Welcome

As the director of the Office of International Services (OIS), it is my pleasure to welcome you to the University of South Florida! Our office is part of USF World and is located on the first floor of the Patel Center for Global Solutions. By joining USF, you join an internationally rich and diverse student body of over 3,800 international students representing more than 130 different countries.

Our staff specializes in advising international students and scholars, helping you understand and maintain your visa status, and connecting you with programs on-campus and in the Tampa community that foster global understanding. It is our goal to ensure that you have the tools to be successful students. This guide is designed to give you valuable information to make important decisions related to your first semester. We trust that you will find it useful as you begin your Glo-Bull adventure!

Again, welcome to USF! My staff and I wish you the very best throughout the year and look forward to getting to know you better in the months ahead.

Warm regards,

Marcia Taylor, M.A.
Director, OIS

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Office of International Services
Pre & Post-Arrival Guide

i. Pre-Arrival

A) TO DO LIST

I. Pay the SEVIS fee, obtain your VISA stamp, and make sure all your travel documents are in order.
   a. Pay the SEVIS Fee - Upon receipt of the I-20 (F-1) or DS-2019 (J-1), the student should go to www.fmjfee.com to pay the SEVIS (I-901) fee. Be sure to print the receipt showing payment of this fee and upload a copy to iStart.
   b. Make visa appointment - Go to http://www.usembassy.gov/ to schedule a visa appointment at the nearest Embassy or Consulate and to complete the visa application forms.
   c. Visa appointment - Take your I-20 or DS-2019, passport, admission letter, and financial support documentation (e.g., award letter, bank statement, etc.) to the US Embassy or Consulate for the appointment. See our Tips for Applying for a Non-immigrant Visa.
      (NOTE: Citizens of Canada are not required to apply for an entry visa at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate but must pay the SEVIS Fee and present the proof of payment at the US Port of Entry).

II. Begin the iStart pre-arrival process - https://istart.usf.edu
   a. You will use E-Forms to provide OIS with important information and copies of documents.
   b. You will be directed to sign up for a university orientation and complete pre-arrival information modules.

III. Arrange travel to Tampa International Airport (TPA). TPA is located approximately 19 miles from the university. Other airports in the area include: St. Petersburg-Clearwater International Airport (PIE) and Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport (SRQ).

IV. Register for a university orientation.

V. Secure on-campus or off-campus housing.
   a. For on-campus housing, please visit the Housing and Residential Education website to find housing rates, availability, move-in dates etc.
   b. For students interested in living off-campus, the best choice is the university’s affiliated properties. These properties provide students with a residential experience that is almost the same as living on-campus.
   c. USF Student Government provides up-to-date information and advice about housing in the university area. Visit their Off-Campus Housing website for more information.

VI. Submit required forms to Student Health Services
   a. All students are required to provide proof of immunization history via the Immunization History Form and submit immunization records.
   b. All international students are required to have health insurance that meets the university and state policy guidelines. Students have a registration hold that prohibits signing up for courses. This hold is removed by submitting the official insurance agreement and purchasing the USF plan or having another insurance carrying complete a compliance form.

VII. Plan to attend OIS Document Check during a scheduled time.
B) WHAT TO BRING

I. Clothing - When packing, plan to bring clothes that are comfortable in warm and humid weather with some appropriate clothing for cooler temperatures. Dressing for class is generally casual. Jeans, shorts and tennis shoes are acceptable. Please note that most buildings at USF are air-conditioned. Tampa has a humid subtropical climate with average high temperatures ranging from 65˚F to 95˚F and average low temperatures ranging from 50˚F to 74˚F. During the summer months (June - August) it is hot and humid with frequent rainstorms in the afternoons. Winter is somewhat cooler and less humid. Temperatures may occasionally drop to as low as 40˚F in the evenings and warm up during the day.

II. Electrical items - The U.S uses an 110v electrical current. You may buy a travel voltage converter online or at stores like Radio Shack, Walmart, and Target.

III. Documents/Mementos: It is much easier to obtain services in the U.S. if the proper documents are available. You should bring your driver’s licenses, academic records, birth certificates, medical records, scholarship notices, and employment recommendations which may be useful during your stay. In addition, it is a good idea to bring cultural mementos to display or use at cultural or social gatherings.

