

**Francis Marion University
International Student Affairs Office
International Student Guide**

Welcome

The faculty and staff at Francis Marion University welcome you to our university! This guide will assist international students in arranging travel to the United States, planning their stay at Francis Marion University (FMU), and taking advantage of the services provided by FMU. The FMU Admissions Office and the International Student Affairs (ISA) office will assist you during your transition to FMU. Please read this carefully!

Immigration Information

In order to enter the United States and study at FMU legally, international students must comply with U.S. immigration laws and regulations as dictated by the United States Citizenship and Immigrations Services (USCIS, a bureau of the Department of Homeland Security) and the U.S. Department of State (DoS). To assist with these matters, FMU has several staff members who serve as designated school officials (DSO) who may provide information and authorization to the student on some immigration issues.

Student and Exchange Visitor System (SEVIS)

SEVIS is a computer database operated by USCIS that maintains information on all international students in the U.S. holding F-1, J-1, or M-1 visas. All students with these visas are required to be registered in SEVIS and to possess an I-20 form generated by SEVIS. Currently, FMU may issue I-20 forms for students seeking F-1 visas.

Student Visa (F-1)

Students must be admitted to the university before applying for an F-1 visa, which may be granted at a U.S. consulate or embassy to an individual who is qualified to pursue a full course of study at an academic or language institution authorized to admit foreign students. At the embassy or consulate, the individual will be required to submit the following items:

- A SEVIS I-20 form, issued by Francis Marion University, consists of three pages with signatures from the DSO.
- Proof of adequate funding for one year of study or the length of the program if less than one year.
- Application for a nonimmigrant visa (OF-156).
- Proof that he or she intends to enter the U.S. for educational purposes only.
- Proof of permanent residence in a foreign country and strong family or business ties which he or she has no intention of abandoning.

It is extremely important for a student on an F-1 visa to maintain legal status throughout the program of study in the U.S. The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act places a particular emphasis on the need for students to take

responsibility for maintaining F-1 student status. Please refer to the section titled “Maintaining Legal Status” to review the basic immigration regulations governing F-1 students.

Tourist Visa (B-2)

An individual who enters the U.S. in B-2 visitor status should be engaged in the following types of activities: visits with friends or relatives, travel, sightseeing or medical treatment. A B-2 visitor will be admitted for a minimum period of six months and may be eligible to apply to the USCIS for extensions of stay in increments no longer than six months each.

A student who plans to study at Francis Marion University *should not* attempt to enter on a tourist visa. The immigration officer at the port of entry will refuse entry if he or she determines that an alien is entering on a B-2 visa for purposes other than tourism.

We strongly recommend that a new student contact the FMU Admissions Office if he or she is having trouble obtaining an F-1 or J-1 student visa. To enter the U.S. on a tourist visa is not a viable solution.

Maintaining Legal Status

There are basic requirements for maintaining student status in the U.S. It is very important that international students follow the guidelines listed below to ensure they remain in good standing with the USCIS:

- Keep passport valid at all times.
- Attend the school noted on the I-20.
- Update all personal information with the DSO for the SEVIS program.
- Maintain full-time enrollment each semester.
- Do not engage in studies beyond the completion date listed on the I-20 or IAP-66. If more time is needed, report to the ISA office to seek information about a program extension before the completion date has passed.
- Report a change of address or phone number to ISA office.
- Report changes of major or degree level to the ISA office.
- Report intentions to transfer to another school or leave FMU to the ISA office.
- Do not work without obtaining proper employment permission from the USCIS. Limit on-campus employment to a total of 20 hours per week (even if you have more than one job) while school is in session. Prior to accepting any employment, it is recommended students report to the ISA office for assistance.

For more information on U.S. Immigration laws and regulations, it is recommended that international students visit the USCIS web site at www.uscis.gov.

Travel and Reentry

Prior to leaving the U.S., international students must ensure they have all the documents needed to reenter (visa, passport, I-20, I-94).

