

2024 • International Scholars at the University of Georgia

Visiting Scholars

GUIDE FOR DEPARTMENTS AND SCHOLARS

Information on:

- Immigration Processes
- J-1 Sponsorship Application
- Pre-Arrival
- Arrival
- Maintenance of Status
- Program Completion

2024 J-1 Scholars Guide

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Office of Global Engagement – Immigration Services

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About the Office of Global Engagement

The Office of Global Engagement (OGE) is pleased to welcome international scholars to The University of Georgia.

International scholars directly support the teaching and research missions of UGA in fundamental and comprehensive ways. Likewise, our office seeks to support this population and all hosting departments with information and advice regarding visa options, benefits and obligations, and legal status in the U.S.

This guide seeks to inform UGA departments and scholars about the process for hosting international visitors from obtaining a visa to successfully concluding the program. We hope that you will not hesitate to contact us with any questions pertaining to international scholars at UGA and the information in this guide. For more comprehensive resources, please visit is.uga.edu.

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The Immigration Process

Introduction to Visa Sponsorship

Departments offering invitations/sponsorship to visitors must request assistance from the Immigration Services office (IS) within OGE for the issuance of any necessary documents required for obtaining a visa to enter the U.S. or for obtaining the correct legal status to allow employment at UGA.

In general, the type of activity and the purpose of the visit will determine what type of visa will be required. The decision regarding the most appropriate type of visa is the responsibility of the IS immigration advisor.

The most common international scholar visa type is J-1 (Exchange Visitor), and most of the information in this guide is geared toward this visa type. However, other visa types are occasionally more appropriate.

Additionally, it should be noted that the procedure for handling J-1 student interns varies slightly from the normal processing of J-1 exchange visitor (scholar, specialist, or professor) outlined in this guide. If your department is planning to host a J-1 student intern, please contact an IS advisor.

IS immigration advisors are trained to determine the best visa type for international scholars, and should be consulted if it is unclear what type of visa sponsorship is required.

For more information visit the Immigration Services web page, Sponsoring UGA Departments: is.uga.edu.



Photo: UGA Photographic Services / Peter Frey

Determining the Correct Visa Type: J-1 Visa

About the J-1

The first step in hosting a scholar is to determine the correct visa type for them. This is typically, but not always, the J-1 visa. Generally, the J-1 is used for research scholars, professors, short-term scholars, J student interns, and specialists coming to the U.S. to teach or conduct research temporarily. The duration of the visit will depend on the category, so the J-1 visa offers great flexibility. This category of sponsorship can be used to hire scholars (paid by UGA) or to host scholars who have separate, external sources of funding. Additionally, the scholar's spouse and children (under 21 years of age) may be eligible to obtain J-2 visas.

Note that the visa application process differs slightly for student interns, and thus not all the information in this guide is applicable to them. If your department will be hosting a student intern, please contact an IS advisor before beginning the application process. For a definition of the five categories of J-1 scholars at UGA, maximum lengths of stay for each, and more information on the J-1 visa in general, visit: [Sponsoring UGA Departments](#).

J-1 12- or 24-Month Bar

If the planned employment or position meets the criteria above, the IS advisor must next determine if the scholar is eligible. This will involve a review of the person's immigration history in the U.S., and specifically whether the person has been in the U.S. on a J-type visa (such as J-2 dependent, J-1 student or J-1 scholar) anytime during the previous 12-month period prior to the beginning date of the current request, and also whether they have just completed a previous J-1 scholar or professor program in the U.S. If either of these applies, the scholar may be temporarily (12-24 months) barred from entering the U.S. on a new J visa.

Your IS advisor can provide more information on these temporary bars, or you may visit:

[Current Visiting Scholars Information](#).

J-1 Home Residency Requirement

The two-year home residency requirement is a *different* rule from the 12 or 24 month temporary bar. Specifically, some scholars must return to their home country for at least two years at the end of their exchange program prior to being eligible for U.S. permanent residency, or a U.S. work visa. The home residency requirement can apply to an scholar if:

- The scholar participated in a government-funded exchange program – that is, the scholar's program was financed (in part or fully) by the U.S. government or the scholar's home country.
- The scholar's field of research or teaching is considered a specialized knowledge or skill, and the scholar is a national or a permanent resident of a country which has deemed his/her field of specialized knowledge as necessary to that country's development.
- The scholar has been in the U.S. receiving clinical medical training.

