



International Student and Scholar Pre-Arrival Handbook

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Pre-Arrival Planning Overview:



THE UNIVERSITY OF
**SOUTHERN
MISSISSIPPI**



**INTERNATIONAL
STUDENT AND
SCHOLAR
SERVICES**
AT SOUTHERN MISS

ARRIVING TO USM

- 1.**
Request and Receive
I-20 at [INTL.USM.EDU](https://intl.usm.edu)
- 2.**
Schedule a U.S. visa
appointment **ASAP**
- 3.**
Attend Pre-Arrival
Orientation (Virtual)
- 4.**
Confirm Housing Plan
- 5.**
Submit Arrival Plan to
ISSS (online)
- 6.**
Reserve In-Person
Check In
- 7.**
Depart with printed
I-20, passport, visa
- 8.**
Check in at ISSS
(in person)
- 9.**
Attend Orientation
(In person)

For questions contact INTL@usm.edu

Getting your Student Visa

For questions about admissions and getting a visa, contact INTLAdmissions@usm.edu. For scholars and after you receive a visa, please contact INTL@usm.edu for next steps.

After being accepted into your program at USM, complete the following steps to get a visa.

- 1) You will send in financial support documents and be issued an I-20 or DS-2019.
- 2) You will be added to the SEVIS Database (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System).
- 3) You will register with SEVIS and pay the [I-901 SEVIS Fee](#) for students/scholars.
- 4) After paying your I-901 fee, you apply for an F-1 visa at the U.S. embassy/consulate in your country using the [DS-160](#) form. Each embassy/consulate may have different requirements.
- 5) The DS-160 form is crucial for your interview, as you will be interviewed based on the information you provide in the form. It is advisable to take your time to carefully input the information to avoid mistakes that can cost you approval. Ensure your information is honest, correct, and not conflicting. If possible, have someone proofread it before submitting it.

As you prepare for your visa appointment, review the article: [10 Points to Remember When Applying for a Student Visa](#) by the NAFSA organization. Ensure that you book a visa appointment early enough, prior to your start date, as some Consulates have backlogs of applications and may delay opening new appointments. *We encourage you to book a visa appointment as soon as possible after you receive your I-20/DS-2019.*

Documents and Items Required for Travel

- Passport with valid visa
- Form I-20/DS-2019 from USM (**paper copy printed and signed is required by U.S. immigration**)
- Admission letter from the University of Southern Mississippi
- Airline tickets
- Credit cards usable in the United States
- Medicines and prescriptions
- Immunization Evidence (paper copy showing at least two doses of MMR vaccine)
- Transcripts and educational documents (extra copies in official sealed envelopes, if needed)
- Electrical adapter (voltage in U. S. is 110)
- Your emergency contacts' information (email, phone number, address)
- USM Contact Information:
 - The University of Southern Mississippi
 - Director: Leah McSorley; Assistant Director: Gina Barker
 - International Student Advisor: Micki Posey
 - Office of International Student and Scholar Services
 - 118 College Dr. #5151 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
 - INTL@usm.edu
 - Office Phone: +1-601-266-4841 (Business Hours: Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. CST)
 - Urgent after business hours: USM Police Department at 601-266-4986
- If you wish to get a driver's license in Mississippi:
 - Birth certificate (original copy) – long form with all your birth information, including parents' names, etc.
 - Government-authorized English translation of birth certificate.

Packing

This is not as simple as it may seem. We suggest you bring items with you that you should have in your carry-on rather than in your luggage.

- \$1,500-\$2,500 cash – to cover expenses until you get your U.S. Bank Account. Please do not bring more than necessary due to safety reasons.
- Laptops, tablets, cell phones, chargers, and **international adapters** should all be carried in your carry-on luggage.
- Essential day-to-day personal items – you may want these in your carry-on luggage.
 - Eyeglasses/contact lenses
 - Prescription medicine with documentation for the prescription from pharmacy or doctor.
- Basic bed linens if you do not have time to shop immediately when you arrive.
- Packaged snacks for the trip and your first few days in Mississippi—**Be careful; some food items are prohibited in the United States or other countries, and you may be stopping in along the way.**

Do Not Bring

- Appliances such as rice cookers
- Pots and Pans
- Large Blankets
- Basic Food Items

U.S. Customs and Border Protection provides a [comprehensive list](#) of food items that cannot be brought into the United States and what cannot be brought in your carry-on.

Your luggage may also be limited in weight. Remember that you can purchase many essential items after you arrive in Mississippi. Walmart is recommended for grocery shopping. Locate the one close to you when you arrive.

Immunizations

Students may upload their immunization records before they arrive through a link in their [SOAR](#) account. However, for international students, the “health hold” will remain in effect until after the initial health screening and review of their physical (paper) immunization records at the Moffitt Health Center.