1. Have the I-20 endorsed by the international student adviser or DSO on campus.
2. Verify that the information on the I-20 is still accurate.

3. Check your U.S. entry visa (which is stamped in your passport) to be sure that it is still valid for additional entries. If it is not, you will have to get a new entry from the U.S. embassy or consulate while you are abroad.

When traveling to the United States, you must have these documents on your person and available for inspection by the U.S. Customs officials.

Housing Issues for International Students

Many international students choose to live in campus housing. By living on campus, students will have ready access to the library, computer center, the student center, sports and recreation facilities, dining hall, and academic buildings. Most important is the increased level of interaction with faculty, staff, and other students.

To live on campus, students must complete the FMU Housing Application and return it with the appropriate deposit as indicated in the acceptance letter received from the Admissions Office. International students *must* arrange for housing prior to their arrival in the U.S. The FMU international student affairs adviser can assist students with information about their campus housing assignments. Currently, FMU does not offer assistance with off-campus housing for international students.

If students choose to live off campus, they should take great care when choosing a residence facility. In choosing an apartment, issues that should be considered include cost, proximity to campus, and safety. A “lease” is a binding contract between the student and the property owner or landlord. When a student signs the lease, they are obligated to pay the landlord monthly rent for the duration of the lease, which is quite difficult to break prior to the ending date. Students should never sign a lease unless they are completely satisfied with the apartment and surrounding property and when they understand all the terms of the lease. Students who choose to live off campus should be aware that there is no public transportation available to transport them to and from campus or other locations.

Transportation

The transportation system in the United States is quite different from that in most countries. Most Americans own cars, which are the most common form of transport. In South Carolina, the public rail and bus system is not extensive. Because FMU is a rural campus not served by public transportation, the ISA office provides weekly shuttle service to various locations in town, including banks, shopping centers, and other needed services. Additionally, the ISA office sponsors periodic trips to locations of interest and entertainment in the area (examples include Charleston, S.C., and Savannah, G.A., two historic U.S. cities within 2-3 hours drive).

A valid driver’s license is needed to drive a car. Each state in the U.S. issues its own driver’s license. To obtain a driver’s license in South Carolina, international students are required to demonstrate knowledge of the state traffic laws, pass an eye exam, and pass

the driving test. Additionally, drivers must maintain appropriate insurance coverage on their vehicles which can be quite expensive.

To apply for or renew a driver's license, or to change the local address listed on a current South Carolina driver's license, the following documents are needed:

- Passport with I-94 card and visa
- I-20 form
- Certificate of enrollment at FMU which lists the student's current, local address. Certificates of enrollment are available at the FMU registrar's office.
- Social security card
- Certification of residence, such as a copy of a utility bill or a housing assignment card from the University.
- Current driver's license from home country.

Some countries and territories have reciprocity, an agreement, with South Carolina. This reciprocity means that these countries have driver licensing standards equal to or greater than South Carolina. If you are a citizen of one of these countries, you do not have to take the knowledge or skills tests to exchange your license for a S.C. license unless your license has expired. These countries currently include Canada, France, Germany, Guam, and Puerto Rico.

General Academic Information

Structure

The undergraduate bachelor's degree typically takes four years to complete, each year typically known as the freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior years of undergraduate study. The academic year includes the Fall semester (mid-August through early December) and the Spring semester (early January through early May). Academic course loads during the Fall and Spring semesters average 15-17 hours, which equals four or five classes and a lab. Additionally, three academic terms are held during the summer months (Late May, June and July) and students may take one or two courses during these terms. More information is available from the FMU Admissions Office on these issues.

New Student Orientation

Orientation is a term used by U.S. institutions of higher learning to describe a formal program of introduction to the institution. At FMU, Orientation is a program specifically designed to assist the parents and families of our newest students in their transition to FMU.

