2017 J-1 Exchange Visitor Handbook
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Welcome to the University of Alabama at Birmingham, home of the UAB Blazers!

It is a great time to be in Birmingham. The population of the city center is increasing thanks to exciting new living and dining options in areas such as Parkside, the Loft District, and Lakeview, and we are proud of beautiful new green spaces such as Railroad Park, Rotary Trail, and Red Mountain Park. In summer 2017, the Maccabi Games come to Birmingham, and in 2021 Birmingham will host the World Games. There is more to see and do in Birmingham than ever before, and our job at ISSS is to make sure that you have the time and peace of mind to enjoy every opportunity.

UAB was instrumental in Birmingham’s urban renaissance and has helped the city transform from an industrial economy to one based largely on medical, legal, banking, and technical services. The international community plays a large and important role in the University’s continued success and in Birmingham’s international renown. We are glad to have you on campus!

Our dedicated staff has decades of experience advising international students and scholars on tax, immigration, and cultural issues. Please do not hesitate to drop by the international center or contact us at any time.

MORE ABOUT ISSS

International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS) facilitates international exchange and understanding through multicultural programs and services. We are the principal administrative and advising office for all international students and scholars. The role of ISSS is to expand and strengthen international ties among the individuals and academic programs on our campus and to encourage the exchange of ideas and information key to developing international awareness. Most importantly, ISSS advises individuals and academic departments on matters pertaining to federal rules and regulations affecting international scholars, including evaluating exchange program offer letters and funding, processing J-1 and H-1B immigration documentation, and providing orientation for newly-arrived scholars.

All new international scholars face similar situations upon their arrival, including finding accommodation, registering for classes, making friends, and learning where things are. This guide has been prepared especially to help international scholars adjust to life in the US and contains information about services, policies, and programs at UAB. Please read it carefully, and let us know if you have questions. We look forward to working with you!

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BRIEF ALABAMA OVERVIEW

Alabama becomes a second home to people from all over the world as they experience the southern hospitality of our beautiful state. With a population of over 4.8 million, our urban centers have a “big city” feel without the overwhelming pressure of living in a hectic environment. If you prefer the quiet of the country, that’s available, too. Alabama has the genteel flair of the old south mixed with the cutting-edge science and technology of the twenty-first century.

Originally explored by the Spanish in the sixteenth century, and later claimed by the French in the seventeenth century, southern Alabama reflects both French and Spanish influences in some of its traditions, architecture, and cuisine. For instance, Mobile has celebrated Mardi Gras since 1703. Southern Alabama is also a region of rare wetlands, sugar white beaches along the Gulf of Mexico, and biological restoration sites for sea turtles and other endangered species. Central Alabama is the home of Birmingham, with its major hospitals and research centers and historic sites from the Civil Rights era. Montgomery, Selma, and Tuskegee share in this historic legacy. Many state parks in central and north Alabama provide wonderful hiking, golfing, and camping options, giving our state the nickname “Alabama the Beautiful.” In northern Alabama, Huntsville houses the NASA Space and Rocket Center; Florence hosts the WC Handy Jazz Festival; and nearby Tuscumbia preserves the birthplace of Helen Keller.

TIME, TEMPERATURE, & WEATHER

Birmingham is in the Central Standard Time zone. Average yearly temperatures range from 27° C/81° F in the summer to 9° C/33° F in the winter. Local meteorologist James Spann, weatherman for Channel ABC 33/40, is something of a celebrity. He has his own Twitter feed (https://twitter.com/spann, @spann) and blog (www.alabamawx.com). When there is dangerous weather (severe thunderstorms, tornado) approaching, a civil defense siren will sound in the downtown area. Take cover, preferably in a basement room or interior hallway with no windows, and wait for the weather to pass. If you are listening to the radio, you will also likely hear three strange bursts of noise followed by what sounds like static. This sound pattern indicates that the National Weather Service will interrupt regular programming to issue a severe weather warning for certain counties for certain timeframes.

LOCAL AND REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION

AIRPORT

The Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport is about 20 minutes from downtown and offers direct flights to most major southern cities. For air travel outside the southeast, you will often need to make a connecting flight in Atlanta, or drive to Atlanta and fly directly from there (sometimes a less expensive option). The only international flights from Birmingham are to Mexico and the Caribbean. www.flybirmingham.com
BUS
- Max (Metro Area Express) provides bus service throughout metro Birmingham and trolley car ("Dart") lines in the downtown area. For schedules and routes, visit [www.bjcta.org](http://www.bjcta.org). Adult bus tickets cost $1.25. Carry exact change.
- Wanderu offers discounted tickets on multiple routes, including Birmingham to Atlanta [www.wanderu.com](http://www.wanderu.com).
- Akai Bus runs service to New York [www.akaibus.com](http://www.akaibus.com).
- Megabus runs from Birmingham to Atlanta and Memphis [www.us.megabus.com](http://www.us.megabus.com).

CAR
- **TAXI** (or “cab”) companies operating in the Birmingham metro area include:
  - American Cab Company, (205) 322-2222
  - Yellow Cab Company, (205) 328-4444
- **UBER** and **Lyft** are smartphone app-based car service companies providing immediate pick-up from local, independent drivers. You must provide a credit card number to use these apps.

TRAIN
- **AMTRAK** provides daily passenger train service throughout the US. The train station is located at 1 19th Street North, Birmingham, AL 35203, 1-800-872-7245. Many Birminghamians take the Crescent train to New Orleans (known as the “Crescent City”) for the weekend. For more information, visit [www.amtrak.com/crescent-train](http://www.amtrak.com/crescent-train) and [www.amtrak.com/servlet/ContentServer?pagename=am/am2Station/Station_Page&code=BHM](http://www.amtrak.com/servlet/ContentServer?pagename=am/am2Station/Station_Page&code=BHM).
GETTING AROUND

BY CAR

APPLYING FOR AN ALABAMA DRIVER LICENSE

It is illegal to drive in the US without carrying state-issued photo identification known as a driver license. All international scholars who are lawfully maintaining their immigration status can apply for an Alabama driver license. You must provide a vehicle for the road test. If you do not have an International Driver License (IDL), you must find a licensed driver to drive you to the office. We highly recommend that you carry your IDL if you have one—Alabama authorities may not accept your home country driver license without an accompanying IDL.

In Birmingham, all non-US citizens must apply for an Alabama driver license at the Alabama Department of Public Safety located at:

908 Bankhead Highway West
Birmingham, AL 35204
Phone: (205) 252-7445
http://dps.alabama.gov/home/DriverLicensePages/wfDLOffices.aspx

To obtain a driver license, you must pass both a written test and a road test. Practice driving the vehicle in an empty parking lot prior to taking the road test so that you’re comfortable driving before being tested. You must find a licensed driver who will drive you to the office and let you use the car for the road test. Proof of auto insurance is required. During the road test, an examiner will inspect the car to see that it is fully functional (e.g., that the horn, lights, brakes, and turn signals work) and then will ride with you in your car for few minutes to ensure that your vehicle is in good condition, you understand how the car works, and you obey traffic rules. The examiner will also ask you to perform basic driving maneuvers. The written and road tests are offered Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 4 p.m. You can schedule an appointment here: www.schedulealdl.com/SelfScheduler/Default.aspx, or try your luck and show up as early as possible. Tests are administered on a first-come, first-serve basis. A study guide is available here: http://dps.alabama.gov/documents/manuals/driverlicensemanual.pdf.
Bring the following documents with you to the Bankhead office to apply for the Alabama driver license:

- Valid passport with J-1 or J-2 visa
- Most recent I-94 card (print from https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/consent.html)
- Social Security Card (or tax form W-2 containing your SSN) [or “denial letter” from the Social Security Administration stating non-eligibility if you are unemployed (see below)]
- Current, signed Form DS-2019
- Employment Authorization Document (ONLY for J-2s with an EAD—the license expiration date will be based upon your EAD)
- $5 test or transfer fee (credit/debit card or cash only)
- Credit/debit card or cash for driver license fee (currently $36.25)
- Birth certificate (not technically required, but helpful just in case)

For more information, see http://dps.alabama.gov/Home/wfContent.aspx?ID=30&PLH1=plhDriverLicense-DocumentRequirementsAndFees.

Be aware that many local government offices are severely understaffed. While this is no excuse, you may encounter stressed, impatient, or even rude employees who do not display sensitivity toward other cultures. Please remain patient and calm, and try not to take such behavior personally.

If you do not have—or are ineligible to obtain—an SSN (for instance, if you are J-1 who is not receiving any financial support from UAB or are a J-2 dependent who is not employed), you must request a “denial letter” from the local Social Security Administration office, located at 1200 Reverend Abraham Woods, Jr. Boulevard, Birmingham, AL 35285. (You should drive or bike there; it is too far to walk from the UAB campus.) The office is open from 9:00 a.m. through 4:00 p.m. on Monday through Friday, except holidays. The denial letter should state that you are ineligible for an SSN. Present the denial letter along with the above documents at the Bankhead Highway office.

If you do not receive your license after 30 days, call the Driver License Division at (334) 242-4400.

**IMPORTANT**

A driver license cannot be renewed until within 30 days of its expiration date. In order to apply for or renew a driver license, you must have at least 160 days (not including grace periods) left in your immigration status as reflected by the program end date on your Form DS-2019.
BUYING A CAR

Buying from a car dealership:
- You may buy a new car or used car from a car dealership. Some dealerships have a single “make” (brand) focus, such as Toyota or Honda, while others sell multiple makes and models.
- Used cars available for purchase at a dealership are trade-ins: someone sold their old car to the dealership and then bought a new car from the dealership (gaining the trade-in value).
- Dealership-owned cars may be more expensive than cars purchased from an individual.
- The “sticker” price is the price literally stuck to the windshield of the car. Never pay the sticker price! You can always negotiate the price of the car lower.
- An used car salesman is a running joke in American culture. Do not be scammed or pressured by sales tactics. Take your time, ask all the questions you want, and negotiate the best possible price.

