The University of South Carolina

International Student Handbook

Study Abroad
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

International Programs

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## Welcome to the University of South Carolina!

Thank you for your interest in studying at the University of South Carolina. In the following pages you will find useful information about USC, the city of Columbia, and the steps you need to take in order to make your experience here a success. Feel free to contact us by e-mail or phone if you have any other questions. We hope you enjoy your time at USC, Go Gamecocks!

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About USC

Columbia, South Carolina
The University of South Carolina

The University of South Carolina is located in downtown Columbia, in the heart of South Carolina. The campus dates back to 1805 and is one of the oldest public institutions in the US. It is the flagship university of eight state wide campuses, with the total student population nearing 27,000. USC offers more than 350 degree programs, many ranked among the nation’s elite. Our university also has a new, multi-million dollar NanoCenter dedicated to cutting edge research in the field of nanotechnology.

Exchange students that study at USC can participate in more than 300 student run organizations on campus. These organizations focus on many subjects ranging from athletics to politics. American football is a really popular part of the campus culture. Many students participate in parades and rallies on football game days. Tailgating is another popular activity during the football season where students and other members of the community get together outdoors to barbeque, chat, and meet new people before the football game.

Courses and Credits
Undergraduate students are required to enroll in a minimum of 12 U.S. credit hours per semester. Students typically fulfill this requirement by taking four 3-credit classes. Sample course offerings are listed below. A complete listing of courses open to exchange students can be found [here](#). Be sure to look at the courses available on the Columbia campus.

Sample Subject Offerings

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About Columbia

Columbia is the capital and largest city of South Carolina. Resting on the banks of the Congaree River, Columbia boasts nearly 125,000 citizens residing in both Richland and Lexington County. Nicknamed “The Capital of Southern Hospitality,” Columbia takes pride in its rich Southern heritage and tradition. A friendly smile from a stranger is as common as sweet tea on a hot day. Summers in Columbia are long and pleasant, and its winters are mild and short.

As for cultural activities, the campus is just a couple of minutes by foot from some of the city’s best architecture, museums, galleries, historic houses, theaters, and large venues for sporting and entertainment events. The State House sits on the edge of campus and the Vista and Five Points, two of the most popular areas for restaurants, bars, cafes and specialty shops, are within short walking distance. For those looking for outdoor activities you can check out the Riverbanks Zoo and Garden or the Riverfront Park with a 2 mile trail for walking, running and biking. A beautiful day creates the perfect setting for a picnic in Finlay Park with its water fountains overlooking the city. Columbia is also a great place to try iced sweet tea, the official drink of the South, and to sample authentic Southern dishes like shrimp and grits, cornbread, fried okra, and pecan pie.

South Carolina is one of the most beautiful states on the east coast, as it has many stretches of unspoiled forest, sandy beaches, and scenic lakes and rivers. The state is home to minority cultural groups of Native American and African descent that cannot be found anywhere else. Columbia is also the crossroads for the southeast as all of the prominent cities in this region are easily accessible from our beautiful city. World famous beaches and resorts, the picturesque Blue Ridge Mountains, and other historic southern cities like Savannah and Charleston are within easy driving distance of Columbia. For more information visit the following websites:

- Official City Website
- Official South Carolina Tourism Site
- South Carolina Information Highway
- Columbia Visitor Bureau
- The State—Columbia’s official newspaper
- Columbia World Affairs Council
- Free Times—An alternative Columbia Newspaper
Congratulations! You’ve decided to apply to be an exchange student at the University of South Carolina. In this section, you will find the steps you will need to take in order to apply and be admitted, including the required forms.

How to Apply

In order to apply as an exchange student, you must submit the following application materials:

1. Special Application for Non-Degree Seeking Students (available at your Study Abroad Office)
2. TOEFL official scores **please have scores sent to USC using code – 5818 when taking the exam, as well as an unofficial copy to our office
3. Application for Immigration Document
4. Photocopy of Official Transcripts
5. Financial certification for living expenses (housing, food, books, health insurance, miscellaneous) while at USC.