You will be provided with information about the resources and services available. This information will help you succeed at Francis Marion. During the Orientation program, students become familiar with the academic requirements and register for classes as well as information regarding co-curricular activities.

Please note that ALL incoming students must participate in a New Student Orientation Program. Additional information about Orientation may be found at the FMU Web Site.

Course Registration

Course registration for a student's initial term of enrollment at FMU typically occurs during his/her Orientation program. Registration for future semesters usually occurs during the preceding term in accordance with the following information.

The registrar is responsible for the management of the registration process by which students enroll in classes. Registration procedures for each term are described in the schedule of classes for that term and on the university's web site.

Each student should meet with his or her faculty adviser to select courses to be taken. The student may enter his or her schedules via the web, in their academic adviser's office or in the office of the registrar. Students must confirm schedules and pay fees in the cashier's office.

Through the registration process, students assume academic and financial responsibility for the classes in which they enroll. They are relieved of these responsibilities only by formally terminating enrollment by dropping or withdrawing in accordance with procedures and deadlines specified in the schedule of classes each term. Please remember that international students must maintain a full-time course load to maintain legal status in the U.S.

Academic Life

Expectations concerning attendance, participation, involvement and other important issues may vary from class to class. It is important for all students to develop a clear understanding of the expectations in each class. To assist with this, course instructors provide a "syllabus," which is a course outline containing course objectives, material to be covered, schedule of assignments, examination dates, textbooks, the instructor's contact information, and general course expectations (attendance, participation, and other issues).

It is important for students to seek assistance if experiencing difficulty. Instructors typically maintain scheduled "office hours" during which they are available to students and will often schedule appointments to discuss student concerns. A common mistake among international students is failing to seek assistance from their course instructor. In addition to individual assistance, the instructor may refer the student to other university academic resources, including the Tutoring Center (a service in which students may receive assistance from upper-class students with assignments), the Writing Lab (a center located on campus that provides free assistance for students with writing assignments), or study groups (typically these are informal and organized by students taking the same class).

Preparing for FMU

Health Requirements, Immunization, and Insurance

International students are required to submit an FMU immunization form with the required immunizations, along with a current (within past 12 months) Tuberculosis skin test prior to arrival. The current immunization form must be received in the FMU student health service before the student will be allowed to register for classes. This form is sent to all students when they are accepted at FMU. A full listing of the required immunizations is available from the FMU Admissions Office. The immunization form can also be downloaded from the FMU website www.fmarion.edu at the student health service link.

Health insurance is mandatory for all international students. International students are required to obtain health insurance for at least \$50,000 coverage. If this insurance is not obtained before arrival at FMU, the student will not be allowed to register for classes and pre-registered courses may be dropped. FMU has a partnership with an insurance carrier regarding student health insurance. Please contact the ISA office for more information or go to <http://www.studentinsurance.com> for the FMU insurance form.

Items to Bring

Climate and Clothing Needs: South Carolina has warm/hot weather from May to October, with temperatures usually ranging from 50 to 100 degrees Fahrenheit (10 to 38 degrees Celsius). Cooler temperatures, ranging from 20 to 70 degrees F (-7 to 21 degrees C) usually occur from December to March. Students will need a heavy jacket during the winter months. Most students will want to purchase additional items for inclement weather (such as umbrellas, raincoats, etc.) upon their arrival.

Personal Items: Most students like to bring typical examples of art, crafts, traditional dress, photographs, tapes, maps, or other items descriptive of their country and culture to show interested Americans and to provide a touch of decoration to their new homes. Students may want to bring items they regularly use that may not be readily available, or may be more expensive in the U.S. Examples include cameras, watches, personal electronics, or items available mainly in their home country.

If living on campus, basic furniture is provided in campus residence halls and apartments, but bed linens (twin long), blankets, pillows, and towels are not provided. If possible, students should bring a light blanket, a bed sheet, sheets and a towel. If that isn't possible, you should plan to purchase them before moving into the residence hall. The ISA office will provide transportation to local merchants to make such purchases.

