



INTERNATIONAL STUDENT
& SCHOLAR SERVICES

The University of Alabama at Birmingham



J-1 Compass Visitor Handbook 2023



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 2022, 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.

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, scholars, staff, and clinical faculty. The role of ISSS is to expand and strengthen international ties between individuals and academic programs on 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, making friends, and learning where things are. This guide has been prepared specially 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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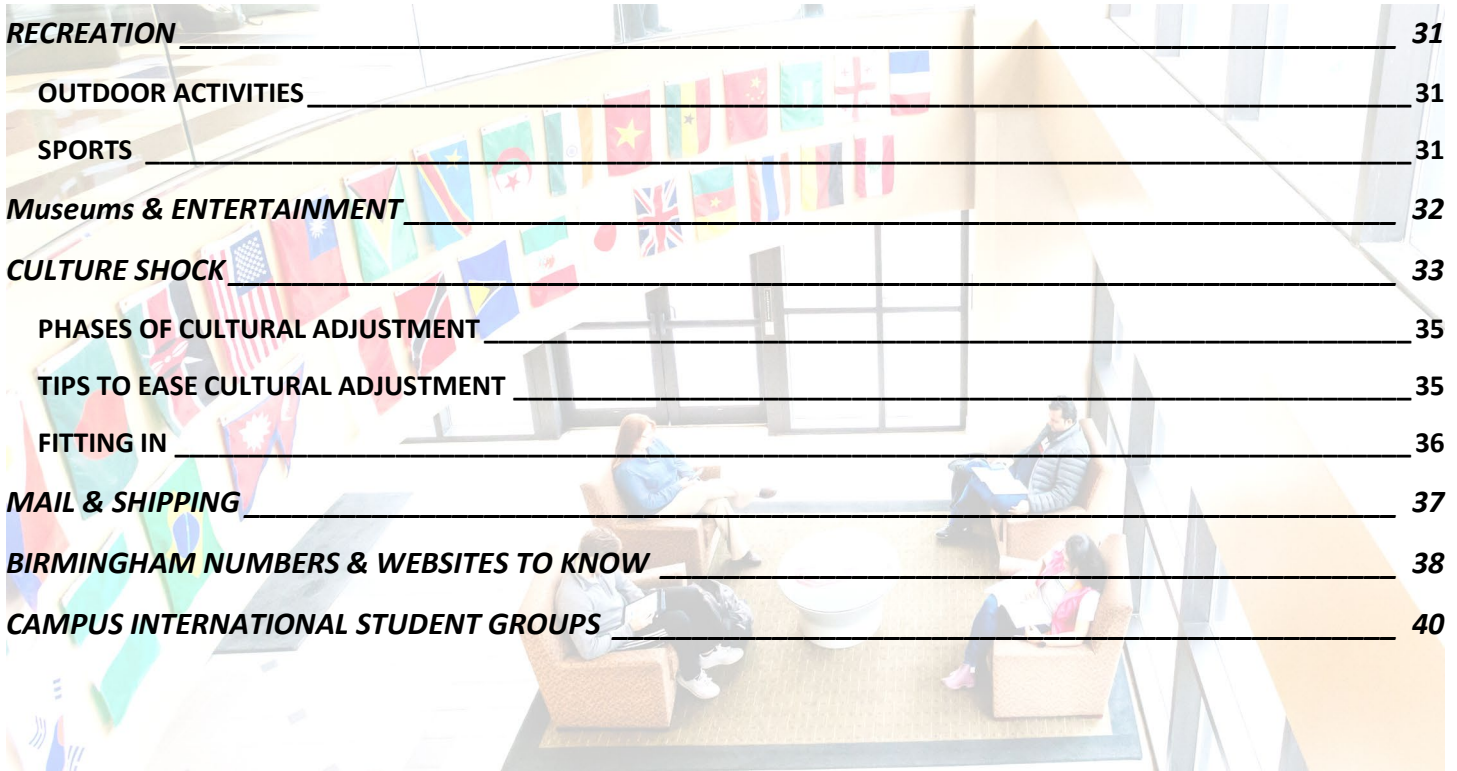
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BRIEF ALABAMA OVERVIEW

Alabama becomes a second home to people from all over the world as they experience the southern hospitality of our beautiful state. With a statewide 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 comfortable pace of the south mixed with the cutting-edge science and technology of the twenty-first century.

