

Valdosta State University

**International
Student
Handbook**

International Student Handbook

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I. WELCOME TO VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY

Dear student,

We are excited to have you here at Valdosta State University! This handbook, along with the VSU Undergraduate or Graduate Catalog, VSU Student Handbook, will help answer most of your questions about life at Valdosta State. If you have other questions not answered in any of these publications, please contact the Center for International Programs and we will gladly assist you.

We have included a copy of the campus map with your welcome packet, but you can always access a copy of the campus map on the VSU website.

Note:

For the sake of differentiating between the two types of student visa that this handbook is designed for, please note the following:

- All international students that are studying in the US with an F-1 visa will be referred to in this handbook as F-1 students, while international students studying with a J-1 visa will be referred to as exchange students.

I. SETTLING IN VALDOSTA

A. GETTING YOUR VSU ID

Your first step when you arrive at VSU should be to get your VSU ID at the 1-Card Office. Your VSU ID is your key to a lot of services and benefits that are available to VSU students only, like getting into your residence hall, using your meal plan to eat at the dining hall, etc.

B. CHECKING INTO YOUR RESIDENCE HALL

After getting your VSU ID card, you will need to head to the Housing Office located at Hopper Hall.

C. FINDING AND MOVING INTO OFF-CAMPUS HOUSING

If it's your first time in the US, you probably do not have a social security number which is required to be able to rent most apartments and houses. However, if you are not admitted as a freshman college student, would like to live off-campus, there are nearby apartment complexes around VSU that will accept other documents instead of a social security number. Please make sure that you read the whole lease agreement (leasing contract) and that you understand the terms of the lease agreement you are agreeing to. Do not sign anything that you do not fully understand! More on Off-Campus Housing can be found on page - 17 -.

D. VSU WIRELESS

All students are welcome to use the internet connection on-campus. To connect to the internet via VSU's wireless network, please follow the steps for your device located here:

<http://www.valdosta.edu/administration/it/its/css/helpdesk/guides/wireless/welcome.php>. If you live on-campus and would like to connect your devices to the network, please see the IT Helpdesk's guides or request assistance by visiting the IT Helpdesk in Odum Library.

II. IMPORTANT IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS

A. PASSPORT

You must make sure that your passport remains valid (meaning unexpired) for at least 6 months after you enter the US, and for the duration of your studies, especially when you are out of your home country. If you are in the US, and you need to renew your passport, please contact your nearest consulate/embassy to inquire about the procedures you need to follow to renew your passport.

B. VISA

This is your key that allows you to enter the US. For international students, this can be either an F-1 or J-1 visa. Once you have entered the US, you do not have to worry if the visa expires as long as your SEVIS* record is still active, or you are in your grace period.

If you leave the US when your visa has already expired, you will have to visit the US embassy or consulate to apply to renew your F-1 or J-1 visa.

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c. I-20

This form is also called “Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Student Status – For Academic and Language Students.” This form is generated by SEVIS through your SEVIS record, and proves that you have been accepted into a school that is allowed to host international students. This form also has the following information: SEVIS ID number, the beginning and end dates of your program of study and current term, requests for benefits and corrections, employment information, current status, etc.

Throughout your course of study at VSU, you will at least be issued **2** form I-20s, but it is possible to have more. It is always a good practice to keep all these documents in a safe place.

Commonly Asked Questions Regarding Form I-20s

Do I need to have a new I-20 every time I travel out of the US?

No. You only need a valid travel signature on the third page of your most recent I-20. A valid travel signature means that it is less than a year old by the time you are planning on re-entering the US.

I lost my form I-20! What do I do?

Contact your International Student Advisor, and let them know. They will provide you with a new I-20, but it is for your own benefit, that you keep all versions of your form I-20s just in case you end up needing to do a change of status.

Can I throw away my old form I-20?

It is always a good practice to keep all the form I-20s that you have been issued throughout the years. In the event that you need to change your status from F-1 to another visa status or even apply for permanent residency, you will have to provide copies of all of those form I-20s. Our office only keeps copies of students' files for a certain number of years after a student has left VSU.

d. DS-2019

This is the form issued to J-1 visa holders (as well as their dependents) to apply for their exchange visitor visas as well as proof of their lawful presence in the US.

e. I-94 RECORD

This is your arrival and departure record. Since April 2013, the US Customs and Border Patrol have automated the made the I-94 record process. You will have a new I-94 number each time you re-enter the US. You can always retrieve your own I-94 record by going to <http://www.cbp.gov/i94> and filling out the form.

III. MANDATORY HEALTH INSURANCE PLAN

All international students are required by federal law to have health insurance for the duration of their studies in the US.

International students that have an F and J visa status have the option of enrolling in the Student Health Insurance Plan through VSU provided by United

Healthcare, or enroll in the alternative plan for F and J visa holders only starting in Spring 2015: PGH Global. Students sponsored by a third party (ex. Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission) that are also provided health insurance coverage must provide proof of the insurance plan, with benefits meeting at least the minimum benefits required by the University System of Georgia (USG) for all international students at the start of the Fall and Spring semesters.

All students that choose to get another health insurance plan other than United Health Care must remember to waive their enrollment in the VSU Student Health Insurance Plan every August and January. *Students sponsored by the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission need to remember to waive their participation in the United Healthcare insurance plan by January and August of each year.*

All students that choose to enroll in the Student Health Insurance Plan provided by United Healthcare through VSU must remember to enroll their benefits during the enrollment period. Students can get an electronic copy of their insurance cards through the United Health Care Student Resource Center: <http://www.uhcsr.com/valdosta>.

IV. IMPORTANT LINKS

A. *MYVSU PORTAL*: <https://www.valdosta.edu/main/myvsu.php>

The easiest way to get to everything that you would need as a student at VSU.



