

International Student Handbook

Updated February 2025



International Student Services (ISS)

Middle Georgia State University

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WELCOME

Dear new international students,

Welcome to Middle Georgia State University and to the beautiful state of Georgia! We are very glad you've chosen to study with us, and we look forward to helping you have a wonderful experience here. This handbook is designed to help you learn more about our university, our state, and what you can expect when you attend Middle Georgia State. Moving to a new place and starting classes at a new school is never easy, but we hope that we can provide you with enough information to make the transition as smooth as possible. The International Student Services office is here to assist you in any way we can, so please contact us if you have questions or concerns during your time here.

Good luck in all your endeavors, and we wish you the best for your studies at MGA!

Allison Garibello

International Student Coordinator

HISTORY OF MGA

What we know today as MGA was created through the merger of Middle Georgia College based in Cochran, Ga., and Macon State College based in Macon, Ga. Middle Georgia College was founded in 1884 while Macon State College was founded in 1968, making MGA a unique combination of the contemporary and traditional in higher education. We commit to four core values: Stewardship, Engagement, Adaptability, and Learning. More details about the University's exceptional history and our vision and values are at the links to the right.

Middle Georgia State University (MGA) is a leading public university in Georgia, committed to offering high-quality educational opportunities and fostering an engaged and welcoming community. The best value state university in the University System of Georgia, MGA serves 8,000+ students on campuses in Macon, Cochran, Dublin, Eastman, and Warner Robins - and online. Student housing is available on the Macon, Cochran, and Eastman campuses.

The University offers 70+ areas of study and degrees at the doctorate, master's, and bachelor's levels, along with select career-oriented associate's degrees and certificates. MGA is home to Georgia's flagship School of Aviation and stands at the forefront of aviation education. With a commitment to excellence, MGA continues to be a hub for innovation and academic achievement.

ABOUT INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICES

International Student Services (ISS) offers immigration and support services to international students, faculty, and staff to support the intercultural and international dimensions of the University and to ensure the University's compliance with federal laws.

Current Physical Location:

Registrars, SLC 2nd floor
100 University Parkway
Macon, GA 31206

Phone: 478-471-5307

E-mail: iss@mga.edu

Website: <https://www.mga.edu/international/current-students.php>

Advising:

F-1 Students are required to be registered by their advisor every semester. All advisors are trained in F-1 requirements and are here to ensure you stay in compliance with your visa regulations.

F-1 students must be enrolled as a full-time student each Fall/Spring semester.

Undergraduate requirements:

12 credits hours / 9 credit hours must be in-person

Graduate requirements:

9 credit hours/ 6 credit hours must be in-person

Summer semester:

Registration is not required / unless specified by your program

Find your advisor – [Here](#)

Advisors assist students with the following:

- Selecting classes
- Exploring majors, minors, and certificates
- Planning for graduation
- Developing educational/career goals
- Evaluating academic progress
- Identifying campus resources

COMMON ISS PROCESSING SERVICES

For details, policies and procedures about the items below, please visit MGA's current international [webpage](#) and meet with your ISS Coordinator. The information below is only meant to give you an idea of some of the services we provide. All requests should be submitted by email to ISS@mga.edu with appropriate documents attached.

Procedure

Certification Letter

Change of Status

Change of Program

Change of Local Address

CPT – Curricular Practical Training

OPT – Optional Practical Training

Reduced Course Load Request

Reinstatement to Active Status

SSN Support Letter

Transfer Out

Travel Signature

When to Request

Anytime

As soon as possible, but at least 3-4 months before start of class. This is an estimate.

Within 30 days after the end of your current program.

Report within 10 days of the move.

As soon as possible before CPT semester. Deadline is by 1st day of class.

As soon as possible before OPT start date & within 60 days after completion of program

Before dropping or withdrawing from any class. Requires approval. Conditions apply.

Immediately, but no later than 5 months after termination of status.

Anytime with job offer in hand.

Within 60 days after completion of the program. Provide letter of acceptance at new school.

2 weeks prior to travel.

INTERNATIONAL ORIENTATION & CHECK-IN

All F-1 students starting a new academic program at Middle Georgia State University are required to attend the International Student Orientation offered for the term of their admission. Orientation is designed to educate and assist you with your transition to life in the United States, Georgia and the Middle Georgia State University campus.

You will receive email correspondence regarding Orientation dates after the issuance of your I-20. Relevant information will also be posted on the ISS website.

Orientation will provide information about:

- federal immigration regulations and your responsibilities as an F-1 student
- how to navigate the campus and administration of Middle Georgia State University
- basic needs such as housing, transportation, food and money
- cultural adjustment to life in the United States and in Georgia

You will have the chance to connect:

- with other new students to form initial friendships
- with continuing students for advice and support
- with the students' academic departments
- with relevant campus services, programs and facilities

Check-In is the required submission of your arrival documentation and information to ISS@mga.edu. All F-1 students starting a new academic program at MGA are required to submit an electronic copy of their F-1 Visa, I-94 record and provide the physical U.S. address of where they are residing while studying.

Submission of this information is required for registration of your MGA SEVIS record. Failure to submit required documentation by communicated deadlines will result in the termination of your F-1 status.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

WHAT TO PACK

Clothing and Linens:

Students usually dress casually for class, so you will see men and women wearing jeans, sweatshirts, flip-flops, etc. Dresses and suits are appropriate for more formal occasions: men will want to have a shirt and tie, and women will want to have at least one nice dress or suit. It is usually better to bring clothes that are easy to care for than those that need frequent cleaning and ironing. Feel free to wear your national dress if you prefer. Even if you live on campus, you will need to provide your own blankets, sheets, towels, lamps, pillows, cooking utensils, and other household items. These items can be easily purchased after you arrive.

