



# PRE-ARRIVAL GUIDE EXCHANGE STUDENTS

## ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

International Student and Scholar Services

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ILLINOIS STATE  
UNIVERSITY  
*Illinois' first public university*

# 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. This guide is also available electronically on our [website](#), allowing you to click on all the links referenced in this guide.

You will come to the United States through the [J-1 Exchange Visitor Program](#). The purpose of the Exchange Visitor Program is for participants to experience U.S. society and culture, as well as engage with and educate your U.S. host community about your own culture.

As an exchange visitor here at Illinois State University, you will have the opportunity to immerse yourself in the American classroom, meet and interact with campus and local community members, and participate in a variety of cross-cultural activities. Program activities that will be available to you during your time on exchange will include but are not limited to:



- **International House trips:** Travel to local areas of interest including Chicago and St. Louis to experience American culture and connect with other international students.
- **Mentorship Adjustment Program (MAP):** Newly arrived international students are paired with established international and domestic ISU students to participate in activities, events, and trips throughout the semester.
- **Ambassadors program:** International students are given the opportunity to serve as cultural ambassadors and representatives of their countries in events on campus involving students, faculty, and community members.
- **International Gala Night:** A night of international food, music, and presentations hosted by Illinois State University's various international student organizations.
- **International Fair:** Cultural/ethnic student organizations on campus are showcased through activities, food, and performances from different countries and regions in this day-long event.
- **Redbird Life:** This student involvement portal will allow you to easily explore [Registered Student Organizations](#), find upcoming [campus-wide events](#), and participate in [volunteer projects](#).





## 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 on 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, which begins one week before the start of classes.

# 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's O'Hare International Airport).



**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.



**Taxi/Uber** 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 our website 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 the International House, you will be required to pay a \$300 housing deposit upon arrival. This expense is included in your budget and will be added to your student bill.

## Housing at Illinois State University

On-campus and off-campus housing are available for exchange students at Illinois State University. As exchange students will be entering the housing process later than most 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.

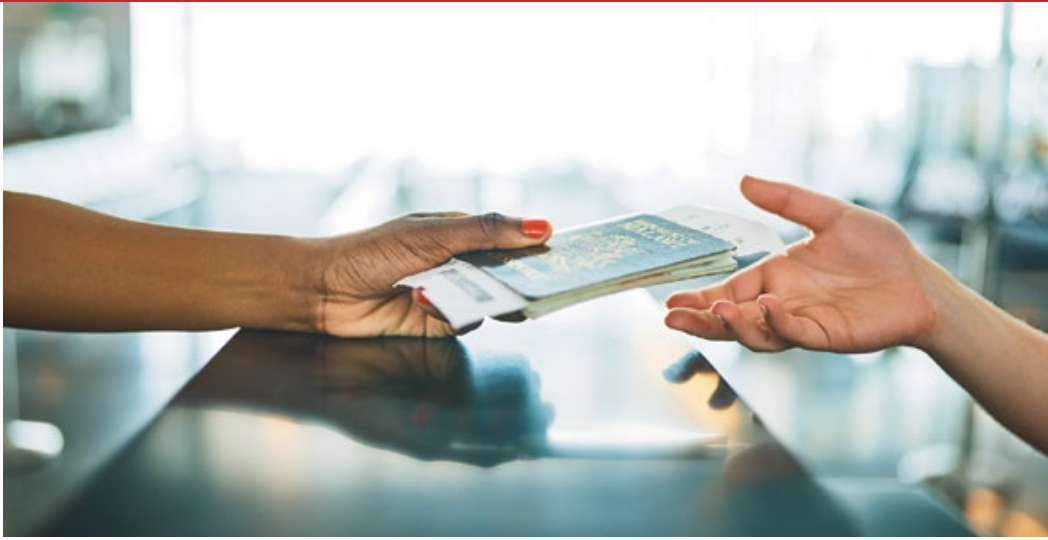
To ensure that exchange students have a place to stay at ISU, our office has reserved spaces for all incoming exchange students on the International House (I-House) floors of [Manchester Hall](#). These spaces are also open during university closures and vacations when all other residence halls close so that students do not have to find temporary accommodations during these times.

**IMPORTANT: IF YOU DO NOT WISH TO LIVE ON I-HOUSE FLOORS, PLEASE EMAIL MATT SCHWAB PRIOR TO YOUR ARRIVAL AT [MLSCHWA@ILLINOISSTATE.EDU](mailto:MLSCHWA@ILLINOISSTATE.EDU).** If you do not reach out to Matt, we will assume you are planning to stay in I-House, and on-campus housing charges will be added to your student account.