1. Banner

This is the portal where you can access the following tools and services:

1. Class Registration
2. Class details
3. Student Information
4. Transcript Request
5. Online student Account



Personal Information Student Services & Financial Aid New Student Portal

Search [] [Go]

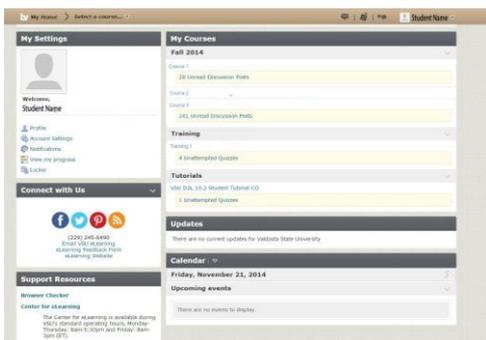
RETURN TO MENU SITE MAP HELP EXIT

Personal Information

- Answer a Survey
- Change Security Question
- View Addresses and Phones
- Update Addresses and Phones
- View E-mail Addresses
- Directory Profile
- View Emergency Contacts
- Update Emergency Contacts
- Change your Self-Service Banner Password
- Need to update your Password? Change it here.
- Create or Update your Campus Alert phone number
- View eCore/eMajor/GOML Login and Request Password
- View Persona PIN
- Alerts - setting of Persona PIN

RELEASE: 6.6

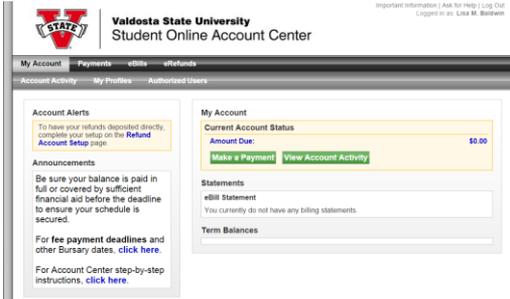
2. BlazeView



3. Online Student Account

You can access this portal through your Banner account, or by going to https://secure.touchnet.com/C20243_tsa/web/login.jsp

If you are wondering where you can see your total tuition and fees for VSU, as well as where to pay your fees online, this is the portal where you can access all of that. You can use a web check (electronic check), or any of your credit or debit cards with a Visa, MasterCard, Discover or American Express logos. For other acceptable methods of payment, please go to <http://www.valdosta.edu/iss/payment-methods.php> to view them.



4. VSU E-mail

All official correspondence and reminders from VSU will go to your VSU E-mail account. Please make sure that you set-up your mobile devices to receive your VSU E-mail or check your VSU E-mail on a regular basis. International Student Services will also only contact you through your VSU E-mail once classes start.

You can check your VSU E-mail either by logging into your MyVSU portal or going to office.valdosta.edu

B. INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICES: <http://www.valdosta.edu/iss>

This website should be the first stop for any questions that has an international student has. A lot of questions may be first answered on the website. If you do not find the answer to your question, or are unclear as what the answer is, please do not hesitate to contact the International Student Advisor or Exchange Student Advisor.

[+ EXPAND](#)

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICES

Home » Academics » Academic Affairs » International Programs » International Students

Welcome to International Student Services

About Us

News & Events

Future Students

After You've Been Accepted

Current Students

Student Resources

Forms

English Language Institute

CONTACT

☎ 229-333-7410
☎ 229-245-3849

Campus Address
204 Georgia Ave
Valdosta, GA 31698

Mailing Address
1500 N. Patterson St
Valdosta, GA 31698

Contact Us



WELCOME TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICES

International students face some unique challenges as well as opportunities while pursuing their academic goals at Valdosta State University (VSU). The International Student Website was designed to offer support and information to the VSU international students on pre-admission, arrival, orientation sessions, immigration advising, employment, federal income taxes, and personal and adjustment problems.

If you are an international student who is interested in applying to Valdosta State University, follow the "Future Student" section to learn more information about how to become a student at VSU. You can also [click here](#) to take a Virtual Tour of VSU!

Students who are new in Valdosta and have been admitted to Valdosta State University can follow the "After You Are Accepted" section.

Students who have been attending VSU can find useful information under the "Current Students" section to learn more on employment, taxes, and immigration issues.

Six good Reasons for choosing Valdosta State University for your studies:

1. **Campus:** beautiful landscaped campus, distinctive Spanish mission style architecture, and advanced facilities.
2. **Services for International Students:** academic advising, detailed orientation, culture adjustment, immigration workshops, English language programs, affordable fees and scholarship opportunities, and graduate assistantships
3. **Location:** small town size, warm weather, and nice scenery

Future Students

Pre-Arrival Information

Address/Major Update Form

Acceptable Payment Methods

Related Resources

Society for Int'l Students Blog

Document Request Form

Hours of Operation
M - TR 8:00 am - 5:30 pm
Friday - 8:00 am - 3:00 pm

C. UNITED HEALTH CARE STUDENT RESOURCE CENTER:
<http://www.uhcsr.com/valdosta>

United Health Care is the company that provides VSU's Student Health Insurance Plan. All international students must be familiar with this website, especially if they have to either enroll their benefits (activate their participation in the plan) or apply for a waiver each Fall and Spring semester.


StudentResources

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Home > Self Service & Support > College Students > Find My School's Plan

- College Students
 - Login to My Account
 - Create an Account
- Find My School's Plan
 - Enroll Online Now
 - Helpful Resources & Forms
 - Health Insurance 101
 - FAQs
- College Parents
 - Clients
 - Providers

Welcome to the Valdosta State University SHIP

Welcome to your student health insurance plan page. UnitedHealthcare StudentResources is committed to doing our part to reduce waste and its impact on the environment. Part of this commitment includes reducing our use of paper as well as increasing our security of personal health information. This is your planet. Go Green! Create an Account Today!

For plan details, including benefits and rates, please refer to Plan Information section below.

MANDATORY SHIP ENROLLMENT

If you are a mandatory student and are required to have insurance and would like to confirm your enrollment and receive your health insurance card early, please complete our online [Enrollment Form](#) and then follow the [Create an Account](#) procedures from the link on the home page.