It is advisable to make potential scholars aware of this potential residency requirement early on during the application process, as it may affect whether or not they decide to come to the U.S.

It is possible to request a waiver of this requirement. See <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study/exchange/waiver-of-the-exchange-visitor.html>.

J-1 Restrictions

The J-1 sponsorship from UGA may NOT be used for the following:

- The employment of persons in nonacademic staff positions.
- Tenure-track or tenured faculty appointments.
- Foreign medical graduates who will be engaged in clinical activities, including training.
- Clinical appointments to the schools of medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, or affiliated centers, or internships or nondegree programs of study including clinical responsibilities in any field.

J-1 Visa (continued)

English Language Ability

As the sponsoring department, you must determine that the scholar has the English language skills necessary for the activities he/she will participate in at UGA. Evidence of this will be required when you submit your request to Immigration Services.

Proof of Funding

Financial support must cover the entire period of the scholar's program. Support may come from UGA or from an outside source. For outside sources, proof of funding must be provided along with the J-1 application materials. If necessary, the proof of funding must be translated into English and converted into U.S. dollars.

Additional Funding Information: If the scholar will be paid by UGA, determine from what account(s) they will be paid. If they will be paid with grant funding, contact your department's Sponsored Programs officer for help in determining whether they should be paid as a UGA employee or via stipend.

Different types of grants have varying stipulations for how the scholar may be paid. For example, training grants may require pay via stipend, while research grants may require pay as a UGA employee. If your Sponsored Programs officer determines that your scholar should be paid as a UGA employee, check in with Human Resources to determine an appropriate job title for the scholar (making sure that it meets the J-1 visit requirements of being an academic position and having an appropriate salary level), whether the position is benefits-eligible, whether the position must be posted competitively, etc.

Whether the scholar provides their own funding, is paid via stipend, or is paid as a UGA employee will determine how their future integration into UGA is handled; this affects who is responsible for initiating their paychecks each month, what forms are necessary for them to receive a UGA card, what privileges they have at the UGA library, whether they are allowed to take UGA property off campus, whether they must obtain a bank account in the U.S., and whether they are eligible for benefits from UGA — and consequently, how much will be deducted from their paycheck for those benefits.

Proof of Health Insurance

All J-1 and accompanying J-2 family members are required to obtain insurance coverage for health, accident, medical evacuation and repatriation of remains while in the United States. They must maintain medical insurance coverage for the duration of their program.

Failure to purchase and maintain such insurance may lead to loss of legal immigration status and termination from the Exchange Visitor Program.

UGA employee benefits insurance currently **does not** cover medical evacuation and repatriation; scholars eligible for UGA employee insurance must purchase a supplemental policy to cover those costs.

For more information, visit the following:

- [J-1 health insurance information sheet: J-1 Health Insurance Info Sheet](#)
- [UGA's benefits website: Healthcare Coverage Options](#)

J-1 Sponsorship Application Process

If the prospective international scholar meets the criteria on the preceding pages, he or she is eligible to apply for the J-1 visa. The following section provides information on how to complete the J-1 sponsorship application process. If the scholar will require a different visa type, skip to “Other Visa Types” on [p. 12](#), and contact an IS advisor for assistance.

Visiting Researcher / Visiting Scholar

The terms visiting researcher and visiting scholar are used broadly to refer to those visitors who are not UGA employees or enrolled students, but who are coming to UGA to participate in research or to participate in activities that require access to UGA facilities, systems or services.

The requirements of the policies and procedures described on the visiting researcher/scholar website help to ensure that mid- to long-term scholars have access to necessary UGA resources, as well as identification through a UGAID and appropriate “standing” at UGA. Once the visit details have been established between the scholar and faculty sponsor and applicable approval is received from the sponsoring unit, the faculty sponsor should initiate the hosting procedures with the Office of Research by completing the **VRS Questionnaire**. The Office of Research highly recommends the faculty sponsor and appropriate staff contact review the procedural information provided on the website prior to initiating the questionnaire, which can be found here: <http://research.uga.edu/visiting/>.