Buying from an individual:
- People will advertise their car for sale online (such as at www.craigslist.com), by taping flyers to telephone poles, or by posting on bulletin boards throughout campus.
- Beware: not all advertisements are legitimate, so use caution. If the offer sounds too good to be true, it probably is. The best advice is to walk away from such ads.
- Check the car’s value on Kelley Blue Book (www.kbb.com) or www.truecar.com to see if the advertised price is fair.
- Ask the seller for a CarFax report (www.carfax.com). If the seller refuses to provide one, ask for the car's VIN number and look it up online yourself. CarFax is not free, however it will provide information on the previous owner and reported car accidents.

If you are arrested for driving under the influence (“DUI”) of drugs or alcohol, your visa can be REVOKED. You may not be immediately notified of the revocation and may find out only after you travel abroad and try to re-enter the US. Please do NOT endanger your life or your visa status by participating in this illegal activity. Call a friend, call a taxi, or use the Uber or Lyft apps to find a ride home.
Before agreeing to purchase a car:

- Visually inspect the car. If you are not sure whether the car is in good condition, ask the owner to meet you at a mechanic shop and ask a mechanic to inspect the vehicle for you. Specifically look for:
  - Leaks – Look for dark stains or puddles under the car indicating that oil or brake fluid is leaking.
  - Body – Look for any type of rust or “bubbling” under the car’s paint. Check the wheel wells, door edges, and trunk floor and lid. Bring a small magnet and try attaching it to different exterior surfaces. If it does not stick, the car may have been repaired with temporary plastic parts, possibly after an accident.
  - Steering – Before turning on the ignition, unlock and turn the steering wheel. There should not be a lot of motion or “play.” When driving, the steering column should not vibrate.
  - Engine and Transmission – The car should start and accelerate smoothly. If there is any bucking, skipping, hesitation, or noise, the car will probably need expensive repairs. Gears should shift smoothly and quietly.
  - Tires – Bald tires, or multiple brands of tires, on a car whose odometer reads only 10,000 miles could mean that the odometer has been “rolled back” or disconnected. Check for uneven tire wear indicating an accident or alignment problem. Examine the trunk and spare tire equipment. Make sure all the necessary parts of the jack are there and that there are no water leaks in the trunk.
  - Suspension – Push and pull the top of each front tire. If it moves or makes a noise, the bearings or suspension joints could be badly worn. Push down with your body weight on each fender and make the car bounce up and down a few times. Then give the car one more downward push and release it; the car should bounce back up and stop moving. If the car does not level off and continues to bounce, it may need repairs or new shock absorbers.
  - Interior – Check window controls, seat belts, seat adjusters, warning lights, wipers, washers, radio, heater, and air conditioner. Check the seats for comfort, broken springs, and torn seat covers. Have a friend stand in front of and behind the car while you turn on the headlights, turn signals, parking lights, and brake lights. Look at the rubber pedal pads; if they are greatly worn or new, but the car has low mileage, ask questions. Check along window seams for water leaks.
  - Alignment – Drive straight, through a puddle if possible, with a friend standing behind the car. The front and rear wheels should follow each other in a straight line. If the car moves even slightly to one side, then it was probably in an accident and has a bent frame. This is very expensive to repair. Do not buy the car!
  - Brakes – Drive the car at 45 mph on a quiet road and apply the brakes firmly without locking them. Do this three times. The car should come to a quick stop without swerving, and the brakes should not vibrate or grab. When you stop the car completely, push the brake pedal down. It should stop well above the floor. If it goes down close to the floor or feels spongy, there may be a brake fluid leak or problems with the master cylinder. These repairs can be very expensive.
  - Oil Use – After the engine has warmed up, drive the car at highway speed and take your foot off the gas pedal for a few seconds. Then, press the gas pedal down hard for two seconds and have a friend look for exhaust smoke. Blue smoke means the car is burning oil. Black smoke means the fuel system may need a minor adjustment.

Do not provide any type of payment or deposit to see and/or test drive a vehicle! Pay for the vehicle only when you take possession of it.
• Take the car on a test drive.
• Check the odometer. Unscrupulous sellers will try to roll back the mileage on a car to make it seem younger or have less wear and tear on it than it truly does.
• Ask if the car has ever been in an accident.
• Inquire about the car’s title (record or chain of ownership). If the car has a “salvaged” title, it was in an accident and deemed a total loss by an insurance company. Cars with salvaged titles are difficult to insure in Alabama, and proof of auto insurance is required by law.

AUTO INSURANCE

Alabama law requires all drivers to carry liability insurance to help pay for any damage or injury you cause to others in a car accident. Your policy must cover at least $25,000 for bodily injury or death per person or $50,000 total for bodily injury or death per accident. More information is available at www.revenue.alabama.gov/motorvehicle/pdf/mlimanual.pdf.

BY BICYCLE

With the opening of the new Rotary Trail and arrival of the Zypbike bikeshare program, cycling is becoming an increasing popular pastime and mode of transportation in Birmingham. Exercise caution when biking in the downtown area, and stay within marked bike lanes. Biking on sidewalks is not allowed.

You will find ads for used bikes in the classified advertising section. See the UAB Reporter, Kaleidoscope, or Thrifty Nickel (http://birmingham.thriftynickel.com/). Used bikes are also sold at garage/yard sales, which are advertised by yard signs on street corners, flyers taped to telephone poles, and at http://classifieds.al.com/.

If you can’t borrow a bike or buy one from a friend or colleague, the following businesses have a great selection:

Bob’s Bikes
1944 28th Avenue South
Homewood, AL 35209
(205) 879-2258
www.bobs-bikes.com

Cahaba Cycles (multiple locations, new and used)
2834 18th Street South
Homewood, AL 35209
(205) 879-3244
http://cahabacycles.com/

Wal-Mart Supercenter
209 Lakeshore Pkwy
Homewood, AL 35209
www.walmart.com

Redemptive Cycles
1305 2nd Avenue North
Birmingham, AL 35205
(205) 224-5631
www.redemptivecycles.com/

Birmingham Ride Share Facebook page: www.facebook.com/groups/bhamridefinder/

Redemptive offers weekly rides every Thursday at 6:00 p.m., rain or shine. www.redemptivecycles.com/group-ride-calendar
AVOID THEFT!! Locks are available at all bike shops and at department stores. UAB Police advise buying a lock that cannot be cut with bolt cutters and strongly suggest keeping your bicycle inside your house or apartment when you’re home.

Zypbike

Zypbikes are bright green bicycles found at solar-powered charging stations all over the downtown and Southside areas. By purchasing a card, downloading the Zypbike app, or using a key fob, you can unlock bikes across the city and ride them to another Zypbike station near your destination. You can rent the bikes for various timeframes (e.g., $6 for a 24-hour membership, $20 for a 7-day membership) or become a member and have fulltime access to the bikes. Bikes must be turned in to another docking station within 45 minutes or overage charges will apply, but you can as many times a day as you like. If the station you want to dock the bike at is full, you can still leave the bike there by following instructions on the kiosk screen. Learn more at www.zypbikeshare.com/pricing/occasional and www.zypbikeshare.com/.

Rotary Trail

Birmingham’s Rotary Club reclaimed a stretch of abandoned railroad track and opened a half-mile walking and biking trail. Look for the landmark “Rotary Trail in the Magic City” sign on 20th Street at the intersection of 1st Avenue South. www.traillink.com/trail/rotary-trail.aspx

FINDING ACCOMMODATIONS

Most international scholars who live off campus will rent an apartment or house. A rental agreement is often called a lease. Some leases are month-to-month (meaning you can leave after any given month, with no obligation to keep renting a particular dwelling for any specific length of time), some are for 6 or 9 months, and some are for a year or two. Consider how long you want to live in a certain place before signing a longer lease. Some rental companies will also allow you to move in or out only in certain months. Since this is a university campus, many will want you to start your lease in August or early September and move out the following July. You may also have to pay a security deposit (usually equal to one month’s rent) up front—the rental company
will hold this money for repairs in the event you damage the apartment. When visiting an apartment complex or rental house, ask the agent the following questions so that you can make the best decision on where to live, and for how long.

- How much is the monthly rent, and on what day is it due?
- Can I pay rent online, or do I need to bring a check?
- Does the monthly rent include any utilities (e.g., water, electricity, gas, phone (if you want a landline), cable/satellite TV, internet)? If so, which ones?
- Do you require a security deposit? If so, is the security deposit refundable at the end of the lease?
- How long are your rental terms (month-to-month, 6 months, one year)?
- What will I owe if I have to break my lease before the end of the agreement?
- Does the lease renew automatically? If so, when will I be notified of any increase in rent?
- How much notice do you require if I plan to move out when the lease ends?
- Can I sublet (find another, temporary tenant whose name is not on the lease) the apartment/house if I leave the area for a brief period or the summer? If yes, what is the procedure?
- Are there laundry facilities? If not, where is the nearest laundromat (a public/community laundry facility)?
- Do you offer furnished apartments?
- Where is the nearest grocery store?
- Can I hang wall decorations with nails? (Some landlords do not allow this, or will deduct a certain amount from your security deposit to repair nail holes.)
- If parking is available, is it in a garage, parking lot, or street? Is the parking area secured?
- Is parking covered in the rent, or is there an extra charge?
- Are there an assigned number of parking spaces per unit?
- Are pets allowed? Is there a maximum size? Weight? Height? Type?
- Is there a pet deposit? How much is it? Is it refundable?
- Do you have childcare facilities? If so, what does it cost?
- Where is the nearest school or daycare?
- Where is the nearest playground or park?