Please **DO NOT** select the Enroll Online now link in the pink box at the top right. This is reserved for voluntary students only.

The University System of Georgia requires certain groups of students to have health insurance as a condition of enrollment. We call this "Mandatory Enrollment." If you fall into one of the mandatory categories listed below, and you are not covered by an insurance policy (i.e. through parent plans, family plans or employer-sponsored plans) that meets the minimum standards of insurance as set by the Board of Regents, you must enroll in the U-SG- SHIP plan. Your registration will be automatic and the charge will be applied to your student bill.

- All graduate students receiving a Full Tuition Waiver as part of their graduate assistantship award
- All undergraduate, graduate and ESL International students holding F or J visas.
- All undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in programs that require proof of health insurance.
- All graduate students receiving fellowships that fully fund their tuition.
- International Scholars.

If you are a mandatory student and are required to have insurance and would like to confirm your enrollment and receive your health insurance card early, please complete our online [Enrollment Form](#) and then follow the [Create an Account](#) procedures from the link on the home page.

If you are already covered by a health insurance plan that meets the minimum benefits, you can easily opt out of U-SG-SHIP by applying for a waiver.

[Waiver Form](#)

Enroll Online Now!

Online enrollment takes only minutes, pay via credit card or eCheck.

Enroll Now

Go Green - My Account

Use My Account to receive electronic correspondence, access your ID Card, claims status, EOBs, locate provider links and other account information 24/7.

Create an Account

Login to My Account






v. HOW TO

1. CHANGE YOUR MAJOR

1. Talk to your current academic advisor about your plans to change your major. You can find out who your academic advisor is by going to your student information account in Banner.
2. If it is possible for you to change your major, you will have to fill out the Student Data Change Form and submit it to the Registrar's Office. You might also have to take your advising file to your new major's department.
3. Inform the Center for International Programs about your new major by filling out the online Major Updated Form:
<https://www.valdosta.edu/iss/forms/address-major-update.php>.

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II. CHANGE YOUR ADDRESS

Option 1:

1. Login to Banner, go to your personal information tab, and click on "Update Addresses and Phones"
4. Click on "Mailing Address", and make sure that you have a local address on file.

Option 2:

1. Go to the Registrar's Office and fill out an "Address Change Form" with your new address.
2. Go online to <https://www.valdosta.edu/iss> and click on "Address and/or Major Update Form".
3. Fill out the form and hit submit.

III. GET A COPY OF YOUR TRANSCRIPTS

Option 1

1. Go to the Registrar's Office
2. Fill out the Transcript Request Form
3. Pick-it up

Option 2

1. Log into Banner Web.
2. Click on "Student and Financial Aid Menu."
3. Click on "Student Records."
4. Click on "Request Printed/Official Transcript."
5. If you are sending the transcript to a college/university in the US, you can click on Lookup College Code and select the school you would like the transcript sent to. OR- If your transcript is going to a specific person at a college/university or it is going to another person or organization; simply enter the recipient in the Issue To: field and click Continue.
6. In order to utilize the eScript service, you must select eScript Electronic Transcript from the drop-down menu. If you do not select it, your request will default to the Web Official service. Web Official transcripts are mailed at no charge.

IV. GET A VERIFICATION OF ENROLLMENT LETTER

1. Go to the Registrar's Office to fill the Verification of Enrollment Request or print the form online from: <http://www.valdosta.edu/academics/registrar/forms/verification-of-enrollment.pdf>.

2. Submit the completed form to the Registrar's Office.

Note: They will only be able to verify your past enrollment status, not future enrollments.

V. REQUEST A LETTER FROM THE CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

1. Go to <http://www.valdosta.edu/iss> and click on the "Letter Request Form" button.
2. Fill out the form, and wait for the International Student Advisor to contact you through your VSU email when your requested letter is ready for you to pick-up.

II. ON-CAMPUS STUDENT RESOURCES

i. CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS <http://www.valdosta.edu/cip>

We are located at 204 Georgia Avenue, next to the Student Health Center. This is where your International Student Advisor or Exchange Student Advisor's offices are held. If you also receive an email from somebody in our office saying that you have some documents you need to pick up, you can pick up those documents at the front desk of this office.

Regular office hours are Monday-Thursday: 8:00 am – 5:30 pm and Friday: 8:00 am – 3:00 pm. Please note that while we do have an open door policy when a student needs us, it is always best to schedule an appointment if you do have a question or an issue that you wish to consult the international or exchange student advisor about.

Also keep in mind that you do not need to see either advisors if you simply need to pick up your documents/mail at the CIP, but you will need to present your VSU ID for verification of your identity.

II. ACADEMIC ADVISOR

The person who can help plan your classes, assist you with your academic concerns, and direct you in the best route to take depending on your educational and career plans. This person can change depending on your chosen major field of study. You can see who your academic advisor is by going to your student information in Banner.

All students are assigned an academic advisor when they enroll in a degree program. For students who have less than 30 credit hours, or have not declared their major field of study, their advisor will be located in the Office of Centralized Advising. For students who have more than 30 credit hours, or have declared their major field of study, there will be a faculty advisor assigned to the student.

Also all freshmen, sophomore, and transfer students who are thinking of studying any one of the fields of study within the College of Business Administration, will be advised in the College of Business Administration's own Student Advising Center, located at VSU's North Campus.

International Student Handbook

III. ODUM LIBRARY <http://www.valdosta.edu/academics/library>

Located on the main campus, next to the student union, this is one the campus resources that students use the most.

As an academic library, there are plenty of resources for students to use. For example, if students need help with their research, the reference desk is there for students to ask help for. Please note that they are not there to do your homework for you, only to guide you!

You will have access to books, e-books, journals, e-journals, music and art resources that you can check out as a VSU student.

