

# The University of South Carolina



# International Student Handbook



*Study Abroad*  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

*International Programs*

Study Abroad Office, Legare College, Suite 321, Columbia, SC 29208  
Phone: 803.777.7557 ♦ Email: [studyabroad@sc.edu](mailto:studyabroad@sc.edu) ♦ Web: [www.studyabroad.sc.edu](http://www.studyabroad.sc.edu)



# Study Abroad

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

*International Programs*

## Important Contact Info

Study Abroad Office  
Legare College, Suite 321  
University of South Carolina  
Columbia, SC 29208

Website: [studyabroad.sc.edu](http://studyabroad.sc.edu)

Email: [studyabroad@sc.edu](mailto:studyabroad@sc.edu)

Tel: (803) 777-7557

Fax: (803) 777-7559

## Welcome to the University of South Carolina!



Thank you for your interest in studying at the University of South Carolina. In the following pages you will find useful information about USC, the city of Columbia, and the steps you need to take in order to make your experience here a success. Feel free to contact us by e-mail or phone if you have any other questions. We hope you enjoy your time at USC, Go Gamecocks!

## Table of Contents

About USC	3
About Columbia	4
How to Apply/Acceptance Packet	5
Visa	6
Immunization/Health Insurance	7
Course Registration/Housing	8
Before You Arrive	9
Getting Around	10
The Arrival Process	11
After You Arrive	12

## **International Student Services**

Byrnes Building, Suite 123  
901 Sumter Street  
University of South Carolina  
Columbia, SC 29208

Website: <http://ip.sc.edu/iss/>

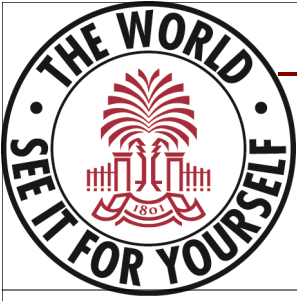
E-mail: [iss@sc.edu](mailto:iss@sc.edu)

Tel: 803-777-7461

Fax: 803-777-0462

## **Useful Websites:**

[University Website](#)  
[USC's Academic Calendar](#)  
[USC Visitor's Center](#)



# About USC

## Columbia, South Carolina *The University of South Carolina*

The University of South Carolina is located in downtown Columbia, in the heart of South Carolina. The campus dates back to 1805 and is one of the oldest public institutions in the US. It is the flagship university of eight state wide campuses, with the total student population nearing 29,000. USC offers more than 350 degree programs, many ranked among the nation's elite. Over 1,000 international students attend USC as degree-seeking students, and we welcome approximately 100 exchange students each year.

Exchange students that study at USC can participate in more than 300 [student run organizations](#) on campus. These organizations focus on a variety of interests ranging from athletics to politics. For example, students can join the French Club, Gamecock Disk Golf, and the Latin Dance Club, among many, many others. Each semester there is a Student Organization Fair, which you can attend to learn more about how to join. As a student at USC, you can attend regular, free movies and concerns offered on campus by [Carolina Productions](#). USC also offers multiple opportunities for students to get involved in [community service](#), including "Service Saturdays", organized group projects. American football is a really popular part of the campus culture during fall semester. Many students participate in parades and rallies on football game days. Tailgating is another popular activity during the football season where students and other members of the community get together outdoors to barbeque, chat, and meet new people before the football game.

### Courses and Credits

Undergraduate students are required to enroll in a minimum of 12 U.S. credit hours per semester. Students typically fulfill this requirement by taking four 3-credit classes. Sample course offerings are listed below. A complete listing of courses open to exchange students can be found [here](#). Be sure to look at the courses available on the Columbia campus. See page 8 of this handbook for information on course registration as an exchange student.