Application Process, *continued*

For Departments

The Sponsorship Request Form

Once you have received the UGAID from the Office of Research, or payroll if your scholar will be paid by UGA, you can initiate the J-1 sponsorship paperwork with our office. The department should submit the online application and supporting documents as soon as possible. To begin the process, please fill out the online J-1 sponsorship request form. See instructions here: [Compass Departmental User Guide](#).

The J-1 sponsorship request form contains information on all the additional documents which should be uploaded along with the form. This includes the sponsoring department’s letter of invitation or appointment letter, which should include the program’s specific beginning and ending dates. All documents should be in English; this may require that the prospective scholar provide an official translation of his/her documents.

After the sponsoring department submits the J-1 sponsorship request form, an IS advisor will review it to ensure the position is eligible for the J-1 program. The advisor will contact the sponsoring department if additional information is needed.

J-1 Exchange Visitor (EV) Intake Form

Next, the scholar will receive an email from Immigration Services with a link to an scholar intake form, which he/she should then complete and submit along with the necessary documents indicated.

Form DS-2019

The IS advisor will review all the information to ensure the J sponsorship is appropriate. The advisor will issue form DS-2019 which is a Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status.

Upon receipt of Form DS-2019, the prospective scholar will use the DS-2019 form to make a visa interview appointment at a U.S. Embassy or consulate in his/her home country and to pay the required SEVIS fee. For more information about Form DS-2019, please visit: <http://j1visa.state.gov/participants/how-to-apply/about-ds-2019>.

Processing Times

- J-1 Sponsorship Request form: 5 to 10 business days after IS advisor receives both the sponsorship request form and scholar intake form with all required supporting documents.
- J-1 initial processing with consular visa application: 1 to 3 months for visa application and travel.



Photo: UGA Photographic Services / Andrew Davis Tucker

J-1 Associated Costs

IS Case Processing Fees

Immigration Services is a cost-recovery program, which means that it is funded in large part through internal fees. After the sponsoring department completes the J-1 sponsorship request form, it will automatically be charged the required sponsorship. The fee increases 2% each year.

SEVIS I-901 Fee

Once the scholar receives the DS-2019 form, he or she must pay the SEVIS fee prior to going to the U.S. Consulate to apply for the J visa. The EV should use the information on the DS-2019 form to complete the information pertaining to the payment of the required SEVIS fee. This fee is in addition to the visa application fee payable to the U.S. consulate. For more information on this fee, visit: <http://www.fmjfee.com>.

International Scholar Compliance Fee

International scholars are required to pay the IS International Scholar Compliance Fee (ISCF). Note that if the scholar fails to pay, the sponsoring department is responsible for covering the fee payment. This fee increases 2% each year.

For more information on Immigration Services and U.S. government processing fees payable by the department or scholar, see: [IS and Government Fees](#).

Other Visa Types

Occasionally, visa types other than the J-1 are more appropriate for scholars. IS is also able to assist with visa sponsorship processing for the following:

H-1B

H-1B is a temporary worker visa. It is appropriate for international researchers, faculty, and staff members who are coming to UGA for purposes of academic employment. The duration of employment can be between one and six years, and in contrast to the J-1 visa, Immigration Services can sometimes initiate a U.S. permanent residency sponsorship if the position is full-time and permanent.

Note that IS should be consulted if a department plans to hire a foreign national in order to assist in ensuring that applicable federal laws and regulations are met before employment begins. For more information on the H-1B visa category, visit: [H-1B](#).

TN (Trade NAFTA)

The TN status is available to Canadian or Mexican nationals working in specific jobs. More information about the TN status, including a list of approved jobs, can be found here: <https://www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/temporary-workers/tn-nafta-professionals>.

E-3

The E-3 status is similar to the H-1B status, and is available to Australian nationals. It does not generally require an application to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, and so is sometimes faster than the H-1B. It usually does require the employee to apply for and receive the E-3 visa from a U.S. embassy. More information about the E-3 visa can be found here: <https://www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/temporary-workers/e-3-specialty-occupation-workers-from-australia>.

O-1

The O-1 status is available for people who are considered “outstanding” in their field of research or teaching. It is a difficult standard to achieve, and requires hard evidence of the employee’s outstanding ability in several different categories of proof. Information on the O-1, including evidence required for eligibility, can be found here: <https://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/temporary-workers/o-1-visa-individuals-extraordinary-ability-or-achievement>.

Visa Inquiry

After reading the above information, if you are not sure what type of visa sponsorship the scholar or employee will require, please contact your IS advisor.