IV. COUNSELING CENTER AND FAMILY WORKS

<http://www.valdosta.edu/counseling/>

<http://www.valdosta.edu/colleges/education/marriage-family-therapy/familyworks/>

The above resources/offices are open to any VSU student who needs them. They are at VSU to provide any mental and emotional support to all VSU students, and their services are free and confidential. Please remember that there is no shame in needing help, and neither is it a weakness.

V. STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER

<http://www.valdosta.edu/academics/student-success-center/>

This office is located at the ground hall of Langdale Hall (look for the red awning).

This office is an excellent student resource. They have tutors for most of the lower level subjects, as well as writing tutors to help students improve their papers.

For students who are taking 1000 and 2000 level business classes, check out the College of Business' Student Advising Center. They offer tutoring for certain classes each semester.

VI. STUDENT HEALTH CENTER

<http://www.valdosta.edu/administration/finance-admin/auxiliary-services/student-health/>

Located next to the Center for International Programs, the Student Health Center should be your first stop when you are not feeling well.

Part of the fees that students pay goes towards the Student Health Center, so all students that have paid fees are eligible to access the services that they provide.

VII. CAMPUS RECREATION CENTER <http://www.valdosta.edu/student/rec-wellness/campus-recreation/>

The Campus Recreation Center (Rec Center) is located next to Centennial Hall on Sustella Avenue.

All VSU students can use the facilities at the Rec Center as long as they have their VSU ID with them. They have a cardio area, an indoor track, weight training area, an indoor pool, and group fitness classes. All free to VSU students!

Students can also choose to participate in Intramural Sports or join the CORE (Center for Outdoor Recreational Experiences) on their different trips around the US, at different times of the year. Please note that CORE trips are not free, but they relatively inexpensive.

VIII. VSU POLICE DEPARTMENT <http://www.valdosta.edu/police>

Located in the Oak Parking Deck, the VSU Police Department is here to keep the campus community safe and secure. They provide basic campus safety services, like escorting students from campus buildings to their residence halls at night. You can also contact them if you have lost any valuables like your VSU ID card, or have found somebody else's lost property.

IX. ON-CAMPUS TRANSPORTATION

X. REGISTRAR'S OFFICE <http://www.valdosta.edu/registrar/>

Located at the University Center, you can access this office by going through Entrance no. 5, and it is next to the Centralized Advising Office. This office is responsible for anything to do with a student's academic record from class registration to final grades.

You can request for copies of your transcripts, a verification of enrollment letter, and here is where you need to apply for graduation.

XI. BURSARY

This office is located across the University Center. They manage the university's billing and payment services for student accounts. They can also assist you with any financial questions that you might have with your student account. Please remember that you can also access your online student account through your Banner account.

XII. IT HELPDESK

The IT Helpdesk can be found in the 2nd floor of the Odum Library if you are having any issues with the IT resources on campus (Banner password reset, connecting to the Wi-Fi, etc.).

Campus Printing Solutions (<http://www.valdosta.edu/helpdesk/guides/campus-printing/welcome.php>): There are also computer labs and study rooms that are free for students to use, as well as access to printers if you need to print out research papers or homework. As a fee-paying student, you are given \$17.50 a semester to use for printing materials on campus. Search for Campus Print Solution Guides on the VSU Website.

For assistance with media projects, the **Media Center** (<http://www.valdosta.edu/library/media/>), located at the first floor of the library where students can borrow some of the equipment and ask from assistance with the Media Center staff.

III. LIFE OFF-CAMPUS

I. RENTING AN APARTMENT/HOUSE

The city of Valdosta is very unique. It is a city that surrounds another city: the city of Remerton. If you go down Baytree Road, you will see a sign that says "Welcome to Remerton." The city only spans a total of 0.2 sq miles.

Most houses for rent or apartment complexes will require a prospective tenant (renter) to agree to get a background check, which you can only get done with a US Social Security Number. Please read page - 18 -, regarding how to get a Social Security number. If you are not eligible to get a social security number, you will need to look for apartment complexes that offer other options in lieu to needing a social security number. Please be cautious and read everything that is put in front of you before you sign! If you do not understand something, make sure that you ask or have a friend with you that can make sure you are not signing something that you might regret later on!

While some apartment complexes will provide the amenity of not having to pay your utilities individually (including it in the rent price), some will not have this amenity available.

II. UTILITIES

- Electric

Georgia Power (<http://www.georgiapower.com/>) is the company that is in charge of providing electricity to all of Valdosta/Remerton. One of their main requirements for electricity to be turned out at your new place is that one of the residents be the primary account holder. Only residents that have a social security number can be a primary account holder. Please read page

Another option is for you and/or your roommates to find an apartment complex that caters to college students and provides this amenity with your leasing contract.

- Water/Sewer/Trash

Depending on where you live (Remerton or Valdosta), these utilities will be managed by the City of Valdosta or the City of Remerton.

III. OFF-CAMPUS TRANSPORTATION

- Taxi Service

There are a couple of various taxi services in Valdosta, but the most popular one is called 244-taxi, and you can just call them at (229)244-8294 to schedule a pick-up.

- Greyhound

<https://www.greyhound.com/>

An intercity bus service that can take people to different cities at different rates. There is a Greyhound Bus Station on 200 North Oak Street.

IV. INTERNATIONAL STUDENT BENEFITS

I. SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

This is a tax id number assigned to all US citizens and permanent residents. International students are eligible to receive a social security number as long as they are authorized for employment. It is not necessary to get a social security number to apply for a driver's license.

To apply for a social security number, you will need the following:

- A letter from the International Student Advisor
- A completed form ss-5: <http://www.ssa.gov/online/ss-5.pdf>
- Passport
- F-1/J-1 visa
- I-94 print-out: <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/request.html>
- Most recent I-20 or DS-2019
- Proof of Employment

II. DRIVER'S LICENSE

To apply for a driver's license in the state of Georgia, you will need the following:

- A letter from the International Student Advisor (ISA) – Please make sure that your ISA has your correct address on file.
- Passport
- F-1/J-1 visa
- I-94 print-out
- Most recent I-20 or DS-2019
- Social Security Card or the form letter SSA-L676
- A utility bill, lease contract, bank statement with your current address on it.
- Any identification card or license that you have been given from your home country.