IV. Baggage: International Services at USF cannot accept or store baggage. Please do not send any baggage or parcels to this office.

V. Money & Currency Exchange - It is strongly recommended that you bring at least $3,000 in the form of U.S. "traveler's checks" to cover expenses during your first four weeks in the U.S. This $3,000 does not include the cost of tuition and fees which also must be paid before the beginning of classes if you are a student. Foreign currency can typically be changed at banks in the area, but foreign checks require 4-6 weeks to clear the bank.

ii. Arrival

I. Entering the U.S.: You should carry your passport with visa stamp and I-20 (F-1) or DS-2019 (J-1) in your carry-on luggage on the airplane. At the US Port-of-Entry, the inspection officer should put a BLUE & RED stamp in your passport near your F-1 or J-1 visa that includes the date of arrival, the visa status (F-1 or J-1) and “D/S”. This refers to the duration of status/stay that is needed to complete your academic program. If the officer puts a date, you need to come to OIS so we can assist in correcting this error. For more information about the arrival process, see the U.S. Department of Homeland Security website Study in the States.

II. Transportation from Airport: Free Airport Pick Up in Tampa is available through USF Campus Ministries and must be requested at least two weeks prior to arrival. If you prefer to arrange for your transportation upon arrival, a shuttle service and taxis are available at all area airports in the baggage claim area. For current costs and transportation options at Tampa International Airport, visit the Tampa International Airport website’s Ground Transportation page.
III. Temporary Accommodations: If you have not arranged for apartment rental prior to arrival or you arrive before the opening of campus housing, you may need to seek temporary accommodations. There are several hotels near the campus that offer discounted room rates for USF students. For a full list go to Hotels Near the Tampa Campus.

iii. Post-Arrival

i. University Matters

a. Get your USF ID – Download this form and fill it out before going to the Card Center located in the Student Service Building (SVC) room 1032. They will take your photo and issue the card the same day. Your university account will be billed the $10 charge for the card. The Card Center is open Monday – Thursday 9am – 6pm and Friday 9am – 5pm. You will need your ID card for various purposes such as riding the USF Shuttle, renting a bicycle from Campus Recreation, printing up to $2.50 for free each day, and discounts at local restaurants and shops.

b. Ride the USF Shuttle and HART Bus – (see below for full details)

c. Attend university orientation and an OIS Immigration Session – Most students need to attend a university orientation. Graduate Students should plan to attend the Graduate Orientation and Undergraduate Students (First Year and Transfer) should plan to attend GloBull Beginnings Week. OIS will offer Immigration sessions during all university orientations for international students. These sessions will provide you with the most current rules connected to student visas.

d. Complete the iStart process and Document Check – Document Check is the process by which an international advisor (DSO) checks that all of your immigration documents show correct status and entry into the US. Once you arrive in the US, you can upload documents to iStart from your electronic device, any university computer, or the computers at the OIS office in the Patel Center. For students new to the US, Document Check is a face-to-face meeting. For students who are changing levels at USF or from INTO USF, this is an online procedure that results in a new USF “Continued Attendance I-20” for the new level/degree program, which you will need to pick up once you are contacted to do so. For students who are not F-1 or J-1 students, this is only an online procedure.

e. Go to Week of Welcome Events – WOW is a campus wide celebration designed to get new students familiar with USF traditions, involvement opportunities, and the campus before school starts. All students are invited to most events – including graduate students. This is a great chance to make new friends and begin to get acquainted with American Culture. There are events every day for all interest areas. Events include picnics, dances, parties, and FREE food.
ii. Personal Matters

a. **Set up a bank account** – There are many options in the U.S. for banking. Here are three that are convenient and close to the campus:

1. **USF Federal Credit Union** is located on-campus with a branch inside the Marshall Student Center. They have many services, including checking and savings accounts, loans, and a low annual rate for credit card subscribers. You do not need an SSN to open an account. They may ask for a proof of residence when opening an account. Your lease agreement can be used for this proof. Membership is a small fee. For more information, contact the USF Credit Union 813-974-3472 or visit [http://creditunion.usf.edu/](http://creditunion.usf.edu/)

2. **Bank of America** has a branch on Fowler Avenue that can be reached using the BullRunner D bus and a 10-min walk. They have a Student Checking Account, which has no monthly charge but you must be 24 years old or less. They offer options for money transfers and students may also get a credit card approved up to a limit of $800 without SSN. For locations go to their [branch locator](http://creditunion.usf.edu/).