Originally explored by the Spanish in the 16th century, and later claimed by the French in the 17th 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. Muscle Shoals is also famous for its recording studios.

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 local TV 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.

This siren is also tested around 10 AM on the first Wednesday of every month, so if you hear the siren then, it is most likely just a test.



LOCAL AND REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION

Public transportation is not very well developed in Birmingham. **Don't expect to find the same type of public transportation as in your home country, or as in big cities like New York.** Most Birmingham residents use their cars to go around.

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. Adult bus tickets cost \$1.25. Carry exact change.
- Greyhound provides bus service throughout the US and Canada. Call (205) 252-7190 or visit <http://locations.greyhound.com/bus-stations/us/alabama/birmingham/bus-station-420156>.
- Wanderu offers discounted tickets on multiple routes, including Birmingham to Atlanta www.wanderu.com
- Akai Bus runs service to New York www.akaibus.com
- Megabus runs from Birmingham to Atlanta and Memphis 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 and 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 a 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. You must provide a vehicle for the 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)



For more information, see <https://www.alea.gov/dps/driver-license> - look on the right side for the list of required documents.

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—a Social Security Card (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. 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.
- A 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 and/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 immigration status by participating in this illegal activity.
Call a friend, a taxi, or use Uber or Lyft 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.
- 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.

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.

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 [HERE](#).



BY BICYCLE

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.thrifynickel.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/>.

You can also look into Veo scooters <https://www.birminghamal.gov/transportation/shared-micromobility/>. To rent a bike or scooter, simply download either app on your smartphone and create an account to get started. It is \$1 to unlock then \$0.33 per minute. If you can't borrow a bike or buy one from a friend or colleague, the following businesses have a great selection:

<p>Bob's Bikes 1944 28th Avenue South Homewood, AL 35209 www.bobs-bikes.com</p>	<p>Cahaba Cycles (multiple locations, new and used) 2834 18th Street South Homewood, AL 35209 http://cahabacycles.com/</p>
<p>Wal-Mart Supercenter 209 Lakeshore Pkwy Homewood, AL 35209 www.walmart.com</p>	<p>Redemptive Cycles 1305 2nd Avenue North Birmingham, AL 35205 www.redemptivecycles.com/</p>

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.

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.trailink.com/trail/rotary-trail.aspx



FINDING ACCOMMODATIONS

Unfortunately, **UAB does not provide on-campus housing for international scholars.** You must do some research and find a place to live. Most international scholars rent an apartment or house. A rental agreement is 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 companies will want you to start your lease in August or early September (when classes start) and move out the following July (after classes end). 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, 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 must break my lease and leave the apartment 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). 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 to get out of your lease.

Several groups on Facebook that can help:

- ISSS page – <https://www.facebook.com/UabISSS/>
- UAB International page – <https://www.facebook.com/groups/uabinternationals/>

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.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.rentmonster.net • www.20midtown.com • www.al.com • www.apartmentfinder.com • www.apartments.com • https://bham.craigslist.org • www.birmingham-apartment.com • www.crowneontenth.com • www.H2realestate.com • www.uab.edu/studentmedia/kaleidoscope • www.liveonhighland.com | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://livewithdwell.com • www.philbostanyrealty.com • www.rent.com • www.selectmyspace.com • www.theplaceapts.com (University Place Apartments) • http://uhbirmingham.com/ (University House) • www.universityflats.net • www.zillow.com/birmingham-al/apartments/ |
|---|---|

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.