### Sample Subject Offerings

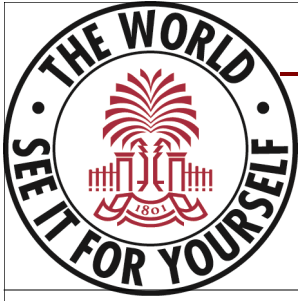
African American Studies	Marine Science
Anthropology	Modern Languages
Biological Sciences	Philosophy
Education	Physics
Engineering	Political Science
Film Studies	Psychology
Geography	Religious Studies
History	Sociology
Hotel, Retail, and Tourism Management	Southern Studies
International Business	Sports & Entertainment Management
Journalism & Mass Communications	Theatre & Fine Arts
	Women's Studies



Students relaxing on the historic Horseshoe







# About Columbia

Columbia is the capital and largest city of South Carolina. Resting on the banks of the Congaree River, Columbia boasts nearly 125,000 citizens residing in both Richland and Lexington County. Nicknamed “The Capital of Southern Hospitality,” Columbia takes pride in its rich Southern heritage and tradition. A friendly smile from a stranger is as common as sweet tea on a hot day. Summers in Columbia are long and pleasant, and its winters are mild and short.

As for cultural activities, the campus is just a couple of minutes by foot from some of the city’s best architecture, museums, galleries, historic houses, theaters, and large venues for sporting and entertainment events. The State House sits on the edge of campus and the Vista and Five Points, two of the most popular areas for restaurants, bars, cafes and specialty shops, are within short walking distance. Columbia is a great place to try iced sweet tea, the official drink of the South, and to sample authentic Southern dishes like shrimp and grits, cornbread, fried okra, and pecan pie.

For those looking for outdoor activities you can check out the Riverbanks Zoo and Garden or the Riverfront Park with a 2 mile trail for walking, running and biking. A beautiful day creates the perfect setting for a picnic in Finlay Park with its water fountains overlooking the city. The [Office of Outdoor Recreation](#) provides regular outdoor trips for students at very low costs.



Finlay Park overlooking the city



The State House

South Carolina is one of the most beautiful states on the east coast, as it has many stretches of unspoiled forest, sandy beaches, and scenic lakes and rivers. The state is home to minority cultural groups of Native American and African descent that cannot be found anywhere else. Columbia is also the crossroads for the southeast as all of the prominent cities in this region are easily accessible from our beautiful city. World famous beaches and resorts, the picturesque Blue Ridge Mountains, and other historic southern cities like Savannah and Charleston are within easy driving distance of Columbia. The [International Student Services](#) Office and the [International Student Association](#) both organize occasional trips to regional attractions. For more information visit the following websites:

[Official City Website](#)

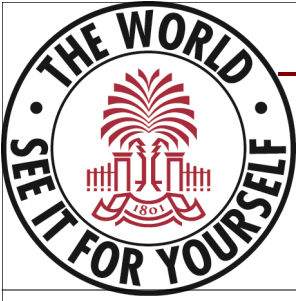
[Official South Carolina Tourism Site](#)

[South Carolina Information Highway](#)

[Columbia Visitor Bureau](#)

[The State](#)—Columbia’s official newspaper

[Free Times](#)—An alternative Columbia Newspaper



# How to Apply/ Acceptance Packet

Congratulations! You've decided to apply to be an exchange student at the University of South Carolina. In this section, you will find the steps you will need to take in order to apply and be admitted, including the required forms. If you are interested in applying, the first step is to speak with your home university's International Office or Study Abroad Office.

## How to Apply

In order to apply as an exchange student, you must submit the following application materials:

1. Special Application for Non-Degree Seeking Students (available at your home Study Abroad Office)
2. TOEFL official scores *\*\*please have scores sent to USC using code – 5818 when taking the exam, as well as an unofficial copy to our office*
3. [Application for Immigration Document](#)
4. Photocopy of Official Transcripts
5. [Financial certification](#) for living expenses (housing, food, books, health insurance, miscellaneous) while at USC.
6. Photocopy of passport

Your home school advisor will send completed forms to:

**Study Abroad Office**  
University of South Carolina  
902 Sumter St.  
Legare College, Suite 321  
Columbia, SC 29208 USA

