International Student Handbook

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Adjusting to the United States: Helpful Tips for a Better Transition

Culture Shock

Most international students will experience some degree of culture shock – the process of cultural adjustment. The unique experiences that one has when traveling and being immersed in a different culture may also bring changes in emotions in terms of how the host country and the home country are viewed. Some of you have gone through some, or all of these phases already; others may be going through them for a second time; and for even others, this is all new.

There are several stages of cultural adjustment:

1. Pre-departure phase – This is the preparatory stage before traveling. It is what you go through in your home country before you leave to come to UNG. This includes deciding to leave home, choosing UNG, and making arrangements for your stay.

2. Honeymoon phase – Everything about the new country is exciting, interesting, and wonderful. You often feel like a spectator in this stage as you observe the US cultural patterns.

3. Uncomfortable phase – The stark differences between your home country and the host country are overwhelming, and everyday tasks may become a hassle. The differences are no longer exciting, but instead are hard to handle and make you feel frustrated, angry, or resentful. People in this stage of adjustment often feel homesick and long for the familiar. This stage is often called culture shock.

4. Humor phase – Gradually, the annoyances seem less so, and things that you found frustrating are now mere inconveniences or just “different.” Your sense of humor returns, and things seem to be much more bearable.

5. Effective adjustment phase – You are fully integrated into the host culture and no longer notice the differences or new ways of doing things. You understand many aspects of the new culture and begin making friends and discovering helpful people at the university. You develop the ability to keep the core values from your home country but operate within the values of the new country.

To combat culture shock and prevent it from getting you down, try the following tactics:

- Stay busy. Explore the campus, city, and surrounding area.
- Socialize with diverse individuals. After a while, US students will assume you have your circle of friends and you do not want to get to know anyone new. Do not limit yourself like that. Use your fellow international students as a support base, but do not fail to get to know people from the country whose culture you came here to learn
- Meet people and make new friends. Meeting people from both your culture and from other cultures, including Americans help you better understand American culture. Meet
people from diverse backgrounds by joining student organizations, talking to new people in the classroom or workplace.

- Exercise. Reduce stress and make yourself feel better by doing something that gets you moving.
- Become immersed at UNG. Become acquainted with all the facilities, and organizations that are available on campus. Take advantage of all the opportunities you have at your disposal.
- Do not be too hard on yourself. Recognize that adjusting to a new culture is very challenging. Keep in mind all the new things you have mastered since your arrival. Learn to laugh at your mistakes, and learn from them.
- Take advantage of the Counseling Center. Free, confidential counseling is available at the Counseling and Career Service Office located in the Student Center. It can be highly beneficial to utilize the expert guidance and help.

Advice from other international students:

- Don’t stay alone at your residence every night.
- Go out with a friend to explore the new area, city, or shops.
- Get dinner on the square or in town.
- Get involved with clubs or other organizations on campus.
- Travel around the United States.
- Don’t be afraid to try new words or practice your English.
- Don’t worry about making mistakes.

Cultural Norms

(This information is meant to provide some generalities about people in the United States, but it does not apply to all people from the US.)

Equality

People in the US attach a lot of importance to the ideal of equality for all. Although this dream has not been achieved yet, respect for individuals regardless of occupation, handicap, sex, race, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, class or religion is expected. All individuals you meet deserve the same consideration and courtesy. Typically, racists or sexist jokes and comments are not tolerated in many social and business settings. In fact, people who make such comments could lose their jobs.

Independence and Privacy

The United States was founded by people who valued independence. An independent spirit is still evident in this culture. People in the US tend to be rather independent and tend to think for themselves. The concept of individual rights is important, especially the right to free speech. Being self-reliant is considered highly important within the US. Privacy is also valued for many of the same reasons. Even among members of a family, issues such as money, marriage, and career decisions may not be discussed out of respect for a person’s privacy.

Religion

Also, freedom of religion is a basic tenet of US society. People tend to be involved in their community, which usually involves the local church, mosque, synagogue, or other place of
worship. Churches often organize recreational activities and also perform a wide array of services for the local community-dinners, tutoring, free English lessons, etc.

**Dress**

US culture is increasingly more informal. The way people dress, act, and treat each other is generally considered to be relaxed, informal, and not rigidly structured. Certain occasions or business settings are more formal than others, so take your cue from other people until you feel comfortable gauging just how formally to act, dress, or speak.

**Work Ethic**

People from the United States tend to value motivation and hard work ethics. We value being busy, and tend to start the day off with hopes of completing a list of responsibilities. You may notice people in the US walk quickly, and talk quickly. Many Americans have the mentality to “get down to business” rather than make polite conversation. We don’t mean to be rude! We just have a lot to do (or think we do).

Your own cultural norms may conflict with accepted behavior in the United States. When a clash in beliefs, values, or traditions occurs, please try to understand the distinction in culture. Keep in mind that no one culture is right or wrong; they are simply different from one another. Observing the behavior that is happening around you is a good way to learn some of these generally accepted US norms. If you have any questions about any of the US social customs described below, do not hesitate to ask a fellow student or the CGE staff. Social customs tend to be vague, especially compared to other countries where the social life is more structured. It is not unusual to be confused at first, so please ask for explanations or help.

**Manners**

People in the US tend to be friendly, patient, and polite, and they expect the same treatment from others. “Please,” “Thank you,” “Excuse me,” and “I’m sorry” are used frequently. “Hi! How are you,” is a common greeting in the US. Very often, the person who asks the question, “How are you?” does not wait for a response. Some international students think this is very rude, but it is not intended to be. Instead, it is usually meant as another way to say “Good morning,” or “Hello.” An appropriate response is saying, “Fine, thank you. How are you?” It is customary that they will answer with a brief response. When departing, phrases such as, “See you later” and “Let’s get together sometime” are often meant as a casual goodbye rather than an actual invitation. When in doubt, please clarify whether it is an actual invitation or not.

People in the United States tend to wait in lines, wait their turn, and usually give others at least an arm’s length of “personal space.” Eye contact is also important. Generally, it is considered impolite to make phone calls before 10:00 a.m. and after 10:00 p.m., though these times can vary depending on a person’s schedule (a fellow student may have a different bedtime than your professor).

**Introductions**

When meeting someone for the first time, a handshake is standard behavior, and many people introduce themselves rather than waiting for a formal introduction by someone else. “Nice to meet you” or “Pleased to meet you” is the standard response either after someone has been introduced to you, or after someone has introduced himself or herself. It is always better to
address someone as Mr., Mrs., Ms., or Dr. at first rather than by their first name, especially if they are older than you—they can always tell you to call them by their first name if they feel that this form of address is too formal. Be prepared to explain where you are from and, if necessary, repeat your name several times and explain how to pronounce it.