Appliances:

If you bring appliances and electronics from your own country (hair dryer, phone charger, laptop computer, etc.), you should also bring an adapter plug with you. U.S. electrical current is 110-115, 60-cycle AC. You would need to bring adapters for electrical appliances (U.S. standard outlets use 110 volts) if you bring electric appliances with you.

Other Items:

If you wear glasses or contact lenses, bring an extra pair. If you have a prescription for your glasses, you can bring it so that another pair can be made easily.

Your medical insurance is not likely to cover items such as personal medications, eye examinations and dental care, so you are recommended to take care of these matters before you leave.

If you have your favorite sporting equipment like bathing suit and tennis racquet, you can also bring them with you. Just keep in mind that you should leave heavy golf clubs, bicycle, basketball, etc. at home. This kind of equipment can easily be borrowed in U.S.

Here are some things you should be sure to bring with you:

- Your academic transcript and diploma
- Driver's license from your home country (if you have one)
- Your marriage license (if applicable) and other important documentations

- Items for sharing your culture with others: souvenirs, music, postcards, photographs, or traditional dress (if you have room)

There are also some things you should NOT bring with you!

Leave these at home:

- Pets
- Large appliances such as refrigerator
- Firearms, weapons
- Fireworks or other inflammable items
- Hot plates
- Mini indoor grills (for example, George Foreman Grill)
- Microwave (allowed only in apartment-style residences)
- Coil lighting
- Air conditioners
- Space heaters

We also recommend that you do not bring any valuable items, such as expensive jewelry, with you.

IMMUNIZATION

In order to register for classes, you will need to have complete immunization records on file.

Complete the following form and submit to

healthclinic@mga.edu

https://www.mga.edu/health-clinic/docs/Immunization_Certificate.pdf

Students may also drop their records off in person to the Registrar's Office or Health Clinic.

Students requesting an exemption should complete the student information section of [The MGA Certificate of Immunization](#) and the appropriate exemption category at the bottom of the page, sending the completed document via email to registrar@mga.edu or healthclinic@mga.edu.

Please contact the Registrar's Office at 478-471-2900 or the MGA Health Clinic at 478-934-3080 (Cochran) or 478-471-2092 (Macon) for additional questions.

<https://www.mga.edu/health-clinic/immunization.php>

TUITION AND FEES

International students do not qualify for in-state tuition regardless of how long they have lived in Georgia and are subject to the out of country rates. Refer to the Tuition & Fees website at <https://www.mga.edu/bursar/tuition-fees/> for current tuition and fees.

Paying your School Bills

If you bring money to the U.S. in a check or money order and deposit it in a bank, it may take up to three weeks for the check to be processed and become available for your use. Therefore, we strongly recommend you choose one of the following options to ensure that you will have money available at the time of registration:

1. Send a check or money order ahead of time to the university. Please include the student's name and MGA ID number on the check or money order.
2. Wire your funds electronically to the university.
3. Have a credit card available to pay your bills through your SWORDS account or in-person at the Bursar's Office.
4. Bring the check to the Bursar's Office

You can pay at the time you register for classes. If not paid at that time, your payment must be received by the Bursar's office by the Fee Payment Deadline of the term you registered for. The accepted fee payment methods include cash, check, money order and credit card.

Wire Transfer

As a secure way of payment, wire transfer is always a recommended way of payment if the student has enough time. International payments must be sent through Flywire. <https://www.mga.edu/bursar/payments/international-payments.php>

Payment Plan

Make college more affordable by paying for tuition and fees over time. Tuition payment plans break down your tuition balance into affordable monthly payments. There's no interest, payment options are flexible, setup fees are affordable, and it's easy to enroll! <https://www.mga.edu/bursar/payments/payment-plan.php>

Deadlines

<https://www.mga.edu/bursar/payments/deadlines.php>
Middle Georgia State University students whose schedules are dropped during the drop for non-payment for Late Registration/Drop/Add process may be considered for a full schedule add back once the student provides required or full payment within 2 weeks after the schedule drop. The Addback fee is \$100.

MGA KNIGHT CARD

The Knight Card is the essential key to campus life and a great tool for handling your money! The Knight Card is your official school ID and is an all-inclusive card used for food, on-campus amenities, access, and a debit card for making purchases on campus! The purpose of this is to provide safety and security to cardholders by eliminating the necessity to carry cash for products and services available.

Please visit their website at <https://www.mga.edu/card/> for more information

HEALTH INSURANCE

In the United States, the government does not pay for health care. Students must pay for every doctor or hospital visit. Health care in the United States is very expensive. A visit to the doctor's office may cost \$100-\$500. A trip to the hospital for a broken arm can cost \$500-\$1,000.

Because of this, all non-immigrant students are required by the University System of Georgia (USG) to have accident and sickness insurance while at Middle Georgia State University. The mandatory student health insurance will be automatically charged to your student account at the time you register for classes. Our current insurance provider is United Healthcare. Coverage and rates can be found at <https://www.mga.edu/health-clinic/docs/2024-1225-4-Summary-Flyer.pdf>

Students with an ACA compliant health insurance that meets the USG waiver requirements may request a waiver from the USG plan. Alternative insurance must meet the standards of the USG plan and must include medical evacuation and repatriation. For more information on waiver requirements and requests, visit <https://www.mga.edu/health-clinic/student-insurance.php>

PARKING

All MGA students pay a \$10 parking fee each semester. As a part of this fee, students can register for a permit online, which covers two vehicles. If a student has a need for more than two vehicles, they must purchase an additional permit for \$10.00. Failure to register your vehicle will result in a citation, Students will not be permitted to register for classes, receive transcripts, or receive diplomas until all citation fines are resolved in full. Student permits expire each year in December and must be renewed annually online. <https://mga.aimsparking.com/>

GEORGIA DRIVER'S LICENSES

Full-time F-1 students who wish to drive in Georgia have the option of using an existing home country license or obtaining a Georgia driver's license. If you decide to drive with your home country license, you will need to always keep your Knight card and proof of current MGA enrollment in your vehicle—this is required by law. You will also need to always keep a copy of the Georgia Code Section 40-5-21(b) in your car.

