International Students, Scholars, and Employees



**Office of International Affairs**



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Dear new international student, scholar, or employee:

The Jefferson community welcomes you as a new member, bringing your perspectives to promote intercultural exchange while participating in your program.

The Office of International Affairs (OIA) is here to assist you in understanding the regulations pertaining to your immigration status, including maintenance of your status, and to help you transition to life in Philadelphia and at Thomas Jefferson University.

Whether you have already been living in the United States or are coming to Philadelphia from abroad, this Pre-Arrival Guide is designed to provide helpful information about settling into the city, learning about its resources, and preparing you to begin your program as quickly as possible.

Upon arrival at the campus, international students, scholars and employees in F-1 or J-1 status must attend a mandatory orientation with someone in the Office of International Affairs and complete all clearance processes.

Please read this guide carefully before you begin your visa application process (if you need a visa) and before starting your onboarding steps. We hope that you have safe and easy travels to Philadelphia.

All staff at the Office of International Affairs can be reached at [ويا@jefferson.edu](mailto:ويا@jefferson.edu).

Sincerely,

Office of International Affairs

Center City Campus

# I. DESCRIPTION OF VISA CATEGORIES

The following visa categories for which this guide is intended are F-1, J-1 and H-1B. The purpose of the visa is so you can enter the U.S. with the same intent that is permitted under that visa category. The Office of International Affairs (OIA) evaluates that the activity matches the specific visa category required.

The categories below are as defined by NAFSA: Association of International Educators:

## **F-1 Student**

An F-1 student is a nonimmigrant who is pursuing a "full course of study" to achieve a specific educational or professional objective, at an academic institution in the United States that has been designated by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to offer courses of study to such students, and has been enrolled in SEVIS (the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System).

## **J-1 Exchange Visitor**

The J Exchange Visitor category was developed to implement the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act (Fulbright-Hayes Act) of 1961. The overall purpose of that Act, and the objective of the Exchange Visitor category, is "to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchanges.

## **H-1B Specialty Worker**

The H-1B nonimmigrant category is the standard professional "work visa," which has been in place in various forms since the original Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 established the H-1 nonimmigrant visa category for aliens "of distinguished merit and ability and who [are] coming temporarily to the United States to perform temporary services of an exceptional nature requiring such merit and ability."

# II. HOW TO APPLY FOR A VISA

## **A. F-1 Student Visa**

A visa is a stamp in your passport issued by American embassies and consulates which allows you to enter the United States. The expiration date is the date you are permitted to enter or re-enter the U.S. using that stamp.

*\*Canadians do not have to apply for a visa but must still pay the SEVIS fee and enter the U.S. on F-1 status.*

### **1) Check if all information is correct on your I-20**

Review all the information on your I-20 to ensure there are no misspellings or other mistakes on your documents. If everything is correct and accurate, you may use the I-20 to apply for a visa at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate nearest you. If corrections need to be made, please contact OIA.

### **2) Pay the \$350 I-901 SEVIS Fee after receiving your I-20**

a) Go to the I-901 Fee website [here](#) and click "Pay I-901 Fee."

- b) Fill out the following page on personal information. This page requires the SEVIS identification number on the upper right-hand corner of the I-20 Form with an N and ten digits.
- c) The "School Code" on your I-20 for Center City programs is PHI214F00255000
- d) Check that the information is correct on all pages
- e) Print at least two copies of the receipt. You must bring the receipt with you to the visa interview AND when you travel to the U.S.

**\*NOTE FOR STUDENTS FROM NIGERIA, GHANA, KENYA, OR CAMEROON:**

Currently, the SEVP (Student and Exchange Visitor Program) system cannot accept credit card payments from persons from *Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, or Kenya*. If you are from one of these countries, you can pay the SEVIS fee by Western Union QuickPay or by regular mail. Instructions are provided on the ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) website [here](#).

You *do not* need to pay the SEVIS fee if:

- You are transferring schools
- Extending your program
- You are applying for an F-2 dependent visa, or
- You have paid this fee and have been denied a visa within the last 12 months

For information to specific questions about the SEVIS fee, go to the FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) on the ICE website [here](#).

- 3) **Find your local U.S. Consulate [here](#) and follow instructions to schedule an interview for an F-1 student visa.** Visa appointment wait times can be viewed [here](#).  
New F-1 visa can be issued up to 365 days in advance of the start date for a course of study depending on the consulate. Be prepared to pay the visa application fee. You should also review the website for the specific consulate or embassy you will visit for the visa appointment for specific instructions and information about additional documents.
- 4) **Complete the DS-160 Visa Application Process:**
  - a) Complete the visa application [here](#)
  - b) Pay the visa application fee by following instructions on the U.S. Consulate's website
- 5) **Prepare and take the following documents to your visa interview:**
  - a) A passport valid for at least six (6) months
  - b) Form I-20 (on "*Student Attestation*," signed and dated)
  - c) School acceptance letter
  - d) Completed Visa Application Form DS-160
  - e) Two photographs, 51mm x 51mm (2in x 2in) each, in the prescribed format (see website for measurements: [travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov))
  - f) A receipt for the visa application fee
  - g) A receipt for proof of SEVIS fee payment
  - h) Financial evidence that shows you have sufficient funds to cover your tuition and living expenses during the period you intend to study (ex. letter of award or scholarship, bank statement, proof of income, deposits in a U.S. bank)

- i) Information that proves that you will return to your home country after finishing your studies in the U.S. This may include proof of property, family, or other ties to your community
- j) Any other information listed on the U.S. Consulate's website

6) **Interview for an F-1 Visa**

Remember, the interview's purpose is to prove that your student visa is consistent with the reason you are going. Try to obtain the full name of the officer who interviewed you and their contact number. Additional points to remember when preparing for your interview can be found in section 2C of this guide.

After receiving your visa, go to the International Services Portal [here](#), log in with your Campus Key and password, and submit your visa information and travel details in the Control Center.