**Invitations**

You may be invited to certain events by personal invitation, which can be printed, handwritten, or verbal. If you are invited and you cannot attend, you may politely turn down the invitation. However, accepting an invitation and then failing to show up is inconsiderate. If you are not sure whether or not you can attend, say so and if possible, call to indicate your plans. If you are invited to someone’s home for the first time, it is customary to bring the person a small hospitality gift, such as flowers, a small token from your home country, or some other inexpensive item. If you are unsure about what type of gift may be appropriate, ask. If you are invited to a meal or refreshments and you have special dietary restrictions, it is considered polite to inform your host of these restrictions in advance, preferably at the time you accept the invitation. When expressing thanks to a host, a short letter or card is sufficient.

**Dating**

The norms and traditions of dating in the US are different from other countries, and can be difficult to explain. To date a person implies that you would like to know him/her better. Going to social events together indicates an enjoyment of the other person’s company, rather than implying a serious commitment.

US women and men are generally treated equally. As a result, dating norms and acceptable behavior are subtle, implied, and constantly changing. Many students prefer to go out in groups or date casually, often meeting for a date in a pre-determined location and sharing the cost of the date. The person who does the asking is generally expected to be the person who pays for the date, though it is polite to offer (once, without insisting) to pay your share and see if your offer is accepted.

**Time**

The concept of time is very important to most people in the US. Classes, plays, concerts, public meetings, dinners, and other events begin as scheduled. Being late is generally not accepted and is considered rude behavior, as if the person being made to wait is less important than the person keeping them waiting. Setting appointments or scheduling a specific time to meet is common practice. If you know that you will be late to a meeting or appointment, a phone call to explain your tardiness is generally expected along with an apology. “Late” is being more than 5 or 10 minutes behind your scheduled time. If your appointment is with a dentist, medical doctor, or other professional, arriving more than 10 minutes late generally indicates that you have skipped your appointment, and you will likely be charged a fee for failing to call to cancel or to inform the receptionist of your anticipated late arrival.

**Hygiene**

People in the US are very much aware of their personal hygiene. They tend to shower daily, and deodorants are universally used. Clothing is worn one day and then a different outfit is worn the following day. Many people also change from one type of outfit to another, depending on the activity that will be taking place later that day (you may wear a t-shirt and shorts to class, but you would put on khakis and a more formal shirt to go to a party or to dinner).
**Tipping**

Tipping is a prevalent custom in the United States. In restaurants, customers are expected to tip the waiter or waitress between 15% and 20% of the total amount of the bill. If your car is parked by a valet attendant, you should generally give him or her a dollar or two. The attendant who checks your coat at a restaurant or other event should also receive a dollar or two. When you get a haircut, you are generally expected to tip your stylist 10% to 15% of the cost of the haircut. Bellmen in hotels and airport skycaps generally receive one dollar per bag, unless they are extraordinarily helpful and go out of their way to assist you. Room service attendants should generally receive a 15% to 20% tip, and the pizza delivery person should also receive a tip of at least 10% to 15% of the price of the pizza. Taxi drivers should be tipped approximately 10% to 15% of the cost of the fare.

**Shopping**

In the US, prices are fixed, the practice of trading and bargaining is not widely utilized. There are some exceptions, or instances, in which bargaining is used, such as buying a car, buying a home, or shopping at an outdoor market or flea market. Generally speaking, there is an abundance of stores in the US and comparing prices at several stores before buying is a good practice. When shopping, use the shopping cart/buggy/basket that the store provides. Also, keep receipts so you can return unused or unwanted items. Generally, you can return items up to three months after purchasing them; however, some stores prohibit you from returning items that were bought during a sale.

There is a sales tax in Georgia on most items sold. The tax in this region of Georgia is currently 7% of the cost. Therefore, if an item costs $1, you pay the seller $1.07. In most countries, sales tax is already included in the price, but in the US this tax is levied when you make the actual purchase.

**Clothing**

What people wear in your home country may be different from what people wear in the United States. Generally, people in the US are fairly casual in their dress, with the exception of formal occasions. If you are invited by written invitation to a party, generally, the invitation will include some information about dress. If no information is included with the invitation, you may be able to guess the attire based on the activity. Generally, a suit or jacket and tie are reserved for semi-formal occasions, a tuxedo is reserved for very formal occasions, and a nice pair of pants with a collared shirt or sweater is acceptable casual wear. Jeans are very informal and khaki pants are less informal depending on the type of shirt they are paired with. For women, there are various types of pants, skirts, or dresses that are appropriate for any occasion. Shorts or casual pants are worn for informal occasions.

**Clothing Sizes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women’s Clothing</th>
<th>Japanese</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>British</th>
<th>Continental</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>British</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Continental</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Collar Sizes, Men’s Shirts
Japanese  36  37  38  39  40  41  42
US        14  14.5 15  15.5 16  16.5 17
British   14  14.5 15  15.5 16  16.5 17
Continental  36  37  38  39  40  41  42

Men’s Suits, Overcoats, and Sweaters
Japanese  S  M  L  LL
US        34  36  38  40  42  44  46
British   34  36  38  40  42  44  46
Continental  44  46  48  50  52  54  56

Women’s Shoes
Japanese  23  23.5 24  24.5 25  25.5 26
US        6  6.5  7  7.5  8  8.5  9
British   4.5  5  5.5  6  6.5  7  7.5
Continental  36  37  38  38  39  40

Men’s Shoes
Japanese  24.5  26  27.5  28  29
US        5.5  6.5  7.5  8.5  9.5  10.5 11.5
British   5  6  7  8  9  10  11
Continental  39  40  41  42  43  44  45

Weights and Measurements
Though a few things are measured using the metric system in the United States, most are not. Below are some common Metric equivalents to standard US measurements:

Temperature
32° Fahrenheit (F) = 0°C (32° F is freezing)
40° F = 5°C
50° F = 10°C
60° F = 16°C
70° F = 21°C
80° F = 27°C
90° F = 31°C
100° F = 38°C
212° F = 100°C (212° is boiling)

Length
1 inch (in.) = 2.54 cm
1 foot (ft.) = .31 m
1 yard (yd.) = .91 m
1 mile (mi.) = 1.61 km
[12 in. = 1 ft.]
[3 ft. = 1 yd.]
[5280 ft. = 1 mi]
Volume
1 teaspoon (tsp.) = 5 mL
1 fluid ounce (fl. oz.) = 29.6 mL
1 pint (pt.) = .47 L
1 quart (qt.) = .95 L
1 gallon (gal.) = 3.79 L
3 tsp. = 1 Tsp
[16 Tsp. = 1 cup]
[4 cups = 1 pt.]
[2 pt. = 1 qt.]
[4 qt. = 1 gal.]

Weight
1 ounce (oz.) = 28.4 g
1 pound (lb.) = .45 kg
[16 oz = 1 lb.]

Area
1 square foot (sq. ft.) = .093 m²
1 acre = 4046.48 m²
1 square mile (sq. mi.) = 2.59 km²
[1 sq. ft. = 144 sq. in.]
[1 sq. yd. = 9 sq. ft.]
[1 acre = 4840 sq. yds.]