Travel

As you plan your travel arrangements and arrival, please remember to [submit your arrival information](#) at least 3 weeks before departure and keep the following in mind:

Airports

- Hattiesburg-Laurel Regional Airport (PIB)
- Gulfport-Biloxi International Airport (GPT)
- Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport (MSY)

Most students fly into New Orleans. However, PIB is most convenient and close to the Hattiesburg campus, and GPT is most convenient and close to the Gulf Park campus.

Students attending the coastal campuses are suggested to fly into either MSY in New Orleans or GPT in Gulfport, which are closer to your campuses.

If an airline doesn't have direct flights from your country to any of these airports, connecting through international airports close to Mississippi is advisable. You may want to consider Atlanta, Georgia or Houston, TX, for example.

Book your flight as soon as possible after receiving your F-1 Visa. You may consider exploring travel agency services for a variety of flight options.

Transportation to Campus

The ISSS office will provide transportation before each semester. Please check with ISSS (intl@usm.edu) to note the final deadline to report transportation plan. ISSS may provide a shuttle on a particular date so students can avoid the cost of transportation to Hattiesburg from the airport.

Refer to Arrival to USM "[Submit Your Arrival Plan](#)" for more information or contact INTL@usm.edu for questions.

Via New Orleans/MSY Transportation Options

The costs below are estimated and subject to change and availability.

- [UBER APP](#) - Car \$182.97; Large vehicle \$295.82
- [LYFT APP](#) - Car \$160-185; Large vehicle \$250-285
- HATTIESBURG TRANSPORTATION (based in Hattiesburg) offers rides to New Orleans (\$250), Jackson (\$250), and Gulfport (\$150) airports. The charge may be split between all the riders. Call Mr. Tony (601)520-4816 a day in advance. If your flight gets delayed, call him as soon as possible to let him know.
- ifriends Ride Share – Other students may offer to drive or rideshare on the [iFriends - Hattiesburg, MS](#) Facebook Group. Note, you must be an approved member to make a post.

Make sure the vehicle you purchase has enough space for all your luggage.

Transportation from PIB and GPT

You must book your own transportation from these airports using the Uber or Lyft Apps.

Transportation to the Coastal Campuses

You must arrange your own transportation from all airports to the coastal campuses. Contact your department for advice about transportation to Hattiesburg Campus for orientation.

AMTRAK

AMTRAK TRAIN goes to New Orleans Mon, Tues., Fri., Sat., Sun., leaving Hattiesburg Station (HBG) at 5:53 p.m. (or later), arriving in New Orleans Union Passenger Terminal (NOL) around 9 p.m. or later. Transfer to MSY airport by taxi or Uber. Return to HBG from NOL on the same day, leaving NOL at 9:15 a.m. and arriving at HBG at 11:41 a.m.

Cost: \$32 most days

Get tickets online at [AMTRAK](#)

Arrival to Southern Miss

Check-In with ISSS

Following your arrival, please [reserve an appointment to check in](#) with the International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) Office.

Class Registration

Undergraduate Students

When an undergraduate student receives their F-1 visa, ISSS will notify their academic advisor, who will contact the student to schedule an advising appointment either before their arrival in the USA or after they get to campus. To attend class, undergraduate students must complete a check-in with ISSS, receive a Moffitt Health Center Appointment, and receive health clearance.

Graduate Students

Graduate students must check in with ISSS, receive a Moffitt Health Center Appointment, and receive health clearance before registering for classes. Because graduate programs are capped, we do not expect graduate students to have difficulty enrolling in appropriate courses after arriving at USM.

Fees & Payments

Tuition and fees are assigned to the student account after class registration. Additional fees, such as tax liability, meal plans, housing, and health insurance, could be added later, throughout the summer. Please check your account often to make sure you are up to date on all payments.

[Payment options](#) include a payment plan (using a U.S. bank account or credit card with an associated fee), full payment via wire transfer, or cash/check/money order/credit card (with an associated cost) on campus.

Note: For safety reasons, we do not recommend carrying more cash than needed for your housing arrangements.

The Student Expenses section of the [Business Services website](#) can help you estimate your costs. [Important financial dates](#) are also listed. If you have any questions about making payments, you can email business.services@usm.edu.

General International Student Resources

Shopping

There are many shopping options in Hattiesburg. Several shopping centers and grocery stores are close to campus or accessible by bus routes. Trips to the Shopping Centers and grocery stores will be scheduled during orientation week. Some available stores include Corner Market, Winn Dixie, Turtle Creek Shopping Center, Walmart, Target, and Sam's Club.

For the Gulf Coast/Gulf Park campus shopping centers and grocery shopping, Walmart Neighborhood Market, Winn Dixie, and Food Giant.

If your housing is arranged in advance or you have a friend near campus, you may wish to ship some important but bulky items in advance. For example, you might ship yourself (or your friend) a single-

person mattress, bedding, and a pillow from Amazon.com or another store so it is available to you soon after you arrive. Be sure to inform your apartment or friend in advance to get permission!