Please see the brochure "Getting a Driver's License" that was given to you with your welcome packet at orientation for more information.

III. EMPLOYMENT

A. ON-CAMPUS EMPLOYMENT

F-1 Students are eligible to work on-campus without authorization from the international student advisor. Students are also only allowed to work for a maximum of 20 hours a week during the semester, and up to 40 hours per week during semester breaks.

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B. OFF-CAMPUS EMPLOYMENT

Students cannot work off-campus or outside of campus without prior authorization from the International Student Advisor or Exchange Student Advisor.

For F-1 students, the first step will be for them to contact the Office of Cooperative Education, which assists all students in finding practical work experience that is related to their field of study or major. It is important for international students that any employment they engage in is related to their field of study.

After the Office of Cooperative Education has made sure that the employment the student is planning on engaging in is related to their field of study, they will send their recommendation for CPT (Curricular Practical Training) to the International Student Advisor. The International Student Advisor will then put the authorization in SEVIS, and provide the student with an updated form I-20.

It is important for F-1 students to know that if they decide to engage in full-time Curricular Practical training (CPT), that they will lose their eligibility to apply for authorization to work after graduation (OPT) if they have a cumulative full-time CPT authorization for a year.

C. EMPLOYMENT AFTER GRADUATION

F-1 students are eligible to apply for post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT). OPT authorizes a student to apply what they learned at the university to a practical setting. However, the student's employment must be related to their field of study.

Please see page - 21 - for more information on Optional Practical Training.

IV. TAXES

All international students are required by Federal law to file a tax return even if you do not have any income to report.

For students who do not have any dependents (spouse or children), you will need to file Form 1040NR-EZ (US Income Tax Return for Certain Nonresident Aliens with No Dependents). If you are married or have children, you will need to file the regular Form 1040NR (US Nonresident Alien Income Tax Return)

V. MONEY AND BANKING

Students are highly encouraged to open a local bank account in the US, especially if you are planning on living off-campus, as this would make it easier to some services (ex. pay rent) via a checking account.

There are a lot of local banks that will offer students a free checking account (deposit account), and they will come with a free check/debit card to use at ATMs (Automated Teller Machines) and a majority of stores.

V. KEEPING YOUR IMMIGRATION STATUS

I. F-1 STUDENTS

a. Full-Time Enrollment

All undergraduate international students must be at least enrolled for 12 credit hours each Fall and Spring semester, unless authorized by the International Student Advisor to do so.

Full time enrollment at the graduate level varies depending on the program. Full-time enrollment is usually either 6 or 9 credit hours each Fall and Spring semester. Please see your program advisor if you have any questions about what being enrolled full-time means for you.

b. Reduced Course Load

There are specific circumstances that an international student can be allowed to take/enroll in less than the required credit hours. *Only the following reasons apply:*

1. First Semester Only
 - a. Difficulty with the English Language
 - b. Unfamiliarity with the American Classroom
2. Medical Reasons
3. Last Semester Only
 - a. To Complete Requirements

If you think that any of the reasons mentioned above may apply to your situation, make an appointment with your International Student Advisor/Exchange Student Advisor.

c. Travelling

1. Inside the U.S

Make sure that you have copies of your I-20 and your passport and visa with you. Do not bring your documents into bars or anywhere that you could possibly lose these important documents.

2. Outside the U.S

To travel outside the US, and be able to return to Valdosta without any trouble, remember to take your most recent I-20, non-expired visa and passport with you.

On the third page of your I-20, there are lines for your international student advisor to sign your document for travel. Make sure that this signature will not be more than a year old by the time you plan on returning to the US. You can stop by the Center for International Programs Office to request a new travel signature on the third page of your I-20 during regular business hours. Make sure to bring your most recent I-20 with you.

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d. Taking a Break

The summer semester is not a required semester for international students to be enrolled in. You have the flexibility to enroll in summer classes or not to enroll.

If you wish to take a break from your studies at any other time, you will need to talk to the International Student Advisor, as this can affect your non-immigrant status.

Please note that to keep your SEVIS record active, you must not be out of the US for more than 5 months at any point in time. If you will need to be out of the US for longer than that, please contact your International Student Advisor to discuss your options.

e. Options after Graduation

After graduation, F-1 students have what's called a "60 day grace period", mentioned below are all the options that are available for F-1 students.

1. *Optional Practical Training*

It is a benefit offered to all F-1 students after they have successfully completed their program of study. Eligible F-1 students are authorized to work after completion of their program, and have the chance to apply what they have learned to the real world.

F-1 students must apply for post-completion OPT 2-3 months before they are schedule to graduate, or 60 days after they graduate.

OPT must start anywhere from the day after graduation to 60 days after the student's graduation.

To Apply:

1. Student must set-up an appointment with the international student advisor. At the appointment, the student must bring the following items:
 - o Passport
 - o Visa
 - o 2 passport-sized photos
 - o \$380 check or money order made out to the "US Department of Homeland Security"
2. Print-out of the I-94 record or the student can request the international student advisor to retrieve this for them
3. The international student advisor will assist the student with filling out the form I-765 (<http://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/i-765.pdf>) and will put in the request in SEVIS and print out a new I-20 with the OPT authorization request.
4. The student will have to provide their preferred start date for their OPT period.

5. The international student advisor will put together the application packet and send it out for the student, unless the student prefers otherwise.
 1. Application Packet
 2. Completed form I-765
 3. Copy of the I-20 with the OPT request
 4. Copy of the passport, visa and I-94 record
 5. \$380 check or money order made out to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security
 6. 2 passport sized photos

2. *Starting another Academic Program*

Students have 60 days to be accepted into a new program of study, and to decide to start another program of study whether the new program will be at Valdosta State University or somewhere else.