Speed
1 mile per hour (mph) = 1.6 km/h

Electric Current
The standard US current is 110 volts, 60 cycles alternating current (A.C.). Appliances running on 220-240 volts will not work in the US. Most appliance or hardware stores will carry current conversion kits that will work on appliances.

You can also find conversion calculators online.

Smoking
Smoking in the United States has continued to fall out of style, with the exception of college and university campuses. Smoking is banned in most public places such as restaurants, hospitals, stores, and schools. If you smoke, it is always appropriate to ask if, and where, you are permitted to smoke. If you are at someone’s home, it is generally customary to smoke outside, unless your host is also a smoker and indicates that smoking indoors is permitted.

The Tobacco Policy at UNG is as follows: “the University of North Georgia is a smoke-free environment. Smoking is not allowed at any times in buildings or anywhere outside, to include building entrances, roads, parking lots, and green areas. The only place smoking is permitted is within one’s personal vehicle. This policy will be enforced with all program participants.”

Drugs and Alcohol
Purchase, possession, and consumption of alcohol in the United States is restricted to individuals who are 21 years old and older. Also, you cannot be in a public place (street, park,
etc.) with an open container of alcohol. This law applies to everyone, even for those over 21 and also includes having an open container in a car driven by a non-drinking driver. Violations involving alcohol can lead to arrest or fines. It may also lead to sanctions by the university. When purchasing alcohol, you will likely be asked to “show ID” (show the store clerk proof that you are at least 21 years of age). An acceptable form of ID is your passport, your driver’s license, or your state ID card.

Please do not drink and drive, keeping your own and others’ safety in mind, and do not accept a ride from someone who has been drinking. Drinking and driving is a serious offense in the US and will result in fines, suspension of your driver’s license, significant legal trouble, and/or imprisonment. Please call a taxi or a friend who has not been drinking if you need a ride home.

Drug abuse and addiction are unfortunately present in US society and commonly include marijuana, ecstasy, mushrooms, nitrous oxide, ketamine, cocaine/crack, heroine, and methamphetamine. All of these, including the abuse of prescription drugs are considered illegal. The use and/or possession of illegal substances, including prescription drugs can have serious consequences including criminal charges, imprisonment, and/or fines. Additionally, the use of illegal substances can be deadly and can lead to lifelong addictions.

Never leave your drink unattended at a party or bar! People can slip drugs into your drink this way. If you happen to set your cup down, get a new cup.

Remember, you always have the right to say no to anything you encounter that makes you feel uncomfortable.
General Information and Settling In

Finances

Paper money is available in denominations of $1, $5, $10, $20, and higher. Coins are available in denominations of $.01 (the penny), $.05 (the nickel), $.10 (the dime), and $.25 (the quarter). There are also a few types of $1 coins that are easily confused with quarters, but these are not in wide circulation.

You will want to open a bank account within a few days of your arrival. There are several types of accounts available. Checking and savings accounts are the two most common ones. A checking account allows you to deposit money and then write a check, or use a debit card to pay for your purchases. A checking account may or may not have a monthly fee or service charge, and some checking accounts require you to maintain a certain minimum balance. Also, some checking accounts are interest bearing and others are not. A savings account is a good place to store funds that you do not need to access on a daily basis. Ask your bank clerk for a complete explanation of the types of accounts that are available. Your bank may also offer other services, such as foreign currency conversion, travelers’ checks, bank drafts, and money orders. Money deposited in banks is generally insured for the amount of the account, up to $100,000. There are several online resources on banking, budgeting, and finances. You can also use the Yellow Pages website to find a local bank online.

Automated Teller Machines (ATM’s) dispense cash, allow transfers, and accept deposits 24 hours a day. ATM’s are accessed by the account holder’s debit card. This debit card allows you to withdraw money directly from your account. If you use an ATM that is not affiliated with your bank, you may be charged a fee for using this service.

You may wish to open a credit card account, but be sure to read the fine print, and pay attention to the interest rates that the credit card company will charge you for any unpaid balances. Credit cards allow you to make purchases even if you do not have any money available for that purchase, which means that you are essentially borrowing money from the credit card company. As a result, credit card debt is a big danger, so be careful to keep track of your expenses, and try to pay the balance in full each month. Be aware that it is sometimes difficult for international students to acquire a credit card issued by a US bank. You may receive unsolicited mail from credit card companies informing you that you have been pre-approved to receive a credit card, but most of these credit card companies require US citizenship or permanent residence status to qualify. For more information on the differences between credit and debit, use online resources like The Mint to determine which the right choice is for you.

Housing

On-Campus Housing

New students on the Dahlonega campus are required to live on campus.

Off-Campus Housing

The Gainesville, Oconee, and Cumming campuses of UNG do not having on-campus, dormitory housing. Some international students in Dahlonega also live off campus. The following information is intended to assist students in establishing housing options upon their arrival, and for their time in the United States.
Living in an apartment or house off-campus requires that you make a security deposit and sign a lease or rental agreement. A security deposit is usually equivalent to one month’s rent. Paying a deposit means that you have expressed interest in the property and intend to live there. It essentially “holds” the property for you until you move in. The security deposit will be returned to you when you move out, provided you leave the apartment in good condition. When you move into the apartment, you sign a lease or rental agreement. This is a binding legal contract between you and the landlord. When you sign a lease, you are obligated to pay the landlord monthly rent for the duration of the lease. Therefore, before you sign you should be reasonably sure that you can live with your decision for the duration of your lease. Never sign a lease unless you are completely satisfied with the apartment and surrounding property. Sign only when you understand all the terms of the lease. When you sign, you also agree to be responsible for any damages that occur while you live in the apartment or house. You must give 30 days’ notice (or more) to your landlord before you move out, in writing, and you will need to remove your name from the lease.

As soon as you have confirmed where you will live, it is a good idea to immediately contact the local utility providers to set up service for your telephone, water, electricity, gas, and cable or DSL service. In some cases, hook-ups can take up to two weeks, so be sure to take care of this immediately. Utility companies usually charge a fee for connection of services and may also require a deposit, so be sure to ask about any charges or deposits that will be associated with your service. Usually, you will have to make an appointment and be present in your apartment or house when the utility providers arrive to initiate service. If you are not present, the provider will not connect your utility, and you will have to reschedule and be present at a later time in order to have your service connected.

When you vacate the apartment, it should be left clean, including the refrigerator and oven. At the time you vacate, do not leave anything behind and surrender your keys immediately. When you vacate, you must call each utility company and order the service disconnected or be responsible for usage after you leave. You must give a forwarding address for final bills, or go in person to close these accounts.