3. **Chase bank** is located on Fletcher close to campus. They offer multiple languages at their ATM. You need an SSN to open an account. For the Closest branch: [https://locator.chase.com/clink/drill?locationid=12372](https://locator.chase.com/clink/drill?locationid=12372)

b. **Arrange to pay the tuition bill** – Your USF bill is due each semester by the end of the first week (add/drop week). Failure to pay the bill in full will result in late charges and loss of access to some USF services. See the [Student Financial Services](http://studentfinancialservices.usf.edu) page for payment deadlines, payment options, and more.

c. **Shopping List for the First week**

**Bedding**
- Bedbug-protecting mattress cover
- Duvet/duvet cover or comforter set
- Mattress pad
- Pillowcases
- Pillows
- Sleeping bag or air mattress
- Sheets 

**Kitchen Supplies**
- Bottle opener
- Broom
- Can opener
- Chip clips
- Dish towels
- Dishes (bowls, plates, cups)
- Dishwashing soap
- Disinfecting wipes
- Duster
- Duster

**Laundry**
- Laundry detergent
- Bleach

**Bathroom**
- Air freshener
- Bath pouf
- Bath towels
- Bathrobe
- Bathroom rug
- Hand towels

**Miscellaneous**
- Batteries
- Flashlight

**Drying rack**
- Iron
- Ironing board
- Laundry hamper or bag
- Lingerie bag
- Lint brush
- Quarters (for washer/dryer)
- Stain remover
- Glass cleaner
- Hand soap
- Mugs
- Oven mitt
- Paper towels
- Plastic wrap
- Reusable water bottle
- Sealable plastic bags
- Sponges
- Tinfoil
- Trash bags
- Tupperware
- Utensils
Toiletries

Products

- Acne medicine/cream
- Antibacterial gel
- Bar soap
- Body wash
- Conditioner
- Deodorant
- Eye cream
- Face wash
- Hair gel
- Hair mousse

Supplies

- Contacts, solution, and case
- Floss
- Hairbrush
- Nail clippers
- Razor
- Tissues
- Toilet paper
- Toothbrush
- Tweezers

Medical

- Allergy medicine
- Aloe lotion
- Antiseptic wipes
- Bandages
- Cold and flu medicine
- Cortisone cream
- Decongestant
- Eye drops
- First aid kit
- Hot and cold packs
- Insect repellent
- Multivitamins
- Over-the-counter pain medication
- Rubbing alcohol
- Supplements (iron pills, etc.)
- Thermometer
- Throat spray
- Upset stomach medication
- Vaseline

## Helpful Hints to Navigating the U.S and USF

### i. Getting a Cell Phone

- When making inquiries, you should ask if there is a special plan for students, if there is a USF discount, and what is needed to set up a service plan. Be aware that some providers require an SSN to conduct a background check. Below are the most popular cell phone providers in our area:

  - T-Mobile
  - Metro PCS
  - AT&T
  - Verizon
  - Sprint

Before purchasing a phone or service plan, you should ask have answers to these questions:

- How much data (for internet) do I want?
- Do I have a limit on international calls?
- How many text messages am I allowed on the plan?
- Do I need more than one person on the phone account?
ii. **Transportation Options**

1. **BullRunner** – Free to all students with a USF ID Card. This is very convenient since it goes to most area apartment complexes and shopping. Buses run late Monday – Thursday and on Saturday nights. See their website for a complete list of current operating hours. For live arrival times download the mobile application: iUSF - For iOS & Android. There are 6 routes available: A, B, C, D, E, and F.
   - A: Runs across Softball stadium, baseball field, Juniper-Poplar area
   - B: Runs across ‘USF Health’ area
   - C: Off-campus (46th and 42nd street)
   - D: Off-campus (takes you to Walmart, University Mall, Bank of America etc. Some residences located on this route as well.)
   - E: Runs in Athletic Center, Sun Dome area
   - F: Goes to Museum of Science and Industry area. Some residences located on this route as well.