You can contact intl@usm.edu to see if iFriends can store something for you if you do not have a contact point in Southern Mississippi.

Banking

Students can open their bank accounts with Regions, Wells Fargo, Cadence Bank, or others. To open a bank account, the student usually needs a Social Security Number (SSN) or two ID verifications. Banks usually accept copies of your passport and visa as two different IDs and your I-20/DS-2019 to open new checking accounts for new international students without SSNs. The student will have to go in person to open their bank account and have an opportunity to open a bank account during orientation. **Note: Students under 18 are considered minors in the United States and cannot open a local bank account without a parent/guardian present.**

Transportation In and Around Campuses

Using a Car

Getting a US driver's license for (1) year takes several steps.

- https://www.driverservicebureau.dps.ms.gov/Drivers/Non_Citizen
- Make sure you study before taking the test: <https://driving-tests.org/mississippi/ms-diagnostic-driving-test/>
- Apply using this form:
<https://www.driverservicebureau.dps.ms.gov/sites/default/files/2018-04/APPLICATION-FOR-MISSISSIPPI-DRIVER-LICENSE.pdf>
- The Driver Service Bureau highly recommends all applicants make an appointment at dps.ms.gov/appointment.
- VERY IMPORTANT:
 - ORIGINAL birth certificate and official English translation document- if your original birth certificate has not already been printed in English translation from two places. If your original birth certificate is not already printed in English, please email intl@usm.edu asking for the procedure for obtaining an official translation of your birth certificate.
 - Bring a copy of your I-94.
 - Bring your unexpired foreign passport
 - Bring an I-20 or DS-2019
 - Proof of physical residence

1. If you live on campus, you need a letter from Residence Life on official university letterhead with your exact physical address—it MUST BE NOTARIZED.
 2. If you live off-campus, you need a recent bank statement, license plate receipt, or a utility bill stamped by the US Post Office.
- [Driver License Locations | DPS Driver Service Bureau](#)
 - Turtle Creek Mall location:
 1. 6109 US Highway 98, Hattiesburg, MS
 2. (601) 582- 3814
 - South Hattiesburg location:
 1. 35 JM Tatum Industrial Drive, Hattiesburg, MS
 2. (601) 582 – 3814
 - Gulfport Location (Kiln):
 1. Mississippi Department of Public Safety
16603 Hwy 603
Kiln, MS 39556
 2. (228) 255-4001
 - Gulfport Location (Biloxi):
 1. Mississippi Department of Public Safety
16741 Hwy 67
Biloxi, MS 39532
 2. (228) 396-7400
 - Pay the \$24 fee for a 4-year license.

Car Rental

- Enterprise is affordable and convenient: [Enterprise Website](#)
- Rent through Expedia (travel app): [Expedia Website](#)

Buying a car is a very exciting and big step!

- Where to look for affordable and reliable cars:
 - Facebook marketplace
 - iFriends: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ifriends.hattiesburg.ms/>
 - Local dealerships
 - Carvana: [Carvana Website](#)

- Plan for the average cost of a minimum-quality car to be approximately \$4,000-\$6,000, depending on the size, make, model, and year.
- Each car is required to have insurance.
 - Liability insurance in the state of Mississippi is REQUIRED BY LAW.
 - For the first-time offense of not having the required car insurance, you will be fined \$1,000, and your license will be suspended for one year or until you provide proof of insurance.
 - These companies can help you get car insurance:
 1. State Farm
 2. Progressive
 3. Geico
 4. Roseberry Insurance: <https://roseberryinsuranceagency.net/>

Public Transit

1. Hattiesburg Transportation
 - Hub City Transit
 - Schedule and Fares here: <https://www.hattiesburgms.com/hct/>
 - Amtrak Train
 - Goes to New Orleans Monday, Tuesday, Friday-Sunday, leaving the Hattiesburg (HBG) location at 5:53 PM or later.
 - Tickets found here: <https://www.amtrak.com/stations/hbg>
 - Costs \$32 most days.
 - Coastal Campuses
 - Coast Transit Authority <https://coasttransit.com/routes-schedules/>
 - Rome2Rio: <https://www.rome2rio.com/s/New-Orleans-Airport-MSY/Long-Beach-MS-USA>
 - Email or call USM for more information.
 1. parking@usm.edu
 2. (228) 214-3290

Private Transit

- [UBER](#)
- [LYFT](#)
- Hattiesburg Transportation Company offers rides to New Orleans (\$250), Jackson (\$250), and Gulfport (\$150) airports. The charge may be split between all the riders. Call Mr. Tony (601) 520-4816 a day in advance. If your flight gets delayed, call him as soon as possible to let him know.

Spouses and Families

Child Care Resources (Ages 0-4/5)

Children under five must always be supervised by their parent(s)/guardian(s) outside of childcare facilities. Because childcare may be limited, it is VERY IMPORTANT to register your children as soon as possible to ensure timely childcare supervision.