**Important Note:** If your visa application is denied, before you leave the U.S. Embassy or Consulate, obtain a written explanation of why you were denied the visa and ask about re-application procedures.

7) **Traveling to the U.S.**

You are permitted to enter the U.S. 30 days before your program start date. See this guide's "Preparing to Travel" in section X for more information.

Once you book your flight to the U.S., go to the International Services Portal [here](#) to submit your flight information in the Control Center.

**What to Expect from Customs and Border Entry**

When you land in the United States, you must go through U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) with your valid immigration documents to gain admission. Please visit the Department of Homeland Security web page [here](#) for information on what to expect.

**Important Note:** The Office of International Affairs' phone number is 215-503-4335. Have this number readily available if you have issues at the port of entry. Note that cell phone usage is generally not permitted in secondary inspection areas. Should you not be able to call OIA directly, you have a right to request that the Border Officer call OIA.

## B. J-1 Exchange Visitor Visa

A visa is a stamp in your passport issued by American embassies or consulates which allows you to enter the United States. The expiration date is the date you are permitted to enter or re-enter the U.S. using that stamp.

*\*Canadians do not have to apply for a visa but must still pay the SEVIS fee and enter the U.S. on J-1 status.*

- 1) **Review all the materials to ensure there are no misspellings or other mistakes on your documents.** If everything is correct and accurate, you may use these documents to apply for a visa at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate nearest you. If corrections need to be made to your visa application materials, please contact [oia@jefferson.edu](mailto:oia@jefferson.edu).
- 2) **Pay the I-901 SEVIS Fee of \$220 after receiving your DS-2019**
  - a) Go to the I-901 Fee website [here](#) and click "PAY I-901 Fee."
  - b) Fill out the following page with personal information. This page requires the SEVIS Identification Number on the DS-2019. This number is in the upper right-hand corner of the I-20, begins with an N, and has ten digits.
  - c) The "Program Number" on your DS-2019 is P-1-03534
  - d) Check that the information is correct on all pages.
  - e) Print at least two copies of the receipt. You must bring the receipt with you to the visa interview AND when you travel to the U.S.

**\*NOTE FOR APPLICANTS FROM NIGERIA, GHANA, KENYA, OR CAMEROON:**

Currently, the SEVP system cannot accept credit card payments from persons from *Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, or Kenya*. If you are from one of these countries, you can pay the SEVIS fee by Western Union QuickPay, or by regular mail. Instructions are provided on the ICE website [here](#).

You *do not* need to pay the SEVIS fee if:

- You are transferring institutions
- Extending your program
- You are applying for a J-2 dependent visa, or
- You have paid this fee and have been denied a visa within the last 12 months

For information regarding specific questions about the SEVIS fee, go to the FAQs on ICE's website [here](#).

- 3) **Find your local U.S. Consulate [here](#) and follow instructions to schedule an interview for a J-1 Exchange Visitor visa.**

Schedule an appointment with the U.S. Embassy or Consulate that has jurisdiction over your place of residence to apply for a J-1 Exchange Visitor visa. You should also review the website for the specific consulate or embassy you will visit for the visa appointment for specific instructions and information about additional documents.
- 4) **Complete the DS-160 Visa Application Process:**
  - a) Complete the visa application [here](#)

b) Pay the visa application fee by following instructions on the U.S. Consulate's website

**5) Prepare and take the following documents to your visa interview:**

- a) A passport valid for at least six (6) months
- b) Form DS-2019
- c) Proof of SEVIS fee payment
- d) A receipt for the visa application fee
- e) Completed DS-160, Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application Form
- f) Financial support documentation (e.g., job offer letter for postdocs)
- g) Invitation letter from the department at Thomas Jefferson University for scholar/researcher or program acceptance letter from the College for J-1 Student
- h) Information that proves that you will return to your home country after finishing your studies in the U.S.; this may include proof of property, family, or other ties to your community
- i) If applicable, marriage and birth certificates for dependents (spouse or any children). DS-2019s are required for any dependents who wish to join you. Contact [ويا@jefferson.edu](mailto:ويا@jefferson.edu) if you need to request these forms.
- j) Two photographs, 51mm x 51mm (2in x 2in) each, in the prescribed format (see the website [here](#) for measurements)

**6) Interview for a J-1 Visa**

Remember, the interview's purpose is to prove that your student visa is consistent with the reason you are going. Try to obtain the full name of the officer who interviewed you and their contact number. Additional points to remember when preparing for your interview can be found [here](#).

After you receive your visa, go to the International Services Portal [here](#) and submit your visa information in the requests.

**Important Note:** If your visa application is denied, before you leave the U.S. Embassy or Consulate, obtain a written explanation of why you are denied the visa and ask about re-application procedures.

**7) Traveling to the United States**

Exchange Visitors are prohibited from entering the U.S. more than 30 days before the program start date identified in Item 3 of Form DS-2019, so plan your U.S. entry accordingly. Please contact [ويا@jefferson.edu](mailto:ويا@jefferson.edu) and your inviting department with your expected arrival date in Philadelphia. For more information regarding traveling in the U.S., check ICE's website [here](#). We have also compiled the checklist to prepare for travel in the section [here](#). Once you book your flight to the U.S., go to the International Services Portal [here](#) to submit the flight information in the requests.

**What to expect at the Customs and Border port of entry**

When you land in the United States, you must go through U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) with your valid immigration documents to gain admission. Please visit the Department of Homeland Security pages [here](#) for information on what to expect.

**Important Note:** The Office of International Affairs' phone number is 215-503-4335. Have this number readily available if you have issues at the port of entry. Note that cell phone usage is

generally not permitted in secondary inspection areas. Should you not be able to call OIA directly, you have a right to request that the Border Officer call OIA.