DIFFERENT NEIGHBORHOODS IN BIRMINGHAM

Several neighborhoods are close to UAB campus, with a blend of historic homes and newly constructed flats. They offer residents an urban feel and tend to be young professional and student oriented. A few international grocery markets are accessible. There are a lot of bars, restaurants, coffee shops, and parks within walking or cycling distance:

- Glen Iris
- Five Points South
- Parkside
- Highland Park
- Forest Park
- Loft District

Other neighborhoods are further away and require a car. They offer a suburban feel and tend to be more family oriented. Public schools in these areas are well-rated:

- Vestavia Hills
- Mountain Brook
- Hoover

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 or 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.
- Allergies : Nuts? Dust mites? Dogs? Seafood? Your favorite spice? Citrus? Perfume?
- Religious dietary restrictions: Vegetarian? Kosher? Halaal? 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, 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 by 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 10 days** of the change.

If you obtain an Alabama driver’s license, you also must update your address with the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA) using Form DL-99. Mail it to the address listed on the form:

[www.alea.gov/Documents/Forms/AELA-ChangeOfAddressFillable\(DL99\).pdf](http://www.alea.gov/Documents/Forms/AELA-ChangeOfAddressFillable(DL99).pdf).

RENTER’S INSURANCE

Many companies offer renter’s insurance to students. For example, National Student Services, Inc. (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.

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 (you must pay tuition every month) 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 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.

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/>
- <https://www.schooldigger.com/go/AL/city/Birmingham/search.aspx>

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 FOR J-2 SPOUSES

J-2 dependents may obtain work authorization (commonly called an “EAD”) by filing an application with United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). 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
- Copies of biographical page and expiration date page of passport
- 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 departmental offer letter from UAB.

More information is available here: www.irs.gov/uac/about-form-w7.

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 biographical page and expiration date page of passport.

After meeting with the ISSS Non-Resident Tax Specialist, take all 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, 2022 are due on Monday, April 15, 2023. See the ISSS Non-Resident Tax Specialist 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.

See table below:

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.



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).



INTERNATIONAL STUDENT & SCHOLAR SERVICES

The University of Alabama at Birmingham

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. Your passport is your main form of identification in the US and should be always kept with you. It is a violation of your immigration status to remain in the US with an expired passport.



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.cpb.dhs.gov/i94/request.html> and provide it to ISSS. If you misplace or lose your I-94, simply print it again.



Most Recent I-94

Admission (I-94) Record Number :
Most Recent Date of Entry: 2018 July 10
Class of Admission : J1
Admit Until Date : D/S
Details provided on the I-94 Information form:

Last/Surname :
First (Given) Name :
Birth Date :
Passport Number :
Country of Issuance :

Form DS-2019: This document is your permission to stay in the US as a student or scholar exchange visitor. You are allowed to stay in the US for 30 days after the Program End Date shown on your Form DS-2019.

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 departure 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 scholars. Here are few easy steps to maintain your J-1 status.

1. Always keep your passport valid.
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 residential address with ISSS within 10 days of moving. Do not keep a mailing address or PO Box at UAB.

INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL AND VISA RENEWAL

INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

Please 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
- Most recent offer letter to prove a continuous appointment with UAB.

RENEWING YOUR VISA

Before traveling internationally and re-entering the US, most J-1 exchange 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, valid 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](#) 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).

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

IMMUNIZATIONS

UAB requires all J-1 exchange scholars - who will be participating in non-clinical research activities (including those involving working with mice or other lab animals) - 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).

Please complete the [Employee Health Enrollment](#) form sent to you by ISSS and coordinate with Employee Health. Your immunization records are protected and cannot be received by everybody. **Be sure to follow the instructions on the first page of the enrollment form.**

HEALTH INSURANCE

The US does not have a universal free healthcare system. **J-1 visa holders and J-2 dependents are required by federal law to maintain insurance at all times.** Specifically, federal regulations require Js 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
- 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.

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

LAUNDROMATS

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

Laundromat	Address
Wash & Go Coin Laundry	500 Palisades Boulevard www.washngoalabama.com
University Laundromat	1169 11 th Avenue South
Aladdin Cleaners & Laundry	1632 Montclair Road, Suite 1200 2819 Cahaba Road http://aladdincleaner.com/
Glen Iris Laundry	Corner of 11 th Place and 16 th Avenue

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 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 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.