When looking for an apartment or house, find a place where you will be comfortable for the duration of your time renting. You will enter a formal agreement, called a lease, with a landlord (owner or manager of the apartment), or with UAB housing if you choose to live on campus. A lease is a contract under which a landlord allows you (a tenant) temporary use of a dwelling in return for monthly payments (rent). A lease is a legally binding obligation. Make sure you feel safe, happy, and comfortable where you plan to live. If you make a bad decision and want to move before the end of the lease, you may have to pay the remaining months’ rent in order to get out of your lease.

Apartments and houses are for rent all over downtown and Southside. Below are some starting points for finding rental accommodation. ISSS does not endorse or recommend any particular rental company or apartment complex.
• www.20midtown.com
• www.al.com
• www.apartmentfinder.com
• www.apartments.com
• https://bham.craigslist.org
• www.birmingham-apartment.com (J.H. Berry & Gilbert, Inc.)
• Birmingham News (published in print editions on Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday)
• www.crowneontenth.com
• www.H2realestate.com
• www.uab.edu/studentmedia/kaleidoscope
• www.liveonhighland.com
• http://livewithdwell.com (Dwell Properties)
• www.philbostanyrealty.com (a/k/a Redmont Realty Group)
• www.rent.com
• www.rentmonster.net (ask for Jesse)
• www.selectmyspace.com
• www.thelplaceapts.com (University Place Apartments)
• UAB Reporter
• http://uhbirmingham.com/ (University House)
• www.universityflats.net
• www.zillow.com/birmingham-al/apartments/
• If you need any more suggestions or have questions, email Sarah Scott at scottsj@uab.edu - she is very familiar with housing in the area.

The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in accommodation based on race, color, religion, sex, gender, national origin, disability, and family status. Notify ISSS immediately if you experience discrimination during your housing search.
**TIPS FOR FINDING A ROOMMATE**

Finding someone to share your apartment or house is not only a good idea financially (you can split the rent!), but is also an easy way to meet new people, avoid loneliness, and share experiences. However, there are many cultural and lifestyle considerations to think about before asking a stranger to share your home. Before beginning a roommate search, describe the kind of person you would want to find in your home after a long day in the lab, at the library, or in lectures. Then describe the kind of person you would not want to find in your home.

Once you have an idea of your perfect roommate, post an ad on the department bulletin board, in the campus newspaper, on websites such as [www.craigslist.com](http://www.craigslist.com) or [www.roommates.com](http://www.roommates.com), and on social media. Ask your friends and colleagues if they know anyone looking to share an apartment or house.

Before deciding who to live with, interview each potential roommate thoroughly. On the phone or over coffee, discuss:

- **Sleep habits:** are you a night person or a morning person? Different schedules could negatively affect your sleep and studies.
- **Visitors:** especially during the week and on days when you have a morning class. This includes girlfriends/boyfriends and possible “sleepovers.”
- **Chores:** Who will take out the trash? Are you a neat freak? Who will clean the bathroom?
- **Personal belongings:** Will everyone have use of the furniture in common areas? Who has a TV? Does someone have a special chair they don’t want anyone else to sit in? Would you prefer your roommate and guests to remove their shoes when in your home?
- **Smoking:** If your apartment or house does not have a porch, deck, or patio, will you allow smoking in the house? Some leases will contain a no-smoking policy.
- **Pets:** number? Kind? Size? Does your house/complex allow pets?
- **“Significant others”** (boyfriend/girlfriend): If the potential roommate is in a relationship, clarify whether their partner will be moving in, too, and if so, what part of the rent they will pay.
- **Religious dietary restrictions:** Vegetarian? Kosher? Halal? Alcohol? Can everyone agree on food storage and preparation and be respectful of each other’s needs?

Also consider asking a potential roommate for the contact information of their previous landlords and/or employers, or for a list of personal references. Contact the listed individuals to learn more about the potential roommate, such as why their previous lease/employment ended, were any complaints received about the potential roommate, and whether they paid rent on time and in the full amount.
Discuss the amount of rent, the monthly due date, and any required security deposit before your roommate moves in. Remember: your best friend may not always be the best roommate! Living with someone can be very different from hanging out with them on weekends or chatting in the breakroom.

What would you do if all your personal possessions - laptop, TV, Xbox, cell phone, mp3 player, calculator, textbooks, clothing - were stolen or destroyed in a flood, fire, or burglary?

We hope you never experience such a loss, but just in case... **GET RENTER’S INSURANCE!**

**YOUR RESIDENTIAL ADDRESS**

Every time you move, you **MUST** update your address via [www.uab.edu/blazernet](http://www.uab.edu/blazernet) and email the ISSS office within 10 days. ISSS must update your residential address in SEVIS (the government database where your DS-2019 is “housed”) within 21 days of notification.


**RENTER’S INSURANCE**

Many companies offer renter’s insurance to students. For example, National Student Services, Inc. ([www.nssi.com](http://www.nssi.com)) provides property insurance to students living in residence halls, off-campus apartments, and houses. Their Student Personal Property Plan covers clothing, textbooks, musical instruments, computers, furniture, appliances, technology, cameras and lenses, etc. Choose an amount of coverage that will allow to replace all of your most important items in the event of loss. ISSS does not endorse or recommend any particular rental insurance policy.

**FOR J-1 STUDENTS: ACADEMIC STUDY IN THE US**

US universities in general reflect the Constitutional value of freedom of speech, which emphasizes political and cultural democracy, competition, participation, and standards of fairness for all.
Course Load

US immigration regulations require J-1 students to be enrolled full-time each semester. Different program levels have different numbers of credit hours necessary to be considered full-time. Students studying in the Academic English program must enroll in 18 credit hours per semester. Undergraduate students must enroll in 12 credit hours per semester. Graduate students must enroll in 9 credit hours per semester. Please understand that these course requirements are the minimum necessary for immigration purposes, and different departments or programs may require additional coursework. For example, a typical undergraduate student course load ranges from 15-18 hours, while a typical graduate course load could be 12 hours.

Attendance Policies

Most professors and instructors will outline their attendance policy in the course syllabus (list of rules and requirements) provided during the first week of class. Pay attention to these: failure to attend classes can result in a failing grade, and failing to attend enough classes can result in your I-20 being revoked. When you must miss a class, inform the professor or instructor according to class policy.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is taking someone else’s words or ideas without acknowledging the source. In the US, it is not acceptable to incorporate the words of other scholars into your own work without clearly attributing it. The consequences of plagiarism can be severe (including receiving a failing grade and/or being dismissed from your program). If you are unsure when or how to cite borrowed words or ideas, ask your instructor.

Class Instruction

Methods of instruction vary according to professor, department, and class. Often, introductory classes will consist of formal lectures, while upper-level classes may use a seminar-style discussion format. Professors usually expect students to ask questions during or at the end of class.

Assessment/Evaluation

Assessment involves a variety of methods, ranging from multiple-choice exams to essay questions. Instructors have the authority to assign grades. Your performance will be evaluated according to criteria distributed early in the semester. If you disagree with your final grade, ask to meet with your instructor to review the assessment together.

Class Participation

In US classrooms, discussion is often considered a vital part of the learning process, and students are encouraged to participate by contributing their ideas and opinions. Some courses will count class participation toward your final grade.

Tips for Academic Success

- Introduce yourself to professors and instructors
- Seek help when you need it.
- Keep up with out-of-class assignments.
FULL COURSE OF STUDY

Credit Hours

The courses a student completes at UAB are measured in "credits." The number of credits a course is worth usually depends on the number of hours per week that the class meets. The academic year at UAB is comprised of three parts: fall semester (15 weeks), spring semester (15 weeks), and summer [divided into a 4-week May mini-term, a 14-week summer session, a 10-week summer session, and 7-week Summer A & B sessions].

Federal immigration regulations require J-1 exchange students to maintain full-time student status by enrolling in a sufficient number of credit hours each semester.

Graduate students: 9 credit hours
Undergraduate students: 12 credit hours

Students also must earn a specified number of credit hours in order to graduate from UAB. Graduation requirements can be found in the UAB Catalog (www.uab.edu/students/academics/catalogs) and by consulting your Academic Advisor.

J-1 students must enroll full-time for 9 consecutive months each year, or 2 consecutive semesters. (If counting summer term as part of the 9 months, you may enroll in the May mini-term.) If you withdraw from courses without prior permission from ISSS, you will violate your immigration status. You cannot audit a class or withdraw. You must earn grades or pass/fail in all of your coursework.

J-1 students can be enrolled at UAB as either degree-seeking or non-degree seeking students.

BIRMINGHAM SCHOOL SYSTEM

The Birmingham school system offers a wide variety of public, private, and specialty schools. Public schools are free to attend, and you can register your children online anytime. To attend a public school, you will have to be “zoned” for that school. This means that your place of residence will determine which public school your child can attend. Private schools are not free to attend and sometimes require a supplemental application to determine whether your child qualifies to attend. You do not have to be “zoned” for a private school.

There are many options for public school transportation. There is a bus system for public schools that will pick up and take home your children every day. Private schools often do not provide transportation to and from school.
US schools get the privilege of enjoying something that we call “Spring Break.” All public and private schools and universities will get a Spring Break. This is a week-long vacation usually during the month of March when schools shut down and students get a break from classes. The dates vary from school to school. Learn when your child’s Spring Break is so that you can plan accordingly.

Birmingham’s schools are highly acclaimed and will offer your children an excellent education and a safe environment. Please research your options and make the best decision based on your situation.

Follow these links to research the school rankings in Birmingham to choose the best option for your child:
https://www.niche.com/k12/rankings/public-school-districts/best-overall/m/birmingham-metro-area/

Follow these links to research our school systems and register your child for school:
http://www.jefcoed.com/home
http://www.bhamcityschools.org/Page/1

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR J-1 STUDENTS

The US Department of State has established two types of J-1 student employment authorization. You must obtain written approval from a J-1 advisor in the ISSS office prior to beginning employment.