3. *Seeing Other Parts of the US*

Students are encouraged to visit other parts of the US as a reward for completing their program of study.

II. *J-1 STUDENTS*

a. Full-Time Enrollment

International students who are studying at VSU for a semester or an academic year as an exchange student and entered the US on a J-1 visa are not required to be enrolled full-time. Please talk to the Exchange Student Advisor if you have any questions regarding your classes.

b. Travelling

1. Inside the U.S.

While you do not need to have a visa to travel around the US, you will need to keep your passport in a safe place, and always keep a copy of your documents in a safe place.

2. Outside the U.S.

You should get a new travel signature on your DS-2019 from your Exchange Student Advisor whenever you are planning on travelling out of the US, even if it is only for a short period of time. To be able to return back into the US, please make sure that you have a recently signed DS-2019 and that you have a unexpired J-1 visa in your passport.

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VI. AMERICAN CUSTOMS AND CULTURE

TIME

Being on time is very important in American culture. Classes, parties, concerts, meetings, and other planned events all start at specific times. If you need to see someone, like a professor, you should make an appointment to see that person beforehand. Do not just appear in their office, as that can be considered rude in some cases. If you will be late to an appointment or know that you will not make it to an appointment, it is good manners to let the person know.

INFORMALITY

American culture has a great deal of informality between people, and does not have a formal class structure. Some Americans may dress casually and act more informally in social situations that what you might be used to.

GREETINGS, INVITATIONS, AND VISITING

The most common forms of greeting include handshakes, smiles, and phrases such as, "It's nice to meet you."

Professors should be addressed as Doctor or Professor followed by their last/family names, unless they ask otherwise. If not sure that prefix to use to address your professor, it might be a good tip to look at your syllabus for the class.

While most of the US has a very informal attitude, it is common for Southern American culture to address elders with respect. If you do not know somebody's title, it is safe to use the prefix "Ms." or "Mr." before the person's name. If you do not know if somebody is married or not, "Ms." is a safe prefix to use to address a female/woman without worrying about offending them.

If you are invited somewhere and you accept the invitation, it is very important that you appear at the event. Do not accept an invitation simply because you are afraid to say no. If you cannot or do not want to come to the event, politely decline instead of accepting, and not showing up at the event. Gifts are also not expected if you are invited, though potluck events to ask guests to bring something (usually a dish) to the event.

TABLE MANNERS

Basic table manners include: not speaking with food in your mouth, keeping your elbows off the table, and keeping your hands in your lap while you're not eating. A knife, fork, and spoon are used unless "finger foods" are being served. It is also considered very rude to belch after eating. After the meal is finished, the napkin should be placed beside the plate and used silverware should be placed across the top of the plate.

RELATIONSHIPS

Most Americans have many friendly acquaintances, but just a few close friends.

MEN AND WOMEN

Men and women are considered equals, and American women are generally independent. It is NOT appropriate to whistle at, touch, or make personal comments about women. These actions are considered very rude.

It is also common for women to live alone, with other women, or with men in apartments off campus. Do not assume that your friend or acquaintance has romantic intentions simply because you have been invited to visit their apartment.

BATHING AND HYGIENE

Most Americans bathe or shower on a daily basis, and use deodorants or anti-perspirants as well.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

Religion is very important part of South Georgian culture. You may be invited to visit a church and to take part in church sponsored social activities. While these church services and activities can be meaningful to you, you are not obligated to join a church.

ALCOHOL

The minimum legal age for drinking and buying alcoholic beverages (ex. Beer, wine) in the US, is 21 years old. You cannot buy or be served alcohol if you are under 21 years of age. You will be asked to present some sort of official identification with your date of birth and photograph before you can purchase alcohol from a store, bar or nightclub.

It is illegal to drive a car after drinking alcoholic beverages, regardless of age. The penalties are severe and may result in imprisonment, which can affect your non-immigrant status.

Serving alcoholic beverages to people under the age of 21 is also illegal. Under the law of the state of Georgia, the host of a party is responsible for any traffic accidents caused by guests who are intoxicated when they leave the home of the host.

SMOKING

Starting on October 1, 2014, VSU has been a Smoke Free/Tobacco Free Campus. This means that smoking is not permitted anywhere near or on-campus. Smoking is also prohibited in hospitals, supermarkets, many restaurants and other public places.

VII. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

I. IMMIGRATION TERMS

ALTERNATE RESPONSIBLE OFFICER (ARO)

A person who is familiar with the current Exchange Visitor Program regulations, and can assist an exchange student with their concerns when the Responsible Officer or the Exchange Student Advisor is not available.

CUSTOMS AND BORDER PATROL (CBP)

An agency under the US Department of Homeland Security that is in charge of facilitating lawful international travel and trade. They are also in charge of making sure that all travellers that enter the US are entering with the right immigration status.

CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING (CPT)

Curricular practical training is a benefit offered to F-1 students to allow them to gain practical experience while they are still in school. This can be a paid/unpaid internship through the Office of Cooperative Education.

DEPENDENTS

This can be the student's spouse and/or children. They are considered dependents as the student will be the primary visa holder (F-1 or J-1) and the dependents will be assigned either F-2 or J-2 visas.

DS-2019

Also called "Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitors." This form is given to exchange students who entered the US on a J-1 visa. It is a form generated with the information from the student's SEVIS record. It contains details about the student's program of study and any authorizations that the student has been given.

DESIGNATED SCHOOL OFFICIAL (DSO)

A school official that is in charge of assisting students with the F-1 visa status with maintaining their nonimmigrant status by informing them of the rules and regulations of their visa status.

F-1 VISA

This is the student visa given to students who wish to study and earn a degree in the US.

GRACE PERIOD

The length of time when a student can legally stay in the US after the end of their program. For international students, this is generally 60 days after the end of their program.

I-20

Also called the “Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Status”. It is a form generated with the information from the student’s SEVIS record. It contains details about the student’s program of study and any authorizations that the student has been given. This form is issued to any international student who is planning to enter the US on an F-1 visa.