Pre-Arrival Information

Determining an Arrival Date

The scholar must plan to enter the U.S. up to 30 days before the start date of his/her program as indicated on form DS-2019. If circumstances prevent him/her from entering the U.S. before the indicated start date, the sponsoring department **must** notify the IS advisor so that they can amend the start date.

If the scholar tries to enter the U.S. after the indicated start date, he/she could be denied entry into the U.S. Ideally, the scholar should arrive in the U.S. during the daytime, on a weekday, in case assistance is required. Note that the scholar cannot begin his/her actual research or work, however, until the official program start date. Rather, he/she should use the time before the start date to settle in.

The Departmental Liaison

The sponsoring department should designate a UGA faculty or staff member who serves as the scholar’s sponsor. This liaison is normally the person who worked with the scholar for his/her initial appointment of visit. The liaison should work with the scholar to make travel and arrival plans, complete all required paperwork and check-in processes at UGA, and settle in. Please see below for detailed information on what may be required. If the scholar has difficulty with the English language, the departmental sponsor must make sure to provide a translator to attend the in-person advising session.

Remember that this is an exciting and stressful time for the scholar, and he/she will greatly appreciate help settling into life in the U.S.

Program Information: Terms and Obligations

The sponsoring department is responsible for providing to the scholar, in writing, the terms and obligations of the program of work or study before arrival. This should include what is expected of the scholar and what resources the sponsoring department is obligated to provide. It may include financial or legal restrictions on research and/or teaching as well as resources available (e.g. laboratories, libraries, outside departments, and financial resources). If the J-1 scholar will be paid by UGA, now is a good time to give them an estimate of what their likely take-home pay will be after deductions such as taxes and health insurance, so that they may budget accordingly. Otherwise, the amount deducted from the first paycheck might be an unwelcome surprise.

Departmental Information

Although an in-person orientation with department will be necessary upon arrival, it is helpful to inform the scholar about the sponsoring department before arrival. This may include key aspects of the department’s administrative structure and key people the scholar will be interacting with. This information can be included in the written terms and obligations of the program.

Pre-Arrival, continued

Housing

The sponsoring department is responsible for assisting the scholar in locating housing. As with many college towns, housing in Athens is in high demand, so it is recommended to begin securing housing as soon as the scholar's visa paperwork has been approved and arrival/departure dates have been confirmed, if possible.

On-Campus & Off-Campus Housing

The department sponsoring your program should assist visiting scholars with locating (at least temporary) housing.

There are many apartment complexes in the Athens area with various price ranges.

Here are websites to help you find off-campus housing. Make sure you find out exactly how far away from UGA these are through Google Maps!

- www.padmapper.com
- www.apartmentfinder.com/Georgia/Athens-Apartments
- [GSE Off-Campus Living Guide](#)

English Classes for Adults

The scholar may want to attend supplemental ESL classes. If the scholar is accompanied by a spouse whose first language is not English, the spouse may be interested in enrolling in English as a Second Language (ESL) courses while in Athens. This is an excellent way for someone who otherwise might feel a bit isolated and lonely to make friends and participate in a worthwhile activity while in Athens.

Classes are available for learners at all skill levels, and some free courses exist. Be sure to take note of enrollment deadlines and any restrictions on enrollment due to visa type. Below are two English literacy programs in Athens:

UGA Intensive English Program

[IEP Website](#)

Athens-Clarke Literacy Council

www.athensliteracy.org/news-2/esl-instruction

For Departments

For Scholars



Pre-Arrival, continued

Healthcare Information

In addition to ensuring that the scholar and any accompanying dependents obtain healthcare (see [“Proof of Health Insurance” on page 7](#)), the sponsoring department should provide the scholar with information about the U.S. healthcare system, as it may differ from that of the scholar’s home country.

For example, in some countries, pharmacists are able to offer medical advice, and medicines are available over-the-counter which require a prescription in the United States (such as contraceptive pills or antibiotics).

Please be sure the scholar understands the terms of his/her health insurance policy and where to go for healthcare in Athens, including pharmacies, non-emergency, and emergency care. Also be sure that the scholar has 911 programmed into his/her phone and has the numbers of two or three people in the department that he/she can contact in case of an emergency.