2. **HART (Hillsborough Area Regional Transit)** – The HART buses take students almost everywhere in Tampa, including downtown for FREE with your USF ID. For Live schedule information download the phone app. You will be able to search for real-time bus arrival time with either bus route number, or stop number (located on the plate where you wait for the bus)

3. **Other cab services**
   - Super Shuttle: Pickup/Drop from/to Airport [http://www.supershuttle.com/Locations/TPAAirportShuttleTampaBay.aspx](http://www.supershuttle.com/Locations/TPAAirportShuttleTampaBay.aspx)

iii. **Obtaining a Florida Driver’s License** – If you have a driver’s license from your home country, you can go to [www.gathergoget.com](http://www.gathergoget.com) to get the list of documents that you need to get your Florida driver’s license. If you have never had a driver’s license, you will need to pass a Traffic Law & Substance Abuse Education Course, the written traffic laws and signs test, and the driving test. Go to the official government website [website](http://www.gathergoget.com) for the most current information.

iv. **Things to Do in Tampa** – See the [TAMPA BAY GUIDE](http://www.tampabayguide.com) for comprehensive information on things to do in and around Tampa Bay. We know there are beaches but here is a list of popular options:

   **Ethnic Grocery Stores [Near USF]**
   - House of Spices (Indian)
   - MD Oriental Market (Asian Market)
   - A-Green Supermarket (Korean)
   - Al-Aqsa (Middle Eastern)

   **Hot Spots in Tampa Bay**
   - Beaches
   - Ybor City
   - Busch Gardens
   - Lowry Park Zoo
   - Florida Aquarium
   - USF Riverfront Park
vii. **Frequently Used Phone Apps for Navigation**

1) **MyUSF** - Track the USF Bullrunner Bus System; pulls up a campus map; athletic events; campus safety tips; dining options, USF calendar, your courses, etc. [Google Play](https://play.google.com/store) or [iTunes](https://itunes.apple.com)

2) **WeChat** - Allows you to send text messages, voice calls, voice messages, facetime & video chat, and much more with a WiFi connection. [Google Play](https://play.google.com/store)

3) **Around Me** - Identifies services (ranging from Banks/ATMs, bars, coffee shops, hospitals, restaurants, movie theaters, etc.) based on your location. [Google Play](https://play.google.com/store) or [iTunes](https://itunes.apple.com)

4) **Google Translate** - Easily translates 80+ different languages. [Google Play](https://play.google.com/store)

5) **FreeRice** - An online game that offers fun trivia questions on geography, mathematics, world pop culture, etc. **For every correct answer in the game, FreeRice.com donates 10 grains of rice to the United Nations World Food Program.** [Google Play](https://play.google.com/store)

vi. **Quick Hints for Maintaining Your F-1 or J-1 VISA Status**

- Complete OIS Document Check
- Be sure to stay enrolled FULL-TIME throughout the academic year
- Update your local address within 10 days of moving to the U.S.
- Keep your immigration documents VALID and CURRENT:
  - Maintain a valid passport
- Apply for an EXTENSION at the OIS BEFORE the “completion of studies” date
- Be sure your I-20 states the correct degree program and level
- If you plan to transfer to another school, visit the OIS to discuss the immigration status transfer.
- Notify OIS of a new degree program no later than 60 days after graduating
- NEVER work off-campus without PRIOR authorization
- Notify OIS you leave the U.S. or change visa status by ensuring you have had a travel signature signed.
- If you TRAVEL outside the United States, get a travel signature from OIS.