A drawback to keeping your existing license is that car insurance will be higher for you than with a Georgia license.

If you decide to get a Georgia driver's license, you will be required to show your foreign license to the Department of Driver Services, and it would no longer be valid in the U.S. Students who do not have a license from their home country but who wish to obtain a Georgia license must take the written and road driving tests.

In order to get your license, visit <http://dds.georgia.gov/> to find the Driver's License Customer Service Center closest to you. You will need these things:

- Passport
- I-94 card
- I-20 or DS-2019
- Proof of local residence (signed lease agreement, utility bill with your address and name, bank statement with your address and name)
- \$20 (cash or card)
- Social Security card or SSN CARD DENIAL NOTICE

If you do not have a social security number, you will need to obtain a SSN CARD DENIAL NOTICE from a local SSA office before visiting a DDS Customer Service Center to apply for a driver's license. See the above section to find out how to locate and visit a Social Security office. Take all your immigration documents with you and tell the agent that you would like the denial notice. After obtaining the form, bring it to the Customer Service Center when you apply for your driver's license.

Social Security card or SSN CARD DENIAL NOTICE

SSN Denial Notice

It is a letter for those who wish to obtain a GA drivers license but do not have an SSN number and are not eligible for one at the time.

You must complete a Certification of Social Security Denial Status Form (DDS-351). This form is available at the Customer Service Centers.

You can find your nearest SSA office by visiting the [website](#) and using the office locator tool.

SSN for employment

- **On campus employment/ CPT**

To obtain an SSN for employment you must have an offer in hand before applying.

2. Complete form [SS-5](#)
3. Schedule an in-person appointment at a Social Security Administration (SSA) office
4. Bring the required documents.
3. Apply within 30 days of your employment start date.

Required documents: Completed Form SS-5, Passport with F-1 visa, most recent I-94 admission record, I-20, Letter of proof of enrollment from MGA DSO and Offer letter from employer.

- **OPT**

Students can apply for an SSN when they apply for their OPT EAD card.

Students can also apply for an SSN after receiving their EAD card in the mail.

LIFE AT MIDDLE GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

ACADEMICS

Educational systems differ from country to country. Here are some things you need to know about academic life at MGA.

The Student/Instructor Relationship

The student/instructor relationship in the U.S. is generally more informal than in other countries. It is acceptable and expected for students to ask questions and discuss topics with the instructor. Some instructors do not mind being called by their first name; they may even sit on the desk and walk around the room as they speak. In class, students may speak without raising their hand and be recognized. Depending on the rules of the classroom or building, some people eat and drink in class.

Tips for Academic Adjustment and Success

- Professors prefer it if students discuss ideas rather than just sit and listen. The way you express your viewpoint is important, however. Show respect by acknowledging the professor or classmates' point of view and then offer your opinion. Say, "In my opinion..." or "I think..." or "I feel..." or "I believe..."
- If you do not understand, ask. If you are not yet used to asking questions in class, make an appointment with your professor.
- At the start of each semester you will be handed a syllabus for each course. This is an outline of the course objectives, due dates for assignments, and much more. Keep the syllabus for the duration of the course and refer to it if you are not sure about assignment requirements. Pay close attention when the professor discusses the syllabus as he will often explain during this time how grades will be determined.
- Do not try to write down everything in class. Practice taking notes.
- You are expected to talk in class. A good rule to follow is to raise your hand to ask a question or make a comment at least once every week. If a professor calls on you to answer a question, you should say something. If you don't know the answer, it's alright to give a wrong answer. Participation may be included in your grade.

Missing Class

You are expected to go to class on time, to notify your teacher ahead of time if you will be absent, and to participate. It is better to be late to class than to skip class. If you must miss class because of illness, you may need a doctor's excuse, especially if you have a long illness and you must miss several classes. You can ask for a doctor's note at

If you have seen the doctor. Ask your professors for their policies on missing class. They may also be included in the syllabus. It is also recommended to notify your professor beforehand if you know you will be absent from a class.

Grading

Grades are on a 4.0 scale, with grades ranging from A to F.

A = 4.0

B = 3.0

C = 2.0

D = 1.0

F = 0

W = This indicates a withdrawal without penalty and is assigned when students withdraw from courses by the deadline to withdraw without penalty. Before withdrawing from a course all international students must consult with their Advisor and ISS coordinator.

WF = This indicates that the student withdrew from a course after the deadline to withdraw without penalty or the withdrawal exceeded the 5-withdrawal limit. A WF grade is counted the same as a "F" grade in the GPA calculation.

I = An incomplete grade (I) indicates that the student, for non-academic reasons was unable to complete the requirements for a course

GPA = Grade Point Average is computed by multiplying credit hours by the class numerical grade and then dividing total credits into the total grade points.

Academic Honesty

What constitutes academic honesty varies from culture to culture, and it is important to understand rules of academic conduct at Middle Georgia State University. All students are expected to do their own work. If you are caught cheating in any way, you will be severely penalized. Do not take the risk of copying anyone else's work. Cheating includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Violating course rules contained in the course syllabus
- Getting or providing unauthorized assistance from another student on a paper or project
- Providing or receiving information during quizzes and exams
- Falsifying, fabricating, or dishonest reporting of research results
- Taking the place of another student or enlisting another student to take your place in an exam
- Plagiarizing

Plagiarism means using someone else's work in your own papers without attributing the work to the real author.

Stress

If you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed, do not stop going to classes. This will make the situation more difficult.