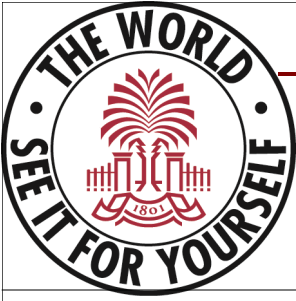


## Acceptance Packet

It will take approximately 4-6 weeks to process your application. Once you have been accepted as an exchange student at the University of South Carolina, you will receive a welcome packet with your official acceptance letter and I-20 document, as well as useful campus information. A USC study abroad advisor will be assigned to help you with your enrollment and will serve as your primary contact at USC. Your USC study abroad advisor will contact you to help you with course and housing selection. Upon acceptance, your advisor will ask you to also submit the following forms:

1. [Immunization form](#) (If students need a PPD vaccination, MMR vaccination, etc., they are available on campus at a reasonable cost and may be administered during orientation week)  
\*\* As classes fill up quickly, it is very important that you submit your immunization form as soon as possible. This will help ensure that you can get into the classes that you need to take. (More info on immunizations and health insurance found on p.7)
2. Housing and Course Preference Form (will be e-mailed to you by an advisor)
3. [Insurance Policy Information](#)
4. [Arrival Request Form](#) (optional, free airport pick-up)





# *The Visa Process*

## Visa/Immigration

In order to study as an exchange student at the University of South Carolina, you will need to apply for an F-1 Visa (student visa) at the nearest U.S. Embassy in your home country. You will receive the necessary documents and more information in your welcome packet.

You will need to schedule an in-person appointment in order to apply for the F-1 Visa stamp. You can check the waiting times for appointments by going to the U.S. Department of State Visa Wait Times [website](#). These steps may differ from those of the US Embassy or Consulate in your home country. Always consult the Embassy/Consulate for exact instructions and guidelines.

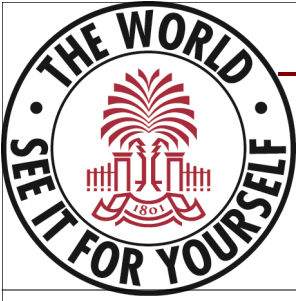
In order to be able to apply for the visa you will need the following documents:

1. Passport
2. SEVIS I-20 document (this document will be issued by USC once you have been accepted to the University of South Carolina)
3. Receipt showing SEVIS fee payment. You will receive instruction on how to pay the SEVIS fee with your SEVIS I-20. You can pay the SEVIS fee on-line or through the mail.
4. Completed DS-156 (visa application form)
5. Pay the visa application fee.
6. Original financial documents showing the amount listed under number seven on your I-20 document.
7. Plans to return to your home country upon completion of your exchange program in the U.S.

For more information on applying for your visa, please refer to the section labeled [Visas on the International Students Services website](#).



Students studying on USC campus



# Immunizations/ Health Insurance

## Immunizations

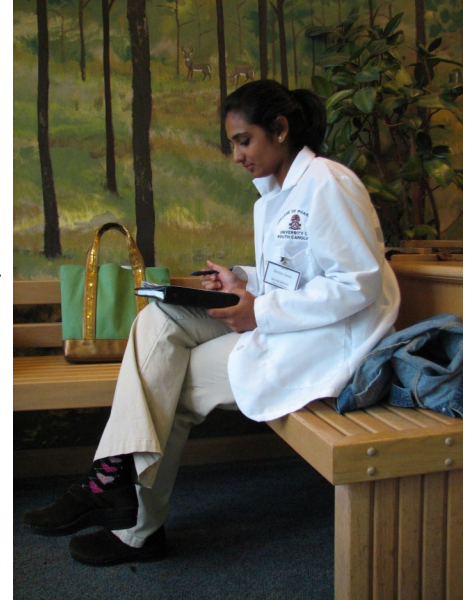
Every incoming USC student must complete an immunization form in order to be allowed to register for classes. You can find the immunization form [here](#).

The **required** immunizations for international students include:

- Two doses of the Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR) immunization that must have been administered after the student's first birthday OR evidence of positive MMR titer.
- Meningococcal vaccine OR your signature declining this immunization.
- Tuberculosis screening and chest x-ray for students from certain countries or who may have been at risk. If you are unsure if you need this, please ask your study abroad advisor.