Child Daycares in Hattiesburg:

- Child Care Resource and Referral: <https://www.mdhs.ms.gov/eccd/parents/find/>
- Mississippi Early Childhood Inclusion Center:
<https://www.usm.edu/education-human-sciences/early-childhood-inclusion.php>
- [Panther's Den](#)
 - Located in Hattiesburg and Petal
 - (601) 336-5954
- [Early Encounters](#)
 - 2420 Hardy Street, Hattiesburg, MS 39401
 - (601) 544-1591
- There are many more available options including “babysitting trade” with other parents. Check the [iFriends Families Facebook group](#) to get nearby quality child care options recommended by current students.

School Districts (Ages 4/5-18)

- [Pre-K](#)
 - Hattiesburg Public School District
 - 301 Mamie Street, Hattiesburg, MS 39401
 - PRVO Head Start
 - 100 West Front Street, Hattiesburg, MS 39401
 - Smart Start Community School
 - 412 JC Killingsworth Drive, Hattiesburg, MS 39401
 - Oak Grove Learning Center
 - 2561 Old Hwy 24, Hattiesburg, MS 39401
- Public schools
 - [Hattiesburg District Public Schools](#)
 - Other nearby districts are called Oak Grove and Petal

- Private Schools
 - [Sacred Heart Catholic School](#)
 - (601) 583- 8683
 - Email: office@shshattiesburg.com
 - Tuition and Fees: <https://shshattiesburg.com/tuition-financial-aid>
 - [Presbyterian Christian School](#)
 - (601) 268 – 3867 (Elementary)
 - Email: info@pcsk12.org
 - Tuition and Fees: \$50 application fee [https://pcs-
ms.client.renweb.com/oa/index.cfm?memberid=2326](https://pcs-ms.client.renweb.com/oa/index.cfm?memberid=2326)

University of Southern Mississippi Campuses

Hattiesburg Campus

Eagle Dining Options

You can choose to have a [meal plan](#) as a USM student, but as a first-year student, it will be required due to the first-year live-on requirement. You are required to purchase \$300 bonus dollars as a first-year student to spend on meals at a variety of on-campus eateries, including Chick-fil-A (excellent fries and chicken nuggets), Starbucks, Bento Sushi, Einstein Bros Bagels, Subway, and others.

You do not use your bonus dollars at the main cafeteria run by The Fresh Food Company. Every day, fresh pizza is served, along with chicken nuggets, on Monday and everyone's favorite, fried chicken, on Wednesday. There are also other options such as Italian food, Salad Bar, Deli, and Homestyle. To allow you to eat before class, if you have an early morning class, they open at 7:00 am.

Facility hours, meal plans, and prices may be subject to change, so check for up-to-date information and current menu information online: <https://usm.campusdish.com/>

On Campus Housing (Hattiesburg)

[All first-year students](#) who will be 20 or older and do not wish to live on campus still need to submit an Exemption Request through the housing portal to be exempted from the requirement.

On the Hattiesburg campus, there are 14 residence Halls, 10 sorority houses, and 9 fraternity houses. Each dorm has residential assistants, and help desks available for students whenever they need assistance.

You should apply for accommodation as soon as possible to allow for the best opportunity to get one of your top choices. If you choose early, you may even be able to choose your roommate.

For further information, visit the [Department of Housing and Residential Life website](#), then click “Residence Hall Options” to view floor plans and video tours. [Residence Hall Prices.](#)

Wilber Hall is the most affordable option for females, while Hillcrest Hall is the most affordable option for males as first-year students who do not mind sharing bathrooms. Otherwise, consider Century Park,

Scott Hall, Vann Hall, or any other. Undergraduates with a housing scholarship will not get a fee credit for selecting a less expensive residence hall.

Off-Campus Housing (Hattiesburg)

Before arriving on campus, it is recommended that you find accommodation as well as a potential roommate.

Documentation needed for apartment application:

- photocopy of your passport photo page and visa
- a copy of your I-20. This also serves as your income report for the application.
- SSN—If you do not have one, put in any numbers in the required format, such as 111-22-3333. They will understand that you do not have a Social Security number **if you are a new international student.**
- Credit Score put in N/A or Not Applicable

There are several off-campus options available:

[Hattiesburg Apartments](#) – Manager: Heather Dickerson – Phone: 1-601-264-4622

Site Manager: Elaine Haley 1-601-255-5472 or 1-442-333-4468

This site has most of the apartment complexes listed here.

- [Available Apartments](#) – this is up to date for what is available.
- Apply using the link for the available apartment.
- No application fees.
- Copy of I-20 & Passport photo ID
- (Social Security Number use: 111-22-3333)

[Apartment Home Living](#) – an independent site with several options

Complexes:

These complexes, if available, should be listed in one of the above links.