Restaurant	Website	Cuisine
Al's Deli & Grill	www.alsdeliandgrill.net/	Gyros/Mediterranean
Bamboo on 2nd	www.bambooon2nd.com	Sushi, Pho
Becky's South	www.allmenus.com/al/birmingham/254897-beckys-south/menu/	Burgers
Bettola*	www.bettolabhm.com/	Italian
Birmingham Breadworks	www.birminghambreadworks.com/	Bakery/sandwiches
Bistro 218	www.bistro218.com/	French/American
Bottega*	www.bottegestaurant.com/	Italian
Brick & Tin	www.brickandtin.com/	American
Café Dupont*	www.cafedupont.net	New American
Cantina Tortilla Grill	www.cantinabirmingham.com	Tex-Mex
Chez Fonfon*	www.fonfonbham.com	French
Chez Lulu/ Continental Bakery	www.chezlulu.us	French
De Vinci's Pizza	www.devincispizza.com/	Italian
Dreamland BBQ	www.dreamlandbbq.com/	Barbeque
El Barrio	www.elbarriobirmingham.com/	Tex-Mex
The Essential	www.essentialbham.com/	New American
The Fish Market	www.thefishmarket.net/#intro	Greek/Southern
Five Point Public House	www.5pointpublichouse.com/	American/Oysters
GianMarco's	https://www.gianmarcosbhm.com/	Italian
Giuseppe's	https://www.giuseppescafe.com/	Italian
Golden Temple	www.goldentemplehealthfood.com/	Organic/vegetarian
Hot & Hot Fish Club*	www.hotandhotfishclub.com/	New American
Hungry Howie's	www.hungryhowies.com/	Pizza take-out/subs
Insomnia Cookies	www.insomniacookies.com/	Dessert

Restaurant	Website	Cuisine
Jim 'n Nick's*	www.jimnicks.com/	Barbeque
Jinsei	www.jinseisushi.com	Sushi
John's City Diner	www.johnscitydiner.com	New American/Southern
Little Donkey	www.thelittledonkey.com/	Tex-Mex
Little Italy's Pies & Pints	www.littleitalybham.com/	Pizza
Makarios Kabob & Grill	www.makarioskabob.com/	Gyros/Middle Eastern
Mellow Mushroom	www.mellowmushroom.com/	Pizza
Mr. Chen's	www.mrchenshomewood.com	Chinese
Newk's Express Cafe	www.newks.com/	Sandwiches and salads
Niki's West	www.nikiswest.com/	Greek/Southern
O'Henry's	www.ohenryscoffees.com	Coffee
Ocean	www.oceanbirmingham.com/	Seafood/fine dining
Original Pancake House	www.originalpancakehouse.com/	Breakfast
Ovenbird*	www.ovenbirdrestaurant.com/	Spanish/Portuguese
Paramount	www.paramountbirmingham.com/	American/pub food
Pho Pho	www.phobirmingham.com/	Vietnamese/sushi
The Pita Stop	www.thepitastop.com/	Middle Eastern
Post Office Pies	www.postofficepies.com/	Pizza
Purple Onion	www.thepurpleonion.com/	Gyros/Mediterranean
Ranelli's	www.ranellisdeli.com/	Italian
Real & Rosemary	www.realandrosemary.com/	Sandwiches/salads
Red Bowl	www.redbowlbham.strikingly.com/	Chinese/Korean
Red Cat	www.theredcatcoffeehouse.com/	Coffeehouse/Greek
Red Pearl	www.superorientalmkt.com/restaurant.html	Chinese
Revelator	www.revelatorcoffee.com	Coffeehouse
Rojo	www.rojobirmingham.com	Tex-Mex
Saigon Noodle House	www.saigonnoodlehouse280.com/	Vietnamese
Saw's Soul Kitchen	www.sawsbbq.com/	Barbeque/Southern
Silver Coin	www.silvercoinusa.com/	Indian
Sitar	www.sitaruab.shop/	Indian
Slice	www.slicebirmingham.com	Pizza/salads
Surin West	www.surinofthailand.com/	Thai, sushi
Taj India	www.tajindia.net/	Indian
Trattoria Zaza	www.zazabham.com	Italian
Frothy Monkey	www.frothymonkey.com/	Coffee/sandwiches
Vino	www.vinobirmingham.com	Mediterranean

Many restaurants offer home delivery through websites and/or apps such as www.thetakeoutbham.com and www.tapingo.com. Uber Eats, Door Dash, Waitr, and GrubHub also deliver in the Birmingham area. You may not have to leave the house to have a great dinner!