U.S. Health System

The United States has one of the best health care systems in the world, but it is by far the most expensive. It’s critical to have insurance before going to a health care provider. If not, any clinic or hospital may charge full price. Often payment is due at the time of services. Therefore, all international scholars must be covered by adequate health insurance. You must carry health insurance for yourself and your family members for the full duration of your program.

Health Insurance

All J-1 and accompanying J-2 family members are required to obtain insurance coverage for health, accident, medical evacuation and repatriation of remains while in the United States. More information can be found on our website: [Health Insurance Information](#)

Any insurance policy purchased must cover the scholar and all accompanying dependents. This website provides information about companies and what to expect: <http://health.usnews.com/health-insurance>.

Hospitals

There are two major hospitals and multiple clinics located in Athens: [Piedmont Athens Regional](#) and [St. Mary’s](#).

Visiting Scholars

ARRIVAL/POST-ARRIVAL GUIDE FOR DEPARTMENTS AND SCHOLARS

- Arrival Information
- Human Resources
- During the Program
- Ending the Program



Arrival Information

Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport Arrival

The sponsoring department is responsible for making arrangements to transport the scholar from the Atlanta airport to his/her housing in Athens. If it is not possible for the departmental liaison to meet the scholar in person at the airport, as of now there is only one shuttle company, Groome Transportation, offering reliable shuttle service between Athens and Atlanta throughout the day: <http://athens.groometransportation.com>.

Remember that international travel, while exciting, is also tiring and stressful. Planning in advance and good communication will help ensure that the scholar's airport arrival goes smoothly. Below are some helpful tips to facilitate this process:

- Be sure that the scholar has a phone number for the departmental liaison (or the shuttle company) who is picking him/her up. It is best to write these down in a safe place, rather than only programming them into a cell phone, in case of a dead battery. Also remember that the scholar's cell phone from his/her home country may not work in the U.S. Pay phones at the airport **do** accept credit cards (as well as U.S. dollars), but can be expensive. In an emergency situation, an employee at the one of the information kiosks located throughout the airport may be able to assist the scholar in placing a phone call.
- Ensure that the scholar and liaison are aware of the arrival time and flight number (again, write these down in a safe place).
- Before departing, the scholar may wish to browse an airport map for directions from baggage claim to his/her pickup location.
- Note that going through customs and baggage claim after an international flight can be a lengthy process, so it is recommended to book a shuttle at least one hour **after** the arrival time, if not more. If the scholar realizes he/she will miss the original pick-up time, he/she can call Groome Transportation to reschedule. If no phone access is available, he/she can go to the shuttle pick-up location and wait for a later shuttle to arrive.

Athens Airport

Although it's not the cheapest option for transportation to Athens, there is a small Athens airport that supports private and chartered flights: www.athensairport.net.

Arriving in Athens

When the scholar finally arrives, he/she will likely be tired from the long trip. Help him/her settle in by taking a trip together to Wal-Mart or Walgreen's to pick up a few necessary items and to a restaurant to get a good meal. A list of restaurants in Athens can be found here: www.visitathensga.com/restaurants.

Although too much information on the first day would likely be overwhelming, the scholar also will need to know convenient options for grocery shopping and dining near his/her home. Those who are new to the U.S. may appreciate a tutorial on the major differences among some of the supermarkets and pharmacies available in Athens, as this may not be readily apparent.



Photo: UGA Photographic Services / Paul Efland

Check-In after Arrival

All scholars must check-in with Immigration Services immediately upon arrival by going to compass.uga.edu. Scholars will receive a welcome email from IS a few days before their arrival to UGA with instructions on how to check-in through Compass. If you do not check-in with IS, your immigration record will be cancelled in SEVIS. If program is cancelled, you must return home.

Human Resources

The Human Resources office at UGA is responsible for filing all necessary paperwork needed in the hiring process. Those scholar hired as UGA employees will need to turn in paperwork to HR.

Scholars who provide their own funding or who are paid by UGA via stipend will not need to file paperwork with HR. The sponsoring department is responsible for assisting the scholar in completing all necessary HR-related forms including:

- Form I-9 (online)
- Form W-4 (if applicable)

For more information, visit www.hr.uga.edu.

Payroll Paperwork

Scholars who are paid by UGA, whether by HR (those on UGA payroll), or by stipend (not on UGA payroll), will need to submit a UGA Tax Information Form for Internationals and the appropriate supporting documents to Susan Caldwell, the International Tax Coordinator.