- Hardy Manor: 1 BR, nice, on Pearl Street near Public Health, Liberal Arts
- Robynwood: 1 BR, nice, on N. 32nd Ave. near Public Health, Liberal Arts
- Stonewood: 2 BR, 2BA, South of Hardy Street near Music
- 2 Square: 2 BR, 1 BA, West of campus on N. 37th Ave.
- LaMaison: 2 BR, gated, W. 4th Street near intramural fields, Science & Technology
- Normandy: 2 BR, South of Hardy St. 1 block, near Music & front of campus.
- Pearl Place: 1 or 2 BR, on Pearl Street, near Theatre Building, Nursing
- West Gate: 2 BR, on Pearl Street near Public Health & Theatre
- Windridge - 2 BR 1BA, just across Hardy St. from USM (University of Southern Mississippi) campus
- Cassandra - 1 BR, West side of N. 38th Ave.
- Midtown Apts. 1 BR, N. 31st Ave. near Blaine Wood, walking trail to campus.
- Magnolia Trace: 2, 3, & 4 BR, 2 BA
- Brookland Trace: 1BR

[Point O'Woods](#) – a complex with its own application.

Address: 520 N. 38th Avenue, Hattiesburg, MS 39401

Phone: (601) 620-4827 or (601) 261-9556

Student Organizations

There are many [student organizations](#) on campus. All students are encouraged to find one (or more!) that interests them so they can connect and gain leadership and teamwork experience.

On Campus Employment

There are various opportunities for on-campus employment. Students may work up to 20 hours a week during the semester. After registering for classes, students will have access to Handshake, a service provided by USM that allows them to see what on-campus jobs are available.

USM Coastal Campuses

(Map links below.)

Stennis Space Center	1020 Balch Blvd., Kiln, MS-39529
Gulf Park	730 Beach Blvd E, Long Beach, MS 39560
Marine Research Center (MRC)	3233-3305 W Beach Blvd, Gulfport, MS 39501
Gulf Coast Research Laboratory (Halstead)	703 E Beach Dr, Ocean Springs, MS 39564
Gulf Coast Research Laboratory (Ceder Point)	300 Laurel Oak Dr, Ocean Springs, MS 39564

On Campus Housing (Coastal Campuses)

None of the coastal campuses has near-campus housing options except for Gulf Park. Gulf Park campus has a nearby housing option in [Friendship Oak Village](#). Here, students can rent a shared room (2 beds) for \$550-\$600 monthly.

Off-Campus Housing (Coastal Campuses)

Most students usually find accommodation in neighborhoods near their designated campuses. For example, Stennis students live in New Orleans, Slidell, Diamondhead, Bay St. Louis, and Gulfport. Students who attend Gulf Park usually live near New Orleans, Bay St. Louis, Pass Christian, Gulfport, and Biloxi. Depending on the location, a 1Bed/1Bath apartment rent is \$700-\$1000 per month, and a 2Bed/1Bath or 2Bed/2Bath apartment costs around \$900-\$1300 per month.

New Orleans, LA—New Orleans has many housing options, but they are slightly expensive. It takes around 1–2 hours to reach any coastal campuses. You need to search third-party websites like [hotpads.com](#) and [apartment.com](#) for availability.

Slidell, LA – (Driving Distances: 25 minutes to Stennis, 50 minutes to Gulf Park, 1 hour 10 minutes to GCRL). Slidell is near the coast of Lake Pontchartrain and has many options for weekend activities.

- [Canterbury House Apartments](#)
- [Fremaux Town Center](#)

- [The Mason Fremaux Park](#)
- [DLP Pelican Pointe Apartments](#)
- [Forestwood Apartments](#)

Diamondhead, MS (Driving Distances: 26 minutes to Stennis, 31 minutes to Gulf Park, 50 minutes to GCRL). Diamondhead was previously a holiday vacation place for elderly citizens, but it was later declared a city. It is a very well-maintained and safe place to live, but there are not a lot of weekend activities available.

- Lanai Village is operated by [REMAX](#) & [ALFONSO](#) rental agents.
- Molokai Village is operated by [REMAX](#) & [ALFONSO](#) rental agents.

Bay St. Louis/ Waveland, MS (Driving Distances: 25 minutes to Stennis, 21 minutes to Gulf Park, 1 hour to GCRL). Close to the beach, downtown Bay St. Louis is a nice place for food and gatherings. This is the only place near our coast campuses with a nearby state park (Buccaneer State Park).

- [The Waverly](#)
- [Manor House](#)
- [Sheffield Park](#)
- [Bay Crossing](#)
- [Manor House Apartment](#)

Pass Christian, MS – (Driving Distances: 36 minutes to Stennis, 12 minutes to Gulf Park, 52 minutes to GCRL). It is close to the beach and has many well-maintained sites for fishing or evening walks.

