



International Student Guide

This welcome booklet has been put together to help you answer some of the questions or concerns that you may have related to leaving your home country to study in the United States. As you read through it, you will find helpful information for making the transition from your country to ours.

We are eagerly anticipating your arrival and trust that you will find that the Lord has blessed you with a wonderful family here at The Master's Seminary.

Prior to Arrival in the United States

What to Bring

Passports, I-20s, & Visas

You will always need these when you travel, even sometimes when crossing state lines within the U.S. For a more complete list of the important documents, see [Study in the States](#).

Birth Certificates

Bring originals and copies.

Driving Records

If you currently have automobile insurance, it would be helpful to get a letter from your insurance company stating how long you have had coverage and the day that you cancelled the policy. You may get a discount on your automobile insurance here if you have had coverage for more than 5 continuous years. If it has been less than 30 days between the old policy lapsing and the initiation of the new policy, you may be eligible for an additional discount.

International Driver's License (IDL)

An IDL can be helpful when applying for automobile insurance, as they will ask for your driver's license number. The IDL can also be useful for identification purposes until you have obtained your California Driver's License (CDL).

Home Ownership Papers

If you own a home, bring a copy of the title and/or certificate documenting your ownership. Apartment rentals and banks may accept this as extra security.

Bank Letters

Bring a letter from your bank with credit history information and a history of your assets, investments, home mortgage, etc.

Health Records

Bring all health records and, if possible, the original copies. Bring a letter from your specialist or doctor if you have a health condition, describing your history and when you last underwent treatment. Health insurance companies often want a letter outlining what medications you have taken in the last 6-12 months and any medical procedures you have undergone. If possible, bring extra medication for any ongoing conditions. Some medications can be more expensive here, and it may also take time to get established with a new doctor and get the medications you need. Please note: If you bring medication with you, make sure it is in the original bottle and bring a copy of the prescription with you.

Curriculum Vitae and/or Resumes

Even if you don't plan on working while you're here, it's good to have access to your employment history.

Will/Family Trust

If you have a will or family trust, bring a copy with you.

References

You may find it helpful to have personal, character, and employment references available in case you need them in the future.

USA Address

Have this handy as you will need to fill out a required form while you are on the plane. It doesn't have to be your permanent address, but it should be the address where you expect to spend the first few days. At the very least, if you don't know where you're staying, carry the seminary's address and the phone number: (818) 909-5622.

Converters for Your Electronics

America runs off a different current than many other parts of the world (120 V), and you probably won't be able to plug in your electrical items, or worse, you may plug them in and either damage them or cause a fire. So, if you are bringing any electronics with you, you will need to purchase converters. Because these converters vary from country to country, it's best to do your research in your home country and purchase the converters before your trip.

Let us Know When You're Arriving

Please share your travel plans with your orientation leader as well as with the Student Life Office. They'll want to know:

- Name of airport
- Name of airline
- Flight number
- Date and time of arrival
- Has someone offered to pick you up at the airport?
- Where will you be staying when you first arrive?

After Arrival in the United States

Things to Do

Report to Your International Student Advisor

As soon as possible after arriving in the U.S., contact your International Student Advisor in the at (818) 909-5627. We will ask you to bring the I-20 and passport for yourself and each of your family members so that we can register you in the Department of Homeland Security's Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). We'll also need your U.S. address, even if it's temporary, and a phone number where you can be contacted.

Find a Place to Call Home

When you first arrive, you may be staying with a friend or host family. In this case, your first priority will be to find a house or apartment to rent. Ideally, you have already been working on this from your home country, although some people prefer to wait so they make these decisions in person. Living near other seminary families will help you make a smoother transition, so we offer the following resources:

- Yammer – TMS Bulletin
- Grace Community Church Opportunity Sheet
- Facebook – TMS Stuff/Opportunity Board

Update Your Address

On first arrival and throughout your time with us, notify your International Student Advisor (ISA) either in person or by email of your new address and any change in phone number or email. We will update your SEVIS record according to regulations.