Other recommended vaccines include Tetanus-Diphtheria, Polio, Hepatitis A and B, HPV and Varicella.

If you are unable to obtain the vaccinations in your home country, you can also make an appointment with the Student Health Center upon arrival. For more information on these immunization requirements, please visit the [Thomson Student Health Center website](#).



## Student Health Insurance & Health Services

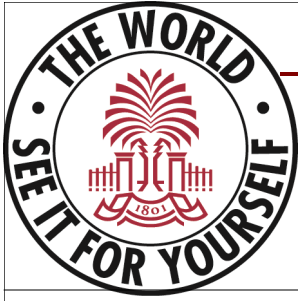
For international students, it is required that you have health insurance. The USC [health insurance](#) coverage is automatically charged to your USC student account. The USC insurance costs approximately \$660 for fall semester, or \$960 for spring semester. If you already have health insurance coverage from your home country that will cover you while you are studying abroad in the U.S., you are eligible to waive the health insurance and have that charge removed from your account, provided your coverage meets the same minimum requirements. In order to do so, you will need to complete the [waiver form](#) and submit proof of insurance coverage from your home country (translated into English). To see the minimum requirements for health insurance, please visit [USC's health insurance website](#).

### **Thompson Student Health Center**

Students are eligible to receive routine treatment, women's care appointments and physicals at the [Thomson Student Health Center](#) on-campus. The Health Center also offers specialized services such as Radiology, a Nutritionist, an Allergy Clinic, and a Sports Medicine Clinic. General, routine visits are usually free for students. Specialized visits may require payment or referral to a doctor off-campus. For more information and to schedule an appointment, you can refer to the Center's website.

### **Counseling and Human Development Center**

Students are eligible for 12 free individual counseling sessions per year. The [Counseling Center](#) also offers free support groups— some general and some with specific themes such as writing therapy, food-related issues or relationship problems. The Center also provides self-help resources and stress management workshops and events throughout the semester.



# Course Registration/Housing

## Course Selection

Course offerings can be found on-line at [http://registrar.sc.edu/html/Course\\_Listings/](http://registrar.sc.edu/html/Course_Listings/). You will need to select courses from the Columbia campus. Please note that undergraduate students should only choose classes at the 400 level or below. Graduate students can select courses at the 500 level and above. Generally, class names are followed by the course number which serves as the level indicator. For example, Biology 101 is an introductory course for first year students, 200 level courses are for 2nd year students, 300 level for 3rd year students, and 400-level are for final year (4th year graduating) students, with some overlap in upper range course numbers. Essentially, the higher the course number, either the higher level the class or the more specialized the topic. All exchange students must take at least **12 credit hours (typically four 3-credit classes), but no more than 16 hours**. Exchange students wishing to take more than 16 hours are responsible for paying tuition for the additional hours. **\*\*Please note, the Study Abroad Office at USC cannot register you for courses until your Immunization Form is complete and submitted to us.**

If you would like to make changes to your course schedule, they may not be made until **after the Exchange Student Orientation**. Prior to arrival, we will work on your behalf to get you into the classes you requested and provide you with a full time schedule (12 credit hours). This typically involves many steps, such as providing transcripts to the appropriate department, calling/emailing professors, etc. If you decide to make any changes to your schedule once you arrive, you will be responsible for taking the steps necessary to add the class. The first week of class is an “add-drop” period for all students to finalize schedules. Courses which are full may become open during this period, but it is never guaranteed that a closed course will become available.

## Housing

Once you have been accepted by USC, a study abroad advisor will help you request housing. **It is mandatory that all exchange students live on campus while they are studying at USC.** Please note that on-campus housing is very limited, and therefore students may not receive their first housing preference.