- [Camille Village](#)
- [Caribbean in the Pass Apartments](#)

D'Iberville, MS – (Driving Distances: 48 minutes to Stennis, 33 minutes to Gulf Park, 22 minutes to GCRL)

- [Landmark of D'Iberville Apartments](#)
- [Landing at D'Iberville](#)
- [Arbor View Apartments](#)

Long Beach, MS – (Driving Distances: 41 minutes to Stennis, 3 minutes to Gulf Park, 38 minutes to GCRL). Close to the beach.

- [Arbor Station Apartments](#)
- [Hampton House Apartments](#)
- [Long Beach Square](#)

Gulfport, MS – (Driving Distances: 45 minutes to Stennis, 5 minutes to Gulf Park, 31 minutes to GCRL). Close to the beach, it has many scenic spots across the Marine Drive Road. Jones Park in Gulfport is one of the best attractions in the United States for Christmas lighting.

- [The Oaks Apartments](#)
- [Three Rivers Landing Apartments](#)
- [Arbor Village](#)
- [Waters Mark Apartment](#)
- [Bayou Landing](#)

Biloxi, MS – (Driving Distances: 51 minutes to Stennis, 23 minutes to Gulf Park, 14 minutes to GCRL). Biloxi is known as “Vegas of the South” for its vivid downtown.

- [The Grove](#)
- [Arbor Place](#)
- [Grande View Apartments](#)

Ocean Springs, MS – (Driving Distances: 53 minutes to Stennis, 29 minutes to Gulf Park, 10 minutes to GCRL)

- [Canvas](#)
- [Westgate Apartments](#)

Mobile, AL—If you prefer living in big cities, Mobile is another option besides New Orleans. It is closer to GCRL campuses and has many accommodation options.

Gulf Coast Utilities

1. Coast Electric

<https://coastelectric.coop/my-home/payments/>

2. Gulfport Water Department

https://www.gulfport-ms.gov/public_works-utility/

3. Telecommunications Carriers

- AT&T
- Verizon
- Metro by T-Mobile

Student Organizations (Coastal Campuses)

There are several student organizations active at our coastal campuses that work to assist students with their academic, career, and everyday life as well. These organizations work together with the SOSE faculty and USM administration to improve the lives of international students and connect them with professional organizations (e.g., IEEE, American Fisheries Society) and academic opportunities (e.g., fellowships). Our student organizations arrange volunteering and recreational events such as a beach bonfire, technical training sessions, beach clean-up, potluck, etc. Major student organizations that are currently active in our coast campuses are:

- Student Oceanographic Society (SOS)
- IEEE Ocean Engineering Society USM chapter
- Marine Technological Society
- American Fisheries Society USM Sub-unit
- Marine and Estuarine Graduate Student Association (MEGSA)

Shopping (Coastal Campuses)

Almost all cities near our coast campuses have multiple grocery stores, such as Walmart, Rouses, etc. The list below includes some grocery stores and shopping centers that students can use for food and personal shopping.

City	Grocery Store and Shopping Mall		
	Grocery Store	Shopping Center	Multi-Purpose Store
New Orleans	As a big city, it has all sorts of shopping centers and grocery stores. You can find separate restaurants and stores for individual cuisines, such as Indian, Mediterranean, Indonesian, and African.		
Slidell	Rouses Market, Winn Dixie, Walmart, Slidell Caribbean market, Sam's Club, Ollie's Bargain Outlet, several Mexican grocery stores, and a shopping center.		
Diamondhead	Rouses Market, Goodwill.		
Bay St. Louis/Waveland	Walmart, Claiborne Supermarket, Froogels, Goodwill		
Pass Christian	Walmart.		
Long Beach	Winn Dixie, Froogels		
Gulfport	Walmart, Rouses Market, Winn Dixie, Froogels, Delmar Plaza, T.J. Maxx, Ollie's Bargain Outlet.		
Biloxi	Food Giant, Walmart, Lee's Grocery (Asian food), International Food Market, Edgewater Shopping Mall, JC Penney,		
Ocean Spring	Rouses Market, Walmart, Winn Dixie, Five Seasons Food Market, ALDI Supermarket.		

Banking (Coastal Campuses)

Students can open their bank accounts with Regions, Wells Fargo, Peoples Bank Chase, etc. To open a bank account, the student usually needs a Social Security Number (SSN) or two ID verifications. Banks usually accept copies of passports and visas as two different IDs and I-20 to open new checking accounts for new international students without SSNs. Students who plan to work on campus or have an assistantship should apply for their social security number as soon as possible. After the Social Security office receives all the information, it will take about two weeks to receive your SSN. Students, especially Graduate Assistants (GA), should not wait that long without a bank account as they might not receive their stipend. Students should provide their SSNs to their bank authority as soon as they get their SSN. Below is the list of cities with bank branches:

City	Bank
New Orleans	Chase, Hancock Whitney, Peoples Bank, Regions, Wells Fargo
Slidell	Chase, Hancock Whitney, The First Bank, Regions
Diamondhead	Hancock Whitney, The First Bank, Peoples Bank
Bay St. Louis/ Waveland	Hancock Whitney, Peoples Bank, Regions, Woodforest Bank
Pass Christian	Hancock Whitney, Peoples Bank
Long Beach	Hancock Whitney, Peoples Bank, The First Bank
Gulfport	Hancock Whitney, Peoples Bank, Regions, Wells Fargo, Woodforest Bank
Biloxi	Peoples Bank, The First Bank, Wells Fargo, Woodforest Bank
Ocean Spring	Hancock Whitney, Peoples Bank, Regions, Wells Fargo, The First Bank

About our Region

Climate

Southern Mississippi has a humid subtropical climate. Its short, cool, temperate winters are followed by long, hot summers. Summer weather begins in April and lasts until the beginning of November when winter begins. June and July bring the hottest weather and the start of hurricane season, which lasts until the end of November.

	Temperature in F° Monthly High/Low Averages	Average Days of rain
January	59° / 37°	8 days
February	63° / 40°	7 days

March	71° / 47°	7 days
April	78° / 54°	6 days
May	84° / 62°	7 days
June	90° / 69°	8 days
July	92° / 71°	10 days
August	91° / 71°	8 days
September	88° / 66°	6 days
October	79° / 54°	4 days
November	70° / 45°	6 days
December	62° / 39°	8 days

Weather

Hattiesburg and the Gulf Coast of Mississippi have a few different types of weather not found in all parts of the world. As stated above, hurricane season is from June 1st until the end of November, and along with hurricanes, there is also the possibility of tornadoes. While only 19 hurricanes have ever directly hit the Mississippi Gulf Coast, knowing what to do and what to expect when they happen is important. Thunderstorms and tornadoes are two other types of extreme weather events that can also occur in Mississippi.

[Eagle Alert](#) is an on-campus student, faculty, and staff alert system. We strongly encourage all students to register for this service and confirm their U.S. phone number is correct.

Weather Apps

[The Weather Channel](#)

[National Hurricane Center \(NOAA\)](#)

Health and Safety

Medical Care

Hattiesburg Campus and Gulf Park Campus have health centers for basic health questions and needs. For financial reasons, except in the case of emergencies, you will want to utilize on-campus medical care when available. The health centers will also refer you to off-campus specialists when needed. If you have an ongoing/chronic medical condition, please work with the health centers when you arrive to establish your in-network care team early on. **It is the individual's responsibility to check if the off campus providers are in-network and to work with them to estimate any costs after insurance coverage.**

Urgent Care—These clinics are available after hours. Be sure to check the “in-network” list to ensure our insurance covers the facility at the best available fee coverage rate. The cost with insurance can be \$200 or more, depending on the service provided.

Emergency Room – These are hospitals for serious emergencies. If you need a ride to the nearest Emergency Room in the United States, dial 911. Emergency rooms can be expensive even with health coverage, so use this only if it is an emergency. Costs generally range from a minimum of \$1,500 and up, depending on the services and care provided. **Check your insurance portal (at www.UHCSR.com) to learn of the local hospitals and Urgent Care Centers that are considered “in-network” to our health plan.**

Medical Costs

Because healthcare costs are shared between the insurance company and the policyholder, ISSS recommends keeping a savings account with \$1000-\$2000 available for medical expenses such as deductible, co-pay, and coinsurance fees.

Insurance

All international students on F-1 and J-1 visas must have health insurance through the university plan. The USM insurance plan is vetted for quality and affordability. Nonetheless, because the United States insurance companies use a cost-sharing model, you will still be expected to pay a portion of your expenses after receiving most medical care.

USM’s student and scholar insurance plan is through United Health Care Student Resources company. The plan year runs from August 1 – July 31, annually. We recommend you activate your account and print your insurance card and review the policy after August 1 (fall semester arrival) or January 1 (spring semester arrival), at <https://www.uhcsr.com/>. Contact ISSS with any questions about health insurance coverage.

Health Insurance for Dependents

- International students and scholars are required to enroll automatically in USM’s student insurance policy, United Health Care Student Resources. Dependents can be added for an additional fee.
 - <https://www.uhcsr.com/>
 - This plan is vetted at the institutional and state level to meet high quality care for students including local coverage at a cost-effective market rate.
 - ISSS does encourage all students and scholar dependents to take advantage of this plan.
- J-2 Dependents are required to show appropriate (J compliant) health insurance, while for F-1 students, it is strongly encouraged (and necessary for medical care) to enroll in a health insurance policy.
- If not in school, dependents may be eligible to enroll in the government marketplace insurance or through other private companies.
 - <https://www.healthcare.gov/>

- Please note this site may offer government subsidies to the monthly costs for which international students are NOT eligible. If subsidies taken, it may result in a higher tax bill at the end of the year.
- **IMPORTANT:** Any use of public assistance programs (i.e., Medicaid for children) is PROHIBITED for international students and could cause problems with future visas/USCIS adjudications.