Pizitz Food Hall

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 restaurants.

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.

Store	Address
Aldi	7400 Crestwood Boulevard 428 Green Springs Highway
Asian Food Market - Homewood	22 Green Springs Highway
Chai's Oriental Food Store	2133 7 th Avenue South
Fresh Market	549 Brookwood Village
Golden Temple Health Foods	1901 11 th Avenue South
India Heritage	3137 Lorna Road
India Spices	2005 Valleydale Road
Joujou's Pita Bakery & Import Foods	166 West Valley Avenue
La Macarena	4643 Highway 280
La Mexicana Mexican Grocery	3065 Lorna Road
Las Americas	235 West Valley Avenue
Mediterranean Foods (halaal meat)	430 Green Springs Highway
Mi Pueblo	813 Green Springs Highway
Nabeel's	1706 Oxmoor Road, www.nabeels.com
Oriental Market	2721 Green Springs Highway
Piggly Wiggly	3314 Clairmont Avenue
Publix	411 Green Springs Highway 1325 Montclair Road 20 th Street and 3 rd Avenue South
Sexton's Seafood	3164 Heights Village
Snapper Grabbers Seafood Market	521 Montgomery Highway
Sprouts	1031 Montgomery Highway
Super Oriental Market	243 West Valley Avenue
Tienda La Mexicana #2	1633 Montgomery Highway
Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market	312 Palisades Boulevard
Wal-Mart Supercenter	1600 Montclair Road 209 Lakeshore Parkway
Whole Foods	3100 Cahaba Village Plaza
Wilson's Market	1401 15 th Street South
Winn-Dixie	4476 Montevallo Road



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). 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 (www.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.

Name	Website/Phone	Religion
Baha'i Center	www.birminghambahai.org	Baha'i
Bethel AME Church	(205) 871-8057	African Methodist Episcopal
Birmingham Alabama Temple	www.lds.org/church/temples/birmingham-alabama?lang=eng	Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon)
Birmingham Friends Meeting House	www.birmingham.quaker.org	Quaker/Society of Friends
Briarwood	www.briarwood.org	Protestant – Presbyterian (PCA)
Cathedral of St. Paul	www.stpaulsbhm.org/	Roman Catholic
Church of Birmingham	www.uucbham.org	Unitarian Universalist
Avondale Church of Christ	www.avondalechurchofchrist.com	Church of Christ
First Church of Christ, Scientist	https://christiansciencebirmingham.org/	Christian Science
Highlands United Methodist Church	www.fivepointchurch.org	Protestant - Methodist
Hindu Temple and Cultural Center	www.bhamhindutemple.org/	Hindu
Holy Trinity-Holy Cross Cathedral	www.holytrinity-holycross.org	Greek Orthodox
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	www.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*. It will arrive in your UAB email inbox every Monday afternoon. Please read it!!!

GLOBETROTTER

Birmingham's local newspaper, *The Birmingham News*, is printed on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays. Its website, www.al.com, is an alternate source. Another paper, *Weld* (www.weldbham.com), is published weekly and covers issues relevant to Birmingham politics. It also has a listing of concerts. Find it at area restaurants and in newspaper boxes on streets around town.

Three monthly magazines cover life in Birmingham: *b-Metro* (www.b-metro.com), *Birmingham Magazine* (www.al.com/bhammag.com), and *Birmingham Home & Garden* (www.birminghamhomeandgarden.com). *Birmingham Parent* (<http://birminghamparent.com/>) lists activities and information specifically for kids.

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.