STUDENT EMPLOYMENT

J-1 student employment is limited to 20 hours per week, except during school breaks and annual vacation. ISSS can approve employment in increments of 12 months. J-1 students may also obtain off-campus work authorization when “serious, urgent, and unforeseen economic circumstances” arise after their arrival in the US or after a change of status to J-1. Contact ISSS for more information.
ACADEMIC TRAINING

The US Department of State defines certain types of study-related employment as “academic training.” It is available part-time during your J-1 program of study, full-time during verified vacation, and full-time after graduation. Academic training undertaken during your program of study will be subtracted from the time remaining for post-graduate academic training. To qualify for academic training work authorization:

1. Your primary purpose in the US must be study, rather than academic training.
2. You must be in good academic standing at the school listed on your Form DS-2019.
3. The proposed employment must be directly related to your major field of study.
4. Throughout your academic training, you must maintain authorization to stay in the US in J-1 student status and apply for extensions as necessary.
5. You must maintain health insurance coverage for yourself and any J-2 dependents throughout your Academic Training.

Academic training is limited to 18 months or the time you have been in J-1 student status, whichever is shorter. However, if you earn a doctoral degree, you may be eligible for 36 months of post-doctoral training (minus any academic training time used before the degree was awarded). This authorization will be granted in two 18-month increments. Consult ISSS to obtain authorization. Authorization will be employer-specific.

Employment of J-2 Dependents

J-2 dependents may obtain work authorization (commonly called an “EAD”) by filing an application with United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. They must demonstrate that the income derived from their employment will be “used to support the family’s customary recreational and cultural activities and related travel.” J-2 income cannot be used to support the primary J-1 student or scholar.

ITIN OR SSN?

Depending on the type of financial support you receive while in the US, you will need to apply for one of two tax numbers: an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) or a Social Security Number (SSN).

To receive any type of scholarship/fellowship (trainee) payments from UAB, you will need an ITIN. If you have a graduate, research, or teaching assistantship, or other on-campus employment not classified as traineeship or fellowship, you should apply for an SSN. If you are not sure how your position is classified, please verify this with your department. (If you already have an SSN or are in the process of obtaining one, you are ineligible for an ITIN.) Regardless of which number you need, you must make an appointment with the ISSS Non-Resident Alien (NRA) Tax Analyst, who will assist you in completing the proper forms to make sure you can receive your payments and comply with US federal and state tax regulations governing international scholars.
If you need an ITIN, bring the following documentation to your appointment:

- Original passport, visa, Form I-94 (print from https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94), and Form DS-2019
- A copy of all of the above (only biographical page and expiration date page of passport needed)
- Social Security denial letter (must be obtained at the Social Security Administration office located at 1200 8th Avenue North, Birmingham AL 35285)
- Copy of your scholarship, fellowship, or traineeship document (if a J-1 student) or your departmental offer letter from UAB (if a J-1 scholar).


If you need an SSN, bring the following documentation to your appointment:

- Form SS-5, Application for Social Security Number (www.ssa.gov/forms/ss-5.pdf)
- Social Security On-Campus Employer Verification Form (your employer must complete page 1 before ISSS completes page 2)
- Original passport, visa, Form I-94 (print from https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94), and Form DS-2019
- Copies of the above (only biographical page and expiration date page of passport needed)

After meeting with the ISSS NRA Tax Analyst, take all of the above documents to the Social Security Administration office located at 1200 8th Avenue North. The office is open Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m.

TAXES

There is no flat-rate tax system in the US. All income and scholarship proceeds are taxed according to tables based on total annual income for the previous tax year. Some of the taxes you will see deducted from your paycheck may include federal income tax, FICA taxes, Alabama tax, and local taxes.

Each January or February, you will receive a tax form from UAB necessary to begin preparing to file your tax returns with the federal Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and the Alabama Department of Revenue. Tax returns for the year ending December 31, 2017 are due on Tuesday, April 17, 2018. See the ISSS NRA Tax Analyst for assistance in completing the proper forms to make sure you can receive your payments and comply with US federal and state tax regulations governing international students and scholars. Also read the weekly Globetrotter e-newsletter from ISSS for announcements about free tax preparation assistance.
IMMIGRATION MATTERS

Important Documents

Your passport, visa, Form I-94, and DS-2019 are the four most important documents for a successful stay in the US. If you lose any of these documents, contact ISSS immediately.

Passport: Your passport must be valid during your stay in the US. Six months prior to its expiration, apply for an extension through your embassy. If your country does not have an embassy in the US, you must travel home to renew your passport. Allowing this document to expire means you are in violation of your status, even if you have attended school as required by law. Your passport is your main form of identification in the US and should be kept with you at all times.

Visa: This stamp is located inside your passport and allows you only to enter the US. (Do not confuse this with Form DS-2019, which allows you to stay in the US.) Don’t worry if your visa expires after you enter the US; you must renew it only if you plan to travel outside the US and re-enter the US. Citizens of most—but not all—countries can renew visas in Canada, Mexico, or their home country. Other citizens are restricted from visa renewal in Canada or Mexico and must return to their home country to process a visa renewal. Ask ISSS if you are eligible for renewal in Canada or Mexico.

Visas have a specific number of entries indicated, such as 1, 2, or M. If your visa is stamped 1, you may enter the US only once before having to apply for a new visa. If your visa is stamped 2, you have only one entry remaining after you enter the US the first time. “M” stands for multiple (you can re-enter the US multiple times by presenting a recently endorsed DS-2019). If your multiple-entry visa expires, you can still visit Canada or Mexico for recreational or business purposes for fewer than 30 days without having to obtain a new visa. This is called “visa revalidation.” You cannot attempt to renew your visa while there!

I-94 Arrival Departure Record: This is your entry/departure record with US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). It confirms your entrance date and states how long you are allowed to remain in the US. The I-94 should indicate that you have been admitted in J visa status for “duration of status” (D/S). Duration of status is indicated by the Program End Date on your DS-2019. Please print a copy of your I-94 from https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html and provide it to ISSS. If you misplace or lose your I-94, simply print it again. When exiting the US, your departure information will be recorded by your airline and shared electronically with US Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

Form DS-2019: This document is your permission to stay in the US as a student or scholar exchange visitor. If your program of study takes longer than the Program End Date shown on your Form DS-2019, or if your department decides to sponsor you for additional research time, please make an appointment with ISSS at least 30 days in advance to extend your stay. Your academic advisor must provide information about your expected graduation date, and you must provide updated financial information. If you remain in the US more than 60 days beyond the Program End Date on your Form DS-2019, you are in violation of your non-immigrant visa status.
and must either leave the US immediately or (if you are a student) apply for reinstatement of your status (if eligible – you must do this within 5 months).

If you plan to travel outside the US, ISSS must endorse page 1 of the DS-2019 so that you will be allowed to re-enter the US. Alert ISSS at least 2-3 weeks before your planned department to learn about any necessary requirements for travel or updates in immigration issues.

**Maintaining Valid Non-Immigrant Status**

Maintaining status means that you are lawfully present in the US and eligible for all benefits available to J-1 students or scholars. Here are 11 easy steps to maintain your J-1 status.

1. Keep your passport valid at all times.
2. Attend the school you are authorized to attend, or participate in the research program identified in your departmental offer letter. If you entered the US on a Form DS-2019 issued by UAB, you must check in with ISSS before UAB can transfer your SEVIS record to another institution.
3. Notify ISSS if you are unable to complete your program by the Program End Date specified on your Form DS-2019. You must obtain an extension within 30 days before the date of expiration.
4. Notify ISSS if you intend to transfer to another institution.
5. Update your physical address with ISSS within 10 days of moving. Do not keep a mailing address or PO Box at UAB.

**INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL**

If you are a J-1 scholar, consult ISSS at least 2-3 weeks before you make international travel arrangements. Depending on whether you have a visa stamp valid for re-entry, ISSS may need to issue you a new Form DS-2019. You will need the following documents to re-enter the US after international travel:

- Form DS-2019 with travel signature
- Passport
- Valid visa stamp
RENEWING YOUR VISA

Before traveling internationally and re-entering the US, most J-1 exchange students and scholars whose visas have expired will need to return home and apply for a new visa at the US embassy or consulate in their home country. Before leaving the US, make an appointment online via the embassy/consulate website. Bring your valid Form DS-2019, unexpired passport, financial support documentation, and all additional documents advised by the embassy/consulate website.

If there is not a US embassy/consulate in your home country, consult the US Department of State website at https://travel.state.gov to obtain information about locations and procedures for renewal.

Citizens of certain countries can renew their visa in Canada or Mexico. Ask ISSS if you are eligible. You will need all documents listed for travel, as well as a Canadian or Mexican visa in order to go there. If your visa is denied in Canada or Mexico, you must return directly to your home country (not back to the US).

If you hold a research, graduate, or teaching assistantship, you must consult ISSS before traveling internationally. You may be subject to a background check due to sensitive areas of research, which can delay visa processing time and further delay your return to the US. It is important to notify both your faculty advisor and your employer about your intention to travel and possible delays.

HEALTH

You will receive your health clearance through the patient portal. In order to access your health information, you must set up your health portal online at www.uab.edu/studenthealth. A BlazerID is required.

STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES AND STUDENT HEALTH INSURANCE

Student Health Services provides outpatient care and covers routine visits to a physician (e.g., earaches, flu, minor emergency visits).

Student Health Insurance covers hospital stays and other expenses not covered by Student Health Services, such as when you have a baby, need to see a specialist, or visit the emergency room. ALL STUDENTS MUST PARTICIPATE IN THESE HEALTH PROGRAMS.