Scholars providing a service may be paid as an independent contractor or employee depending on the circumstances of the services being provided. Please visit this website to find what category you fall under and for any other questions: www.busfin.uga.edu/payroll.

UGA MyID & Email

Effective June 25, 2016, employees will be assigned MyIDs that include their initials and five random digits (example: abc12345). The form to request a MyID now requires authentication through UGA's Central Authentication Service (CAS), so new employees and others who do not have MyIDs will no longer be able to request a MyID for themselves. The sponsoring department is responsible for the creation of a MyID for international scholars.

To access the form, visit myid.uga.edu and click on the link to Request a MyID for Faculty, Staff, and Others. If the department member is not already logged into CAS, the site will redirect to the CAS login page. After logging in with a current MyID and password, the department member will be able to access the Request a MyID form. Once a MyID request has been successfully completed, the new employee will be informed of this request by an email from accounts@uga.edu.

When requesting the MyID, there may not be an appropriate classification for the visitor if they are not either a UGA employee or a UGA student; in this case, choose the "staff" option. If noted on the form that the applicant is a J-1 scholar, someone at EITS will read and approve it. If the "student" option is selected for someone who is not enrolled as a student at UGA, the request will automatically be denied, as it will be run against the student database. It can occasionally take a day or two for the MyID request to be approved.

If the scholar needs immediate access to PAWS in order to access the internet on campus, he or she can call the EITS helpdesk to obtain guest access: 706-542-3106.

Additional information, along with frequently asked questions, is located on the EITS Helpdesk website: [New To Campus](#)

UGACard

The sponsoring department is responsible for ensuring that the scholar receives his/her UGACard. The scholar will need a UGACard to check out library books, access his/her on-campus workplace after hours (if applicable), and access many other facilities and services throughout campus.

Note that employees and dependents must be included in the appropriate database prior to receiving the UGACard; employees must submit a faculty/staff dependent request form to the UGACard Office at least five working days prior to having a dependent's card made.

Additionally, for those scholars who are not in the employee or student databases at UGA, the sponsoring department must submit a Request for Visitor ID Card form to the UGACard office at least five days prior to the card being made. As this form requires the approval of the department head and a dean or senior VP, it is a good idea to start this process at least two weeks before the scholar will need to have the card made.

The UGACard office is located in the Tate Student Center in room 309. For information on UGACards, visit: <https://tate.uga.edu/ugacard/>

Library Access

J-1 scholars in the UGA student or employee database are automatically given library privileges and may check out books with their UGACard.

Scholars who are not in either of those databases must submit a Visitor Voucher form to the library after receiving their UGACard. This form requires the sponsoring faculty member to assume all responsibility for any library materials the visitor loses or damages.

Library privileges for non-UGA employees/students are also more limited in some ways. For example, they cannot request materials via interlibrary loan.

The Visitor Voucher form is available here: <https://www.libs.uga.edu/access-services/borrowing/visitors>

Social Security Number

For Departments

The sponsoring department should assist the scholar in obtaining his/her Social Security Number, if eligible. Please wait until after you have checked in online with Immigration Services (IS) and IS has processed your check-in before applying for the SSN. F, J, and H visa holders, if they are paid by UGA, may obtain an SSN; J-2's may do so only if they receive a temporary work card from the U.S. government. More information on how to apply can be found on our website: [J-1 Scholar Orientation](#).

For Scholars

J-1 and J-2 visa holders can obtain a Social Security Number (SSN). J-2's must have received a temporary work card from the U.S. government prior to applying for the SSN.

The Social Security office is located at 1650 Prince Avenue, 800-772-1213 or go to: www.ssa.gov.

Retirement Account

All regular employees of the University of Georgia are required to participate in a retirement program. Faculty and all benefit-eligible staff in exempt positions have the option of participating in either the Teachers Retirement System (TRS) or an Optional Retirement Plan (ORP). To read more about TRS and ORP, see: <https://hr.uga.edu/employees/retirement-other-savings-options/>.

To view exempt and non-exempt positions, select any pay plan listed on the UGA pay plan page: <https://hr.uga.edu/employees/compensation/uga-staff-pay-plan/>.