- AT&T 1-844-723-0252 www.att.com/local/alabama/birmingham
- Boost Mobile www.boostmobile.com
- Cellular Express (carries T-Mobile, Boost, and Virgin), (205) 941-1144
- Simple Mobile www.mysimplemobile.com

- T-Mobile www.t-mobile.com/store/cell-phone-birmingham-al-819.html
- 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

Expression	Translation
a good ways off	a long distance
ahead of the game	out in front/ahead of the rest
ASAP	as soon as possible
bat an eye	pay any attention to, be affected by
blow it off	forget about it
brand new	just bought/just purchased
bullheaded or pigheaded	stubborn
Coke	any soda or soft drink
crazy about	to like something/someone extremely much
dead last	at the very end, last place
feel free to	make yourself welcome
from scratch	start all over from the beginning
get a bug	get a virus on your computer or an illness/cold
get a hold of someone	reach someone by phone or email
get around to it	do it when you get the opportunity
hang in there	do not quit
hard pressed	very busy with very little time
head start	start something with an advantage, ahead of others
hold on for dear life	hold tightly
I'm fixing to	I'm about to
in the nick of time	perfect timing
jump right in	begin at your own pace
keep an eye out for you	be mindful of your best interests, watch out for you
keep in touch	continue contact/correspondence
kick or get it in gear	to get prepared
look into it	regard with close scrutiny, learn more about
my bad	my mistake
offhand	without any research or reflection
out of line	out of one's place, in appropriate
out of whack	out of the ordinary/broken
over yonder	over there
plug away	keep working at something busily
pull up a chair/take a seat	sit down

Expression	Translation
reckon	guess
see to it	make sure it is done
see you around	to meet later
shut up	be quiet
slammed	busy, overwhelmed
step out of line	to get out of one's place, do something in appropriate
stick with it	keep going until you finish the job
strung out	very busy
take care of	make sure a goal or project is achieved
take it in stride	to receive information calmly, not overreact
this neck of the woods	in the area
to count on someone	to rely/depend on someone
What's up/what's new?	How are you?
y'all	"you all" or "all of you"
you bet	of course, yes
zeroed in/zero in	focus on a particular idea or item

RECREATION

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

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.trekbermingham.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”). UAB plays in the Conference USA (“C-USA”). 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 a 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. 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.

MUSEUMS & ENTERTAINMENT

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, 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).

The Birmingham area also features a wide variety of music venues and concert halls. Classical music aficionados will enjoy hearing the Alabama Symphony Orchestra play at UAB's very own Alys Stephens Center (www.alysstephens.org). Iron City (www.ironcitybham.com), WorkPlay (www.workplay.com), Saturn (www.saturnbirmingham.com), and Oak Mountain Amphitheater (www.theoakmountainamphitheater.com) attract the nation's best bands. Hear live jazz or join in open mic/spoken word nights at the Carver Theatre (www.jazzhall.com/carver). Southside's legendary, windowless "The Nick" (www.thenickrocks.com) dive bar/pool room hosts country, rock, alternative, house, metal, and blues acts almost nightly. Saturn (www.saturnbirmingham.com) in Avondale brings in new alternative and classic rock acts. Birmingham's beautifully-restored Alabama (www.alabamatheatre.com) and Lyric (www.lyricbham.com) theatres lend old-world glamor to chamber music, solo, pop artists, and comedians. The Alabama also hosts a popular summer movie series featuring classic American films (*Jaws*, *Gone With the Wind*, *The Godfather*, etc.), popcorn, and its famous Wurlitzer organ.

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, Alabama Ballet's *Nutcracker*, Greek Food Festival, Secret Stages, Southern Makers, and Birmingham Restaurant Week—just to name a few!

Learn more at www.birminghamal.org/ and www.birmingham365.org.

CULTURE SHOCK

*Adapted from Rhodes, Gary. Culture Shock. University of California, Irvine, Center for International Education (2000).
Used with permission of the author.*

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 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. 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.

MAIL & SHIPPING

A US postage stamp to mail a simple letter or card in the US currently costs \$0.55. Stamps are available at the Post Office locations below and at many pharmacies. Prices and shipping times for packages are available at www.usps.com.