Instead, talk to your professor about your situation. All professors have office hours when they are available to see students, and they encourage students to come talk to them. Don't hesitate to visit or email your professors throughout the semester. Most of them are willing to help you if they see that you are making every effort to do well in their class.

MGA BEWELL

In addition to a 24/7 support line - **833.646.1526** - which provides in-the-moment support for mental health issues, additional Uwill services are offered through the [MGA Counseling Center](#) - call 478.471.2985 or 478.934.3080 or email for:

- Virtual psychiatric clinics to offer assessment and medication management
- Personal Student Navigators to assist with referral coordination and support

HOUSING

For all types of housing, you will need to provide your own pillows, sheets, blankets, towels, dishes, silverware, and pots and pans. If you sign an on-campus housing contract, confirm details with this office soon after arrival.

Hotels

Before you settle down in an apartment or house, you may need to find a temporary place to stay. If you want to find a hotel or inn near MGA campus, you can refer to Airbnb or Google search.

On-Campus Housing

We offer housing options on our Cochran, Eastman, and Macon campuses. Our dedicated student and professional staff members are on-site to encourage personal growth, academic success, and leadership development.

<https://www.mga.edu/residence-life/housing/index.php>

Our housing rates also include utilities, such as electricity and water, and access to high-speed internet, which can save you money compared to off-campus options. Compared to local housing options, our rates are some of the most affordable in the area and often are less than the price of nearby apartment complexes.

Apply early using your SWORDS account! There is an application fee of \$155.

<https://www.mga.edu/residence-life/apply.php>

Off-Campus Housing

When choosing an apartment, consider:

- Furnished or unfurnished
- Private or shared kitchen and bathroom
- Availability of laundry services
- Accessibility to campus or public transportation
- Parking availability (if you have a car)
- Lease term (many leases are at least six months or one year)
- Deposit (in addition to the first month of rent, a security deposit is usually required, which is returned to you if you leave the apartment in good condition)
- Utilities (gas, electricity, water) may be paid by you or the landlord.
- Safe neighborhood (talk with local residents or police to learn about safety)
- Number of roommates

Requirements for renting:

- You will usually be required to show income of at least 2-3 times the amount of the rent. To show this, you can bring in pay stubs or find a guarantor.
- The landlord will ask for your rental history. The university housing office can help you with this.

Housing tips:

- If possible, pay by check or money order; not cash.
- Always ask for a receipt in order to have proof that you have paid.
- In the US, a written contract is more important than what is said.
- If possible, bring a friend with you to help ask questions.
- Read carefully before you sign a contract. Ask for a copy

Housing Quick Vocabulary:

- AC/H = Air-conditioning and Heat
- HVAC = Heating and Cooling System
- BR = Bedroom
- BA = Bathroom
- ½ BA = No shower or bathtub
- Util. = Utilities: gas, electricity and water
- Dep. = Deposit, usually one month's rent or less

Mobile/Cellular Phone Service

There are many options for cellular phone service. Many companies offer service contracts for two years, with deals for free or discounted phones when the contract is signed. Another option, especially for students who will be in Georgia for less than two years, is pay-as-you-go (also known as prepaid) cards. These cards allow you to prepay for a certain number of minutes, with the option of buying more minutes when you need them. To use this kind of service, you will need to purchase a phone.

Cellular companies:

- AT&T: www.wireless.att.com
- Metro-PCS: <http://www.metrobyt-mobile.com/>
- Sprint: www.sprint.com
- T-Mobile: www.t-mobile.com
- Verizon: www.verizonwireless.com

SAFETY

When off campus, be aware of your surroundings, do not carry copious amounts of cash and avoid being out late by yourself. Uber and Lyft are reliable transportation apps, always confirm license plate numbers before entering the car.

Each campus is equipped with a 24/7 police department.

To help us better ensure your security while you are on campus, **take these four steps:**

1. **Make sure you've [taken the steps on this page](#) to receive Knight Alerts** – automated campus safety alerts delivered via text message and/or email.
2. **Program the number for MGA University Police (478.471.2414) into your phone**, so that you can easily contact them in the event of an emergency.
3. **Review the campus' [Emergency Response Plan](#)** to make sure you know what to do if an emergency occurs.
4. **If you see something, say something** – if you see or hear anything, in person or online in social media, that could impact your safety or that of fellow MGA students, staff, or faculty, notify the MGA University Police at or by calling 478.471.2414. **Online threats ARE real threats – do not dismiss threatening or dangerous activity just because it's happening online.**

HEALTH CARE

For All Emergencies: dial 911 on any phone

University Health Clinic

Staffed by licensed Nurse Practitioners, Health Clinics are located on the Macon and Cochran campuses. These facilities are medical clinics providing a broad range of affordable health care to currently enrolled MGA students on all five campuses. A valid MGA Knight ID card is required.

Middle Georgia State University Students can visit the university clinic, which treats minor illnesses and injuries. Seeing a doctor and getting medicine from the clinic are free, but for more serious cases they may need to refer you to an outside physician.

Some services UHS provides include:

- Primary care services, including diagnosis and treatment of common illnesses, annual physical, and STD checks and treatment.
- Minor emergencies
- Sports medicine.
- Women's health treatment
- Health education
- Dispensing some prescription drugs and over-the-counter medications
- Immunizations
- Laboratory tests, most of which are available at deeply discounted rates

Locations:

Health Clinic - Macon

Music Building
100 University Parkway
Macon, GA 31206
Phone: 478.471.2092

Health Clinic - Cochran

Georgia Hall, Lower Level
1100 Second Street, S.E.
Cochran, GA 31014
Phone: 478.934.3080

STUDENT SERVICES

Student Life

MGA's Student Life Program offers students diverse opportunities, activities, and services which foster meaningful engagement outside the classroom. For information on specific campus events, please contact the Office of Student Life.