Renter’s insurance will cover your possessions in the event of theft, fire, flood, or other disaster. This insurance is available for any type of room or apartment you rent. When you purchase this insurance and something happens to your belongings, the insurance company will provide you with full or partial replacement value for your possessions depending on the situation. This insurance is optional, so you might want to weigh the risks and benefits of purchasing this type of insurance. If you have expensive equipment, many valuables, or would rather be “safe than sorry,” you may want to consider purchasing renter’s insurance. This insurance will bring some peace of mind when unforeseen circumstances occur. Find a local insurance provider online.

**Land and Mobile Telephones**

NOTE: Due to the wide use of mobile phones in the United States, many public phones are no longer available.

If you want to call your friends and family, using a calling card is probably the most financially savvy way to do so. You can buy calling cards at most grocery and convenience stores. There are also several websites for purchasing calling cards. CallingCards.com is one option where you can find and purchase calling cards. Another popular company is PhoneCards.com. A third option is SpeedyPin.com. All three websites have excellent rates for purchasing international
phone cards. When purchasing a calling card, follow the instructions. These will tell you the number to call and the authorization number to enter. The time used talking on the phone will be deducted from the card. After each call, you will be told how much money and time is left on your card.

If you want to call collect, dial “0” and the operator should assist you. The option of calling collect is not available to most countries. You may also want to establish an account with a long distance company, so you can dial directly. You may choose any long distance carrier to provide this service to you. Shopping around and calling different carriers may pay off to find the best rate to your country. The following is the procedure for making a direct international call:

1. The international access code is 011
2. The country code (listed in the telephone book)
3. The city code
4. The local telephone number

For domestic long distance calls, dial 1 + the city code + the local telephone number.

If you wish to purchase a mobile phone, there are various calling plans, service providers, and options available. There are currently four major mobile phone service providers throughout the United States: Verizon Wireless, Sprint, AT&T Wireless, and T-Mobile. These providers have both pre-paid/temporary plan options and contract agreement options. Be sure to carefully compare plans before choosing a mobile phone provider. Many of the contract options require at least a one-year service contract and once chosen, the contract is very hard (and expensive) to terminate.

**Skype and Other Internet Communication Options**

Skype is a great way to stay connected with friends and family back home. If you and the person you are speaking to both have an internet connection, speakers and a microphone, the most cost effective form of voice communication would be through the use of Skype or an equivalent. Using Skype, both parties can talk for free over their internet connections. You can also call land lines using Skype by setting up a Skype-Out account and pre-paying for phone time. For more information on Skype please visit the Skype website.

Also if you are on the internet, you can use one of the many instant messaging services available. Skype has its own messaging service, as does Yahoo, and Gmail. You can also use social networking sites such as Facebook and Google+ to keep in touch. If all else fails, you can rely on regular email. You will almost always have access to computers with internet on campus, even if you do not have your own personal computer. Internet is a cost effective way to check in back home.

Apps for smart phones are a new development that allow for easy communication with friends and family back home in addition to internet and phone cards. Apps such as WhatsApp, Talkatone, and iMessage (for iPhones only), are cross-platform mobile messaging apps which allow you to exchange messages without having to pay for SMS. As long as smartphones have access to internet (whether through wireless internet, or coverage through their mobile phone provider) they can exchange messages with someone who also has the same app on their phone, whether abroad or within the US.
Safety and Legal Issues

Police in the United States are trustworthy and fair about enforcing laws and procedures. As an international student, you are subject to the laws of the federal US government and the Georgia state government, and are expected to be aware of those regulations. You are also entitled to the same protections as US citizens. If you break the law, you are expected to know your rights and responsibilities. You may want to read and become familiar with the advice offered by the American Civil Liberties Union.

Though most safety tips are common sense, it is important to be aware of your surroundings at all times. Always lock your apartment or car door. Always let roommates know where you are going, what you are doing, how long you plan to be gone, and who is accompanying you. Avoid walking alone at night. Avoid carrying large sums of cash or valuables with you. Do not open the door to strangers. Do not divulge personal information about yourself or where you live to people you do not know. Walk briskly and purposefully when in unfamiliar areas and do not act lost, even when you are. When a situation makes you uneasy or uncomfortable, do not ignore your instincts.

To report an emergency where someone needs immediate help, dial 9-1-1. This number will connect you with emergency services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Tell the emergency dispatcher the exact nature of the emergency, and do not hang up the phone until instructed to do so. Calling “911” will dispatch the police, fire department, or a hospital ambulance. If you need to reach the local police in the event of a non-emergency, simply dial “0” and an operator will connect you. To reach Public Safety (the University Police), dial the number appropriate to your campus. All calls to Public Safety are dispatched through the Dahlonega campus so you must specify the campus and location of your need. Dialing “911” as a joke or prank is illegal and can result in fines or even criminal prosecution.

Transportation

Bicycles can be bought new or used through advertisements in the school or local paper, or through local stores.

Some students choose to purchase automobiles. They are a great convenience, but can be very expensive. It is wise to compare base prices, additional costs, and get advice from experienced people not involved in selling cars. Consumer Reports magazine is a good reference on most US and foreign cars and is available at newsstands and libraries.

Used cars are less expensive than new cars, but the buyer must be willing to take the risk of car trouble and repair costs. Any reputable person selling a used car will allow you to take the car to a garage mechanic to be thoroughly checked before you decide whether or not to buy it. Mechanics will charge for this service, but having the car checked is a wise precaution to avoid buying a car in bad condition.

Plan your purchase before you visit a car dealer: the age and type of car you want, price, down payment, and terms of financing. You should make a note of the Blue Book value of the car, which is available at most banks and on the Kelley Blue Book website. When you visit the car dealer, explain to the salesperson that you do not intend to buy a car now, but that you plan to shop around and compare prices. Do not permit the salesperson to urge you to make a quick decision.
Taxis are available; however, these are not the best choice financially and may not always be available. In the north Georgia region, it is hardly possible to hail a taxicab, so calling a taxi company is necessary. When calling, please be prepared to state the exact address from where you wish to be picked up. You can find local taxi companies online.

**Driving**

You must have a driver’s license to operate a motor vehicle in the United States. Your international driver’s license authorizes you to drive in the US, but local laws and driving procedures may be very different from those in your home country. You may wish to obtain a Georgia driver’s license.

If you already have a driver’s license, you will be asked to surrender your home country license before a Georgia license is issued. Please contact your country’s embassy or consulate to ask them what the procedure is for retrieving your driver’s license or applying for a new one when you leave Georgia. Please search online to find a listing of embassies and consulates in the United States. If you do not have a license, you will need to take a written test and a driving test in order to obtain your Georgia driver’s license.

To apply for a driver’s license, you must also show proof of identification (passport, I-20 or DS-2019, and I-94 card), a social security card or letter from the Social Security Office stating that you are ineligible for one, and proof that you reside in the state of Georgia by showing a utility bill or bank statement, and a copy of your rental contract/lease agreement. If you have all appropriate documentation, you will be required to take a written and road test in order to get a Georgia license. A fee is required at the time the license is issued that is payable by cash, check, money order, MasterCard or Visa. Visit the Georgia Department of Driver Services website for more information on required documents and fees.