Exchange students may be assigned to:

- [International House at Maxcy College](#) - a special learning community designed to enhance intercultural experiences through matching international students with American roommates
- [French House](#) (Located on one designated floor of the International House at Maxcy College. For students with an interest in the French language)
- [Bates House](#)
- [The Quads](#)
- [Thornwell/Woodrow/DeSaussure](#)

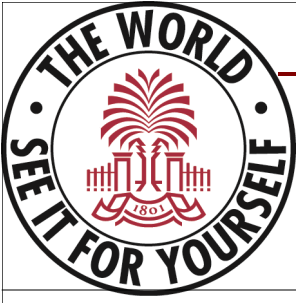
You can view the housing options and take a virtual tour at <http://www.housing.sc.edu/virtualtour/>. The costs for the different housing options can be found at <http://www.housing.sc.edu/rates.html>.

All exchange students will be placed in halls which remain open during university holidays. All halls either have private or shared kitchens so students can prepare their own meals. Final housing placements for the Fall semester won't occur until the summer and we will not be able to confirm your housing until July or August. Spring assignments will be released in December.



South Quad Residence Hall





# *Before You Arrive*

## **Financial Matters and Budgeting**

It is always a good idea to have some U.S. dollars with you upon your arrival. The Columbia airport does not have a currency exchange booth, though if you are flying through a major airport, you should be able to find one during your trip.

The university will provide estimated expenses prior to the application deadline. These estimates include most living expenses like housing, food, books, health insurance, and other miscellaneous expenses, but do not include personal travel. Some courses also carry fees and these can vary in amount from \$45-\$250. A few examples of these courses are language, art, journalism, sports, etc., however this is not a complete list. Please be aware that every USC student is responsible for any course fees and unfortunately, exchange students are no exception. In addition to the cost of your housing assignment, you will also be responsible for the following fees for each semester you are at USC:

Post Office Box Fee—\$20.00  
Security Network Fee — \$76.00

Residence Hall Activity Fee — \$50.00  
Rental Insurance — approximately \$200.00

USC offers several meal plan options at a variety of on-campus dining locations. Students who do not wish to purchase a standard meal plan may use their Carolina Card or cash to purchase individual meals at Campus dining facilities. Meal plan costs range from approximately \$715-1420 for the semester. For meal plan options and current prices visit <http://www.sc.edu/dining/plans/index.html>.

Some international students find it convenient to open a bank account in the U.S. Banking representatives will be available to provide information and account assistance during the orientation week. Bank of America and Wells Fargo Bank are two major banks that have ATMS on campus and branches within walking distance. You can also check with your financial institution in your home country to see about fees and usability of your debit card in the U.S.

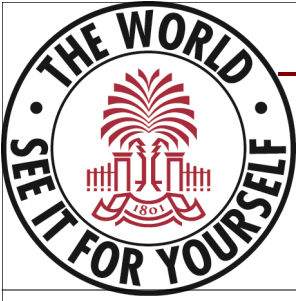
## **Paying your Bill**

Before you arrive on campus, your bill will not have been changed to reflect your exchange student status. Exchange students **DO NOT** pay any USC fees until they arrive on campus and have attended the **mandatory exchange student session**. At this session, you will learn how to pay your bill. Students can pay their bill using cash, an American check, through a US bank account, money order, American Express, or Mastercard. **\*\*Payments by credit card are subject to an additional 2.5%, and Visa credit cards are not accepted.** Students are also able to arrange a payment installment plan, which requires a \$75 set-up fee and four payments of 25% each using cash, check or money order (students cannot use credit card for the installment plan).

## **Packing**

Temperatures in Columbia are fairly mild throughout the year. During the winter months of November-February, temperatures may drop as low as 30 degrees Fahrenheit; however, in the summer months of June-September, temperatures can reach over 100 degrees Fahrenheit with high humidity. You will have access to laundry facilities so it is a good idea to pack light. You will need to have a warm coat, gloves and a hat for the winter months and rain gear, including an umbrella, for the spring months. Also keep in mind that the beach is a short drive away so you may want to include a swimsuit.