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 resources.







## 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 (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) fee: You must pay the I-901 SEVIS fee before you attend your visa interview. You will bring a receipt of your payment to your interview. SEVIS 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](#) or go to [fmjfee.com](http://fmjfee.com).

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 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.

**IMPORTANT:**  
REMEMBER TO CARRY  
YOUR PASSPORT, VISA,  
AND DS-2019 WHEN  
YOU ENTER THE U.S.

# Exchange visitor laws

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

1. Exchange activities:
  - Attend all 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 nine credit hours each semester.
  - You must stay enrolled full-time during your exchange program unless you receive permission from ISSS for a Reduced Course Load. If you wish to drop a class after the 10th day of classes, you must submit a request to the Office of the Registrar that will need to be approved by ISSS before it is processed.
2. Immigration documents: Do not let your passport or DS-2019 expire. Keep documents in a safe place. Contact ISSS for assistance if any of these documents are lost or stolen.
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 and off-campus through [Academic Training](#). 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.

If employed, you must apply for a [Social Security Number](#) (SSN). This nine-digit number helps the U.S. government monitor the wages you receive when employed. You can apply for this upon arrival depending on when your job starts. Our office will help you with this process by providing a letter that along with a letter from your hiring department will serve as proof of work authorization. More information on this process will be provided during international orientation week.

1. Change of contact information: Whenever you move or change your email or phone number, you must update your [My Illinois State](#) student portal within 10 days of the change.
2. When to enter the U.S. and when to leave: Your DS-2019 form shows a begin and an end date. You may enter the U.S. up to 30 days before the start date and exit up to 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 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.

## Your student bill

- Your tuition waiver will not be reflected on your initial student bill.
- Tuition will not be removed from your bill until after the third week of classes, but you will not be charged any late fees associated with this delay.
- You can view your itemized bill in your [My Illinois State](#) student portal. Prior to the tuition being removed from your account, you can either submit a payment for the other items listed on your bill that are not included in tuition or wait until the waiver has been posted to your account in order to have the most accurate reflection of your billing charges for the semester.
- Any payments made prior to the tuition waiver posting will automatically be applied to tuition first, but you will still receive the full amount of your tuition waiver.
- Once the tuition waiver is posted to your account, you should submit payment for the remaining balance. If you submitted a payment prior, it will be applied to the remaining balance. If you have overpaid, you will receive a refund check.
- There are a variety of [payment methods](#) available to you when you do wish to pay your bill.



### TUITION CHARGES ON YOUR BILL?

If you see tuition charges on your bill, they will be removed after the third week of classes, and you also won't have to pay any late fees.

## Registering for classes

The search for classes is based on what you have submitted on your **Course Request Form** in the [ISSS Portal](#). If you are an undergraduate student or non-degree seeking graduate, your academic advisor will register you in classes. If you are a degree seeking graduate student, your departmental graduate advisor will assist you with class registration. Your academic advisor cannot begin working on your course schedule until you have submitted your Course Request Form. The earlier your Course Request Form is submitted, the better chance you have of getting your requested courses. Your academic advisor will contact you via email with any follow up questions or issues.

There are many factors that can influence your ability to get into a class:

- A class may be full or have been canceled;
- 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. Twelve hours is generally equal to four classes. Graduate students must be enrolled in a minimum of nine credit hours—the tuition waiver will cover 12 at maximum.



### COMPLETE YOUR COURSE REQUEST FORM EARLY!

## Selecting classes

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

# 100

**LEVEL  
COURSES**

Are for first- and second-  
year students

# 200

**LEVEL  
COURSES**

Are for second- through  
fourth-year students

# 300

**LEVEL  
COURSES**

Are for third- and fourth-  
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. Any required prerequisites for a specific class will be listed in [Course Finder](#).

**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 your requested classes. These classes are not guaranteed and are subject to availability and space in the course. Please reach out to your academic advisor for further clarification on which COB courses are available for exchange students during your semester of study.

## 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 the U.S. Department of State's mandatory insurance requirements for J-1 Visa holders and is inexpensive compared to similar plans. ISU's health insurance is automatically billed to all students who are enrolled full-time. 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 it provides equal or greater coverage when compared to ISU insurance) at the start of each semester in order to cancel your ISU insurance. Make sure to bring this detailed health insurance information in English (like a policy plan or brochure detailing the coverage) with you. For more information about canceling your ISU insurance, visit the [Keep or Cancel](#) page of the student health insurance website.