Check out all of our student organizations and exciting events in [MGA Knight Life!](#)

MGA Athletics

Middle Georgia State University (MGA) has men's and women's teams for baseball, basketball, cross country, soccer, softball, tennis, and volleyball, and has recently transitioned to NCAA Division II.

Other athletic activities Club equestrian team (IHSA) and Women's outdoor track and field (distance).

Come and support the Knights!

<https://mgaknights.com/calendar>

Career & Leadership Development

Our mission is to provide innovative, student-centered services, programs, and connection opportunities that prepare and empower students to identify, build, and articulate career and leadership competencies needed to enhance their local and global communities as professionals, leaders, and lifelong learners.

During your journey at MGA, the Center for Career & Leadership Development (CCLD) is here to help you reach your professional career goals. [Overview of Services \(PDF\)](#)

To schedule appointments, go to the Career Center section of [Handshake](#).

Locations

- Macon: Student Life Center 261
- Cochran: Sanford 112
- Eastman: Room 1129

Student Success Center

The mission of the Student Success Center is to positively impact retention and progression by providing academic assistance and support to students and faculty at Middle Georgia State University.

The Student Success Center provides the following resources:

<https://www.mga.edu/student-success-center/index.php>

- Tutors - Professional and Peer Certified Online
- Online Study Resources and Links
- Professional and Peer Panels
- Chat with a Tutor!

Academic Success Coaching

Academic Success Coaching at MGA empowers students to become confident, lifelong learners who are equipped with the skills, resources, and support systems necessary to succeed and achieve their academic and personal goals.

<https://www.mga.edu/student-success-center/academic-success-coaching/index.php>

Academic Success Coaches empower students and contribute to their success by:

- Increasing students' self-awareness and their understanding and appreciation of others
- Developing students into their full potential through academics, career, leadership, relationships, and engagement
- Increasing students' overall confidence, engagement and sense of responsibility in pursuing their undergraduate goals
- Positively impacting retention, graduation rates, and satisfaction among students

The Writing Center

The MGA Writing Center is a free service that provides one-on-one consultations to assist students with all types of writing. Our consultants provide feedback and use different strategies to help students improve their writing.

MGA Writing Centers are open for face-to-face and video-conferencing options in Macon and Cochran. Video conferences are available for Dublin, Eastman, and Warner Robins campuses.

<https://www.mga.edu/student-success-center/writing-centers.php>

Writing Center services include:

- Providing Feedback
- Offering suggestions for improvement
- Explaining concepts in grammar and documentation (MLA, APA, Chicago, ASPA, ETC.)
- Supplying resources to improve writing
- Offering guidance on research papers
- Providing anti-plagiarism guidance

Writing Center consultants are unable to:

- Write papers for students.
- "Proofread" whole papers.
- Interpret the writing assignment given by a professor.

MANAGING YOUR MONEY

MONEY AND BANKING

Opening a Bank Account

Make it a priority upon your arrival to open a checking and/or savings account with a bank. Banks with many branches around Middle Georgia include:

- Bank of America (www.bankofamerica.com)
- Truist (<https://Truist.com>)
- Wells Fargo (www.wellsfargo.com)

When you open an account, the bank will likely ask you for your passport, I-20, and Social Security Number (SSN). If you do not have an SSN, you can tell the bank that international students are not allowed to have SSNs unless they are employed. If the bank refuses to open an account for you, ISS can write a letter for you to give to the bank.

It is not safe to carry large amounts of cash with you. When first coming to the U.S., it is safest to bring your money in the form of traveler's checks. If you deposit checks or traveler's checks into your account, the money can take up to three weeks to be cleared for withdrawal. Once you have opened a U.S. bank account, your parents can deposit money into this account from overseas by wire transfer. When opening your account, be sure to ask the bank official to give you the necessary information your parents would need in order to make such a transfer.

If you have a spouse or other dependents, you may wish to open a joint account so multiple family members can use the same account.

U.S. Money Facts

- The dollar is also called a buck, bill(s) or a one. All U.S. paper money is the same size and color.
- American coins have names:
 - Penny = 1 cent
 - Nickel = 5 cents
 - Dime = 10 cents
 - Quarter = 25 cents
 - Half-dollar = 50 cents
 - Dollar = 100 cents

Using an ATM

Automated Teller Machines (or ATMs for short) allow you to make cash withdrawals, deposits, and transfers between accounts. You can also view your account balance. This is free at your own bank and its branches, but when you use another bank's ATM, both your bank and the other bank could charge you a bank fee of between \$1.50 and \$2.50. You will need an ATM card or a debit card to use the ATM machine. There is a limit on how much money you can withdraw from an ATM at one time or on one day. Check with your bank to find out what the limit is.

Using a Debit Card

A debit card—also called a check card—is connected to your checking account and is used almost like a regular credit card (such as MasterCard or VISA), except that the charges made are deducted from your checking account upon purchase. You do not get a separate bill at the end of the month as with a credit card. Be sure to keep track of your spending, though. If you spend more money than is in your account, you do not only risk ruining your credit record, but the bank also charges you with a fee of around \$25 every time you overdraw your account.

How to Write a Check

Americans use checks rather than paying cash for big purchases. When opening your bank account, you'll be given a checkbook. Using a checkbook for paying rent, your phone bill etc. helps you to keep track of payments.

Here are steps to follow when writing a check:

1. Write the date on which you are "issuing" or writing the check.
2. Write the name of the person or business to which you are making the payment, and draw a line after the name so no one can add to the name.
3. Write the dollar amount in numerals (e.g. \$20.53). Put the first number directly after the dollar sign so that there is no room for someone to add another number between the dollar sign and the first number.
4. Write out the dollar amount, and draw a line to fill the space.
5. Sign your name as it is printed on the check (don't sign in Chinese, Japanese etc.).
6. Write down the purpose of the check in the lower left hand corner, e.g. Groceries, or if it is for payment of an account, write the account number in that space.