IMMUNIZATIONS

UAB requires all J-1 exchange students and certain J-1 scholars to have proof of certain immunizations (Measles, Mumps, Rubella; Tetanus, Diphtheria, Pertussis, Varicella, 2 Tuberculin Skin tests or 1 TB blood test; and, if you are 21 years old or younger, Meningitis). When you were admitted, you should have received an email from your department explaining the clearance process for immunizations and providing specific information on how to log into the online patient portal, complete the required forms, and submit your immunization documentation. You must have a BlazerID to access the patient portal. If you have not created your BlazerID, register for one at https://idm.uab.edu/bid/reg.
Students enrolled in the Joint Health Sciences program and in the Schools of Medicine, Dentistry, Optometry, Public Health, Nursing, and Health Professions must also provide documentation that they have received three Hepatitis B vaccines and a Hepatitis B surface antibody blood titer and undergo a physical examination within 12 months prior to matriculation. **ALL TB testing (skin, blood, or chest X-ray) must be performed in the US within 3 months prior to matriculation.***

If you do not have the required vaccinations prior to your arrival, Student Health Services can administer the immunizations for a fee. For specific information, see www.uab.edu/studenthealth/immunizations/level-3.

**HEALTH INSURANCE**

The US does not have a universal free healthcare system. **J-1 students scholars and their J-2 dependents are required by federal law to maintain insurance at all times.** Specifically, federal regulations require J-1s to obtain minimum coverage of medical benefits of at least $100,000 per accident or illness; repatriation of remains in the amount of $25,000; and expenses associated with the medical evacuation of exchange visitors to their home country in the amount of $50,000. Deductibles cannot exceed $500 per accident or illness.

The UAB School of Dentistry offers a dental insurance plan (available only in the fall term), or you can purchase an independent policy. VIVA insurance does not cover dental expenses.

**PHARMACIES**

In the US, many medicines cannot be purchased without a doctor’s recommendation, known as a prescription. Pharmacies (also known as drugstores) are the only resource licensed to sell prescription medicines. Bring your prescription from a doctor to any local pharmacy or to UAB Student Health & Wellness. Pharmacies also sell cosmetics, soap, shampoo, toothpaste, magazines, non-prescription medicines (known as “over-the-counter” medicines for common illnesses such as a cold, cough, fever, and allergies), candy, drinks, and snacks. There are many pharmacies close to UAB’s campus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pharmacy</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham Apothecary</td>
<td>1032 20th Street South</td>
<td>(205) 251-4248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVS</td>
<td>1431 11th Avenue South 3303 Clairmont Avenue South</td>
<td>(205) 933-8374  (205) 322-3055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harbin Discount Pharmacy</td>
<td>521 Richard Arrington Blvd. South</td>
<td>(205) 323-2474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walgreens</td>
<td>3020 Clairmont Avenue South 101 Green Springs Highway</td>
<td>(205) 323-6823 (205) 942-3668*** (This location is open 24 hours a day)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LAUNDROMATS

Laundromats are public laundry facilities with multiple washers and dryers, usually operated by coins. Bring a roll of quarters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laundromat</th>
<th>Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wash &amp; Go Coin Laundry</td>
<td>500 Palisades Boulevard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.washngoalabama.com">www.washngoalabama.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Laundromat</td>
<td>1169 11th Avenue South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aladdin Cleaners &amp; Laundry</td>
<td>1632 Montclair Road, Suite 1200 <a href="http://aladdincleaner.com/">http://aladdincleaner.com/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glen Iris Laundry</td>
<td>Corner of 11th Place and 16th Avenue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BANKS

Banks offer a variety of professional services, including checking and savings accounts, certificates of deposit (CDs), automatic teller machines (ATMs), electronic banking, credit and debit cards, investment services, and estate planning. When selecting a bank, it is important to determine which of these services are needed.

Shop around for the best interest rates and conditions of banking. Contact a bank’s Newcomer Services department to determine which services are available. Make sure you understand all terms and agreements and receive adequate instructions on how to use the banking services.

You must provide certain information to a bank in order to open an account: photo identification (such as your passport), personal data, a mailing address, and money to deposit into the account. Banks may also request a Social Security Number (SSN). It is advisable to obtain an SSN as soon as possible in order to open a bank account. Banks will accept an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) if you are ineligible for an SSN.

Checking Account

A checking account safeguards money while allowing for easy payment of expenses. Some banks require customers to maintain a minimum amount of funds in a checking account, and some charge monthly fees for the maintenance of your account. You withdraw and deposit cash into your checking account by inserting the ATM card provided by your bank into an ATM and entering your personal identification number (PIN). If you write a check or withdraw more money than is available in your account, you will be charged an overdraft fee. When writing checks, leave no areas blank.

Savings Account

A savings account is used to safeguard money for a prolonged period. A low rate of interest is paid on the balance. Certificates of Deposit (CDs) earn higher interest rates than savings accounts, but you cannot access your money for a specific period of time. The longer the money is left in the CD, the higher interest it pays.
**NOW Accounts**

Many banks offer NOW (notice of withdrawal) accounts that combine the features of checking and savings accounts. With a NOW account, the individual may write a certain number of checks each month; such accounts can be very handy for students who maintain a relatively high balance and write relatively few checks.

**Credit Cards**

Many banks offer a credit card with a charging limit. Credit cards are very convenient, but individuals should use them with caution. The amount charged to the card must be repaid, often at a high interest rate. Credit cards are best reserved for emergencies.

**Handling Money Safely**

Do not keep large sums of cash in your pockets, in your backpack or purse, or at home. Report a lost or stolen credit or debit card to your bank immediately so that no fraudulent charges will be put on your card.

**FOOD**

Birmingham is a culinary destination in the Southeast. Below is a selection of only some of the fantastic locally-owned restaurants and coffee houses in the Birmingham-Homewood-Mountain Brook area. Restaurants marked with an asterisk (*) are among the finest in the country (many of their chefs have been nominated for and/or received awards from the James Beard Foundation for culinary excellence) and are best suited for a special date night, graduation celebration, anniversary, or final interview dinner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Restaurant</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Cuisine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Al’s Deli &amp; Grill</td>
<td><a href="http://www.alsdeliandgrill.net/">www.alsdeliandgrill.net/</a></td>
<td>Gyros/Mediterranean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamboo on 2nd</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bambooon2nd.com">www.bambooon2nd.com</a></td>
<td>Sushi, Pho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becky’s South</td>
<td><a href="http://www.allmenus.com/al/birmingham/254897-beckys-south/menu/">www.allmenus.com/al/birmingham/254897-beckys-south/menu/</a></td>
<td>Burgers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bettola*</td>
<td><a href="http://www.opentable.com/bettola-birmingham">www.opentable.com/bettola-birmingham</a></td>
<td>Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham Breadworks</td>
<td><a href="http://www.birminghambreadworks.com/">www.birminghambreadworks.com/</a></td>
<td>Bakery/sandwiches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bistro 218</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bistro218.com/menu.html">www.bistro218.com/menu.html</a></td>
<td>French/American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottega*</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bottegarestaurant.com/">www.bottegarestaurant.com/</a></td>
<td>Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brick &amp; Tin</td>
<td><a href="http://www.brickandtin.com/downtown-menu/">www.brickandtin.com/downtown-menu/</a></td>
<td>American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buck Mulligan’s</td>
<td><a href="http://www.buckmulliganspub.com/">www.buckmulliganspub.com/</a></td>
<td>Irish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Café Dupont*</td>
<td><a href="http://www.cafedupont.net">www.cafedupont.net</a></td>
<td>New American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantina Tortilla Grill</td>
<td><a href="http://www.cantinabirmingham.com">www.cantinabirmingham.com</a></td>
<td>Tex-Mex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chez Fon Fon*</td>
<td><a href="http://www.fonfonbham.com">www.fonfonbham.com</a></td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chez Lulu/Continental Bakery</td>
<td><a href="http://www.chezlulu.us">www.chezlulu.us</a></td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Vinci’s</td>
<td>2707 18th Street South, Homewood, AL 35209</td>
<td>Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreamland BBQ</td>
<td><a href="http://www.dreamlandbbq.com/">www.dreamlandbbq.com/</a></td>
<td>Barbeque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Name</td>
<td>Website</td>
<td>Cuisine Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Barrio</td>
<td><a href="http://elbarriobirmingham.com">elbarriobirmingham.com</a></td>
<td>Tex-Mex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fancy’s on Fifth</td>
<td><a href="http://www.fancyson5th.com">www.fancyson5th.com</a></td>
<td>American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feast and Forest</td>
<td><a href="http://feastandforest.com">feastandforest.com</a></td>
<td>Sandwiches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fish Market</td>
<td><a href="http://www.thefishmarket.net/#intro">www.thefishmarket.net/#intro</a></td>
<td>Greek/Southern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GianMarco’s</td>
<td><a href="http://www.birminghamrestaurants.com/Restaurants/Profile/GianMarco">www.birminghamrestaurants.com/Restaurants/Profile/GianMarco</a></td>
<td>Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giuseppe’s</td>
<td><a href="http://places.singleplatform.com/giuseppescafe/menu?ref=google">places.singleplatform.com/giuseppescafe/menu?ref=google</a></td>
<td>Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golden Temple</td>
<td><a href="http://www.goldentemplehealthfoods.com">www.goldentemplehealthfoods.com</a></td>
<td>Organic/vegetarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlands Bar &amp; Grill*</td>
<td><a href="http://www.highlandsbarandgrill.com">www.highlandsbarandgrill.com</a></td>
<td>New American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hot &amp; Hot Fish Club*</td>
<td><a href="http://www.hotandhotfishclub.com">www.hotandhotfishclub.com</a></td>
<td>New American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungry Howie’s</td>
<td><a href="http://hungryhowies.com/store/hungry-howies-2321">hungryhowies.com/store/hungry-howies-2321</a></td>
<td>Pizza/subs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insomnia Cookies</td>
<td><a href="http://insomniacookies.com/locations/state/AL">insomniacookies.com/locations/state/AL</a></td>
<td>Dessert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim ’n Nick’s*</td>
<td><a href="http://www.jimnicks.com/menus/5-points-south/bar-b-q/">www.jimnicks.com/menus/5-points-south/bar-b-q/</a></td>
<td>Barbeque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jinsei</td>
<td><a href="http://www.jinseisushi.com">www.jinseisushi.com</a></td>
<td>Sushi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John’s City Diner</td>
<td><a href="http://www.johnscitydiner.com">www.johnscitydiner.com</a></td>
<td>New American/Southern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Donkey</td>
<td><a href="http://www.thelittledonkey.com/">www.thelittledonkey.com/</a></td>
<td>Tex-Mex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Italy’s Pies &amp; Pints</td>
<td><a href="http://places.singleplatform.com/little-italys-pies--pints-0/menu?ref=google">places.singleplatform.com/little-italys-pies--pints-0/menu?ref=google</a></td>
<td>Pizza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Savannah</td>
<td><a href="http://littlesavannah.com">littlesavannah.com</a></td>
<td>New American/Southern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy’s Coffee &amp; Tea</td>
<td><a href="http://lucyscoffeeandtea.com">lucyscoffeeandtea.com</a></td>
<td>Coffeehouse/teahouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makarios Kabob &amp; Grill</td>
<td><a href="http://makarioskabob.com">makarioskabob.com</a></td>
<td>Gyros/Middle Eastern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mellow Mushroom</td>
<td><a href="http://mellowmushroom.com/store/birmingham-five-points">mellowmushroom.com/store/birmingham-five-points</a></td>
<td>Pizza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Chen’s</td>
<td><a href="http://www.mrchenshomewood.com">www.mrchenshomewood.com</a></td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newk’s Express Cafe</td>
<td><a href="http://www.newks.com/locations/">www.newks.com/locations/</a></td>
<td>Sandwiches and salads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niki’s</td>
<td><a href="http://nikisdowntown.com">nikisdowntown.com</a></td>
<td>Greek/Southern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noni’s Cafe</td>
<td><a href="https://facebook.com/pages/Nonis-Kafe/472173329563580">facebook.com/pages/Nonis-Kafe/472173329563580</a></td>
<td>Kenyan/Everything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Henry’s</td>
<td><a href="http://www.oheenrysoffices.com">www.oheenrysoffices.com</a></td>
<td>Coffee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ocean</td>
<td><a href="http://www.oceanbirmingham.com">www.oceanbirmingham.com</a></td>
<td>Seafood/fine dining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Octane</td>
<td><a href="http://octanecoffee.com/homewood">octanecoffee.com/homewood</a></td>
<td>Coffeehouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ollie Irene*</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ollieirene.com">www.ollieirene.com</a></td>
<td>New American/Southern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original Pancake House</td>
<td><a href="http://www.originalpancakehouse.com">www.originalpancakehouse.com</a></td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ovenbird*</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ovenbirdrestaurant.com">www.ovenbirdrestaurant.com</a></td>
<td>Spanish/Portuguese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paramount</td>
<td><a href="http://paramountbirmingham.com">paramountbirmingham.com</a></td>
<td>American/pub food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pho Pho</td>
<td><a href="http://phobirmingham.wixsite.com/phobirmingham">phobirmingham.wixsite.com/phobirmingham</a></td>
<td>Vietnamese/sushi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Office Pies</td>
<td><a href="http://postofficepies.com">postofficepies.com</a></td>
<td>Pizza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple Onion</td>
<td><a href="http://www.thepurpleoniononline.com/splash.aspx">www.thepurpleoniononline.com/splash.aspx</a></td>
<td>Gyros/Mediterranean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranelli’s</td>
<td><a href="http://ranellisdeli.com">http://ranellisdeli.com</a></td>
<td>Italian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many restaurants offer home delivery through websites and/or apps such as www.thetakeoutbham.com and www.tapingo.com. You may not have to leave the house to have a great dinner!

