

Pre-Arrival Guide

Fall 2019 Exchange Students

Illinois State University

Office of International Studies

and Programs

Email: internationalstudents@ilstu.edu

Main Office: 001-309-438-7901

<https://internationalstudies.illinoisstate.edu/students-scholars/>

Welcome to Illinois State University!

We look forward to meeting you and becoming a part of your study abroad journey. In this guide, you will find information to help you prepare for studying in the United States. Please read everything carefully.

Welcome Packet: Your welcome packet should include a two-page document with your name and personal information on it. This is your immigration form called “Certificate of Eligibility” or “DS-2019”. You will need to have your DS-2019 when you apply for a J-1 visa. The J-1 visa is the visa type for students here as part of an exchange program in the United States.

Please be sure that the information on the first page of your DS-2019 is correct and read Page 2. You will sign in the bottom of Page 1—write the date and the location where you are signing your form (for example: if you are standing in Paderborn, Germany when you sign your DS-2019, write “Paderborn, Germany” in the space where it asks for location).

Please arrive at Illinois State University in time to attend orientation beginning **Monday, August 12.** Please be sure to also complete the [Intent to Enroll Form](#) to confirm your attendance.

Traveling to Illinois State University

Illinois State University is located in the Town of Normal (next to the City of Bloomington), in the state of Illinois. The two most convenient ways to travel here are by air and bus.

- **Air-** We have a convenient local airport in Bloomington called [Central Illinois Regional Airport](#). It is a 15 minute drive from ISU. Since it is a smaller airport, you must take a connecting flight from a larger airport (such as Chicago O’Hare).
- **Bus-** You may also take the [Peoria Charter](#) bus from O’Hare International Airport in Chicago to our University. This is the most popular option. The drive takes about 3 hours. From O’Hare, your destination is Uptown Station.
- **Taxi-** Please do not use this option, as it can be very expensive.

If you are interested, you may stay for a couple of nights upon your arrival with an American Host Family. Please view information about [local organizations](#) for more information.

Money for Your First Days

It is recommended that you have access to about \$2,000 (only a small portion of this should be in cash) when you travel to ISU. This should cover any unexpected hotel and food expenses caused by flight delays. It will also help you buy items you will need when you first arrive (books, school supplies, bedding, etc.). If you are living in International House, you will be required to pay a \$300 housing deposit upon arrival.

Housing at Illinois State University

Two types of housing are available at Illinois State University for exchange students: (1) on-campus and (2) off-campus. As exchange students will be entering the housing process later than the majority of students, many of the housing options that are available for ISU students may be significantly more limited by the time that exchange students are ready to apply. To ensure that exchange students have a place to stay at ISU, our office has reserved spaces for all incoming exchange students on the International House (I-House) floors of [Manchester Hall](#). These spaces are also open during University closures/vacations when all other residence halls close so that students do not have to find temporary accommodations during these times. If you do not wish to live on I-House floors please email Matt Schwab, prior to your arrival at: mlschwa@ilstu.edu. However, please note that any students who wish to live off campus need to make these arrangements as soon as possible to ensure that they have a place to stay.

Please see our [Housing](#) page for a list of off-campus housing options and additional housing information.

Important Immigration Information

Before you travel to ISU, there will be many things to do. The most important is to receive your J-1 visa in order to enter the United States. Please see the information below about this process:

1. To participate in our exchange program, you must apply for a J-1 visa. This type of visa is specifically granted to students and scholars who wish to engage in Exchange Programs in the U.S.
2. A visa is a document issued by the U.S. government that will allow you to enter the country.
3. You may apply for your visa at any U.S. Embassy or Consulate, but it will be easier to apply in your home country. Please view information about [U.S. Consulates](#) in order to locate the consulate nearest to you.
4. All students must pay two fees:
 - A Visa fee: You will pay a visa fee to attend an interview with consulate representatives as part of the visa application process.
 - A SEVIS fee: You will pay an I-901 SEVIS fee. You must pay the SEVIS fee before you attend your visa interview. You will bring a receipt of your payment to your interview. SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) is an internet system/database that helps the U.S. keep track of international visitors. As a university that sponsors international visitors, we are required to use SEVIS to enter information about you before and during your stay in the U.S. We use the SEVIS system to create your DS-2019 document. Click here to pay the [SEVIS fee](#).