## C. Ten Points to Remember When Applying for a Non-Immigrant Visa<sup>1</sup>

### 1) Ties to Your Home Country

Under U.S. law, all applicants for non-immigrant visas are viewed as intending immigrants until they can convince the consular officer that they are not. You must, therefore, be able to show that you have reasons for returning to your home country that are stronger than those for remaining in the United States. "Ties" to your home country are the things that bind you to your hometown, homeland, or current place of residence: job, family, financial prospects that you own or will inherit, investments, etc. If you are a prospective researcher, the interviewing officer may ask about your intentions or promises of future employment, family or other relationships, research objectives, long-range plans, and career prospects in your home country.

Each person's situation is different, and there is no magic explanation or single document, certificate, or letter that can guarantee visa issuance. If you have applied for the U.S. Diversity Green Card Lottery, you may be asked if you intend to immigrate. A simple answer would be that you applied for the lottery since it was available but not with a specific intent to immigrate. If you overstayed your authorized stay in the U.S. previously, be prepared to explain what happened clearly and concisely, with documentation if available.

We recommend that you bring a letter from your current institution stating you will return to your institution to complete your program or continue your employment.

### 2) English

Anticipate that the interview will be in English, not your native language. One suggestion is to practice English conversation with a native speaker before the interview, but do NOT prepare speeches!

### 3) Speak for Yourself

Do not bring parents or family members with you to the interview. The consular officer wants to interview you, not your family. A negative impression is created if you are not prepared to speak on your own behalf.

### 4) Know the Program and How It Fits Your Career Plans

If you cannot articulate why you will study/research/consult/observe/teach in a particular program in the United States, you may fail to convince the consular officer that you are indeed planning to engage in that program of activity rather than to immigrate. You should be able to explain how your research activity in the U.S. relates to your future professional career when you return home.

### 5) Be Brief

Because of the volume of applications received, all consular officers are under considerable time pressure to conduct a quick and efficient interview. They must decide on the impressions they form during the first minute of the interview. Consequently, what you say first and the initial impression you create are critical to your success. Keep your answers short and to the point.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: [NAFSA](#) (adapted to include J-1 Exchange Visitors)

**6) Additional Documentation**

It should be immediately clear to the consular officer what written documents you are presenting and what they signify. Interviews are usually brief and lengthy written explanations cannot be quickly read or evaluated.

**7) Not All Countries are Equal**

Applicants from countries suffering economic problems or countries where many researchers have remained in the United States as immigrants will have more difficulty getting visas. Statistically, applicants from those countries are more likely to be intending immigrants. They are also more likely to be asked about job opportunities at home after their research program in the United States.

**8) Employment**

You are only allowed to be employed in the U.S. for research related to your main program objective on your DS-2019. You must clearly articulate your plan to return home at the end of your program.

**9) Dependents Remaining at Home**

If your spouse and children remain behind in your country, be prepared to address how they will support themselves in your absence. This can be an especially tricky area if you are your family's primary income source. If the consular officer gains the impression that your family will need you to remit money from the United States to support them, your student visa application will certainly be denied. If your family does decide to join you later, it is helpful to have them apply at the same post where you applied for your visa.

**10) Maintain a Positive Attitude**

Do not engage the consular officer in an argument. If you are denied the visa, ask the officer for a list of documents they would suggest you bring to overcome the refusal and get the reason you were denied in writing.

Before applying for your non-immigrant visa at the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate, you are strongly advised to consult the U.S. Department of State website [here](#) to obtain the most up-to-date information about the application process.

## **D. H-1B Specialty Worker Visa**

If you have an H1-B petition approved and are currently outside of the US, you will need to take an H1-B visa stamping appointment at a designated US embassy or consulate in your country of citizenship. An H-1B visa stamp means the government endorses your visa approval. Note that the approval of H-1B status and a stamped visa on your passport do not guarantee entry into the U.S.

\*Canadian citizens do not currently need to apply for a visa to enter the U.S. However, Canadian citizens must have a valid I-797 H-1B approval notice as well as a copy of the I-129 and certified Labor Condition Application (LCA) when requesting to enter the U.S. in H-1B status.

- 1) **Once your H-1B petition is approved and you receive a copy of your I-797, review the information to ensure there are no misspellings or other mistakes on your documents. If**

everything is correct and accurate, you may use these documents to apply for a visa at the U.S. embassy or consulate nearest you. If corrections need to be made to your visa application materials, please contact [ويا@jefferson.edu](mailto:ويا@jefferson.edu).

- 2) **Find your local U.S. Consulate [here](#) and follow instructions to schedule an interview.** Estimated processing wait times can be found at the [US Department of State website](#).
- 3) **Bring the following documents with you to the interview:**
  - Passport, valid for travel to the United States and with a validity date at least 6 months beyond the applicant's intended period of stay in the United States;
  - Form DS-160, Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application
  - Form I-797 H-1B petition approval notice (check consulate if the original is required)
  - Copy of H-1B petition (I-129, LCA, and supporting documentation) that was filed with and approved by USCIS
  - Two photos conforming to Department of State specifications
  - Machine Readable Visa (MRV) fee
  - Visa reciprocity fee
  - Any other documents as required by the U.S. Consulate
- 4) **Once you receive your visa, make your travel plans to the U.S. to arrive up to 10 days before the validity period begins.**
- 5) **Travel with the appropriate documents.** This includes your passport, H-1B approval notice, copy of your H-1B petition, and any other documents related to your H-1B status on your person and not in your checked baggage. At the port of entry, an immigration officer will look at your documents and ask you several questions about your stay in the US.

## II. F-1 PRE-ARRIVAL REQUIREMENTS

### A. Immigration Orientation and Check-in

Pursuant to U.S. immigration regulations, the Office of International Affairs (OIA) at Jefferson is required to validate your arrival on campus. In addition to your college's program orientation, OIA will contact you by email with the date and time of your immigration check-in and orientation. This check-in is mandatory for your immigration record to be validated. Failure to report to OIA for this immigration check-in may result in losing your F-1 student status. Make sure you know the date and time of your orientation with OIA before your program start date.