Downtown

351 24th Street North

Birmingham, AL 35203

Monday - Friday: 7:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Saturday & Sunday: Closed



**INTERNATIONAL STUDENT
& SCHOLAR SERVICES**

The University of Alabama at Birmingham

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 for large overseas packages include [UPS](#), [FedEx](#), and [DHL](#).

BIRMINGHAM NUMBERS & WEBSITES TO KNOW

Service	Contact
311 CALL CENTER	www.birminghamal.gov/311
ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES (DMV)	(205) 325-5171
Jefferson County Driver License Office	(205) 252-7445 www.alea.gov/
Jefferson County Car Tag and Title Office	(205) 325-5300 www.jccal.org/
BETTER BUSINESS BUREAU	(205) 558-2222 www.bbb.org/CSAL/
BIRMINGHAM BUSINESS ALLIANCE	www.birminghambusinessalliance.com
BIRMINGHAM CITY WEBSITE	www.birminghamal.gov
COURTHOUSES	
Birmingham David J. Vann Municipal Justice Center	(205) 254-2161 www.birminghamal.gov/municipal-court
Jefferson County (10 th Judicial Circuit)	(205) 325-5300 www.jccal.org/
United States District Courthouse for the Northern District of Alabama	(205) 278-1700 www.alnd.uscourts.gov/court-info/court-locations



**INTERNATIONAL STUDENT
& SCHOLAR SERVICES**

The University of Alabama at Birmingham

Service	Contact
CRISIS CENTER BIRMINGHAM	(205) 323-7777 www.crisiscenterbham.org http://www.birminghamal.gov/
EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE	911
Birmingham Fire & Rescue Service – <u>Non-Emergency</u>	(205) 254-7540 https://fire.birminghamal.gov/
Birmingham Police Department – <u>Non-Emergency</u>	(205) 328-9311 https://police.birminghamal.gov/
UAB Police Department	Emergency (205) 934-3535 Non-Emergency (205) 934-4434 www.uab.edu/police
LIBRARIES <i>(free membership at all branches with proof of Jefferson County residence)</i>	
Birmingham Public Library	(205) 226-3600 www.bplonline.org/services/LibraryCards
Southside branch	(205) 933-7776 www.bham.lib.al.us/locations/branch/southside
PUBLIC UTILITIES – NEW SERVICE	
Alabama Gas Corporation	1-800-292-4008 www.alagasco.com/Start-Gas-Service-497.html
Southern Company (electricity)	1-800-245-2244 www.southerncompany.com/
Birmingham Water Works	(205) 244-4000 www.bwwb.org/requestservices
PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION – Max Buses & Dart Trolley Cars	(205) 521-0101 www.bjcta.org/
SCHOOL SYSTEMS	
Birmingham City Schools	(205) 231-4600 www.bhamcityschools.org
Jefferson County Schools	(205) 379-2000 www.jefcoed.com
SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION Birmingham District Office (parking entrance is on 12 th Street)	1-800-772-1213 1200 Reverend Abraham Woods, Jr. Boulevard, 1 st Floor, Birmingham, AL 35285

CAMPUS INTERNATIONAL STUDENT GROUPS

Group	Contact
Asian American Organization	www.facebook.com/UABAAO/
Association of Indian Students	www.facebook.com/groups/181488011919086/
Chinese Student and Scholar Association	www.facebook.com/uabcssa/?ref=br_rs
Cricket Club	www.facebook.com/UABCricketClub
Global Medical Brigades	www.facebook.com/UabGlobalMedicalBrigades/
Indian Cultural Association	https://www.facebook.com/ICAatUAB/
International Friends	www.intlfriends.org/
International Mentors	www.facebook.com/InternationalUAB
Ivorian Students Organization	www.facebook.com/isobirmingham/
Muslim Students Association	www.facebook.com/UAB.MSA/
Nepalese Student Association	www.facebook.com/groups/uab.nepali.students
Student Multicultural and Diversity Programs	www.uab.edu/students/diversity
Vietnamese Student Association	www.facebook.com/groups/uabvsa/