vii. **Helpful Links**

- [USF Office of International Services](https://www.usf.edu/international)
- [USF Counseling Center](https://www.usf.edu/counseling-center)
- [USF Student Health Services Clinic Appointments](https://www.usf.edu/student-health)
- [USF Student Organizations](https://www.usf.edu/student-organizations)
- [USF Office of Multicultural Affairs](https://www.usf.edu/multicultural-affairs)
  - [iBuddy Global Friendships Program](https://www.usf.edu/multicultural-affairs/ibuddy)
vi. **Advice From Current USF International Students**

Name: Rhondel Whyte  
Country of Origin: Trinidad and Tobago  
Year: Senior  
Major: Electrical Engineering

**Advice for the incoming international student:**

It is important to find the balance between involvement and academics! Always be aware that your academics will take precedence and allow you to confidently knock on doors. Keep in mind however, that involvement leads to networking opportunities for these doors to be presented. Moreover, the type of leadership and professional development you can gain from an organization is unparalleled.

**If you could re-do your experience at USF so far, what would you do differently and why:** This is a tough question, because all my decisions thus far have allowed me to leave a legacy at USF, and I don’t know if I would be where I am without the bad ones. But if I could change anything, I would have chosen a major I am passionate about, and not gotten side tracked by certain things I chose to involve myself in. International parents do not understand that there are multiple avenues to success, especially when you are passionate and have the ambition to be great. They believe the only avenues are in Engineering, Medicine, and Law, but you need to not be afraid to stand up and say (after great deals of research) that you want to pursue your passion. My mother forced me to do engineering until my junior year; at that point there was no turning back. Doing engineering I personally believe is my only regret in college.

**Favorite spot on campus:**

Personally I enjoy going to the top of parking garages and looking at the stars. As an international student I often reminisce about home, and I think that my family and friends are all looking the same stars just in a different part of the world. For me, it brings me solace knowing that we are far apart but that the world is only so large.

**Tell us about your most memorable experience at USF:**

My most memorable experience would definitely be winning homecoming, because it opened me to a number of experiences after that! I was able to walk onto the field at a football game, actively be on a large float in the homecoming parade, and be a guest of honor at a number of events. Homecoming is a foreign concept to international students so it’s memorable because it’s where the gap gets bridged between America and myself.
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<tr>
<th>Name: Huzzatun Noor Iqra</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country: Chittagong, Bangladesh</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year: Senior</td>
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<tr>
<td>Major: Accounting</td>
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<td>Minor: Leadership Studies</td>
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**Advice for the incoming international student:**
Take advantage of all the opportunities that USF provides. Don't be afraid to try and fail because in the end of the day, you learn more from failures than from successes. Ask for help when you need it and help others along the way!

**If you could re-do your experience at USF so far, what would you do differently and why:**
I would love to have a leadership position with CLCE and other volunteering organizations.

**Favorite spot on campus:**
I love the patio by the MLK Plaza, especially during sunset. The walk there calms me down and it's the perfect spot for introspective reflections.

**Tell us about your most memorable experience at USF:**
Being crowned USF’s first international homecoming queen is definitely my most memorable experience at USF. Being an international student, the idea of homecoming was completely new, but this showed how I have completely immersed myself in the culture and did all that I could to make the best of USF.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: Reshma Pinnamaneni</th>
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<tr>
<td>Country of Origin: India</td>
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<td>Year: Senior</td>
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<td>Major: Chemistry</td>
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**Advice for the incoming international student:**
Think about your interests. Take classes pertaining to your strengths and likes. Take basic classes to see if it fits you. Go see an academic adviser. The adviser is there to guide you, to help you understand the difficulty levels of classes.

**If you could re-do your experience at USF so far, what would you do differently and why:**
I might have come into USF with more of a strategic plan, declaring a minor first. I wanted to find something interesting first before declaring a major. Use minors as a way to test the waters. I would have gotten involved earlier on campus and would have diversified my student involvement.

**Favorite spot on campus:**
Marshall Student Center. It is the center of USF. It is the most accessible spot and is very easy to meet up with friends.

**Tell us about your most memorable experience on campus:**
Of course getting A’s in Organic Chemistry classes! Aside from that, I would have to say the Diwali 2014 festival. People talked about the event for weeks. I felt like Indian culture was shared with the general public, fulfilling the reason why I joined the Students of India Association.