To complete the check-in required by F-1 regulations, you must:

- Attend the F-1 orientation
- Update local, mailing, and foreign addresses in Banner Web
- Submit the Check-in Request in the Control Center of the International Services Portal
- Register full-time for the term

## B. Immunizations

Everyone coming to Jefferson must undergo a health screening in the Jefferson Occupational Health Network for Employees & Students (JOHN) before starting their program. For more information, visit JOHN's website [here](#). **Please note that any incomplete or inaccurate documentation will delay your clearance.** If you have any questions about immunization clearance, contact [jeffuhs@jefferson.edu](mailto:jeffuhs@jefferson.edu).

## C. Student Health Insurance

As a Jefferson student, you must have Jefferson student health insurance for the duration of your academic program. If you want to waive Jefferson's insurance, your insurance must meet the minimum requirements to qualify for a waiver. For information on Jefferson's health insurance, go to the Office of Student Life & Engagement's website [here](#).

# II. J-1 PRE-ARRIVAL REQUIREMENTS

## A. Orientation

**All J-1 Exchange Visitors must attend International Affairs' mandatory orientation.** Per regulations, an orientation for scholars and students is required to go over the regulations you must abide by as a J-1 Exchange Visitor. International Affairs will email you the date and time in advance.

**J-1 Students must also attend their program orientation.** This orientation is separate from OIA's and will discuss your program's academic information.

To complete the check-in required by J-1 regulations, you must:

- Attend OIA orientations, and
- Submit the following requests to the International Services Portal:
  - Visa Information
  - Flight Information
  - J-1 Exchange Visitor Check-In
  - Health Insurance Compliance

## B. Immunizations

Everyone coming to Jefferson must undergo a health screening in the Jefferson Occupational Health Network for Employees & Students (JOHN) before the beginning of an assignment. For more information, visit JOHN's website [here](#). **Please note that any incomplete or inaccurate documentation will delay your clearance.** If you have any questions about immunization clearance, contact [jeffuhs@jefferson.edu](mailto:jeffuhs@jefferson.edu).

## C. J-1 Exchange Visitor Insurance

The U.S. Department of State requires all J-1 Exchange Visitors and their J-2 dependents to have insurance for the entire duration of their J program. Willful failure to maintain insurance requirements

will result in the termination of your exchange visitor program. Minimum requirements for insurance coverage are found in [22 CFR 62.14].

### Minimum requirements for J-1 program participation

- 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 exchange visitor to their home country in the amount of \$50,000
- The deductible does not exceed \$500 per accident or illness

Find the category below to learn how to meet the insurance requirement.

Category	Do I need to buy insurance?
<input type="checkbox"/> A scholar employed by Jefferson who will receive health benefits immediately	<b>YES.</b> Although Jefferson’s health insurance benefits through Human Resources cover you after you sign up, you must purchase supplemental insurance to cover repatriation of remains and medical evacuation for the entire duration of your program.
<input type="checkbox"/> A scholar employed by Jefferson or Jefferson affiliations who will receive health benefits on the first day of the month following your employment start date.	<b>YES.</b> Jefferson’s health insurance coverage starts on the 1 <sup>st</sup> of the month. If you do not start employment on the 1 <sup>st</sup> of the month, you will need to purchase insurance that meets all J-1 criteria until Jefferson’s health insurance becomes effective. Make sure you sign up for Jefferson’s health insurance benefits on time through Human Resources. From the time your Jefferson health insurance becomes effective, you must also ensure that you purchase supplemental insurance to cover repatriation of remains and medical evacuation for the entire duration of your program.
<input type="checkbox"/> A scholar employed by Jefferson affiliates who will receive health benefits	<b>MAYBE.</b> You must be sure that your health insurance starts at the start of your program. You may need to purchase separate medical evacuation/repatriation insurance covering the whole period of your program. Check with your insurance provider and/or employer to ensure all J-1 insurance criteria are covered.
<input type="checkbox"/> A scholar who is not employed by Jefferson or Jefferson affiliations	<b>YES.</b> Visit our website to see the list of insurance companies on J-1 insurance <a href="#">here</a> .
<input type="checkbox"/> A full-time student at Jefferson	<b>YES.</b> All students are required to have health insurance. Jefferson student health insurance meets the minimum requirements for J-1 compliance. If you formally waive out of the Jefferson health insurance plan through the Office of Student Life and Engagement, you must ensure that your insurance meets the minimum J-1 requirements.

### **Additional Considerations When You Buy Insurance**

- An insurance policy secured to meet the benefits requirements must be underwritten by an insurance corporation with an A.M. Best rating of "A-" or above, an Insurance Solvency International, Ltd. (ISI) rating of "A-I" or above, a Standard and Poor's Claims Paying Ability rating of "A-" or above, or a Weiss Research, Inc. rating of B+ or above.
- To avoid reimbursement issues for any medical costs with non-U.S. insurance plans, we strongly recommend that you enroll in an eligible insurance plan from a U.S. insurance company. Contact the health insurance provider should you have questions about their plan.
- Should you arrive earlier than your start date, we strongly recommend coverage starting from the day of your arrival.
- You must show proof of insurance at the check-in appointment with OIA

## **III. ACCOMMODATIONS**

### **A. Short-Term Housing**

There are no short-term housing options on campus, however, you can book hotels and short-term rentals.

Websites that can help you find short-term housing are:

- [Airbnb.com](https://www.airbnb.com)
- [Vrbo.com](https://www.vrbo.com)
- [Hotels.com](https://www.hotels.com)
- [Apartments.com](https://www.apartments.com)

### **B. Long-Term Housing**

#### **University Apartments**

University apartments have year-long leases and offer various living space options. You can choose between studio, 1-bedroom, 2-bedroom, or 3-bedroom apartments. University apartment buildings include laundry rooms, professional front desk staff, 24-hour emergency services, and a residence life program. For more information, contact the Office of Housing and Residence Life [here](#).