Items not to Bring

You can obtain a booklet on U.S. Customs regulations at the consulate or embassy where you acquire your visa. Prohibited items include open containers of food, narcotics, agricultural products and goods for resale. Required textbooks and supplemental reading materials are available for purchase or in the university library. You do not need to bring books used in previous study.

It is best to purchase electrical appliances after you arrive. Appliances manufactured outside the U.S. may not work with our electrical system. The U.S. electrical system is 110 volts.

Mail/Postal Services

Until you have a mailing address in Florence, you may have your letters (not parcels) mailed to you in care of the Office of International Student Affairs, Francis Marion University, PO Box 100547, Florence, SC 29501-0547, U.S.A. "Hold for Arrival" should be marked on the envelope. The university cannot be responsible for any mail.

If living on campus, students may receive mail in a box assigned to them and packages may be received at the FMU Housing Office. Specific mailing addresses are sent with student housing assignments.

Students living off campus may consider renting a postal box at a local U.S. Post Office upon their arrival. While there is no post office on campus, the ISA office will arrange for weekly trips to a post office during the academic year.

Traveling to the United States

International students must arrange for transportation to Florence between two and four days prior to the beginning of classes. If requested at least two weeks in advance, the ISA office will arrange for transportation from your arrival point in Florence (usually the Florence Airport or Bus Depot) to the FMU campus.

Transportation: If you come directly to Florence from any U.S. port of entry, you will save money if you purchase a domestic travel ticket with your overseas flight. Otherwise you will need extra money in U.S. dollars to purchase an airline or bus ticket to Florence. Exchange rates and U.S. taxes generally make it more expensive to buy tickets after you arrive.

Before buying an airline ticket, you should shop for the most economical fare. Some national air carriers offer student rates, and organizations often contract with travel agents for group rates. Bookings for discount fares usually must be made several months prior to departure. The Council for International Education Exchange (CIEE) arranges transatlantic and transpacific passage for groups and individuals.

CIEE also sells the international student identification card, which provides for reduced air, bus and train tickets; accommodations discounts in major cities; discounts for certain services and shopping, and traveler's health and accident insurance for the duration of your trip. Travel arrangements through the CIEE are optional and are not required by FMU.

Luggage and Baggage

Please do not send baggage or packages in advance of your arrival because the university does not have storage facilities for luggage, trunks, or packages. Regardless of cost for excess weight, most students find it best to bring all personal baggage on the

plane (check with your travel agent or airline for size and weight limitations) rather than ship it separately. Students shipping items separately may require the services of an agent to arrange for U.S. customs clearance and forwarding of unaccompanied parcels. Such services are expensive and result in considerable delays. Once you arrive, you may receive packages and parcels if you are living on campus.

Money

Many students find it more convenient to exchange their local currency for U.S. dollars before their departure. It is important to not travel with large amounts of cash, due to the danger of theft. If students anticipate bringing large sums of money to the U.S., they should consult with their bank about the safest and most convenient means of carrying and transferring funds. Some students make arrangements for funds to be transferred in U.S. dollars to a U.S. bank before they arrive so that money is available immediately upon arrival. Foreign currency is not available in most U.S. cities, and all local businesses (including FMU) accept only U.S. currency.

Students arriving in the U.S. should have sufficient funds to cover expenses until they arrive on campus. The amount depends on individual travel plans. Most students choose to use traveler's checks, which may be obtained at banks or travel offices and can be cashed by most businesses, including hotels, restaurants, and airports. Most vendors in the U.S. also accept major credit cards, such as Visa or MasterCard.

It is also advisable to carry a small amount of cash, at least one hundred dollars in paper currency and two or three dollars in coins for bus fares, telephones, baggage, lockers and tips.