J-1 scholars who are required to contribute to a retirement account may be eligible to receive a refund upon ceasing to work at UGA; however, this process involves substantial paperwork. Retirement funds may be kept regardless of where you relocate. For more information on current regulations, contact Human Resources at 706-542-2222.



Banking

For Departments

The sponsoring department is responsible for assisting the scholar in opening a U.S. bank account, if necessary. In particular, the scholar may find it convenient to have a checking account with a debit card.

Opening a Bank Account

Upon arrival, the scholar will want to open a bank account to keep your money in a secure location. In the U.S., people use a combination of check writing, Automated Teller Machine (ATM), debit card or credit cards, and online banking to make purchases and pay bills.

For Scholars

What are Checking Accounts?

A checking account is set up usually with a local bank. Checking accounts are useful for buying things without carrying around cash. Whether you have a debit card linked to your checking account or you write paper checks, these accounts come in handy.

Why Use a Checking Account?

A checking account is a payment account. You have easy access to cash via checks, debit card, or online bill pay. Your checking account should only hold money that you intend to spend quickly, so look for a checking account that best meets your needs.

Banks in Athens

For a list of banks in Athens, visit: [Banks in Athens](#).





Photo: UGA Photographic Services / Peter Frey

Public Transportation

For most scholars, the primary means of transportation will be the UGA and Athens bus systems.

UGA Bus System

It is free to ride a UGA bus. Buses can take you from downtown to Family Housing, the gym, and of course academic buildings. To find out departure times and what route is best for you visit: <https://tps.uga.edu/transit/>

Athens Bus System

Athens has a city bus that may be free to ride for some campus visitors and students. For bus schedules and routes please visit: <https://tps.uga.edu/maps/>

Phone Service

The sponsoring department should assist the scholar in arranging telephone services. For scholars whose stay will be one year or less, a pre-paid cell phone may be the most convenient option. With pre-paid phones, it is not necessary to sign a contract, payments may be made online, and a variety of rates and plans are available. If the visiting scholar wishes to use the cell phone to call a foreign country, they should carefully check the rates and plans, as they vary based on which country one wishes to call; it may be necessary to purchase separate phone cards.

A more affordable option for calling abroad may be an online Skype account; computer-to-computer Skype calls are free, and Skype rates are affordable for calling phones in many countries.

For more information and to purchase a pre-paid phone, the departmental liaison can accompany the scholar to a major retailer such as Best Buy or Walmart.

You will probably want your own phone while in Athens. Although you can set up a landline in your apartment, a cell phone may be more convenient. If you will be staying in Athens one year or less, a pre-paid phone is the best option because there is no contract to sign, and you can pay the bill online each month using your debit card. Many different plans are available depending on how much you want to spend. To buy a pre-paid phone, visit the electronics section of a major retail store such as Wal-Mart or Best Buy. If your stay in Athens will be longer, you can also sign a contract with a company such as Verizon, AT&T, Sprint, or T-Mobile.

Georgia Driver's License

Although most short-term scholars will likely not purchase a car, the scholar still may wish to rent or borrow a car on occasion. Residents of other countries may generally drive in Georgia for up to one year on a valid international driver's license (If the scholar already has a driver's license in his/her home country, an international license can be obtained for a reasonable fee before departing for the U.S.). Non-U.S. citizens who become Georgia residents must transfer their out-of-country driver's license within 30 days of obtaining Georgia residency (a written and driving test are necessary).

Those who do not wish to drive in the U.S. should consider obtaining a Georgia Identification Card (non-driver card), which will be useful when a photo ID is requested.

The Georgia Department of Driver Services provides information on the application process for non-U.S. citizens here: www.dds.ga.gov/drivers/dldata.aspx?con=1741471757&ty=dl.

Updated information about Georgia driving laws and procedures is available at the Georgia Department of Driver Services, where you can find detailed information about applying for a license, as well as the Driver's License Manual. Visit: <https://dds.georgia.gov/dds-forms-and-manuals/manuals>.

For Departments

For Scholars

Sponsoring Department Orientation

Immigration Services strongly encourages the sponsoring department to provide the scholar with an in-person welcome and introduction to the department, including meeting the colleagues, staff, and students with whom the scholar will be working. Please take the time to familiarize the scholar with the available resources in the department (e.g. laboratories, libraries), as listed in the program's written terms and obligations. If the scholar will be working in a laboratory, make certain that he/she has been thoroughly trained in all lab safety procedures and that they have completed any trainings required by UGA. The lab manager or principal investigator should know which trainings are necessary to complete. For more information, refer to the website of the UGA Environmental Safety Division: www.esd.uga.edu.