#### **Off-Campus Housing**

The Office of Housing and Residence Life provides off-campus housing postings online [here](#).

#### **Types of Off-Campus Housing**

##### **Rooms**

Renting a room implies sharing common spaces (e.g., kitchen, bathroom, living room) with other residents.

## Apartments

The number of rooms in the U.S. means the number of bedrooms. There are various apartment options in Philadelphia, from studios to multiple-bedroom apartments. A studio apartment has a bathroom and an open space that serves as a kitchen, bedroom, and living room.

## Houses

Students or visiting professionals who come with their families may want to rent an entire house. You can locate houses for rent through the previously mentioned websites, real estate agents, or personal contacts with property owners or renters who are vacating a house.

## Lease

A lease is a binding legal document between a tenant and property owner, describing the rights and responsibilities of each. Read the lease carefully to understand its duration, utilities included, and any restrictions. As a tenant, you are responsible and contractually obligated by this lease. You may need to contact gas, electric, or water companies to start service in your home.



When you sign a lease, you must usually pay a "security deposit," which typically equals one month's rent. The property owner will return the deposit within 30 days after you leave the apartment if you have paid all your rent, left the apartment and appliances clean and undamaged, and have not been evicted.

In addition to a security deposit, many property owners require payment of the first and last month's rent before you move in. Therefore, you should be prepared to pay up to three months' rent at the time you sign the lease. As a newcomer, you will not have a credit history in the United States. If you have a credit history in your home country, bring a copy of it with you. You may pay more for the deposit until you establish your credit history.

Philadelphia landlord-tenant law and the Philadelphia housing codes guarantee minimum living standards in rented rooms and apartments. Property owners are required to provide adequate winter heating and regular insect control. If you make any special agreements with the property owner concerning repairs or alterations, *make sure those agreements are written into the lease, signed, and dated.* (Many Americans consider it essential to have important agreements written down and signed.) You may find more details [here](#).

## C. Utilities

Once you have your housing, you may need to contact gas, electricity, and water services companies to turn on your utilities.

Philadelphia Gas Works, Check the nearest locations [here](#), (215) 235-2050  
PECO Energy, 2301 Market Street, (215) 841-4000, Check the website [here](#).

*The city of Philadelphia* provides water, sewer, and trash removal service to Philadelphia residents.

Check water services [here](#).

Check sewer services [here](#). (This service is usually included in your water bill for Philadelphia)

Check trash removal services [here](#). (This may not be necessary in some larger apartment buildings)

Talk to your property owner about utilities and trash removal requirements.

## IV. TRANSPORTATION

### A. Getting to Center City Philadelphia

Philadelphia International Airport is in the southeasternmost region of the city, 12.4 miles/19.9 km from Center City. You can get to Center City by rental car, public transportation, taxi, and limousine. Go to the Philadelphia International Airport's website [here](#) or call their 24-hour phone numbers for general information at 215-937-6800 or 215-937-6937.

If you are coming from another airport, check that airport's website for more information.

### B. Commuter Services at Jefferson

Anyone with a Jefferson ID badge may be eligible for discounts on public transportation and parking your car on campus through the Commuter Services Office. Find more information on their website [here](#). The office is at 1100 Walnut Street, Suite 102, Philadelphia, PA 19107.

### C. Getting Around

#### Transportation Apps

You can download various transport apps onto your phone to help you navigate the greater Philadelphia region.

- Transit- provides real-time public transit data to determine the location of buses and trains
- Google Maps- helps you plan the fastest routes to a specified location for traveling by foot, car, or public transportation
- City Mapper- like Google Maps, helps you find the fastest route by combining bus, subway, train, and walking

#### Public Transportation

##### SEPTA

SEPTA is Philadelphia's local public transportation system that operates buses, subways, trolleys, and regional rail throughout the Philadelphia area. You can download the SEPTA app to view transportation schedules, stay updated on any delays, and check your SEPTA Key Card balance.

##### ***Buses, Subways, and Trolleys***

You can acquire route maps at train stations or on SEPTA's website [here](#). The base fare for buses, the subway, and the trolley is \$2.50 (subject to increase), payable upon entry. It is \$1 dollar extra if you need to transfer. *An exact change is required.* Monthly

transpasses (bus, subway, or trolley) cover up to 240 rides for one month. If you use the SEPTA Key Card, it is \$2.00 each way and the first transfer is free if it is within two hours.

### ***Regional Rail***

Trailpasses (train or regional rail) cover up to 240 rides on public transportation for one month. The cost varies depending on the destination.

### ***SEPTA Key***

SEPTA Key is a reusable card that can be used for the subway, bus or trolley, and regional rail. You can purchase SEPTA Key in subway stations at a Fare Kiosk. You can also view your electronic Travel Wallet Account at the kiosk to load/reload a fare onto your Key card, check your balance, and add a trailpass or transpass. Kiosks accept credit, debit, and cash.



The kiosk also sells a Quick Trip ticket, a single ride fare for customers without a Key Card.

Receive a discount for each ride by registering your card at the SEPTA Key website [here](#). Once you create an account, you can choose to have your card automatically reloaded, view your balance, and look at your trip history.

### **PATCO Hi-Speed Line**

This rapid transit system links Philadelphia with Southern New Jersey. The closest PATCO stations to Jefferson are at 8th & Market Street and 9<sup>th</sup>/10th & Locust Street. For more information, go to the PATCO website [here](#).

## **D. Other Modes of Transportation**

### **Driving**

Individuals who possess a valid foreign driver's license from their country are authorized to drive in Pennsylvania for up to one year from their entry into the United States or upon expiration of their foreign license, whichever comes first. You may also use your international driving permits. Check out the DMV (Department of Motor Vehicles) website for more information [here](#). If you establish residency in a neighboring state, check the DMV website of the state in which you live.