EMPLOYMENT

While international students have limitations on where and how much you can work, there are many opportunities for employment. F-1 students are allowed to work up to 20 hours per week on campus, beginning as soon as your studies begin. You will learn more about employment at orientation, and if you have questions about working on or off campus at any time during your stay at Middle Georgia State University, stop by the ISS office and speak with the coordinator.

The Center for Career & Leadership Development can help you find a job on campus or an internship off campus. They can also help you practice and prepare for a job interview, refine your resume (CV) and cover letter, learn how to network, and many other things. Career Services also offers job listings and online venues for finding internships. To learn more, see <https://www.mga.edu/center-career-leadership-development/index.php>

U.S. TAXES

Filing correct federal income tax forms is the personal responsibility of each international student. All F-1 students and their dependents are required to file an annual tax form of some kind if you have:

- Income from wages, unless the income you earned does not exceed the [personal exemption amount](#).
- A taxable scholarship or fellowship.
- Income from stock options.
- Lottery or gambling winnings.
- Other types of non-wage income.

If you earned any of these types of income during the previous calendar year, you must file your taxes by the deadline, which is in the month of April

Employment Workshops:

Employment workshops (CPT and OPT) are offered every semester in collaboration with career services. Communication about these workshops will be sent to your student email address

CPT

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is a work authorization program for F-1 visa holders that allows them to work off campus while completing their program of study.

A DSO can authorize CPT for an F-1 student enrolled at an SEVP-certified university if the student:

- Has been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis for at least a full academic year.
- Enrolled in an internship course or practical work experience or is required for their program of study.
- Has secured a training position that is related to their program of study.

Post OPT

OPT" for F1 stands for "Optional Practical Training," which is a temporary work authorization period that allows F-1 visa holders to gain practical work experience in the United States directly related to their field of study, after completing their academic program; essentially, it lets them work in their major for up to 12 months to gain real-world experience while maintaining their F-1 student status. You need to apply for OPT through the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and will receive an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) if approved.

EXPERIENCE GEORGIA

WEATHER

Weather in Georgia is generally warm in the spring and fall, hot in the summer, and mildly cold in winter.

Summer: June through September is generally hot and humid during the day, with pleasant temperatures at night. Highs are in the 80s-90s Fahrenheit. However, even when it is very hot outside, air-conditioned buildings can be very cold, so you may need to bring a jacket with you even in summer. Also beware of mosquitoes in the summer, especially in areas with lots of plants and trees. You can buy insect repellent at the drugstore or grocery store to help keep them from biting.

Fall: October is variable and can be either very hot or very cold, while November begins to get cold. Expect to start wearing winter clothes in November with temperatures dropping into the 40s Fahrenheit.

Winter: December through February can be very cold, with temperatures in the 30s and even 20s. Snow is rare but does come every few years. Winter highs are generally in the 40s Fahrenheit.

TRANSPORTATION

Arriving to Campus

When flying into Georgia you will fly into the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. To arrive on campus, you can take a taxi, Uber, or Lyft.

Those residing in Macon/Warner Robins can schedule a ride with a local shuttle service; Groome. Groome services will take you to their shuttle stations, not directly to campus, and from there you can take a taxi a short distance to campus.

Groome

Groome provides safe, dependable, and convenient intercity airport transportation connecting regional cities to major hub airports. With shared shuttle services between over 100 cities and 13 airports in the US, getting to and from the airport has never been easier.

Make your reservations ahead of time.

https://groometransportation.com/?&sd_client_id=ebe83ba4-7fda-45aa-9242-7cf2cda74c0b

Traveling around the U.S.

If you are planning to visit friends or family further away or would like to explore the USA during your summer or winter break, you can, of course, fly. But you can also take the train or bus. This will not only save you money; you will also get to see more of the countryside.

Amtrak provides rail service to all major cities, and Greyhound is the major bus carrier. Megabus is more limited but offers direct service to major cities. These services can even take you into Canada. If you're adventurous, look into their explorer tickets, which allow unlimited travel for one price.

- Amtrak <http://www.amtrak.com/home>
- Greyhound <http://www.greyhound.com/>
- Megabus <https://www.megabus.com/>

SHOPPING

In most stores prices are fixed, which means that you cannot bargain for a lower price. The exception to this is buying very expensive items such as a house or car. The posted price generally does NOT include sales tax, which must be calculated in when you make your purchase. The sales tax varies by county but is usually 6-7% of the purchase price.

Whenever you buy something, ask for a receipt. The receipt proves that you have purchased an item on a particular day in a particular store. If the item is damaged or unsatisfactory.

These stores offer a wide variety of items at a lower cost.

Walmart
Dollar general
Dollar Tree
Ross
Marshals
TJ Maxx
Ollie's Bargain Outlet

AMERICAN CULTURE

NAMES

First or given names are used in the US more frequently than anywhere else. The last name is the family name. If they are about the same age or status people may call each other by their first names immediately after they meet.

When you meet someone who has a title like "Professor," "Doctor," "Ambassador," "President," or "Dean," it is correct to use that title and the person's last or family name. "Ms." is an appropriate way to address both married and unmarried women. If invited to address someone by their first name, you may do so. In the classroom if you feel uncomfortable calling your instructor by the first name, you can use a title and their last name.

If you don't know how to address a person you can follow these general rules:

- Address people of your own approximate age and status by their first name.
- If the person is older use Mr., Mrs., Miss or Ms. and the last name. Ask them "What shall I call you?" or "How shall I address you?"
- If someone appears uncertain about how to address you say, "You can call me..."
-

Be patient with people in terms of helping them pronounce your name. Just like some sounds are new to you, there will be sounds that are new to others.