I-94

Also called an Arrival/Departure Record. It is a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) document issued to nonimmigrant aliens at the time of lawful entry the United States at an air or sea port of entry.

The Form I-94 is evidence of a non-immigrant’s term of admission and used to document legal status in the United States, including length of stay and departure.

INDIVIDUAL TAX IDENTIFICATION NUMBER (ITIN)

A tax processing number issued by the Internal Revenue Service. All international students must file a tax return, even if they do not expect to owe any taxes. A student can apply for an ITIN if they are not eligible for a Social Security number, and they need to use the form W-7 to apply for an ITIN.

J-1 VISA

The J-1 visa is issued to students who only plan on studying at a US institution for a semester to an academic year, and plan on returning to their home institution or university.

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)

A benefit offered to F-1 students after they have completed their programs. F-1 students can apply for this benefit at least 90 days prior to the completion of their program, and up to 60 days after.

REDUCED COURSE LOAD (RCL)

Under certain circumstances, F-1 students

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER (RO)

Often an employee of the sponsoring organization of an exchange student, they are in charge of the exchange student’s SEVIS record and is the same as the Exchange Student Advisor at Valdosta State University.

SEVP (STUDENT AND EXCHANGE VISITOR PROGRAM)

The electronic database that is used by the US government to keep track of all non-immigrant students and scholars.

SEVIS (STUDENT AND EXCHANGE VISA INFORMATION SYSTEM)

The electronic database that is used by the US government to keep track of all non-immigrant students and scholars.

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SEVIS RECORD

The electronic record that an international student or scholar that is on an F-1 and J-1 visa must maintain for the duration of their visa status.

SEVIS ID NUMBER

A unique identifier found on the top right of either the form I-20 or DS-2019. It starts with N, and followed by 10 digits.

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

A tax id number that is given to US citizens from birth and to international students when they have found authorized employment.

USCIS (US CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES)

A government agency that oversees lawful immigration to the United States, as well as processes applications for lawful non-immigrants such as work authorization and any change of status requests.

US DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

The department of the US federal government that oversees the following agencies: USCIS, SEVP, and CBP.

II. UNIVERSITY/ACADEMIC TERMS

ACADEMIC ADVISOR

The person in the student's major's department that will be able to advise them on how to reach their academic goals at VSU.

ACADEMIC PROBATION

A student is put on academic probation if their cumulative GPA falls below a 2.0 GPA at the end of any semester.

ACADEMIC SUSPENSION

Students whose semester GPA falls below a 2.0 or the minimum required semester GPA for the amount of semester credit hours they have earned will not be permitted to register for classes. Only Fall and Spring semesters are the only semesters that count when a student is suspended.

1st Suspension: One semester.

2nd Suspension: 2 semesters.

3rd Suspension: Also called academic dismissal. A student is not allowed to register for classes at VSU for 5 years.

ATTENDANCE

Students are required to attend all of their classes. Excessive absences or tardiness can affect a student's grade in a class.

COLLEGES

The university is divided into units known as "Colleges." The Colleges at VSU are: Arts and Sciences, Business Administration, Education, the Arts, and

Nursing. Unlike many other countries, the American term “college” does not refer to high school or secondary education. It is often used interchangeably with the term “university.”

CORE CURRICULUM

These classes are designed to present a unified learning experience for all undergraduates, regardless of major, that teaches students to read, write, and think critically while acquiring a basic understanding of human society. This often consists of the first 60 credit hours of an undergraduate student.

Fulfilling all the requirements of the core curriculum is required of all students seeking a bachelor’s degree at VSU.

CURRICULUM

This refers to the program that you are following and its degree requirements. There are required courses and elective courses in most curricula. Your academic advisor will go over this with you prior to registration for the next term.

COURSE

Subject offerings. These are listed in the Course Catalog, and are classified by department.

CREDIT HOURS

It is a unit of academic credit. VSU's academic year consists of 3 semesters (Fall, Spring, Summer). A course usually is assigned 3 credit hours, but

An F-1 student must take a minimum of 12 credit hours, while the maximum credit hours that a student can enroll in, without their Dean’s approval, is 18 credit hours.

DEPARTMENTS

Within each College are several Departments, which specialize in a certain subject. For example, the college of Arts and Sciences, includes the Biology Department, History Department, and others. The department and a student’s major are usually the same. This information can also be found in a student’s Banner account.

DROPPING A CLASS

During the first week of classes, a student may decide that a certain class would be better to take or to not take. During this period, a student may cancel their enrollment in the class without penalty (getting a “W” on their transcript).

ELECTIVE COURSE

These are optional courses that a student may take. Elective courses are often in the student’s major field of study, and would help supplement their academic knowledge. The student’s academic advisor may suggest specific elective courses appropriate for either the student’s degree or future plans.

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FINAL EXAM

It is the last exam in a semester that a student may have to take for a class. Sometimes a professor might ask students to submit a paper or a project instead of having to take the final exam.

FULL-TIME ENROLLMENT

The minimum number of credit hours that an F-1 student needs to be enrolled in to be considered a full-time student. For undergraduate students, they need 12 credit hours, and for graduate students they need 6-9 credit hours.

GPA (GRADE POINT AVERAGE)

In the US, a student's performance is evaluated by letter grades (A, B, C, D or F). Each letter grade has a corresponding value quality (A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, F=0), also called quality points.

The GPA is computed by dividing the total quality points that a student has earned (depending on their letter grade) by the number of credit hours a student has enrolled in a given semester.

The difference in a cumulative GPA and a semester GPA is that the semester GPA is only calculated using the courses that a student has taken during the semester, and a cumulative GPA includes all college-level course work that a student has taken (including transfer credits).

GRADUATE STUDENT

A graduate student is someone who is studying to receive a Master's or a Doctoral degree.