### **Taxicabs**

Taxi (or "cab") service is oftentimes more expensive here than in other countries. Taxis have meters that show the fare. Paying an additional 15 to 20 percent of the fare as a "tip" or gratuity is customary.

### **Ridesharing**

The two most common ridesharing apps used in Philadelphia are Lyft and Uber.

You will need a U.S. debit or credit card and a local U.S. number to book a ride. Both companies use individual contractors to pick up passengers and have options to rideshare or be the only passenger. It is a convenient way to get around the city if it is late at night or public transportation is not near and accessible to your destination. Check that the license plate and the driver's name are correct before getting in the car.

## **Bicycles**

Bicycles are a convenient way to get around the city. The Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia is a resource for maps and other information on getting around by bike. Visit the website [here](#).

Google Maps has a feature that allows you to find a bicycle route to your destination. You can access Google Maps either by app or website [here](#).

If you do not own a bike, you can rent one through various Indego locations. Check the Indego website [here](#).

# **V. COMMUNICATION SERVICES**

## **A. Cell (Mobile) Phone**

You can buy prepaid cell phone plans and pay monthly for the services you use, as most cell phone providers offer prepaid plans. You may also apply for a cell phone plan that has a contract. You do not need a social security number to get a cell phone in the U.S., however, your local carrier may require a higher deposit. There are various providers in this area (i.e., Verizon, AT&T, T-Mobile and H2O). If you need a SIM card, inquire with your local mobile phone carrier. If you are on payroll with Thomas Jefferson University, you may be eligible for employee discounts and benefits at mobile carriers.

## **B. Internet Access**

All Jefferson buildings have internet access, and some have wireless access. If you are employed at Jefferson, you must speak with your department to get a campus key. If you are a student, you should have already received a campus key during the admissions process. Visitors can go to Thomas Jefferson University's Library at the Scott building to get temporary guest access. Should you need assistance with your wireless setup at Jefferson's Center City campus, please call the IS&T (Information Services & Technology) Service Desk at 215-503-7975. Some coffee shops, bookstores and public libraries offer wireless services for little or no fee if you have a laptop computer or a smartphone.

# VI. MONEY MANAGEMENT

## A. United States Currency

### Paper Money

All U.S. paper money is in the same size and color. Denominations include \$1 (often called “a buck”), \$5, \$10, \$20, \$50, and \$100. Paper money for amounts larger than \$100 is not usually seen in public circulation.

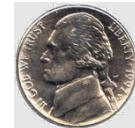


### Coins

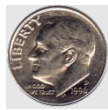
American coins come in two colors and four sizes. Smaller-sized coins are not always lower in value than larger coins.



*Penny* = 1 cent = \$0.01



*Nickel* = 5 cents = \$0.05



*Dime* = 10 cents = \$0.10  
(smallest U.S. coin)



*Quarter* = 25 cents = \$0.25

## B. Currency Exchange

Although you can exchange currency at the airport when you arrive to the U.S., they do not usually offer the best exchange rate. The website [here](#) will provide you with multiple suggestions on where you can exchange money in Philadelphia. We suggest calling various locations to confirm the day's exchange rate and hours of operation.

We strongly recommend that you do not carry substantial amounts of cash with you or keep it at your home. Instead, deposit it in a bank.

## C. Banks and Banking Services

Banks offer savings and checking accounts, safe deposit boxes, international currency exchanges, loans to qualified customers, and varying interest rates. When choosing a banking service, ensure that the federal government (FDIC) insures it. You can look up your bank [here](#) to confirm it is FDIC certified.

## Opening a Bank Account

To open a bank account, you must show evidence of your legal immigration status and a local address in the United States. Some banks do not require a social security number to open an account, but you may need two forms of identification documents (I.D.). There are numerous banks near Jefferson. Many banks allow you to pay bills via the internet. Inquire at your bank if you are interested in this service. Check the banks near Jefferson [here](#).

## Automated Teller Machine (ATM)

The ATM is a device through which bank customers can make deposits or withdrawals at any time of the day, any day of the week, using a plastic card and a secret PIN (personal identification number). Instructions for operating the automatic teller are given on the machine itself. If there is a fee, you will be notified and allowed to cancel the transaction. Fees range from \$1 to \$3 per transaction. Debit cards may also be used to purchase items or pay for services.



ATMs are located at banks, supermarkets, shopping centers, and Jefferson's campus buildings.

# VII. IDENTIFICATION DOCUMENTS

## A. Jefferson ID Badge

Thomas Jefferson University visitors, students, and staff members receive a Jefferson ID card, which is required to enter buildings on campus.



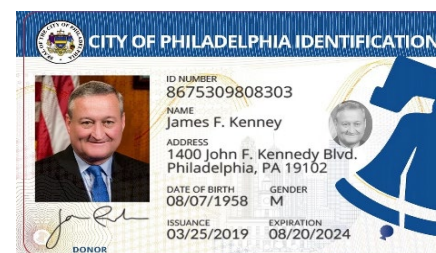
## B. Driver's License or State Photo ID Card

While a passport can be used as proof of identity, most Americans use a driver's license as an I.D. card. You can also apply for a Pennsylvania State ID card if you are not driving. For more information, click [here](#). An international driver's license is valid for up to one year if it does not expire during that period.



## C. Philadelphia (PHL) City ID

The PHL City ID is an alternative to a driver's license and provides a secure and affordable photo identification card for individuals living in Philadelphia. It is a quick and straightforward process and especially beneficial for those who do not prefer to always have their passport with them. Click [here](#) to learn more.



## D. Social Security Number (SSN)

The Social Security Number is a tax identification number that is often used for many other purposes, such as applying for a driver's license or phone services. J-1 Exchange Visitors may only apply for an SSN two weeks after arrival in the U.S., and F-1 students may only apply once they obtain work within F-1 regulations, get a stipend, or receive a compensatory award. Information will be provided during your check-in at OIA.