During your visa interview, you may be asked to show a variety of documents, such as:

- DS-2019 “Certificate of Eligibility” form. Your DS-2019 will be enclosed in your welcome packet that is mailed to your home university.
- A valid passport
- Visa application forms
- Documents to show you will have enough money for your time in the U.S.

- Documents to show ties to your home country (plans to return home after your program)

If your visa application is approved, the officer will print or stamp a visa in your passport. Your visa will note whether or not you are subject to the two-year home residency requirement. Your passport/visa and DS-2019 immigration documents will then be given back to you. **Remember to carry these documents when you enter the U.S.**

Exchange Visitor Laws

While you attend ISU, there are federal immigration laws that you must follow in order to not fall out of status with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the Department of State:

1. **Exchange Activities:**
 - Attend all of your classes. If you are ill or must miss a class, contact your Professor.
 - Undergraduate students must be enrolled in at least 12 credit hours each semester. Graduate students must be enrolled in at least 9 cred hours each semester.
 - Never drop/quit a class without first receiving written permission from your Academic Advisor and International Student Advisor.
2. **Immigration Documents:** Do not let your passport or DS-2019 expire. Keep documents in a safe place.
3. **Health Insurance:** All J-1 students must have health insurance for the duration of their stay that is approved by the Department of State.
4. **Employment:** J-1 students are allowed to work on-campus for up to 20 hours per week. However, before you start working, you must receive permission from your International Student Advisor. Otherwise, you will be working illegally and will need to return home.
5. **Change of Contact Information:** Whenever you move or change your email or phone number, you must report your new information to your International Student Advisor within 10 days.
6. **When to Enter the U.S. and When to Leave:** Your DS-2019 form shows a “Begin” date and an “End” date. You may enter the U.S. up to 30 days before the start date and exit 30 days after the end date.

Additional Information for Exchange Visitors

- Some visitors may be subject to a Two-year Home Country Residency Requirement. This law states that visitors must return to their home countries and be physically present there for two years before being able to return to the U.S. on certain visa types. You will be subject to this requirement if you have received government funding or possess skills that your government needs. Your visa and DS-2019 will say whether or not this requirement applies to you.
- J-1 visa holders may not change category while in the U.S. For example, a non-degree seeking student may not change to a degree-seeking student.
- You are always welcome to contact International Student and Scholar Services when you have questions, especially about immigration. When it comes to immigration matters, please do not rely on friends or family for information, as laws can be complex and can change.

Bills from ISU

You may receive notification from the University before you arrive that show amounts you need to pay. You will see that the University has not yet discounted the amount for tuition. Note that our office will make the necessary tuition payments AFTER you arrive and are registered for courses. You will not be required to make payments to ISU until you arrive. Any payments that you do make, will automatically go towards your tuition. Once your tuition has been paid by our office, any prior payments that were made will go towards your remaining balance. There are a variety of [payment methods](#) available to you when you do wish to pay your bill.

Registering for Classes

The search for classes is based on what you have written on your Course Request Form. If you are an undergraduate student, your Academic Advisor, Nora Atkins, will register you in classes. If you are a graduate student, your graduate advisor will register you in classes. She will contact you via email with any questions or issues. There are many factors that can influence your ability to get into a class:

- A class may be full or has been cancelled;
- A class may be limited to degree-seeking students or those who are graduating soon; or
- Permission from an advisor or professor is required to allow special access into a class.

Course Credit Limits

Exchange students must take 12 credit hours minimum—the tuition waiver will cover 15 at maximum. 12 hours is generally equal to 4 classes. *Graduate students must be enrolled in a minimum of 9 credit hours—the tuition waiver will cover 12 at maximum.