Please mail or fax completed forms to:
Study Abroad Office
University of South Carolina
902 Sumter St.
Legare College, Suite 321
Columbia, SC 29208
USA

Acceptance Packet

Once you have been accepted as an exchange student at the University of South Carolina, you will be contacted by one of our study abroad advisors who will help you with course and housing selection. You will need to also submit the following forms:

1. **Immunization form** (If students need a PPD vaccination, MMR vaccination, etc., they are available on campus at a reasonable cost and may be administered during orientation week)
** As classes fill up quickly, it is very important that you submit your immunization form as soon as possible. This will help ensure that you can get into the classes that you need to take. (More info on immunizations and health insurance found on p.7)
2. Housing and Course Preference Form (will be e-mailed to you by an advisor)
3. **Insurance Policy Information**
4. **Arrival assistance request** online (optional, free airport pick-up)
Visa

Visa/Immigration

In order to study as an exchange student at the University of South Carolina, you will need to apply for an F-1 Visa (student visa) at the nearest U.S. Embassy in your home country.

You will need to schedule an in-person appointment in order to apply for the F-1 Visa stamp. You can check the waiting times for appointments by going to the U.S. Department of State Visa Wait Times website.

In order to be able to apply for the visa you will need the following documents:

1. Passport
2. SEVIS I-20 document (this document will be issued by the USC International Programs Office once you have been accepted to the University of South Carolina)
3. Receipt showing SEVIS fee payment. You will receive instruction on how to pay the SEVIS fee with your SEVIS I-20. You can pay the SEVIS fee on-line or through the mail.
4. Completed DS-156 (visa application form)
5. Pay the visa application fee.
6. Original financial documents showing the amount listed under number seven on your I-20 document.
7. Plans to return to your home country upon completion of your exchange program in the U.S.

For more information on applying for your visa, please refer to the section labeled Future Students on the International Programs for Students website.
Immunizations

Every incoming USC student must complete an immunization form in order to be allowed to register for classes. You can find the immunization form [here](#).

The required immunizations for international students include:

- Two measles and one German measles immunization that must have been administered after the student’s first birthday
  
  **OR**

- Positive serum titer test for measles and German measles. The positive titer must have been performed within the last 5 years.
  
  **OR**

- Physician diagnosed measles illness, plus meeting either criterion 1 or 2 above for German measles.

  In addition, some international students must also have proof of a PPD test (Mantoux) within the past 12 months. Please see the bottom of the immunization form to determine if you need a PPD test. Other recommended vaccines include Tetanus-Diptheria, Mumps, Polio, Meningococcal, Hepatitis B and Varicella (if you have no prior history of Chicken Pox). If you are unable to receive the PPD test (Mantoux) in your home country, you can submit a chest x-ray instead along with the chest x-ray examination results documented in a letter from your doctor.

Student Health Insurance

For international students, it is required that you have health insurance. Health insurance coverage is automatically charged to your USC student account. If you already have health insurance coverage from your home country that will cover you while you are studying abroad in the U.S., you are eligible to waive the health insurance and have that charge removed from your account. In order to do so, you will need to complete the [hard waiver form](#) and submit proof of insurance coverage from your home country (translated into English) to the Student Health Center within the first two weeks of the semester. To see the minimum requirements for health insurance, please visit USC’s [health insurance website](#).

Thompson Student Health Center

Students are eligible to receive routine treatment and physicals at the [Thompson Student Health Center](#) on-campus. For more information and to schedule an appointment, you can refer to the Center’s website.
Course Registration/Housing

Course Selection

Course offerings can be found on-line at [http://registrar.sc.edu/html/Course_Listings/](http://registrar.sc.edu/html/Course_Listings/). You will need to select courses from the Columbia campus. Please note that undergraduate students should only choose classes at the 400 level or below. Graduate students can select courses at the 500 level and above. Generally, class names are followed by the course number which serves as the level indicator. For example, Biology 101 is an introductory course for first year students, 200 level courses are for 2nd year students, 300 level for 3rd year students, and 400-level are for final year (4th year graduating) students, with some overlap in upper range course numbers. Essentially, the higher the course number, either the higher level the class or the more specialized the topic. Full-time status, which is required for all exchange students, is 12 credit hours, typically four 3-credit classes. **Please note, the Study Abroad Office at USC cannot register you for courses until your Immunization Form is complete and submitted to us.