Arrival at the University

Students are expected to arrive at the university no later than the arrival date specified on your I-20 form. There will be an Orientation program to become familiar with the campus and its resources. Students need to secure housing, get settled in, and learn about university procedures and regulations, register for courses, recover from travel fatigue, and begin the transition of life in a new environment and cultural setting.

Personal Information

Banking and Finances

Most international students choose to open a bank account with an American bank. To open an account, students should bring their student identification, passport, and funds for deposit. Banks offer many different financial services. Students may wish to compare the services and costs of several banks before choosing one at which to open an account. A checking account will permit you to write checks to make purchases and pay bills. Most retailers will accept a personal check on any U.S. bank as long as you can show proper identification (passport, student identification card, or driver's license). By using checks, it is easy to keep records of your purchases and payments. A "debit card" allows you to withdraw or deposit money to your bank account using an automatic teller machine (ATM) and to make purchases at stores that accept the card. Most students

choose to use a major credit card (such as Visa or MasterCard), which is available in some countries prior to arriving in the U.S.

At the beginning of the semester, the ISA office will provide transportation to local banks to assist the student in opening an account if desired.

Employment

Employment opportunities for foreign students are limited due to USCIS regulations and are available only to students who have maintained their immigration status and academic standing. F-1 students may work on campus without permission from the USCIS or the ISA office. F-1 students may work on campus no more than 20 hours per week while classes are in session. During the vacation periods and academic breaks, you may work full time (40 hours) per week on campus if returning to classes the following semester.

In order for the University to meet federal tax filing guidelines, students with campus employment must apply for a social security number prior to September 30 of any calendar year. International Students without a valid Social Security number may not accept campus employment after September 30.

Generally, international students with an F-1 visa may not work off campus. There are situations in which students may apply for permission to be employed off campus. To do so, **the student must consult with the ISA office for more information**. Please note that permission to work off campus is often refused, and the application process may take many months.

Social Security Number

A social security number is often requested of individuals seeking to open a bank account, apply for a driver's license, register a motor vehicle or complete a tax form. You do not need a social security number to open a bank account even if the number is requested and expected of a U.S. citizen.

On the other hand, you will need a social security number if you will be employed and paid by a U.S. employer. To apply for a social security number, students must go in person to the Social Security Administration Office in the McMillan Federal Building in Florence, S.C. Students will need their passport, I-20, and a letter from the ISA office. During the first week of classes, the ISA adviser will coordinate transportation to the social security office for those who expect employment. In some cases, it takes several months to receive a social security card after submitting the application.

Culture Shock

It is normal to have some ups and downs during the period of transition to a new culture. Culture shock occurs at a different rate for different people and may build gradually. Everyone experiences culture shock in different ways. The most effective way to combat culture shock is to step back from a given event that is bothersome, assess it, and search for an appropriate explanation and response. Try the following:

1. Observe how others are acting in the same situation.
2. Describe the situation; what it means to you, and your response to it.
3. Ask a local resident or someone with extensive experience how they would have handled the situation and what it means to the host culture.
4. Plan how you might act in this or similar situations in the future.
5. Test the new behavior and evaluate how well it works.
6. Decide how you can apply what you have learned the next time you find yourself in a similar situation.
7. Ask the ISA office for the names of other international students that may have experienced these feelings and seek their advice.

Throughout the period of cultural adaptation, take good care of yourself. Read a book or rent a video in your home language, take a short trip if possible, exercise and get plenty of rest, write a letter or telephone home, eat good food, and enjoy time with friends. Take special notice of things you enjoy about living in a host culture. If experiencing difficulty with the transition, international students should consult with the ISA adviser as soon as possible.

Contact Information

Francis Marion University
www.fmarion.edu

Dean of Students Office
843-661-1182

Office of Multicultural and
International Student Affairs
843-661-1188

Admissions/Enrollment Management
843-661-1231 or 1-800-368-7551

Accounts Payable
843-661-1128

Athletics
843-661-1240

Health Services
843-661-1840

Emergencies
843-661-1109