**Pizitz Food Hall**

New to Birmingham in the spring of 2017, the Pizitz Food Hall offers a variety of international and southern cuisine in a historic downtown department store building. Options include Ethiopian, Vietnamese, Japanese, Mexican, and a rotating restaurant. Learn more at http://www.thepizitz.com/food-hall/.

**Grocery Stores**

Avoid shopping on Sunday afternoons, as grocery stores tend to be most crowded then as people prepare for the coming week. The Lakeview stop on the Dart trolley car lets you off within two blocks of the Piggly Wiggly.
Birmingham-based start-up company Shipt will deliver groceries to your home. Visit www.shipt.com to set up an account (annual membership fee, free delivery on orders over $35, no tipping allowed). Prices may be slightly higher via Shipt than if you go to the store yourself, but you save time and hassle via delivery.

**Wholesale Clubs**

A wholesale club is a warehouse-style store offering everything from underwear to brie to high-definition TVs to lemons. Items often come in bulk (two-packs of ketchup, 36 rolls of toilet paper, etc.), so you need a car big enough to transport them and a pantry big enough to stock them. Birmingham has two wholesale clubs: Costco (3650 Galleria Circle in Hoover) and Sam's (201 Lakeshore Parkway and 3900 Grants Mill Road). The only credit card Costco accepts is Visa; annual memberships start at $55. Sam’s memberships start at $45. The membership fees covers two family members over the age of 18 (so you or your spouse can shop). You can apply online or in-store. A membership in a wholesale club can save a family a considerable amount of money over the course of a year and is worth considering.
**Farmers Markets**

Birmingham’s oldest and most established farmer’s market is held daily from 6:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. at 344 Finley Avenue West, Birmingham, AL 35204 (http://alabamafarmersmarket.org/). Farmers from all over the state bring the freshest and finest seasonable fruits and vegetables.

The Pepper Place market is open from 7:00 a.m. until 12:00 p.m. every Saturday (rain or shine!) from April through December. In addition to the freshest Alabama produce, you can find ice cream, baked goods, flowers, herbs, handmade soaps, wooden handicrafts, jewelry, live music, and cooking demonstrations. Pepper Place is dog-friendly if you keep your dog on a leash and clean up after it.

There are several smaller weekly farmers markets as well. The Urban Cookhouse restaurant at The Summit shopping center hosts a farmers market on Thursdays from June through August from 3:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m. The West Homewood Farmers Market runs June through August on Tuesdays from 5:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. at 160 Oxmoor Road (www.westhomewood.com). Vestavia Hills United Methodist Church runs a farmers market every Wednesday from May through September from 7:00 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. at 2061 Kentucky Avenue. In Hoover, you can find a farmers market at 4601 Valleydale Road (www.valleydalefarmersmarket.com).

**RELIGION**

Birmingham is located in what is known colloquially as the “Bible Belt,” a region of the southeastern and south-central US where Protestant Christian denominations have traditionally played a prominent role in social and political life. Although practitioners of nearly every faith live in Birmingham, do not be surprised if some of your American friends and colleagues born in the south adhere to a Christian faith tradition or embrace conservative values. Many smaller local businesses and restaurants are likely to be closed on Sundays. Below is just a small sample of places of worship and reflection available in metro Birmingham.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of Worship</th>
<th>Website/Contact Information</th>
<th>Denomination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baha’i Center</td>
<td><a href="http://www.birminghambahai.org">www.birminghambahai.org</a></td>
<td>Baha’i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethel AME Church</td>
<td>(205) 871-8057</td>
<td>African Methodist Episcopal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham Alabama Temple</td>
<td><a href="http://www.lds.org/church/temples/birmingham-alabama?lang=eng">www.lds.org/church/temples/birmingham-alabama?lang=eng</a></td>
<td>Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham Friends Meeting House</td>
<td><a href="http://www.birmingham.quaker.org">www.birmingham.quaker.org</a></td>
<td>Quaker/Society of Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briarwood</td>
<td><a href="http://www.briarwood.org">www.briarwood.org</a></td>
<td>Protestant – Presbyterian (PCA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathedral of St. Paul</td>
<td><a href="http://www.stpaulsbhm.org/">www.stpaulsbhm.org/</a></td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of Birmingham</td>
<td><a href="http://www.uucbham.org">www.uucbham.org</a></td>
<td>Unitarian Universalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avondale Church of Christ</td>
<td><a href="http://www.avondalechurchofchrist.com">www.avondalechurchofchrist.com</a></td>
<td>Church of Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Church of Christ, Scientist</td>
<td><a href="https://christiansciencebirmingham.org/">https://christiansciencebirmingham.org/</a></td>
<td>Christian Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlands United Methodist Church</td>
<td><a href="http://www.fivepointschurch.org">www.fivepointschurch.org</a></td>
<td>Protestant - Methodist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu Temple and Cultural Center</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bhamhindutemple.org/">www.bhamhindutemple.org/</a></td>
<td>Hindu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holy Trinity-Holy Cross Cathedral</td>
<td><a href="http://holylotrinity-holycross.org">http://holylotrinity-holycross.org</a></td>
<td>Greek Orthodox</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Homewood Masjid | www.bisweb.org | Muslim
Knesseth Israel | www.kicong.org | Jewish - Orthodox
Losel Maitri Tibetan Buddhist Center | www.loselmaitribuddhist.org | Buddhist
Sikh Temple of Alabama | www.sikhtempleofalabama.org/ | Sikh
South Highland Presbyterian Church | www.southhighland.org | Protestant – Presbyterian (USA)
Southside Baptist Church | www.southsidebirmingham.org | Protestant - Baptist
St. Andrew’s | www.standrews.dioala.org/ | Episcopal
St. Elias | www.stelias.org/ | Maronite Catholic
St. Paul’s | www.usachurches.org/church/st-pauls | Protestant - Lutheran
St. Stephen the Martyr | www.stsbhm.org/ | Roman Catholic
St. Symeon | www.stsymeon.com | Russian/Eastern Orthodox
Temple Beth-El | (205) 933-2740 | Jewish – Conservative
Temple Emanu-El | http://ourtemple.org/ | Jewish – Reform
Pilgrim Church | www.pilgrimuccbham.org | United Church of Christ

**MEDIA**

**Print/Electronic**

The most important media for international students and scholars is the ISSS weekly e-newsletter, the *Globetrotter*. Contact Tracy Maxwell at tmaxwell@uab.edu to subscribe. It will arrive in your inbox on Tuesday afternoons.