If you do not have a driver’s license and do not wish to get one, you may apply for a Georgia ID card. This card has the exact same information as a driver’s license. In order to get a state ID, you need to show the same proof of identification and residency as you would to get a driver’s license. Visit the DDS website to find the fees associated with obtaining a state ID. State IDs and driver’s licenses serve as an official form of ID in the US, and they are helpful to have when wanting to open a bank account or conduct other personal business matters.

You can apply for a driver’s license or state ID at one of these nearby Department of Driver Services locations:

- 1010 Aviation Blvd, Gainesville, GA 30501
- 400 Aquatic Circle, Cumming, GA 30040
- 1505 US Highway 29 North, Athens, GA 30601

Office Hours
- Tuesday - Friday: 8:00 – 6:00
- Saturday: 8:00 - 12:00

In order to operate a car in the US, you need to have car insurance. Georgia requires all drivers to have liability insurance, however, if you limit your coverage to this type of insurance, only the car of the other party with whom you might be involved in an accident is insured. It does not cover the damage to your own car. For this type of coverage, collision insurance must be purchased. Please let your insurance company advise you on what coverage is best for your vehicle and situation. There are many car insurance companies, and you should shop around to
get the best rates. To get a better insurance rate, it is helpful to have a Georgia driver’s license rather than one from your home country. It is important that you go online and learn more about car insurance and why you need it. You can also find a local car insurance provider online. All drivers are responsible for knowing the driving regulations of the State of Georgia. You can find out all driving rules in Georgia by downloading the current Georgia Driver’s Manual, which is available online.

If you break the law and are spotted by the police, the police officer will indicate that you need to pull over by turning on a siren and by flashing the car’s blue lights. As soon as you can do so safely, pull over to the right side of the road without impeding the flow of traffic or turn into a parking lot. Park the car, but do not get out. Roll down the window when the officer approaches, and be courteous, even if you are angry or puzzled about why you were pulled over. You will need to provide the officer with your driver’s license, proof of auto insurance, and the car registration. If you are issued a ticket, you will probably be subject to a fine, and you may be required to appear in traffic court. If you are issued a warning, you will not need to appear in court or pay a fine, and you should thank the officer for only issuing you a warning.

If you are involved in an accident involving another car, call the police immediately and alert them to the need for an ambulance if you or other passengers are injured. It is best to avoid a confrontation with the other driver, so it might be a good idea to avoid speaking to the driver until the police officer arrives.

Health Insurance
Health insurance in the United States is essential. Unlike many countries around the world, medicine is not socialized, so the government does not pay for doctor’s visits, visits to the hospital, or any other type of medical care. Since an accident or illness can be very expensive, adequate insurance coverage is required. UNG requires all international students on an F-1 or J-1 visa to carry medical insurance through the USG Student Health Insurance Program (SHIP). Medical coverage is through United Healthcare and payment is due along with your tuition and fees each term you are enrolled. You must carry your insurance card with you at all times in case you encounter an emergency and need to see a doctor. To learn more about your benefits and plan options, please visit UNG’s insurance homepage. This website will also provide you with the necessary resources to manage your health care needs and options.

Your insurance does not cover expenses related to vision and dental health. There are various independent vision care centers that can offer eye exams, glasses, and contact lenses for a fairly reasonable price. A visit to the dentist for a cleaning and check-up typically costs less than $100, but any sort of dental work (fillings, crowns, extractions) is very expensive. Purchasing a separate dental insurance policy may be a worthwhile investment. You can find out more about the details of the medical insurance that you must carry and the optional dental insurance that you may buy online. Also, please be aware that the Pearce and Pearce, Inc. insurance contracts with certain, but not all local doctors and clinics. Please visit the website and perform a “Network Provider Search” to find out which doctor and clinic you may visit.

Illness
In the event that you become sick, it is advised that you visit a medical facility as soon as possible. Urgent care centers are board certified physicians that offer prompt treatment of illness or injuries that require immediate attention, but are not-life threatening, without an appointment or established doctor.
Some pharmacies offer “mini clinics” with board certified practitioners to provide treatment, health screening, and vaccinations. No appointment is required, walk-ins are welcomed.

An ambulance should be summoned for any life-threatening emergency. You can seek immediate, life-threatening medical assistance by dialing 911.

**Taxes**

All international students in the United States must obey a United States law, which means that international students need to file tax documentation for any year that they were in the United States. Failure to file tax documentation can have a negative effect on a student’s immigration status and may prevent a student from attaining other visa statuses. The international student advisor is trained to aid students with preparing their Non-Resident tax returns and documentation. International students may make an appointment with the International Student Advisor to do their taxes starting the week after UNG’s spring break in March until April 14th.

**Academic Integrity**

Academic standards and practices are influenced by culture. What is considered appropriate academic behavior in your home country might be different from what is appropriate in the US. The US definition of academic honesty is based on the cultural values of individualism, fairness, the idea that individuals must work independently, using original thinking, creativity, and invention. This means that plagiarism and cheating are not allowed. Plagiarism is defined as copying the work of someone else and not naming this person as your source. In the US, this will be perceived as an attempt to utilize the ideas or words of another person as your own.

Plagiarism is one of the most serious violations of academic conduct standards in the US. Of course, when you are writing a paper you research many sources and then present or summarize other people’s ideas. But you must name your sources and identify them when you are using their words and ideas. This also applies to the work of other students. Discussing ideas for a paper with friends is okay, but it is not acceptable to hand in papers that are the same as your friends’, or to let someone else write your paper for you, even though the ideas are yours.

Cheating is defined as copying someone else’s work or taking prohibited information or tools to an exam. Be sure that the work you complete is always your own, and be sure to ask about proper citations and references if you do not yet fully understand how to use them.

More information regarding academic integrity can be found in the Student Code of Conduct on the UNG website.

**Class Expectations**

Your instructor will give you a course syllabus, which contains all the information relevant to your course-expectations, required texts, suggested texts, assignments, exam dates, and additional course requirements. This syllabus is considered to be an implicit contract; by enrolling in the course, you accept the information and schedule that are outlined in the syllabus. Most instructors tend to follow the schedule printed in the syllabus, so generally you can count on the assignment and test dates listed on your syllabus.

Class attendance is usually required and often affects your final grade. It is important that you make every effort to attend class. When you cannot, try to obtain any notes and handouts that
were missed during your absence. It may also be a good idea to meet with your professor during his or her office hours after an absence for any material you missed.

Adequate class preparation ensures that you can participate actively and productively in class on a voluntary or compulsory basis. Your professors should be addressed as “Doctor” or “Professor” followed by their last name unless they inform you otherwise. Though lively debate is sometimes the norm in classes that involve considerable class discussions, interrupting someone else while he or she is talking is considered rude, especially if the person you interrupt is your instructor. Looking someone in the eye when you speak to him/her or when he/she speaks to you is important; avoiding eye contact makes people uncomfortable and gives the impression of indifference.