## VIII. SAFETY AND SECURITY

As Philadelphia is a large city, please be aware of your surroundings and secure your personal items. Avoid using outside ATMs, taking public transportation alone late at night, and walking in poorly lit areas.

In case of an emergency, **dial 911**.

911 is the emergency number used across the U.S. for immediate assistance in case of a fire, medical emergency, or any criminal activity.

Jefferson University Center City Campus provides campus security:

- Dial 811 from a campus phone or 215-955-8888 from a cell phone to connect you with campus police
- University Escort Service- This service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, if you need a walking escort on the University or Hospital campus.
- Blue-light E-phones- Pictured in the photo at the right, these phones are found in various locations on campus and connect you directly with campus security with the push of the button. You must speak when you push the button. Security will respond quickly.



For more information on different Philadelphia neighborhoods and safety, attend the Philadelphia Orientation hosted by our office. Contact [uia@jefferson.edu](mailto:uia@jefferson.edu) for more details.

## IX. WEATHER

Philadelphia experiences all four seasons, with temperatures ranging from 24°F (-4°C) in the winter (which may feel colder because of the wind) to 87°F (31°C) in the summer (which may feel hotter due to the humidity). To prepare for Philadelphia weather, please look at the table below.

	Summer (June-August)	Fall/Autumn (September-November)	Winter (December-February)	Spring (March-May)
Fahrenheit	67°-89°	42°-80°	28°-46°	37°-75°
Celsius	19°-31°	5°-26°	-2°-7°	2°-23°
Appropriate Clothing	Short-sleeved shirts and shorts	Long-sleeved shirts, sweaters, light coat	Winter coat, sweaters, scarves, boots.	Long-sleeved shirts and pants

# X. PREPARING FOR TRAVEL

## A. When to Travel

You are permitted to enter the U.S. *30 days before the start date* on your I-20 or DS-2019.

Once you book your flight to the U.S., go to the International Services Portal [here](#) to submit your flight information.

## B. Prepare in Advance

- 1) Contact your local bank and credit card companies to inform them of your travel plans.
- 2) Download pertinent maps and get Wi-Fi information ahead of time if your current cellphone plan does not support international cellphone usage.

## C. Packing Checklist

### Carry-on Items

Ensure any liquids brought in your carry-on are less than 3.4 ounces (100 milliliters or less) per item or will be confiscated.

#### Documents

- Immigration documents (I-20, DS-2019, I-797 Notice of Approval)
- SEVIS fee receipt
- Valid passport (the expiration date should be at least six months after your date of travel)
- Valid visa
- Another picture form of identification (ex. driver's license)
- Travel Insurance
- In addition, if you are a student, bring your:
  - Acceptance letter
  - Proof of funding
- In addition, if you are an employee, bring your employment verification letter

#### Money

- As you may not be able to open a U.S. bank account immediately, you may need to bring at least two weeks' worth of cash in U.S. dollars.
- If you will be using a debit card, you may need to notify your bank before you travel overseas and find out about international ATM fees.
- You may need to notify your credit card company of international travel.

#### Address and contact number of accommodation and details on how to get there

## For Checked Luggage

- ❑ Prepare for the weather conditions of Philadelphia by packing the appropriate clothing shoes. See the Weather section.

## What Not to Bring

Click [here](#) to look at the list prohibited items for both carry-on and checked baggage.

# XI. Resources for F-1 and J-1 International Students

The **Office of International Affairs** offers regulation-specific advising and workshops. For more information, click [here](#).

**Academic Programs** provide information regarding your program, courses, and curriculum.

- For information regarding the College of Health Professions, click [here](#).
- For information regarding the College of Life Sciences, click [here](#).
- For information regarding the College of Pharmacy, click [here](#).
- For information regarding the College of Population Health, click [here](#).
- For information regarding the College of Nursing, click [here](#).
- For information regarding the College of Sidney Kimmel Medical College, click [here](#).
- For information regarding the College of Rehabilitation Sciences, click [here](#).

**International Student Liaisons** are peer contacts who support you on all non-regulatory information, such as their experience in the program, life in Philadelphia, and overall experience at Jefferson. OIA will provide you with contact information if there is an International Student Liaison at your College.

The **International Student Society** aims to build a community for international students at Jefferson to connect and support one another. They provide mentorship opportunities for incoming international students and hold events to promote intercultural conversations. Contact [iss@students.jefferson.edu](mailto:iss@students.jefferson.edu) to become a member.

The **Office of Student Life and Engagement** organizes students and activities, student health insurance, and manages student organizations. For more information, click [here](#).

**Housing and Residential Life** provides information on and off-campus housing. For information regarding housing options, click [here](#).

The **Registrar's Office** handles registration, course scheduling, and transcripts. For more information, click [here](#).

**Student Account Transactions** handles tuition charges, payments, housing charges, stipends, and late fees. For more information, click [here](#).

## XII. Resources for J-1 Scholars

### A. Jefferson Postdocs

The **Office of Postdoctoral Affairs** provides all postdocs at Jefferson with an opportunity to participate in the Postdoc Buddy Program. In the program, a postdoc is paired with another postdoc at Jefferson and gets support related to settlement, navigating the city, professional networking, etc. For more information, click [here](#).

**Jefferson Postdoctoral Association (JPA)** is a liaison association for Jefferson postdocs. JPA can give general information about settling in and provide social and professional events to all Jefferson postdocs. For more information, click [here](#).

### B. English Language Courses

The locations below provide English as Second Language courses for adults who wish to improve their English skills. Learn more about the classes offered by the Free Library of Philadelphia [here](#) and the Nationalities Service Center [here](#).