GRE (GRADUATE RECORD EXAMINATION)

It is one of the standardized exams that all students wishing to pursue a graduate degree (Master's /Doctoral) must take, depending on the graduate program. The GRE is required for most graduate programs.

GMAT (GRADUATE MANAGEMENT ADMISSION TEST)

The standardized exam that most graduate programs in the business fields require of applicants. Minimum test score requirements differ from university to university, depending on the program the student is applying for.

HYBRID CLASS

A type of class structure where the professor conducts part of the class online and the students have to meet often at least once a week.

LSAT (LAW SCHOOL ADMISSION TEST)

The standardized exam that all students who are interested in getting admitted to law school in the US need to take. Minimum test score requirements differ from university to university.

MCAT(MEDICAL COLLEGE ADMISSION TEST)

The standardized exam that all students who are interested in getting admitted to medical school in the US need to take. Minimum test score requirements differ from university to university.

MAJOR (FIELD OF STUDY)

An academic field of study (or two) that a student chooses to specialize their studies in, at the undergraduate level. It consists of at least 30 semester credit hours of upper level course work (3000 and above). A lot of new students start in the General Studies major, until they choose a major field of study that they want to focus in. It is also common for college students in America to change their major field of study at least once, during their course of study at VSU.

MINOR (FIELD OF STUDY)

An optional field of study that a student can choose to concentrate in, but not as much as their major field of study. It usually consists of 15-18 semester credit hours with at least 9 credit hours being upper division level courses (3000- 4000), the courses required to gain a minor in a field of study is determined by the department.

MAYMESTER

Also called Summer I session. It is an intensive summer class that starts in May, and only lasts for a month.

MIDTERM

Some classes in the university give students a major exam in the middle of the semester and one final exam at the end of the semester. At VSU, it is usually also around this time that it is a student's last change to withdraw from a class.

ONLINE CLASS

All instruction, communication with classmates and the professor, as well as any assignments, quizzes and exams are done online through Blazeview D2L.

PLAGIARISM/ ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All students are required to uphold to the standards of academic integrity. Plagiarism,

PREREQUISITES

The requirements that a student has to fulfill prior to taking a certain class. These can be something like requiring a student to take certain classes and pass them with a grade of "C" or better prior to taking an upper level course.

QUIZ

An informal examination, shorter in length than a regular examination.

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RESEARCH PAPER

A major paper, which often ranges from 5 to 25 pages in length, that a student has to write as a class requirement. In order to write this paper, a student must select an approved topic by the professor, do some research (this is where the library is an excellent resource to use) and use the research material to construct the paper. There are writing tutors in the Student Success Center that can critique your paper and help you improve them.

SECTIONS

Some courses are offered in a number of sections each semester, so that a large number of students may take the same courses each semester. A course reference number and a section letter identify a course.

SEMESTER

A semester is generally a 16 week academic term. At VSU, there are 3 semesters: Fall, Spring, and Summer. All F-1 students are required to be enrolled in the Fall and Spring semesters, as well as exchange students who are attending VSU for an academic year. Summer semesters are optional for F-1 students.

SYLLABUS

Important information about a course provided to students by the instructor/professor on the first of class. It includes the books you will use, the professor's name, office hours, phone number, and e-mail address. It also includes the deadlines for projects, papers, dates of exams, and sometimes their grading and attendance policy.

TOEFL (TEST OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

This test is one of the more popular tests that academic institutions use to test a potential international student's ability to use and understand English at the university level. If a student has successfully completed a degree program at a US academic institution, sometimes this requirement is waived.

TRANSCRIPT

The record of a student's courses and grades. It is used to document a student's academic performance while attending a university. This is used by universities and some employers to determine the desirability of accepting or hiring a student.

UNDERGRADUATE

These usually are students who are studying for their first degree in the university, and are aiming to be awarded a bachelor's degree after the completion of the program's requirements. There are also a lot of students that decide to return to university to gain a secondary (or even third) undergraduate degree.

WITHDRAWING FROM A CLASS

Students are given the option to withdraw from a class after the first week of classes. After withdrawing, the student will see a “W” on their transcript instead of a letter grade. Students withdrawing from a class before the midterms/middle of the semester can do so online, and without the permission of the Dean of their college.

Students are also limited to 5 W’s on their transcript for the duration of their degree program. F-1 students must also remember that any withdrawal from their classes that will result in their enrollment being less than 12 credit hours must request authorization from the International Student Advisor first.

WITHDRAWING FROM THE UNIVERSITY

Things happen, there might a reason that a student might have to withdraw from all their classes. In this case, the first contact should be the International Student Advisor or Exchange Student Advisor, as unauthorized withdrawals are a violation of the regulations for international students. Please go to the link listed on page - 33 - of this Handbook.

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IX. REFERENCES

- Department of Homeland Security “Study in the States”
<http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/>
- USCIS
<http://www.uscis.gov/aboutus>
- Valdosta State University Website
<http://www.valdosta.edu/>
- United Health Care Student Resource Center
<http://www.uhcsr.com/valdosta>
- US Internal Revenue Service
<http://www.irs.gov/Individuals/International-Taxpayers/Taxation-of-Nonresident-Aliens>
- Test of English As A Foreign Language
<http://www.ets.org/toefl>
- Georgia.gov - Remerton
<http://georgia.gov/cities-counties/remerton>

X. IMPORTANT VSU LINKS

- Academic Probation and Suspension
<http://www.valdosta.edu/academics/academic-affairs/vp-office/advising/academic-probation-and-suspension.php>
- Hardship Withdrawal
<http://www.valdosta.edu/academics/academic-affairs/vp-office/advising/hardship-withdrawal-process.php>
- International Student Services Website
<http://www.valdosta.edu/iss>
- Undergraduate Catalog for 2014-2015
<http://www.valdosta.edu/academics/catalog/1415/ugrad/welcome.php>
- Graduate Catalog for 2014-2015
<http://www.valdosta.edu/academics/catalog/1415/grad/welcome.php>

XI. NOTES