All professors have scheduled office hours during which students can go talk to them to ask questions or discuss problems. Professors encourage students to visit them during their office hours. If you need additional time, you can also make an appointment to meet with your professor outside office hours.
University of North Georgia Information for International Students

Tuition and Fees
All international students on F-1 and J-1 visas must be enrolled for 12 credit hours each semester. Even though some students have some of their tuition and fees paid for through scholarships, all students are responsible for insurance fees and material fees related to enrollment in a certain class. Please make sure that you log into your Banner account to make sure that all your fees are paid. You can log in to Banner by going to your MyUNG Portal. Tuition and Fees will vary every year, so please visit the UNG Website for current tuition costs.

All international students are classified as NON-RESIDENT. This means that international students are required to pay out-of-state tuition. Some international students can receive waivers that will allow them to pay only in-state tuition. These waivers require the student mean certain criteria and are issued through the Admissions Office. If you are able to get one of these waivers and do not meet or exceed this criterion, you will lose the waiver and will be required to pay out-of-state tuition.

NOTE: Full payment of tuition and fees by the posted deadline is expected. If you are not able to pay your tuition and fees possible consequences can be late fees, being unable to register for classes, being dropped from classes and even legal action against you. The events that result can also cause you to be terminated from your immigration status. Make sure that you stay informed on deadlines for payment and pay in full by the deadlines. Messages will be sent out about payment deadlines on your UNG email account, so make sure that you check it frequently. Please visit your MyUNG Portal for additional information regarding the tuition and fees payment schedule.

Academic Advisors
Academic advising is an integral part of the educational program. Academic advisors are faculty members who help you think about academic, personal, and career goals, so you can plan a program of study that will enable you to achieve these goals. The advising process allows a student to understand the educational and career options available to him/her. The advisor approves specific courses required to complete the degree of the student’s choice. The student maintains communication with the advisor throughout their academic career.

As a student at UNG, you will be assigned an academic advisor within the major you have selected. You can find out who is your assigned academic advisor by logging into your Banner account. If you find another faculty member within your major other than your assigned academic advisor that you would like to be your advisor, you do have the option to change your academic advisor.

Grades
Assessment, evaluation, and grading will typically be explained in your course syllabus. A letter grading scale is the norm for universities in the US. The University of North Georgia uses the generally established 4.0 grade point system.
Your grade point average (GPA) is based on a 4-point scale. Your GPA is computed by first taking the grade you receive for a course and multiplying its numerical value by the number of credit hours for the course, then totaling the points earned by all courses and dividing by the total number of credit hours.

Depending on the course and the instructor, the grading scale may differ. For example, in some courses having a 90% or higher will earn you an A, whereas in some others, a 93% or higher will earn you an A. It is important to familiarize yourself with a course’s evaluation process as described in the syllabus.

Student ID Card
Your Student ID Card, or “Nighthawks Card,” is your student identification card. During your first couple days on campus, go to the Card Services, located in Student Center. To verify your identity to obtain a Nighthawk Card, you must provide one of the following at the time your card is made: United States Driver’s License, military ID, passport, or another student ID. Your first card is issued at no cost. Replacement cards are $25.00. For more information on obtaining your student ID, visit the UNG Card Office website. You can also visit or call the Card Office.

Motor Vehicle Permits and Parking
If you are able to purchase a car and want to drive it to campus, you will need to get a campus parking permit. All vehicles that are parked on campus must have a vehicle permit sticker, which is called a decal. UNG decals may be obtained at the Card Office. In order to obtain your decal, you must first register your vehicle using the Parking Services Online Portal. You will need to include your vehicle information (Plate, State, Year, Make, Model and Color). For more information, visit or call the Card Office.

Smoking and Drinking on Campus
The Tobacco Policy at UNG is as follows: “the University of North Georgia is a smoke-free environment. Smoking is not allowed at any times in buildings or anywhere outside, to include building entrances, roads, parking lots, and green areas. The only place smoking is permitted is within one’s personal vehicle. This policy will be enforced with all program participants.”

In many countries, and even other universities in the United States, drinking is allowed if you are of a certain age. However, drinking is prohibited on UNG’s campus, anywhere and anytime! Students found to be drinking on campus will be subject to disciplinary action and will be subject to state and local laws as well. The state laws and consequences in Georgia and most of the United States are as follows:
The Law
A. It is illegal for persons under 21 years of age to possess, consume or purchase alcoholic beverages.
B. It is illegal for any person to furnish alcoholic beverages to persons under 21 years of age.
C. It is illegal to furnish, sell, or provide alcoholic beverages to a person who is in a state of noticeable intoxication.
D. It is illegal to charge admission to events where alcohol is provided, unless a license for sale of alcoholic beverages has been obtained.
E. It is illegal for persons under the age of 21 to misrepresent (fake I.D.) themselves for the purpose of obtaining an alcoholic beverage illegally.
F. It is illegal in the City of Gainesville to carry an open container of an alcoholic beverage.

Penalties for Alcohol – Georgia
1) Alcohol possession and selling violations
   a) Up to 1-year imprisonment
   b) Up to $1,000 fine
2) Driving under the influence
   a) One day to one year’s imprisonment
   b) Up to $1000 fine
   c) Suspension of license for a minimum of six months
   d) Perform 20 to 40 hours of community service
3) Open-container
   a) $250 fine
4) Underage drinking
   a) Up to $1,000 fine
   b) Community service.
   c) Alcohol Prevention Classes
   d) Minimum 6 months’ probation

Getting Involved on Campus
There are many things to do on campus at North Georgia and numerous student organizations for students to get involved in. Student organizations are a valuable resource to make connections with other student, international or domestic. It is also a great way to experience new things.

To find an up-to-date list of student organizations available by for your campus, visit the Office of Student Involvement’s Student Organizations website.

More information and current campus policies and regulations can be found in the UNG Student Handbook produced by the Office of Student Involvement.
Keeping your Status: Important F-1/J-1 Immigration Regulations

For this section, some regulations discussed will be only for F-1 Students or only for J-1 students. If a regulation is only for F-1 Students, an “F-1 only” in parentheses, (F-1 only), will appear. Example: Optional Practical Training (OPT) (F-1 only). If a regulation is only for J-1 Students then a “J-1 only” in parentheses, (J-1 only), will appear. If the regulation is true for both, nothing will appear.

Maintain Valid Documentation

As an F-1 and J-1 student you must keep your immigration documentation up to date at ALL TIMES! This means that you must have a valid I-20 (F-1) or DS-2019 (J-1), Passport, and I-94 at all times. Keeping these documents up-to-date is your responsibility. Failure to keep these documents up-to-date could result in loss of status.