The apartments on campus are furnished but not stocked. You will need to provide your own bedding and towels. While the kitchen is not stocked, some international students are able to rely on their American roommates to provide kitchenware, or they purchase items at Wal-Mart or similar stores. Students can either bring bedding, towels, etc. with them or order them through several stores online and have the items delivered to their PO Box on campus. Some options to look into are <http://www.target.com/> and <http://www.walmart.com/>. There will be several trips to Wal-Mart offered during the arrival weekend and the first week of classes.



# Getting Around

## Transportation

Transportation in Columbia, and throughout the U.S., may be very different from that of your home country. You may be accustomed to using public transportation such as buses, trains and subways to get around your home city. Although there is a limited public [bus transit system](#) in Columbia, you will most likely need to rely on walking to get around campus and the surrounding area. Most U.S. students do have cars on-campus so once you meet other students, you may be able to ask them for a ride off-campus.

USC also offers [Hertz on Demand](#), which provides hourly and daily car rental for qualified student drivers.

USC campus is very walkable, but it quite large. There is a comprehensive and efficient [USC shuttle bus system](#). Some exchange students also decide to purchase new or used bicycles to navigate the campus or city. The campus is within walking distance of the [Five Points district](#), which has a supermarket bike shop, and stores specializing in electronics, clothing, gifts, and music, along with numerous cafes, restaurants, and nightlife options.



*Students waiting for the USC campus shuttle*



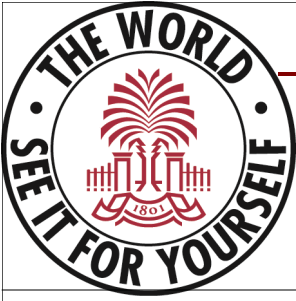
## Area Airports & Regional Transportation

There is an airport in [Columbia](#), but more than likely you will first fly into one of the nearby international airports in [Atlanta](#) or [Charlotte](#). After arriving at the international airport you will either take a connecting flight to Columbia or make arrangements for transportation to Columbia from those airports. It is recommended that you take a connecting flight to the Columbia airport. More information about area transportation can be found below.

Keep in mind that the Columbia airport is about a 25 minute drive from campus. You can request arrival pick-up (p. 11), but if you do not make other arrangements for airport pick-up, you will need to have U.S. dollars for a taxi. A taxi from the airport to USC costs approximately \$30-40 USD, before leaving tip.

If you're interested in travelling around the Southeastern US, there is limited regional bus transportation, such as [Greyhound](#), [Southeastern Stages](#), or [Megabus](#). National train service is provided by [Amtrak](#). We recommend that you compare costs on all modes of transportation when making travel plans. If you fly out of the Charlotte airport, the [Columbia-Charlotte Shuttle](#) provides pickup and drop-off at reasonable rates.





# The Arrival Process



## Arrival Assistance

Upon acceptance, the Study Abroad Office will send you the specific mandatory arrivals. Exchange students are required to arrive on these days. Please email your study abroad advisor your exact time of arrival so that we may know when to expect you. You may make arrangements for someone to meet you at the Columbia Metropolitan Airport (CAE) by completing an application through the [Columbia Council for Internationals](#). Please complete the application a minimum of 10 days before arrival. If your flight schedule changes, please email CCFI at [info@columbiacfi.org](mailto:info@columbiacfi.org) to give us your new flight information. Arrival assistance is not available from Charlotte or Atlanta.

If you plan to arrive before the designated arrival days, you must make arrangements to stay in a hotel until the residence halls open. You may find information on local hotels by visiting [http://www.sc.edu/visitorcenter/jsp/Public/visitor\\_accommodations.jsp](http://www.sc.edu/visitorcenter/jsp/Public/visitor_accommodations.jsp). Additionally, if you will arrive to campus after 5pm on the designated arrival days, you should also make arrangements to stay at a hotel. Please come check in at the Study Abroad Office between 8:30 and 4:30 on the arrival days. Your study abroad advisor will assist you with move-in, obtaining your Carolina Card and residence hall keys and setting your network log-in for internet usage.