If you would like to make changes to your course schedule, they may not be made until after the Exchange Student Orientation. We have worked on your behalf to get you into the classes you requested and provide you with a full time schedule (12 credit hours). This typically involves many steps, such as providing transcripts to the appropriate department, calling/emailing professors, etc. If you decide to make any changes to your schedule once you arrive, you will be responsible for taking the steps necessary to add the class. You will have until the first week of classes to finalize your schedule for all semester-long courses. All exchange students must take at least **12 credit hours but no more than 16 credits each semester. **Please note that some intensive, 8-week courses have an earlier drop deadline.

Housing

Once you have been accepted by USC, a study abroad advisor will help you request housing. **It is mandatory that all exchange students live on campus while they are studying at USC.** Exchange students have the option of living in:

- **West Quad** (Green Quad)
- **South Quad**
  - Special communities within South Quad
    - Carolina Global Community (designed to enhance intercultural experiences through matching international students with American roommates)
    - Spanish Language House (For students with an interest in the Spanish language)
    - French House (For students with an interest in the French language)

You can view the housing options and take a virtual tour at: [http://www.housing.sc.edu/undergrad.asp](http://www.housing.sc.edu/undergrad.asp). The costs for the different housing options can be found at [http://www.housing.sc.edu/signrates.asp](http://www.housing.sc.edu/signrates.asp).

Final housing placements for the Fall semester won't occur until the summer and we will not be able to confirm your housing until July. Spring assignments will be released in December. Housing placements will occur on a first come, first serve basis.
Before You Arrive

Financial Matters and Budgeting

It is always a good idea to have some U.S. dollars with you upon your arrival. The Columbia airport does not have a currency exchange booth, though if you are flying through a major airport, you should be able to find one during your trip.

The university will provide estimated expenses prior to the application deadline. These estimates include most living expenses like housing, food, books, health insurance, and other miscellaneous expenses. However, if you do plan on traveling extensively while in the U.S., you may want to consider having extra spending money.

USC offers several meal plan options at a variety of on-campus dining locations. Students who do not wish to purchase a standard meal plan may use their Carolina Card to purchase individual meals at Campus dining facilities. For meal plan options visit: http://www.sc.edu/dining/plans.html

Some international students find it convenient to open a bank account in the U.S. You will receive more information on how to open a bank account during the orientation week upon your arrival. You can also check with your financial institution in your home country to see about fees and usability of your debit card in the U.S.

Paying your Bill

Before you arrive on campus, your bill will not have been changed to reflect your exchange student status. Exchange students DO NOT pay any USC fees until they arrive on campus and have attended the mandatory exchange student session. Students can pay their bill using cash, an American check, money order, American Express, or Mastercard. **Visa credit cards are not accepted.** Students are also able to arrange a payment installment plan, which requires a $50 set-up fee and four payments of 25% each.

Packing

Since Columbia is located in the Southeastern part of the U.S., the temperatures throughout the year are fairly mild. During the winter months of November-January, temperatures may drop as low as 30 degrees Fahrenheit; however, in the summer months of June-September, temperatures can reach over 100 degrees Fahrenheit with high levels of humidity.

You will have access to laundry facilities so it is a good idea pack as light as possible. You will need to have a warm coat, gloves and a hat for the winter months and rain gear, including an umbrella, for the spring months. Also keep in mind that the beach is a short drive away so you may want to include a swimsuit.

The apartments on campus are furnished but not stocked. You will need to provide your own bedding and towels. While the kitchen is not stocked, most international students are able to rely on their American roommates to provide kitchenware. Students can either bring bedding, towels, etc. with them or order them through several stores online and have the items delivered to their PO Box on campus. Some options to look into are http://www.target.com/ and http://www.walmart.com/.
Getting Around

Transportation

Transportation in Columbia, and throughout the U.S., may be very different from that of your home country. You may be accustomed to using public transportation such as buses, trains and subways to get around your home city. Although there is a limited bus transit system in Columbia, you will most likely need to rely on walking to get around campus and the surrounding area. Most U.S. students do have cars on-campus so once you meet other students, you may be able to ask them for a ride off-campus.