Subscribe to the *Birmingham Business Journal* at www.bizjournals.com/birmingham for news about local politics, the economic climate, new developments at Birmingham companies, and entrepreneurial exploits.

Several Birmingham suburbs also publish papers or newsletters, such as the *Over-the-Mountain Journal* (www.otmj.com), the *Homewood Star* (www.thehomewoodstar.com), and Mountain Brook’s *Village Living* (www.villagelivingonline.com).
Internet/Cable/Satellite TV

AT&T U-verse, Charter, Comcast, DIRECTV, Spectrum, and Dish Network all offer home media services (known as “bundles”) in the Birmingham area, although not all companies operate in the same neighborhoods. Visit their respective websites to determine which services are provided in your specific area.

Mobile Phones

You can often purchase a US SIM card to obtain service with no contract. Prices vary from $35-75 per month, depending on the service/data plan you need. Any of the following providers can set you up.

- Boost Mobile www.boostmobile.com
- Cellular Express (carries T-Mobile, Boost, and Virgin), (205) 941-1144
- Simple Mobile www.mysimplemobile.com
- Verizon www.verizonwireless.com/stores/alabama/birmingham
- Virgin www.virginmobileusa.com/#!/store/35205/1/
- Wal-Mart (offers many prepaid and no-contract options) www.walmart.com

SOUTHERN EXPRESSIONS/COLLOQUIALISMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘purt near</td>
<td>pretty nearly, almost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a good ways off</td>
<td>a long distance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ahead of the game</td>
<td>out in front/ahead of the rest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASAP</td>
<td>as soon as possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bat an eye</td>
<td>pay any attention to, be affected by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blow it off</td>
<td>forget about it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brand new</td>
<td>just bought/just purchased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bullheaded or pigheaded</td>
<td>stubborn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coke</td>
<td>any soda or soft drink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crazy about</td>
<td>to like something/someone extremely much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dead last</td>
<td>at the very end, last place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feel free to</td>
<td>make yourself welcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from scratch</td>
<td>start all over from the beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get a bug</td>
<td>get a virus on your computer or an illness/cold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get a hold of someone</td>
<td>reach someone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get around to it</td>
<td>do it when you get the opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hang in there</td>
<td>do not quit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hard pressed</td>
<td>very busy with very little time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>head start</td>
<td>beginning first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hold on for dear life</td>
<td>hold tightly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m fixing to</td>
<td>I’m about to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Birminghamians are outdoors more than ever before. The city’s flagship park is Railroad Park (www.railroadpark.org) in the Parkside area of Southside near Regions Field. Railroad Park offers free exercise and cooking classes, 19 acres of green space, a skate park, pond, walking/running trails, and a playground.

Designed by renowned park planner Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., George Ward Park (www.friendsofgeorgewardpark.org) on the edge of campus has tennis courts, a disc golf (“frolf”) course, a dog park area, and softball fields. You will often find adult kickball (www.gokickball.com/birmingham) and softball leagues sweating it out after work. The Olmsteds also designed Rushton Park along Highland Avenue in the Forest Park area of Southside.
Runners will enjoy Mountain Brook’s Jemison Trail and the downtown Rotary Trail. The Birmingham Zoo (www.birminghamzoo.com) and Botanical Gardens (www.bbgardens.org) offer year-round family programming. Kayakers and canoeists enjoy floating one of the longest free-flowing rivers in the Southeast, the Cahaba, from any of several put-in points. Check out www.trekbirmingham.com and www.outdooralabama.com for more activities.

**SPORTS**

Alabama is dominated by one sport, and one sport only: football. Specifically, college football. According to popular opinion, the only two teams on planet Earth are the University of Alabama Crimson Tide and the Auburn University Tigers . . . but we all know the UAB Blazers are the best! The regular season runs from late August/early September through November, with regional (“conference”) playoffs determining who will play in various championship “bowl games” throughout December. Alabama and Auburn play in the Southeastern Conference (“SEC”). The season culminates with the National Championship in January. Do not underestimate the power of college football. You may be greeted with phrases such as “Roll Tide” (designating an Alabama fan), “War Eagle” (designating an Auburn fan), or “Blaze On” (designating a UAB fan). Just nod and smile. People plan their weddings around games, name their children and pets after players, host elaborate “tailgate” parties at their home or outside the football stadium, and do not speak to family members who do not support their team. That said, the best time to run errands is during an Alabama or Auburn football game. The streets and stores will be deserted for four hours while people are glued to their televisions cheering for colleges some of them did not even attend.

Birmingham is also home to both the nation’s oldest and one of its newest baseball parks. Rickwood Field (www.rickwood.com) was built in 1910. Every summer the Birmingham Barons put on vintage uniforms and play the Rickwood Classic. During the regular season, the Barons play at Regions Field (1401 1st Avenue South), which was built in 2013. Tickets start at $7 for general admission. See www.barons.com for a complete schedule.

Birmingham’s NPSL (National Premier Soccer League) team, the Hammers, play at the Sicard Hollow Athletic Complex near Liberty Park (4700 Sicard Hollow Road). See www.birminghamhammers.com for more information.

Birmingham is also home to the Birmingham Vulcans rugby team. They play at Erskine Ramsay Park on the corner of Country Club Drive and Montclair Road. See www.birminghamrugby.com for season information.
Birmingham is home to several nationally-renowned museum collections, including the Birmingham Museum of Art (www.artsbma.org, home to the world’s largest Wedgwood collection outside England), the Southern Museum of Flight (www.southernmuseumofflight.org), the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame (www.ashof.org), the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (www.bcri.org, currently under consideration for designation as a national park), the Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame (www.jazzhall.com), Vulcan Park and Museum (www.visitvulcan.com, home of the largest cast iron statue in the world), the Negro Southern League Museum (www.birminghamnslm.org), and the Barber Motorsports Museum (www.barbermuseum.org).


Catch live theatrical performances at The Terrific New Theatre (www.terrificnewtheatre.com), Red Mountain Theatre (www.redmountaintheatre.org), and Virginia Samford Theatre (www.virginiasamfordtheatre.org). The Opera Birmingham (www.operabirmingham.org) also features two-three concerts per season.

The social calendar in Birmingham is stocked year-round. Don’t miss the Sidewalk Film Festival, Mercedes Marathon, SlossFest, Alabama Ballet’s Nutcracker, Greek Food Festival, Secret Stages, Southern Makers, and Birmingham Restaurant Week—just to name a few!


CULTURE SHOCK


You may experience many emotions while adapting to US culture, from excitement and interest to depression and fear of the unknown. The difficulties you may experience as you navigate American society can result of what is termed “culture shock.” Most experts agree that culture shock, although often delayed, is inevitable in one form or another. However, adjusting to a foreign culture and living through difficult times of change can be a satisfying experience—worth the occasional discomfort and extra effort. Such feelings are perfectly normal.
Knowing this, and with a bit of conscious effort, you will soon find yourself making adjustments (some quite subtle and perhaps unnoticeable at the conscious level) that will enable you to adapt to your new cultural environment.

The attitudes you bring with you to the US and those you form while here will have a great effect upon your perception of the American people and the southern way of life. It is very important for you to be aware of the role attitudes play in your US experience. Communication can break down when US cultural attitudes are fundamentally different than yours, and the results are often feelings of confusion and hostility on both sides.

You might be under the impression that cultural shock is some kind of disease that everyone catches after arriving in the US and, after a certain length of time, recovers from. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Some international students and scholars never recover from this condition no matter how long they spend in the US. This is because culture shock is actually caused by a mismatch of cultural attitudes—not by some virus, as the name implies. If you don’t keep an open mind and don’t invest any effort trying to understand American culture, you will always be in a state of shock.

There is no clear-cut way of dealing with culture shock. Simply recognizing its existence and accepting your vulnerability to it is an important first step. Remember that you are not the only one experiencing occasional frustration, irritability, and depression. Experiencing culture shock does not imply any psychological or emotional shortcoming on your part.

Undergoing culture shock is in itself a learning experience. It is a way of sensitizing yourself to another culture at a level beyond the intellectual and the rational. Just as an athlete cannot get into shape without conditioning, so you cannot fully appreciate the cultural differences that exist without first going through the uncomfortable stages of psychological adjustment.

An underlying cause of negative reactions to another culture is the tendency to label something that is different as inferior. It is important to be open toward the culture into which you are going, try to discard stereotypes, and read as much as you can about culture before your departure. If you educate yourself, you will better understand and appreciate your new surroundings much sooner. Before leaving home, learn about American history, natural resources, social customs, religions, art, and political structures. Find out the manners, expected behavior, and unspoken rules in play in the US. Read up on our present-day problems and current national issues. Learning about current affairs will help you get a sense of how people evaluate events from different perspectives. Talk to other students who have been to the US to learn what problems you may encounter.

Even with preparation, you will inevitably experience some symptoms of culture shock. If you understand the phenomenon and its possible causes, you can decrease its effects. Try to acquaint yourself with its signs.

**PHASES OF CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT**

Studies have shown that there are distinct phases of culture shock which virtually everyone who lives abroad goes through. These phases include:
Preliminary Phase: Awareness of the host culture, preparation for the journey, farewell activities, anticipation

Initial Euphoria: Thrill of being in a new place, happiness at being welcome, sense of independence and invincibility as you start classes and explore campus

Irritability: Frustration arising from acclimating to your new setting; difficulty coping with the elementary aspects of everyday life when things still appear foreign to you; focus shifts to the sometimes troubling differences between the US and your home country; insignificant difficulties feel like major problems; tendency to associate mainly with others from your home country

Gradual Adjustment: Begin to orient yourself and become able to interpret subtle cultural clues; US culture and mannerisms become familiar to you

Adaptation and Biculturalism: Sense of “foreignness” diminishes significantly; you start to feel that you are a part of American culture.