### C. Cultural Community Resources in the Greater Philadelphia Region

#### Africa & The Caribbean

1. **African Cultural Alliance of North America** provides culturally sensitive social services, cultural programs, economic and workforce development programs, community engagement and development programs, and other services targeting African and Caribbean immigrants in the United States. More information can be found [here](#).  
Phone: (215) 729-8225
2. **Philly Nigerian Professionals** is a professional organization that aims to build and strengthen connections among Nigerian and Nigerian-American students and professionals through social networking, professional development, and charitable events. Despite the name, you do not have to be Nigerian to be a part of PNP. PNP has members from all over the African Diaspora. More information can be found [here](#).  
Phone: (267) 571-9849  
Email: [phillynaijaprofessionals@gmail.com](mailto:phillynaijaprofessionals@gmail.com)

#### Asia

3. **Asian Arts Initiative** is a multi-disciplinary and community-based arts center in Philadelphia that advances racial equity and understanding, activating artists, youth, and their communities through creative practice and dialogue grounded in the diverse Asian American experience. More information can be found [here](#).  
Phone: (215) 557-0455  
Email: [info@asianartsinitiative.org](mailto:info@asianartsinitiative.org)
4. **Council of Indian Organizations in Greater Philadelphia** is a nonprofit organization formed primarily for cultural and educational purposes. They promote, coordinate, and support joint efforts in the member organizations' social, cultural, educational, and charitable activities. They

provide civic and political education to the people of Indian origin and foster friendship and understanding between people of Asian-Indian origin and others. More information can be found [here](#).

Email: [president@indiacouncil.org](mailto:president@indiacouncil.org)

5. **Japan America Society of Greater Philadelphia** is a private nonprofit organization that has inspired mutual curiosity, understanding, and collaboration between Japan and Philadelphia for more than 30 years through art, business, and culture. The organization operates and organizes the Shofuso Japanese House and Garden, the Subaru Cherry Blossom Festival, a US-Japan Business and Public Policy Series, and provide Japanese arts, business, and programming for all ages. More information can be found [here](#).

Phone: (267) 237-3550

6. **Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation** provides services focused on promoting Chinatown as a regional destination, helping low-income families meet basic needs, empowering youth, preserving heritage, and promoting the businesses and residents of the Chinatown community and beyond. More information can be found [here](#).

Phone: (215) 922-2156

7. **The Korean Cultural Foundation** assists in fostering a better understanding of the Korean culture; helping reduce the gap between first, second, and third generations in the Korean community to preserve and promote Korean culture and heritage; develop Korean cultural activities that are appropriate for the local community. More information can be found [here](#).

Phone: (484) 213-4603

Email: [info@kculfoundation.org](mailto:info@kculfoundation.org)

8. **The Mainline Indian Association** aims to promote local intracultural and intercultural connections by providing a forum for the fostering and sharing of Indian culture through educational, cultural, and social programs and activities. More information can be found [here](#).

Email: [mainlineindianassociation@gmail.com](mailto:mainlineindianassociation@gmail.com)

9. **The Philadelphia Korean Scholars Association** is aimed at promoting networking among Korean scholars in the greater Philadelphia area. PKSA warmly welcomes new Korean scholars in the region regardless of research fields and affiliations. More information can be found [here](#).

Email: [pksa.scholar@gmail.com](mailto:pksa.scholar@gmail.com)

### **Europe**

12. **The America-Italy Society of Philadelphia** promotes a broader understanding of the Italian cultural and artistic heritage through lectures, films, concerts, and language studies. It has several hundred members in the Philadelphia area who share a love for Italy by regularly participating in this program. More information can be found [here](#).

Phone: (215) 735-3250

Email: [info@aisphila.org](mailto:info@aisphila.org)

13. **Turkish American Friendship Society of U.S.** is a nonprofit organization that promotes better understanding and friendship between Turkish and American communities through educational, cultural, and social activities. More information can be found [here](#).

Email: [info@tafsus.net](mailto:info@tafsus.net)

### Islamic Resources

14. **Al-Aqsa Islamic Society** was established in 1989 to maintain the Islamic Identity and to protect and sustain the Islamic Community in Philadelphia. The task is fulfilled through many services this society offers to the Muslims and Arab Communities in the Greater Philadelphia area. More information can be found [here](#).

Phone: (215) 765-2743

15. **United Muslim Masjid** was established on October 11, 1994, and its goal is to build a strong Islamic community on Qur'an and Sunnah, and is devoted to serving the religious, social, and educational needs of the Muslim community of Philadelphia. More information can be found [here](#).

Email: [info@ummonline.org](mailto:info@ummonline.org)

### Latin America & Mexico

10. **Acción Colombia** aims to develop leadership in the Colombian and Latin American communities by fostering art, culture, and civic participation in the Tri-State area of Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey. More information can be found [here](#).

Phone: (267) 338-6787

11. **Centro Nueva Creación** is a nonprofit with a mission to promote resilience in young people through educational enrichment and engagement with the arts and Latino cultures. More information can be found [here](#).

Phone: (215) 426-8762

Email: [goodlands.director@gmail.com](mailto:goodlands.director@gmail.com)

12. **The Mexican Cultural Center** is a nonprofit organization devoted to promoting understanding and awareness of the cultural and artistic diversity of Mexico and its influence in the Delaware Valley in the United States. More information can be found [here](#).

Phone: (215) 592-0410

Email: [info@mexicanculturalcenter.org](mailto:info@mexicanculturalcenter.org)

### Middle East

16. **Al-Bustan Seeds of Culture** is rooted in Arab arts and language and offers artistic and educational programming that enriches cross-cultural understanding and celebrates diversity. They serve youth and adults of all ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds while supporting the pursuit and affirmation of Arab American cultural identity and playing a constructive civic role within broader American society. More information can be found [here](#).

Phone: (267) 809-3668

17. **Shabahang** is a non-religious, non-political, non-profit organization. Since its establishment in 1990, Shabahang has served as a platform for cultural expression and intellectual discourse for Iranians and those interested in Iranian culture. Additionally, the organization fosters community engagement with its many events and scholarship opportunities. More information can be found [here](#).

Email: [contact@shabahang.org](mailto:contact@shabahang.org)