### **Please bring the following documents with you to the Study Abroad Office upon arrival:**

- I-20 or DS-2019
- I-94 (you will be given this form at the airport)
- Passport with Visa
- SEVIS fee payment receipt (if available)

## Getting your Carolina Card (University ID card)

All new students will be issued a USC student card called the “Carolina Card” upon arrival. This card serves as a student ID, your key to your residence hall, library card, and allows access to a variety of on campus services such as dining, photocopying, health services, bookstore, etc. For more information on the Carolina Card, see the [Carolina Card website](#).

## Mandatory Exchange Student Orientation

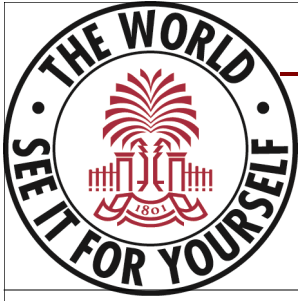
The Study Abroad Office holds a mandatory orientation session at the beginning of each semester. This session will give us a chance to meet and discuss exchange student specific information and answer any questions that you may have for us regarding USC life, Columbia and its surroundings. We will cover health insurance requirements, how to use VIP, campus safety, ways to get involved on campus, and academic differences at USC. The International Student Office will also cover how to stay in status and immigration requirements.

## Emergency Contact Information

In the event of an emergency, your parents or home university should call the Study Abroad Office at 803-777-7557. If it is after business hours, they should call USC Campus Police at 803-777-4215 and the police will contact the appropriate Study Abroad Office staff. For all emergencies in the US, you should call 911.







# After You Arrive

## Preparing to Live in the U.S./Columbia

As much as you may feel familiar with U.S. culture through music, movies or TV shows, actually living in the U.S. will be an adjustment. To help you prepare for this cultural adjustment, you can read more about [culture shock](#) and how to adjust to living in a foreign country. Keep in mind that legal drinking age in the U.S. is 21, and that offenses are taken very seriously. Violations of any kind are reported to the USC [Office of Student Conduct](#). Drinking on campus and the consequences will be discussed in more detail during Orientation.

## Buying Books

The course syllabus that you receive during the first class meeting will include a required book or reading list. You can then purchase or rent your books at the [University of South Carolina Bookstore](#), other bookstores near campus, or online at sites like [amazon.com](#) or [ebay.com](#). Students are able to re-sell some textbooks at the end of the semesters.

## Student Involvement & Recreation Opportunities

Joining student organizations on campus is a great way to get involved and meet other students. You could join an international student organization, an intramural sports team, a singing group, or almost anything else you may be interested in. For more information about student organizations, click [here](#).

In addition to getting involved in student organizations, you can also take advantage of a variety of [recreation facilities](#) on campus. The Strom Thurmond Wellness and Fitness Center is a world class facility that promotes physical fitness and a healthy well being. It boasts 5 basketball courts, 5 racquetball courts, 80 cardiovascular machines, a huge area full of strength training machines and free weights, an indoor track, an outdoor and an indoor pool, and sand volleyball courts. The Strom is truly a first class facility for all your fitness and recreational needs.

Not only is the University known for high-quality academics, but also a number of highly rated athletic teams. To cheer on your favorite sports team, you can refer to the [Gamecock Athletics](#) site for game times. Sporting events are a big part of the USC culture, especially Gamecock football and baseball, so be sure to try to attend at least one event while you are here.

## Academic Assistance

Academics in the U.S. may be quite different from your home country. Instructors in the U.S. expect active class participation and discussion from all students. Assignments usually include papers, group projects, and 2-3 exams per semester. Class attendance policies are usually strict and typically, more than 3 absences will result in a lower final grade. USC offers multiple (free!) resources for any students who may be having academic difficulties. The [Writing Center](#) can help with papers, [Academic Centers for Excellence](#) provides individual tutoring and success coaching, and the [Student Success](#) Center offers Supplemental Instruction sessions. These resources and more can help you maintain your grades and prevent you from falling behind in class while at USC!



*The Strom Thurmond Fitness and Wellness Center*