Later on in the program, it is also advisable to work with the scholar to make academic connections in other departments or at other universities, if useful. Ensuring that the scholar makes connections at UGA will make his/her stay more productive and enjoyable.

Changes to the Program

The sponsoring department should notify IS immediately if:

- The scholar will be transferring his/her program to another university.
- There are any changes in the immigration status of the scholar. Note that the processing time for a J-1 change of status from within the U.S. is over 12 months, so it is advisable to begin the process in a timely manner.
- The scholar will be departing from the program early.
- The scholar needs to extend his/her stay. The sponsoring department should notify IS at least 30 days prior to the expiration date of the current DS-2019, and will need to provide proof of funding and health insurance, including medical evacuation and repatriation coverage.

Travel Outside the U.S.

J-1 scholars may need to travel outside the U.S. during their stay at UGA. They must have a valid J visa to re-enter the U.S., and a recent travel signature on the DS-2019 form. Only the IS advisor is authorized to sign the DS-2019 form; departmental representatives **may not** sign the DS-2019 form. The scholar should contact the IS advisor for information prior to departing the U.S.

Visa Application

The scholar should contact the IS advisor for information regarding a renewal of the J visa if it has expired, and he or she will be travelling abroad. The visa application process can take anywhere from a few days to a month or two – or longer if the applicant is subjected to a security clearance delay. Delays are not common, but possible. It can be helpful for the scholar to have a letter from the departmental supervisor confirming the position at UGA, and the field of research or teaching.



Photo: UGA Photographic Services / Paul Efland

Income Taxes

J-type visa holders must file income taxes every year, regardless of whether or not income was earned. SPRINTAX, a web-based federal tax return preparation software, is available through the Payroll office for international scholars who are non-residents for tax purposes. For more information, visit <https://gse.uga.edu/taxes/> and please feel free to reach out to isltax@uga.edu for additional assistance.

All J visa holders must file a tax statement with the IRS by April 15 of each year, regardless of whether or not income was earned. Each employer you have had during a given calendar year should send you a Form W-2 sometime in the month of January listing the amount of your earnings and federal and state taxes withheld. For questions, e-mail Susan Caldwell at

Community and Campus Involvement

When the scholar has free time, she/he will likely want to make friends and participate in some of the many activities available on campus and in the Athens area. Joining an extra-curricular organization or house of worship will make the scholar's stay more enjoyable and help combat normal feelings of homesickness. Take the time to find out what the scholar's interests are and help her/him connect to a relevant organization or two.



Ending the Program

Departmental Exit Interview

As the scholar's stay draws to a close, schedule a time to meet with him/her to get feedback on the program. Learning about the positive and negative experiences the scholar had while at UGA will improve the experience of future scholars to your department and enhance the quality of any ongoing collaboration with the current scholar.

Future Collaboration

The sponsoring department is encouraged to stay in touch with the scholar and discuss options with him/her for future collaboration if the exchange has been productive for all concerned. Let Immigration Services know if you are planning to have future or continued exchanges. Additionally, contact International Partnerships if you are considering a formal agreement: [Proposing Cooperative Agreements](#).

Notice of Departure

Scholars who have completed their J-1 program must fill out a departure notice and submit it to IS. IS is required to report your program's end date to the federal government. The end date is the date listed on your DS-2019, or it could be a prior date if you complete your program early. Please complete and submit your departure form in your Compass record at compass.uga.edu

IS Exit Interview

Although it is not required, IS strongly encourages scholars to participate in an exit interview before departing. An exit interview is typically a meeting between the scholar and either his or her IS advisor, or the Director of IS. The purpose of the exit interview is to gather data to improve working conditions, services, and retain highly qualified scholars, and get feedback on scholars' exchange experiences at the University of Georgia. Information compiled from exit interviews may also be used to improve the quality of services for future scholars.

IS encourages scholars to stay in contact with their sponsoring faculty, departments, and IS. International collaboration and cooperation at the University grows as new relationships build with our scholars. Immigration Services is also happy to share news of published research and other activities that result from scholars' time spent at UGA!