Selecting Classes

At Illinois State University, courses are generally numbered in accordance with the following system:

100-Level Courses Are for 1 st and 2 nd year students
200-Level Courses Are for 2 nd through 4 th year students
300-Level Courses Are for 3 rd and 4 th year students
400-Level Courses Are for Graduate students (who have already completed a bachelor's degree)

Prerequisites

A “prerequisite” is a course that must be taken before another course. With some 200- or 300-level course requests, students must be able to show that they have taken classes at home that satisfy the prerequisite requirement here. For example, if you ask to take “Auditing 200”, you should have studied a class like “Auditing 100” at home that appears on your transcript.

Please note: Any Teaching and Learning (TCH) courses that include a clinical component will not be available for exchange students. Additionally, College of Business (COB) courses require many prerequisites and you may not be able to get into all of your requested classes. A list of approved COB courses for exchange students is available from Nora upon request. These classes are not guaranteed and are subject to availability and space in the course.

Health Insurance from ISU

For your safety, we strongly suggest that you use Illinois State University's student health insurance during your time in the U.S. This plan meets all of the U.S. Department of State's mandatory insurance requirements for J-1 visa holders and is an excellent deal. ISU's health insurance is automatically billed to all students who are enrolled full-time (approximately \$262/semester and \$197/summer). Please view information about [ISU student insurance](#) to read more about the plan.

If you decide to use insurance from home, you will be required to sign a waiver and present information regarding home insurance coverage (proving its equal or greater value compared to ISU insurance) at the start of **each semester** in order to waive the ISU insurance. Make sure to bring this detailed health insurance information in English (like a policy plan or brochure detailing the coverage) with you.

J-1 Visa Holders Department of State (DOS) Requirements

Exchange visitors are required by the DOS to have very specific types of medical insurance for the entire length of their stay. Since this is an immigration law, all J-1 students must have the necessary insurance or they will not be allowed to attend their program. Should a student choose to use insurance from home, the policy must abide by these rules in order to be compliant:

- Medical benefits of at least \$100,000 per accident or illness
- Medical Evacuation coverage- \$50,000 is the minimum coverage allowed (to pay for transportation back to home country, or elsewhere, in the event of serious illness or injury)
- Repatriation of Remains coverage- \$25,000 is the minimum coverage allowed (to pay for transportation back to home country in the event of death)
- Deductible should not be more than \$500
- Pre-existing conditions coverage at start of policy or within a reasonable waiting time
- Co-payment that does not exceed 25% co-pay by the exchange visitor and/or does not exclude benefits for perils inherent to the activities of the exchange visitor's program
- Must be underwritten by an insurance company with a specific rating. Find these details online: To find these details, please view information about [Health Care and Insurance](#)

Immunization Records

All students admitted to Illinois State University are required, by Illinois Law, to provide Immunization Records. Immunization Records can be submitted prior to arrival by submitting the records on the Student Health Services [secure web form](#). Health Services will work with you if any immunizations are missing. You will be required to have a Tuberculosis (TB) Screening within ten days of your arrival on campus.

Weather

Weather in Illinois can be very extreme. When you arrive in August for the fall semester, you should expect summer temperatures around 90 degrees Fahrenheit or 32 degrees Celsius. In the winter, you can expect temperatures as cold as 5 degrees Fahrenheit or -15 degrees Celsius on average.

Transcripts

Our office will mail your academic transcript about two months after the end of your stay at ISU. Please note that it is university policy that we cannot order transcripts until students have fully paid their account balances. Any delay in payment of your account in full causes delays in being able to request transcripts and mail them in a timely manner.

*All University Housing damage fees will be assessed after move-out.

Exchange Student Contacts at ISU

Ms. Lindsey TeVoert
Immigration Specialist
Inbound Exchange Coordinator
[lrtevoe@ilstu.edu](mailto:lrvoe@ilstu.edu)

Ms. Nora Atkins
Academic Advisor for Undergraduate Exchange Students
ngdiaz@ilstu.edu

Mr. Matt Schwab
Assistant Director, International House and Special Programs
International House Coordinator
mlschwa@ilstu.edu