Around Columbia

Central Midlands RTA Bus

USC Campus shuttle

Area Airports

There is an airport in Columbia, but more than likely you will fly into one of the nearby international airports in Atlanta or Charlotte. After arriving at the international airport you will either take a connecting flight to Columbia or make arrangements for transportation to Columbia from those airports. It is recommended that you take a connecting flight to the Columbia airport. More information about area transportation can be found below.

Keep in mind that the Columbia airport is about a 25 minute drive from campus. If you do not make other arrangements for airport pick-up, you will need to have U.S. dollars for a taxi.

Columbia Metropolitan Airport

Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport

Transportation to Columbia from Atlanta: Greyhound (around $50 one-way) or Southeastern Stages

Charlotte-Douglas International Airport

**Columbia Charlotte Shuttle**—great new service!

Ground Transportation at the Charlotte airport

Amtrak
The Arrival Process

Arrival Assistance

Please email your study abroad advisor your date of arrival so that we may know when to expect you. You may make arrangements for someone to meet you at the Columbia Metropolitan Airport (CAE) by completing the online application found here http://www.columbiacfi.org/arrival.htm. Please complete the application a minimum of 10 days before arrival. If your flight schedule changes, please email CCFI at info@columbiacfi.org to give us your new flight information. Arrival assistance is not available from Charlotte or Atlanta.

If you plan to arrive before the designated arrival days, you must make arrangements to stay in a hotel until the residence halls open. You may find information on local hotels by visiting http://www.sc.edu/visitorcenter/jsp/Public/visitor_accommodations.jsp. Additionally, if you will arrive to campus after 5pm, you should also make arrangements to stay at a hotel.

Please come check in at the Study Abroad Office between 8:30 and 4:30 on the arrival days. Your study abroad advisor will assist you with move-in, obtaining your Carolina Card, and setting your network log-in for internet usage.

Getting your Carolina Card (University ID card)

All new students will be issued a USC student card called the “Carolina Card” upon arrival. This card serves as a student ID, your key to your residence hall, library card, and allows access to a variety of on campus services such as dining, photocopying, health services, bookstore, etc. For more information on the Carolina Card, see the Carolina Card website.

Mandatory Exchange Student Session

This session will give us a chance to meet and discuss exchange student specific information and answer any questions that you may have for us regarding USC life, Columbia and its surroundings. We will cover health insurance requirements, how to use VIP, and academic differences at USC. The International Student Office will also cover how to stay in status and immigration requirements.

Please bring the following documents with you to the orientation session:
- I-20 or DS-2019
- I-94 (you will be given this form at the airport)
- Passport
- Visa
- SEVIS fee payment receipt (if available)
- Documents for any dependents who have entered with you.
After You Arrive

Preparing to live in the U.S./Columbia

As much as you may feel familiar with U.S. culture through music, movies or TV shows, actually living in the U.S. will be an adjustment. To help you prepare for this cultural adjustment, you can read more about culture shock and how to adjust to living in a foreign country.

Buying books

The course syllabus that you receive during the first class meeting will include a required book or reading list. You can then purchase your books at the University of South Carolina Bookstore, other bookstores near campus, or online at sites like amazon.com or addall.com.

Student Involvement

Joining student organizations on campus is a great way to get involved and meet other students. You could join an international student organization, an intramural sports team, a singing group, or almost anything else you may be interested in. For more information about student organizations, click here. The International Student Association (ISA) sponsors trips to the beach and other locations for an additional fee. The Carolina Global Community (CGC) also often sponsors a number of trips to popular tourist attractions within our state.

Campus Recreation and Sports

In addition to getting involved in student organizations, you can also take advantage of a variety of recreation facilities on campus. The Strom Thurmond Wellness and Fitness Center is a world class facility that promotes physical fitness and a healthy well being. It boasts 5 basketball courts, 5 racquetball courts, 80 cardiovascular machines, a huge area full of strength training machines and free weights, an indoor track, an outdoor and an indoor pool, and sand volleyball courts. The Strom is truly a first class facility for all your fitness and recreational needs.

Not only is the University known for high-quality academics, but also a number of highly rated athletic teams. To cheer on your favorite sports team, you can refer to the Gamecock Athletics site for game times. Sporting events are a big part of the USC culture, especially Gamecock football, so be sure to try to attend at least one event while you are here.