Open a Bank Account

One of the first things you will want to do is establish an account at a local bank. Here is a list of some of the major banks in our area:

- Bank of America
- Chase
- Citibank
- Union Bank
- Wells Fargo

Although you can often open a bank account online, you may find it easier to do this in person at a bank in your area. This will allow you to be clear on the different types of accounts and to get your questions answered before proceeding. Be sure you have the following items with you:

- Passport
- Second form of identification with photograph if possible
- I-20
- Your U.S. address and phone number
- Your address in your home country
- Social Security Number if you have one. As an international student, unless you are employed, you are ineligible for a Social Security Number and are therefore exempt from SSN requirements.
- Funds for deposit

Research Emergency Services in Your Area

It's a good idea to know where to turn in the case of an emergency. Find contact information for the following services near you:

- Urgent Medical Care
- Hospital
- Police Department
- Fire Department
- 911 – Know that you can dial 911 from your phone in the case of a life-threatening emergency. It will activate the nearest police, fire and paramedic response. Stay on the line and speak clearly when asked to state your emergency. The operator will advise you on what to do next.

Make Plans for Transportation

Unless you have come by car from Canada or Mexico, you will probably need to rely on fellow students for transportation in the very beginning. Although we do have trains, busses, Uber and Lyft in the Los Angeles area, you may find that our public transportation system is somewhat lacking. If it's not practical for you to rely on friends or public transportation, you'll need to:

- *Obtain a California Driver's License*
Anyone living in the States and driving a car must have a driver's license. You may drive legally for approximately six months if you have a current International Driver's License and your

country's driver's license is in your possession when you drive. For details on anything related to driving in California, refer to the California Department of Motor Vehicles website:

www.dmv.ca.gov.

- *Purchase Automobile Insurance*

In the state of California all vehicle owners and operators are required to have at least liability insurance.

- *Buy a Car*

Follow Department of Motor Vehicle instructions for properly registering the vehicle in your name. www.dmv.ca.gov

Get Involved at Church

Make it a priority to join a church and get involved in a Bible study and fellowship group. If you're married, encourage your wife to join the Seminary Wives Discipleship and Women of Grace on Wednesdays. Connecting with these groups will assist you in settling in and obtaining guidance from people more familiar with the area

Maintain F-1 Student Status

- Always be sure you are enrolled full-time during the fall and spring semesters.
- Keep your address updated.
- Keep your immigration documents valid and current.
- If you have been offered on-campus employment, be sure to clear it with your International Student Advisor. If you don't already have a US Social Security Number, you'll need a letter from TMS and one from your employer to take with you when you apply.
- Limit your on-campus employment to 20 hours per week while school is in session. During school breaks (Thanksgiving break, Christmas break, Shepherds' Conference week and Spring break) you are eligible to work full-time.
- Never allow your wife or children (F-2 status) to work for pay. This includes working for benefits such as free or reduced rent, free food, etc. People in F-2 status are not authorized to work.
- Never work off-campus without prior authorization from the Department of Homeland Security. See your ISA for instructions on how to obtain this authorization.
- Before you or your family members travel outside of the U.S., notify your ISA to assure that you have the proper re-entry documents. The official signature on the back of your I-20 needs to be less than one year old on your date of re-entry.
- If your studies are going to extend beyond the "program end date" on your I-20, check in with your ISA for an extension well before that date.
- If you are continuing on to an additional degree program, check in with your ISA to process a new I-20 for you.
- If you plan to transfer to another school, discuss this plan with your ISA so that your I-20 record can go with you.

Study in the United States

Probably the most helpful resource for international students is the Department of Homeland Security's website, [Study in the States](#). We highly recommend you familiarize yourself with this resource and turn to it whenever you have questions. You can even select your language in the translation box at the top of the site for ease in understanding some of the terminology.

Here you can find information related to

- Obtaining your visa
- Paying your I-901 fee
- Understanding and maintaining your status
- Preparing for your arrival in the U.S.
- Employment rules
- Obtaining a Social Security Number
- Applying for a driver's license
- Changes of immigration status
- Bringing your dependents with you
- Emergency preparedness
- Immigration scams