If any of your immigration documentation is lost, please take steps to replace the missing item as soon as possible. If you lose your I-20, DS-2019 or I-94, please contact the current International Student Advisor in order to apply for a replacement. If you lose your passport please contact your nearest consulate or embassy in the United States to find out how you can receive a replacement.

NOTE: Your actual visa DOES NOT need to be valid WHILE IN THE UNITED STATES. Once in the United States your I-20 or DS-2019 becomes the document that demonstrates that you are in status. A valid visa IS required if you leave the United States and want to come back.

Full Course of Study Requirement

All F-1 and J-1 international students are required to be enrolled full-time during the entire semester. At UNG, this requires enrollment in at least 12 credit hours. If an international student in F-1 or J-1 status falls below 12 credit hours, and they cannot return to the class, they will be terminated from status.

Online Classes: Increasingly, more and more classes are going completely online. If you are an F-1 or J-1 student you must be taking at least 9 credit hours of traditional classroom study to count as a full-time student. Any other classes taken above these 9 credit hours can be online.

Exceptions to the Full Course of Study Requirement

If you believe you meet the criterion for one of the exceptions below, please contact the International Student Advisor for more information on applying for the exception.

Academic Difficulty Exception: A student seeking this exception at UNG will not be considered for the exception after their first semester or if they are transferring in from another US institution. To be eligible for this exception, a student must meet one of the following conditions:
• Initial difficulties with the English language
• Initial difficulties with reading requirements
• Unfamiliarity with American teaching methods
• Improper course level placement

If a student does not meet one of these conditions, they will not be considered for the exemption under any circumstances.

If a student meets all the requirements, the student will be permitted to take a minimum of 6 hours due to academic difficulty. If a student is granted a reduced course load due to Academic Difficulty, they must return to a full course of study in the next session. Once granted an Academic Difficulty exception, a student is ineligible for another reduction of course load due to Academic difficulty.

Medical Condition Exception: A student must provide documentation from a licensed physician or psychologist outlining the severity of the student’s condition and the length of time the student will be required to be away from school. If the student will be out for more than one semester, new and recent documentation must be provided for each semester the student will be away. Medical Condition exceptions can only be granted for a maximum of 12 months over the course of a program.

NOTE: Students will not be granted a medical condition course load reduction in SEVIS at UNG if the student only brings a note from student health services saying that they will not be able to return to class for a certain amount of time due to illness. A note from student health services can act as supporting documentation but primary documentation must be from a licensed physician or psychologist.

Completion of Course of Study Exception: If a student is in their final semester of study at UNG they may be exempt from taking a full 12 hours if less than 12 hours is needed to complete their degree. If you are a student that needs less than 12 hours of classes to complete your degree and you are in your final semester, please contact the international student advisor to apply for the exemption.

Learning Support Classes and Maintaining Documentation
Students with Learning Support requirements must enroll in their required Learning Support (LS) courses in each semester of attendance until the requirements have been satisfied. Learning Support courses do not carry college-level credit leading to graduation; however, the courses do carry institutional credit.

ESL Learning Support Classes: After COMPASS Placement Testing, if required to take ESL courses, international students should take ESL language courses as opposed to the Native Speaker Course. For ESL Learning Support Classes (reading/writing), students have 3 chances to pass at each level (classes 73, 74, 75)

Math Learning Support Classes: After COMPASS Placement Testing, if required to take Math Learning Support courses, students have 3 cumulative or total chances to pass BOTH math 97/99. Please note this is different from ESL classes, where students have 3 chances at each level.
How Learning Support Classes Can Affect F-1 Status:

- If a student fails to complete the Math Learning Support courses in the 3 cumulative, or total chances, they will be put on academic suspension for 3 consecutive semesters.
- If a student fails to complete the ESL Learning Support Classes in the 3 chances at each level, they will be put on academic suspension for 3 consecutive semesters.
  - This would result in termination of F-1 visa status once the paperwork is received by the Center for Global Engagement.
  - During this period of suspension, students will be unable to transfer to any university or institution in the University System of Georgia.
  - There is possibility that a suspended student could transfer to a technical institution outside of the University System of Georgia – however finding an institution that would accept a suspended student and be willing to assume the student’s SEVIS record would be the responsibility of the student.
  - NOTE: Finding a technical institution to accept a suspended student, and within the short time frame of when a student’s status would be terminated is extremely difficult.
- If a student learns they are going to be put on academic suspension, it is recommended to speak with the International Student Advisor as soon as possible.

Obeying Local, State, and Federal Law

The United States has three levels of laws: Local, State, and Federal. All laws must be obeyed while in the United States and ignorance of the law is not an excuse to be free of the consequences. Breaking any law can have an adverse effect on your schoolwork, immigration status, and/or life in general. If you are convicted of a misdemeanor it can mean up to a year in jail and subject to a fine. If you are convicted of a felony it can mean 1 year or more of jail time and a fine. If an international student is convicted of a felony, they will automatically lose their F-1 or J-1 student immigration status in most cases.

SEVIS Registration and Information Reporting Requirements

SEVIS registration occurs during the first 30 days of each semester that an F-1 or J-1 student is required to be enrolled during their program. Please make sure that you contact the International Student Advisor as soon as possible to correct any information that has changed like your address or a change of major if you have not done so already.

Name and address changes are required to be reported to the International Student Advisor within 10 days of occurring. The address given must be the actual physical address in which you will be staying, not the address that your mail goes to. Failure to keep this information current could result in the loss of status.

Working

Working in the United States is highly restricted while in the United States on an F-1 or J-1 student visa. Since your primary reason for being in the United States is to be a student, unauthorized employment will result in the termination of status and can effect application for future statuses.

On-campus employment: International students are allowed to work on campus for a maximum of 20 hours a week while school is in session and up to 40 hours a week during school breaks and vacations. If it is your first time working, you will be required to apply for a social security
card and fill out the necessary employment forms in the human resources department on campus.

Applying for a Social Security Card: The items required to acquire a social security card are as follows:
- An employment letter from the employing department on campus
- An International Student Advisor (DSO) approval letter
- A completed Social Security Application form
- I-20 or DS-2019, Passport, I-94

After you are able to gather all the required documentation, you must apply at a social security office. To find the office closest to you, use the Social Security Office Locator online.

Once you have gone through the process and been approved, it will take about 2 to 4 weeks to get your social security card back. For additional information on obtaining a social security card, please make an appointment with your International Student Advisor.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) (F-1 only): CPT is work authorization while engaged in an internship or cooperative program through your academic department. To apply for CPT, a student needs to provide a letter from his or her advisor saying that they approve of the internship, name of the organization, and the course number that the credit will be received and the student must also provide an internship offer letter from the organization is which the student is doing the internship for. The internship offer letter must specify the name of the organization, the offer of the internship to the student, the start and end dates of the internship, and a short description of what the student will be doing while at the internship. Turn in the UNG CPT Application form, the advisor letter, and the internship offer letter to the International Student Advisor. The CPT application form can be found on the Center for Global Engagement website. CPT is authorized by the by the International Student Advisor and does not require USCIS authorization.