Re-Entry Phase: Excitement about sharing your experiences accompanied by a realization that you have changed, although you may not be able to explain how; both your original and US-acquired sets of values may seem equally valid; difficulty re-adapting to the pace and scale of life at home; need to maintain contact with US friends and colleagues

TIPS TO EASE CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

Here are some general tips to help ease cultural adjustment:

- Travel in a spirit of humility and with a genuine desire to meet and talk with local people.
- Do not expect to find things as they are at home—you left home to discover different things!
- Do not take anything too seriously. An open mind is the beginning of a fine international experience.
- Do not let others get on your nerves. You have come a long way to learn as much as you can, to enjoy the experience, and to be a good ambassador for your country.
- Read the information in the Compass, the Globetrotter, student handbook, and any departmental materials carefully. Those who have gone before you have good advice to share.
- Keep your passport with you at all times.
- Don’t judge the entire United States by the one American you disagree with or who treats you disrespectfully. There are over 318 million of us, and we can all learn from you!
- Cultivate the habit of listening and observing, rather than merely seeing or hearing.
- Realize that other people may have thought patterns and concepts of time which are very different than yours—not inferior, just different.
- Be aware of the feelings of local people to prevent what might be offensive behavior.
- Make no promises to local, new friends that you cannot implement or carry through.
- Keep a journal and reflect on your daily experiences to deepen your understanding.
- Take steps to minimize emotional and physical ups-and-downs.
• Try to establish routines that incorporate both the difficult and enjoyable tasks of the day or week.
• Treat yourself to an occasional indulgence, such as a magazine or newspaper in your own language, a favorite meal or beverage, or a long talk with other students experiencing the same challenges.
• Keep yourself healthy through regular exercise and eating habits.
• Accept invitations to activities that will allow you to see other areas of Alabama and the south.

FITTING IN

Social customs differ greatly from one country to another. Generally speaking, be friendly, courteous, and dignified. If you err on the side of being respectful, people will make allowances when you do not immediately understand or feel comfortable with things.

POLITENESS: Offer a formal word of greeting to whomever you meet in your day-to-day activities. For example, begin your conversation with, “Hello, good morning (afternoon, evening)!”, and become familiar with the appropriate expressions of gratitude in response to southern hospitality.

HUMOR: While each country has its own particular brand of wit and humor, very few cultures are as direct, sarcastic, and occasionally gross as Americans. Don’t take things literally or personally. If you are unsure if someone meant a comment as a joke or was serious, feel free to ask.

SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE: Most southerners will have as hard a time understanding your accent (if you have one) as you will have understanding theirs. Don’t be intimidated or inhibited when speaking English, even if you have only a limited command of the language. Also, don’t be afraid to ask Americans to please repeat themselves. Americans will use phrases that you have never learned in a textbook that may confuse or even embarrass you if you take them literally. Again, keep a sense of humor and ASK if you are confused!

PHYSICAL CONTACT: Americans tend to shake hands when they meet each other (in business relationships) and mainly in the south – give hugs or a pat on the back when they meet each other (in a more social relationship). Southerners are just very “touchy” people. Don’t be afraid to let someone know if you prefer a different form of greeting, or if a common form of greeting makes you uncomfortable. Americans generally require more “personal space” (how far away they stand or sit when conversing with you) than other cultures. Observe your colleagues and friends at meetings and parties to see how Americans interact.

PERSONAL QUESTIONS: Americans find it easy and quite appropriate to talk about themselves, which you may find impolite. Feel free to talk about yourself back to them! Remember: you have come here to get to know the US, its people, culture, and language! If you avoid contact with Americans, you cheat yourself and lengthen the process of adaptation. Try to maintain a sense of humor.

DRINKING AND DRUNKENNESS: Americans enjoy social drinking, but drunkenness is neither amusing nor tolerable. There are severe academic and immigration consequences for drunk driving and misbehavior due to intoxication. American college campuses are also extremely sensitive to claims of “date rape” (taking advantage
of someone sexually while they are incapacitated by drugs and/or alcohol). Know the law, local customs, and your limits.

**PRICE BARGAINING:** Except when buying a car or visiting a yard or garage sale, haggling and bargaining are practically never done in the US. Prices at farmers markets are non-negotiable as well. You may find some independent vendors who occasionally will let you argue for a lower price, but this is highly extraordinary. The published price is generally the price you must pay.

**TALKING POLITICS:** Americans think they know everything about international affairs and generally stick to their opinion, however ill-informed it may be. Do not be at all surprised if your new friends try to engage you in political debate, and do not be surprised if they offer one-sided or even plainly erroneous arguments. Be discrete and rational when defending your own convictions, and do your best to keep the conversation calm. Some of the current administration’s policies have caused tempers to run higher than usual. Try to steer the conversation in another direction if it heats up.

One of the main benefits of studying and living abroad is developing a sensitivity to and appreciation for the people and customs of a totally different culture and way of life. Be flexible and receptive in dealing with these differences, and you will find your life greatly enriched.

The International Student website offers additional information about the way of life in the US, including helpful tips about culture shock, safety issues, social life, accommodations, etc. [www.internationalstudent.com/study_usa/way-of-life](http://www.internationalstudent.com/study_usa/way-of-life)

**MAIL & SHIPPING**

A US postage stamp currently costs $0.47. Stamps are available at the Post Office locations below and at many CVS and Walgreens pharmacies. Prices and shipping times for packages are available at [www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com).

**Downtown**
351 24th Street North
Birmingham, AL 35203
Monday - Friday: 7:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.
Saturday & Sunday: Closed

**UAB Post Office**
1720 2nd Avenue South
Birmingham, AL 35294
Monday - Friday: 7:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Saturday & Sunday: Closed

**South Highland**
1821 11th Avenue South
Birmingham, AL 35205
Monday - Friday: 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Saturday: 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Sunday: Closed

Other shipping options include UPS (www.ups.com), Federal Express (www.fedex.com), and DHL (www.dhl-usa.com).

BIRMINGHAM NUMBERS & WEBSITES TO KNOW

311 CALL CENTER……………………………………………………………………………www.birminghamal.gov/contact/311-call-center

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES (“DMV”)……………………………………………………..(205) 325-5171
  o Jefferson County Driver License Office……………………………………………………….(205) 252-7445
     www.alea.gov/Home/DriverLicensePages/wfDLOffices.aspx
  o Jefferson County Car Tag and Title Office………………………………………………...(205) 325-5300
     http://jeffconline.jccal.org/Default.asp?ID=698&pg=Revenue

BETTER BUSINESS BUREAU………………………………………………………………..(205) 558-2222
     www.bbb.org/CSAL/

BIRMINGHAM BUSINESS ALLIANCE……………………………………………………..https://birminghambusinessalliance.com

BIRMINGHAM CITY WEBSITE…………………………………………………………………………………………www.birminghamal.gov

COURTHOUSES
  o Birmingham David J. Vann Municipal Justice Center………………………………………..(205) 254-2161
     www.birminghamal.gov/municipal-court
  o Jefferson County (10th Judicial Circuit)……………………………………………………….……..(205) 325-5300
     http://jeffconline.jccal.org/Default.asp?ID=801&pg=Find+Office+Hours
  o United States District Courthouse for the Northern District of Alabama…………………..(205) 278-1700
     www.alnd.uscourts.gov/court-info/court-locations

CRISIS CENTER BIRMINGHAM…………………………………………………………………(205) 323-7777
     http://crisiscenterbham.org

EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE
  o Birmingham Fire & Rescue Service……………………………………………………………http://fire.birminghamal.gov
    ▪ Emergency…………………………………………………………………………………………..911
    ▪ Non-Emergency……………………………………………………………………………………(205) 254-7540
  o Birmingham Police Department………………….www.informationbirmingham.com/po
c  ▪ Emergency…………………………………………………………………………………………..911
  ▪ Non-Emergency ………………………………………………………………………………………(205) 328-9311
  o UAB Police Department……………………………..www.uab.edu/police
    ▪ Emergency…………………………………………………………………………………………..(205) 934-3535
    ▪ Non-Emergency……………………………………………………………………………………(205) 934-4434
LIBRARIES (free membership at all branches with proof of Jefferson County residence)
  o Birmingham Public Library...........................................................................(205) 226-3600
    www.bplonline.org/services/LibraryCards
  o Southside branch.......................................................................................(205) 933-7776
    www.bham.lib.al.us/locations/branch/southside

PUBLIC UTILITIES – NEW SERVICE
  o Alabama Gas Corporation...........................................................................1-800-292-4008
    www.alagasco.com/Start-Gas-Service-497.html
  o Alabama Power Company...........................................................................1-800-245-2244
  o Birmingham Water Works.........................................................................(205) 244-4000
    www.bwwb.org/requests

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION
  o max Buses.................................................................................................(205) 521-0101
    www.bjcta.org/schedules-maps/system-maps
  o dart Trolley Cars.......................................................................................(205) 521-0101

SCHOOL SYSTEMS
  o Birmingham City Schools.........................................................................(205) 231-4600
    www.bhamcityschools.org
  o Jefferson County Schools.........................................................................(205) 379-2000
    www.jefcoed.com

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION.................................................................1-800-772-1213
  o Birmingham District Office (parking entrance is on 12th Street)
    1200 Reverend Abraham Woods, Jr. Boulevard, 1st Floor, Birmingham, AL 35285

UAB HOSPITAL......................................................................................................(205) 934-3411
  www.uabmedicine.org/locations/uab-hospital/emergency

UAB NUMBERS & WEBSITES TO KNOW

Career & Professional Development Services.............................................www.uab.edu/students/cpd/make-an-appointment

Disability Support Services.............................................................................(205) 934-4205
  www.uab.edu/students/disability

International Student & Scholar Services......................................................(205) 934-3328
  www.uab.edu/global/international

Lister Hill Library..............................................................................................(205) 934-2230
  www.uab.edu/lister

Registrar...........................................................................................................(205) 934-8228
  www.uab.edu/registrar
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