## 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:

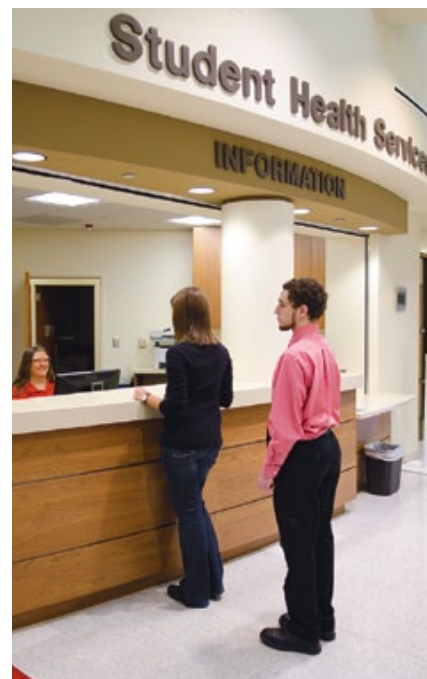


- Medical benefits of at least \$100,000 per accident or illness
- Medical evacuation coverage—\$50,000 is the minimum coverage allowed (to pay for transportation back to home country, or elsewhere, in the event of serious illness or injury)
- Repatriation of remains coverage—\$25,000 is the minimum 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 percent 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

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 requirements](#) are detailed on the Student Health Services website. 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 10 days of your arrival on campus.



## Weather



Bloomington-Normal experiences all four seasons. 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 below zero Celsius on average. Be sure to pack a variety of clothes, including clothing for snow and rain.

## Transportation

The most convenient ways to travel during your time here are by train, local bus, long-distance bus, and car.



**Train** Amtrak (station located in Uptown Normal) provides rail service to Chicago and St. Louis on the Illinois and Texas Eagle services. Please visit [Amtrak.com](https://www.amtrak.com) for schedules and rates.



**Local Bus** [Connect Transit](#) is the public transit system in Bloomington-Normal. Use one of the 14 different routes to access shopping, entertainment, and dining in Bloomington-Normal. By using your Redbird ID card, you can ride Connect Transit for free.



**Long-Distance Bus** Access Chicago, St. Louis, and other major cities by [Greyhound](#), [Peoria Charter Megabus](#), and [Burlington Trailways](#). Visit their websites or contact them for rates and schedules.



**Taxi/Uber** To call a cab or order a ride, visit their websites or contact them for rates and schedules. Use with caution, as these expenses can add up quickly.

## Driving in Illinois

You may drive with a valid license from your home country for up to 90 days after your arrival. Please note that an International License is not valid in the state of Illinois. You can choose to either get an Illinois driver's license or a temporary driver's license if you wish to drive during your exchange experience. You will need a Social Security Number to apply for an [Illinois driver's license](#).

## 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.*

CREATE YOUR **LEGACY**



# Exchange student contacts at ISU

## **International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS)**

[InternationalStudents@IllinoisState.edu](mailto:InternationalStudents@IllinoisState.edu)

### **Sarah Van Alebeek**

Senior ISSS Advisor

[svanale@IllinoisState.edu](mailto:svanale@IllinoisState.edu)

### **Kera Storrs**

International Data Specialist

[kbstorr@IllinoisState.edu](mailto:kbstorr@IllinoisState.edu)

### **Nora Atkins**

Academic Advisor for Undergraduate Exchange Students

[ngdiaz@IllinoisState.edu](mailto:ngdiaz@IllinoisState.edu)

### **Graduate Coordinators**

Academic Advisors for Graduate Exchange Students

[Grad.IllinoisState.edu/faculty/coordinators](http://Grad.IllinoisState.edu/faculty/coordinators)

### **Matt Schwab**

Associate Director, International House and Special Programs

[mlschwa@IllinoisState.edu](mailto:mlschwa@IllinoisState.edu)

### **International Admissions**

[InternationalAdmissions@IllinoisState.edu](mailto:InternationalAdmissions@IllinoisState.edu)







## INTERNATIONAL STUDENT AND SCHOLAR SERVICES

*Illinois State University*

This document is available in alternative formats upon request by contacting the Office of International Studies and Programs at (309) 438-5276.

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