Get in the habit of using your official name when you write your signature. Signing abbreviations of your name can be confusing. It is also helpful for instructors and other people who come in contact with you to know your full name and your nickname. Some international students may use nicknames because people have trouble pronouncing their birth names. Being called by a nickname can indicate you are viewed with respect and affection.

JUST SAY NO

The freedom of speech to which Americans have become accustomed has established a way of communicating that is sometimes seen as very direct. Directness while communicating with others is very acceptable and sometimes expected. DON'T FEEL BAD ABOUT SAYING NO!

In some countries, open rejection or disagreement may be considered rude. This is not the case in the United States. Here it is quite normal to disagree openly. Therefore, the

following scenarios have been provided in order to give you a better idea of how to say "No" when you find yourself in one of these situations.

Telemarketing

You may get phone calls from people wanting to sell you things or wanting you to give money to a charity. Credit card companies may try to give you credit cards, marketing companies may ask you to participate in surveys, and telemarketers may try to sell you various products. The people who call may ask for your personal information without telling you why they are asking. They may also keep talking without giving you the chance to talk and explain things that you don't understand. They will also do their best to keep you on the phone as long as possible. This is their job.

What you can do is say, "No, thank you!" and hang-up the telephone. Don't stay on the phone any longer once you have said it. If these people come to your door, just say, "No thanks!" and close your door. Don't worry about being rude—they are used to it. It is possible to have your phone number removed from most of the telemarketers' lists by registering your number on the National Do Not Call List at www.donotcall.gov.

Religion

People may try to get you to visit or join their church. They may invite you to one of their organization's events or give you books and magazines about their religion. What you can do if you don't wish to attend their meetings or church services is simply say, "No, thank you." It is not rude and they should not get angry. Even if the person has been a good friend or helped you in some way, you have the right not to attend a church service or meeting if you don't want to.

Panhandlers

Panhandlers (or beggars) can be seen in some areas surrounding campus. They may be standing or walking around asking people for money. If they approach you, DO NOT GIVE THEM MONEY. Panhandling is illegal and should not be encouraged, and charities provide shelter and food for those who need it.

If you are approached, you can say, "Sorry, I don't have any money," or "No, thanks." If the person becomes aggressive or insists, just walk away. If possible, try to avoid coming near panhandlers at night.

Drugs

Recreational drugs are common in the United States. You are most likely to be offered drugs at a party, a night club, or a bar. It's all right to say "NO." Also be aware that many of these drugs are made in people's homes and cut, or mixed, with deadly substances.

Never set your drink down at a party or bar! People can slip drugs into your drink this way. If you happen to set your cup down, get a new cup and drink. Remember that you always have the right to say no to anything you encounter that makes you feel uncomfortable.

Alcohol

The legal age to purchase and/or drink alcohol is 21, and you must show your identification before buying any kind of alcohol. It is illegal to carry open containers of alcohol in public places like the street, or even transport them in your car. In addition, the laws against drunk driving are very strict. DO NOT DRINK BEFORE YOU DRIVE. Not only is this dangerous to you and others, but you could also lose your license and go to jail – for international students this means deportation.

FRIENDSHIP

A U.S. student may consider you a friend, but he or she may invite you to do something only once or twice a quarter. This is not because he or she does not like you. It simply means that life in the United States is very busy and U.S. students tend to have many commitments (work and family, for instance, in addition to their studies) and not much free time.

Sometimes international students feel that U.S. students are superficial because they act very friendly but do not wish to build a friendship. Acting friendly is a U.S. custom. It is intended to create positive feelings. Some new international students feel confused when someone they do not know says hello to them in the street. This casual greeting is not intended to encourage a conversation or express a romantic interest. It is just another form of American friendliness.

"Hi, how are you?" is a common greeting in the United States, but very often the person who asks the question does not wait for a response. Some international students think this is very rude, but it is not intended to be. It is not customary for the person asking this question to wait for a deep answer. It is customary to reply, "Fine" or "Good." You may also want to ask how the other person is. She or he will most likely answer with the same brief response.

DATING

When you first start interacting with Americans, it may seem a little awkward in the way they joke around and socialize. Someone you meet may find an interest in you, or you may find an interest in him or her. So, if you are interested, how do you make the first move? If you are not interested, how do you tell that person?

If you like someone:

Tell him or her that you are interested and ask him or her to have dinner or coffee with you sometime. It is all right to be direct in these cases. Don't worry—even most Americans find this difficult. Do not go out alone with someone you just met. If someone asks you on a date and you wish to accept, agree to meet in a public area with other people around.

If you don't like someone:

When he or she asks to see you sometime, you can simply say, "Probably not, but thank you."

If you no longer want to date someone or if you are not interested in having sex with someone who is pressuring you, simply tell him or her directly what you want. Don't be afraid to state your mind or else he or she may assume you are still interested. If someone behaves aggressively or threateningly, end the relationship. You do not need to be polite if someone makes you feel pressured or scared.

CULTURAL VALUES

Independence

The United States was founded by people who valued independence. An independent spirit is still evident in this culture. Many people from the U.S. believe that they are responsible for their own destinies. Being self-reliant is considered more important than relying on family and friends. Many people from the United States believe that individuals reach maturity at age 18 and should be ready to make independent decisions. Privacy is valued for many of the same reasons. Even among members of a family, issues such as money, marriage, and career decisions may not be discussed out of respect for a person's privacy.

Work Ethic

People from the United States tend to value being busy, and we often make lists of what we hope to accomplish in a day! You may notice that people in the U.S. walk quickly, talk quickly and pay little attention to manners and politeness. We want to "get down to business" rather than make polite

conversation. We don't mean to be rude! We just have a lot to do (or think we do). Time is money!