CPT can be granted for full-time or part-time. UNG will not grant anyone full-time CPT while class is in session if they are an undergraduate student. If a student accumulates more than one year of full-time CPT, they will not be eligible for Optional Practical Training (OPT). A student can have unlimited part-time CPT without effecting OPT.

Optional Practical Training (OPT) (F-1 only): OPT is work authorization for practical work experience related to a student’s major. There are two types of OPT: Pre-completion and Post-Completion. No matter which type of authorization you apply for, the maximum amount of time that a student can engage in OPT is 12 months. F-1 students applying for OPT must have completed 1 full academic year of their program before being eligible for OPT. All OPT does not require the student to find a job before applying, but only 90 days of unemployment is allowed during the 12 months of OPT.

Pre-Completion OPT is OPT that is done before an F-1 Student’s program is concluded. Pre-completion OPT has the same restrictions as on-campus employment if approved. A student will only be able to work 20 hours per week while school is in session and up to 40 hours during school vacations and breaks. Pre-completion can be specified for up to 12 months and any pre-completion OPT counts toward the overall OPT 12 month total.
Post-Completion OPT is OPT that is done after an F-1 student’s program is over. Post-Completion OPT must be full-time and requires the student to be employed for 20-40 hours per week. Post-Completion OPT can be submitted to USCIS from up to 90 days before an F-1 student’s program end-date and up to 60 day after. A student can only participate in Post-completion OPT up to 14 months after their program end date. Post-completion OPT will end at the end of twelve months of employment or 14 months after his or her program end date, whichever comes first.

Applying for OPT is the same for both Pre and Post Completion OPT. Applying for OPT is a complicated process that is best done with the help of the International Student Advisor, so please make an appointment. The following documentation is required in order to apply for OPT:

- Copies of all former and current I-20’s
- Copies of all former EAD cards (if applicable)
- Letter from registrar or academic advisor detailing current academic standing and date of completion of studies
- Copy of Passport
- Copy of I-94
- Two Immigration Style (Passport) Photos
- OPT authorization I-20
- I-765 USCIS Work Authorization Application
- I-765 Filing Fee (Check made out to the Department of Homeland Security): current application and filing fee can be found on the USCIS website.
- UNG OPT Application

Once all documentation has been completed, the application and supporting documentation will be sent to the USCIS service center for processing. OPT applications can take a significant amount of time to be returned, 2 to 3 months or longer in some cases, so please make sure to contact the international student advisor early in order to get your application in on time. Please contact the international student advisor for more information.

**Severe Economic Hardship (F-1 only):** In some cases, students may be authorized to work off campus if UNFORSEEABLE forces have caused severe financial difficulties. If you believe that you qualify for severe economic hardship, please contact your international student advisor.

**Extension of Program**

**J-1 Students:** As a J-1 student the extension of the students program depends on the University System of Georgia’s Board of Regents Office. Please contact the International Student Advisor for current information.

**F-1 Students:** For F-1 students, to be eligible for an I-20 extension a student must be in good standing (have a 2.0 grade point average or higher), provide a document from their academic advisor or the Registrar stating their new estimated date of completion or documentation of a change of major, and the UNG extension of program application. If a student qualifies for an extension they will be issued a new I-20 with a new program end date within 5 business days.

**Transferring Institutions**

**J-1 Students:** International students at UNG on a J-1 visa may not transfer to another institution since their visa is based on UNG institutional exchanges.
F-1 Students: International students at UNG on an F-1 visa may transfer to another institution. In order for an international student to transfer to another university they must first apply to the university in which they would like to go and be accepted. An F-1 student must then fill out UNG International Student Transfer Application and attach with it the acceptance letter from the institution to which the student is transferring. An application for transfer can be delayed or denied if a student does not provide all documentation required for the transfer. Processing of transfer paperwork can take up to 5 business days.

Ending Your Program

J-1 Student: If you are a student on a J-1 visa, at the end of your exchange program you have up to 30 days after your program end date to leave the United States. Please inform the International Student Advisor near the end of your program when you will be leaving the United States.

F-1 Student: If you are a student on an F-1 visa, at the end of your program you have up to 60 days to either apply for OPT, transfer to a different program of study, change education levels, apply for a change in immigration status or leave the country. Please contact the International Student Advisor if you need more information on your end of program options.

Termination from Status

Termination from status can happen due to failure of a student to maintain the conditions of their program outlined above. If a student has done something to be terminated, the International Student Advisor will contact the student as soon as possible to try to resolve the issue. If the issue cannot be resolved or the student does not respond within two business days of being contacted, the student will be notified that they will be terminated and termination will occur immediately. If an international student is terminated from status, they must leave the country immediately.

Note for J-1 students: Since all J-1 students at UNG are only here for maximum of one year, if they are terminated there is no possibility for reinstatement if a violation of status and termination occur. Please make sure to stay in status to avoid this situation.

Reinstatement of F-1 Status (F-1 Only)

In the event that an F-1 student is terminated from status, if the student can demonstrate that the termination was outside of their control, the student may be eligible for reinstatement. Reinstatement for a terminated F-1 student is not advised in most situations since an application for reinstatement has to be submitted to USCIS for approval and the application must meet the F-1 regulation criteria listed below.

Under 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(16) an F-1 student may be considered for reinstatement if the student:

(A) Has not been out of status for more than 5 months at the time of filing the request for reinstatement (or demonstrates that the failure to file within the 5 month period was the result of exceptional circumstances and that the student filed the request for reinstatement as promptly as possible under these exceptional circumstances);
(B) Does not have a record of repeated or willful violations of Service regulations;

(C) Is currently pursuing, or intending to pursue, a full course of study in the immediate future at the school which issued the Form I-20;

(D) Has not engaged in unauthorized employment;

(E) Is not deportable on any ground other than section 237(a)(1)(B) or (C)(i) of the Act; and

(F) Establishes to the satisfaction of the Service, by a detailed showing, either that:

(1) The violation of status resulted from circumstances beyond the student's control. Such circumstances might include serious injury or illness, closure of the institution, a natural disaster, or inadvertence, oversight, or neglect on the part of the DSO, but do not include instances where a pattern of repeated violations or where a willful failure on the part of the student resulted in the need for reinstatement; or

(2) The violation relates to a reduction in the student's course load that would have been within a DSO's power to authorize, and that failure to approve reinstatement would result in extreme hardship to the student.

If an F-1 student believes that he/she meets the criteria to file for reinstatement, please fill out UNG Application for Reinstatement form and attach the supporting documentation listed on the application form to the international student advisor as soon as possible. Please be advised that a reinstatement I-20 is needed in order to apply so please do not attempt to apply for reinstatement completely on your own.