Race, Ethnicity, and Gender

Many people in the United States like to think that all people are equal—race, color, religion, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation are unimportant to our value as human beings. Words like “tolerance” and “appreciation” are words that we may use to describe our relationship with people different from ourselves. For this reason, racist and sexist jokes and comments are not tolerated in many social and business settings. In fact, people who make such comments could lose their jobs.

However, despite these principles, many inequalities still exist in the United States. You may hear people make negative comments about other groups. You may even experience discrimination because you are an international student. If this happens to you and you wish to talk about it, talk to an advisor in the ISSS office or a counselor from the Counseling Center. An advisor or counselor who is familiar with these issues will try to understand the situation and make some suggestions for dealing with it.

Some international students are surprised to hear men and women say they are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. There is a growing community of Americans who identify themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender and do not believe that it is necessary to keep this a secret. This community has become more visible and accepted, and people who are part of this population form a respected part of U.S. society. You will most likely have a professor, classmate, roommate, or friend who is gay. Remember to treat the people you meet with the same respect and openness that you would want to be treated with.

U.S. HOLIDAYS

There are many different holidays in the United States, the most widely celebrated ones are:

- **January 1** – New Year's Day. Beginning on the evening of December 31, Americans celebrate the New Year.
- **Third Monday in January** – Martin Luther King Jr. Day. This holiday celebrates the life of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., a leader of the U.S. civil rights movement.
- **Third Monday of February** – Presidents' Day. This is a day to remember past U.S. presidents George Washington, the first U.S. president, and Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president who led the country during the Civil War and is credited with abolishing slavery. Both were born in this month.

- **March 17**—St. Patrick's Day. Named for the patron saint of Ireland, this day is often celebrated with parades and parties. Many people wear green clothing and put up decorations—even if they're not of Irish decent! If you do not wear green on this day, classmates may pinch you.
- **Springtime** (date varies)—Easter. This is a traditional Christian holiday, when people decorate eggs and children are visited by the Easter Bunny.
- **Last Monday in May** – Memorial Day. This holiday is a time that Americans remember all of those who died in war for the United States.
- **July 4** – Independence Day. On July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence, a document the United States used to declare its independence from England, was signed. Americans celebrate this holiday with picnics and fireworks.
- **First Monday in September** – Labor Day. This holiday recognizes the efforts of American workers.
- **October 31**—Halloween. People often celebrate this holiday by wearing costumes and carving scary faces on pumpkins. Children dress up in costumes and go trick-or-treating to get candy.
- **Last Thursday in November** – Thanksgiving. According to legend, the first European settlers of the United States gave thanks for their first harvest season by eating a feast with Native Americans. This is a traditional time for families and friends to eat a big turkey dinner together.
- **December 25** – Christmas Day. This holiday, at one time a traditionally Christian one, is now a time for most people to exchange gifts, decorate homes, and attend gatherings and parties for the few weeks before December 25.

But sometimes we have classes on some of the holidays. For the scheduled paid holidays of MGA, check: <https://www.mga.edu/academics/calendars/index.php> OR your syllabus to avoid missing class.

CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

Everyone who moves to a new country experiences a period of adjustment and adaptation to the new culture. This is sometimes referred to as “culture shock” because of the difficulty of leaving your home culture and living in a new culture. It includes the shock of a new environment, meeting lots of new people, and learning the ways of a different country. It also includes being separated from the important people in your life, such as family, friends, colleagues, or teachers.

Culture shock is entirely normal, usually unavoidable, and it does not mean anything bad about you or your new home. Actually, it can be a very significant learning experience, because it makes you more aware of your own culture as well as the new culture you have entered. It will give you valuable

skills that will serve you in many ways in the future—it's part of the benefit of international education.

Some typical symptoms of culture shock are:

- Extreme homesickness
- Loneliness
- Avoiding contact with other people, especially Americans
- Negative feelings and hostility toward American culture and people
- Anger, frustration, confusion
- Tiredness or need for excessive amounts of sleep
- Boredom
- Inability to concentrate or work
- Loss of appetite
- Loss of enjoyment in daily activities
- Lack of confidence
- Feelings of inadequacy or insecurity
- Depression and feelings of helplessness

Although you can't stop culture shock, there are some things you can do to make yourself feel better. Here are some ideas:

- Understand that your reactions are normal.
- Be open-minded and curious about your new environment
- Talk with an International Student Coordinator about your feelings
- Make friends with Americans and other international students
- If you struggle with academics, talk with your professors and advisors
- Stay busy with academics, hobbies, friends, and other interesting activities
- Exercise or participate in sports
- Try a new activity that you can't do in your home country
- Don't forget the reasons you came to America
- Be patient with yourself and your new culture
- When culture shock hits you, just remember that it is a normal part of being an international student. You will pass through periods of ups and downs, but in the end it will all be worth it. Try to focus on all the positive and rewarding aspects of your experience!
- For more information on American culture and living in the United States, take a look at the following links.
<http://www.leaderu.com/isr>
http://www.isep.org/Family/helping_before.asp
<http://www.internationalstudent.com>

MEASUREMENT EQUIVALENTS

Weight:

1 ounce = 28.35 grams

1 pound = 453.59 grams

Length:

1 mile = 1609.34 m

1 inch = 2.54 cm

1 foot = 30.48 cm

1 yard = 91.44 cm

Liquid Volume

1 teaspoon = 4.929 ml

1 fluid ounce = 29.57353 ml

1 cup = 236.59 ml

1 quart = 0.94635 liters

1 gallon = 3.7854 liters

Temperature:

Formula for conversion from Celsius to Fahrenheit:

$$F = ((9/5) * C) + 32$$

Formula for conversion from Fahrenheit to Celsius:

$$C = (5/9)*(F-32)$$