Hurricane Preparation

In the unlikely event of an incoming hurricane, knowing what to do in advance and after the event is very important. It is very important to have a plan and to be prepared. The University of Southern Mississippi (USM) has a plan for each campus and all the on-campus housing. It is also important for each person to be prepared.

Follow this Hurricane Preparation Checklist to prepare yourself:

- Plan where you will go if an “evacuation order” is issued for the area. For example, check with a friend or family in another city if you might stay with them temporarily in the unlikely event of an evacuation and figure out a transportation plan. Hurricane evacuation centers are available, but it is more comfortable and safer to travel outside of the affected area, if possible.
- Make sure all your important documents, including medical documents, wills, passports, and personal identification, are in a waterproof package. This includes all I-20s and immigration documents.
- Pack safety and personal items in an easy-to-carry backpack or very small suitcase.
 - Flashlight and batteries
 - Charging cube and cord for your phone
 - Clothing
 - A blanket
 - Documents in a waterproof bag
 - Prescription medicine
 - Bottled water (1-2 bottles)
 - Nonperishable ready-to-eat food such as tuna fish in cans, crackers, fruit cups, and peanut butter.
- Write down all emergency phone numbers.

For everyone not living in a dormitory on campus:

- Fill your bathtub and sink with water.
- Fill containers with clean water to drink.
- If you have a house with a yard, ensure all outdoor furniture is put inside and that trash, such as a tree limb, is not in your yard.
- Be prepared to leave if asked to evacuate and know your evacuation route and the transportation method you will use.

Tornado Preparation

Tornadoes, unlike hurricanes, do not give very much advanced warning when they occur. It is very important to know what to do and to be prepared. The difference is that when tornado watches or warnings are issued, individuals should shelter in place with emergency bags. You may wish to invest in a weather radio, power charging cube, and cord for your phone.

In Apartments:

- If you can get to the basement of your apartment building during a tornado warning, the safest place is the first floor, basement, or a covered garage.
- Internal stairwells are also a safe option. Get to the lowest floor and shelter under the stairs.
- If you cannot leave your apartment, keep away from all windows and glass doors. The safest room in most apartments is the bathroom.
- Always make sure you protect your body.
- After the tornado, be careful of any debris inside or outside. Broken glass and downed power lines can be hazardous.

Houses:

- Go to your basement, safe room, or an interior room away from windows. Don't forget pets if time allows.
- Do not leave your safe place until after the warning ends.

Resources

Campus Resources

Center for Student Success

[Student Success | The University of Southern Mississippi](#)

International Student and Scholar Services

www.usm.edu/iss

Advisors are available by appointment and at daily drop in advising hours

INTL@usm.edu

601-266-4841

Instagram: www.instagram.com/ISSS_USM

Moffitt Health Center & Pharmacy

www.usm.edu/student-health-services

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/moffitt_health/

Student Counseling Services:

<https://www.usm.edu/student-counseling-services/index.php>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/usmcounseling/>

Southern Miss Activities Council (SMAC):

<https://www.usm.edu/leadership-student-involvement/southern-miss-activities-council-smac.php>

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/usm_smac/?hl=en

Southern Miss Campus Recreation:

<https://www.usm.edu/campus-recreation/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/southernmisscampusrec/>

City Resources

- Visit Hattiesburg: <https://www.visithburg.org/>
- Living Coastal (Mississippi Gulf Coast): <https://livingcoastal.com/mississippi-gulf-coast-guide-visitors-guide>
- New Orleans Tourism: <https://www.neworleans.com/>

U.S. Government Resources

Immigration Resources for Students and Scholar

- F-1: <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/>
- J-1: Bridge: <https://j1visa.state.gov/>

Government Agencies and Offices

- Department of Labor <https://www.dol.gov/general/dol-agencies>
- Internal Revenue Service <https://www.irs.gov/>
- Social Security Administration <https://www.ssa.gov/>
- United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) <https://www.uscis.gov/>
- United States Department of State <https://www.state.gov/>

Orientation to Immigration Regulations:

ISSS will provide an in-person orientation to immigration responsibilities and transition support to USM upon your arrival. Until then, please familiarize yourself with the basic regulations that students and scholars must follow. We encourage you to routinely refer to our comprehensive website at <https://www.usm.edu/iss/>, especially the New Students, Current Students, and Scholars tabs on the left side.

Immigration Area	Your Responsibilities
Registration: Full time enrollment is required of all students in F-1 or J-1 Status.	<p>You must register for and <u>complete</u> a full course of study each fall and spring semester.</p> <p>“Full time” is defined as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">o Graduate students at USM: 9 credits minimum, 6 must be face to faceo Undergraduate students at USM: 12 credits minimum, 9 must be face to face. <p><u>You must officially register for your courses by the published registration deadline.</u></p> <p>Late registering students will be reported as having violated their immigration status.</p>
Full Time Exceptions: These are limited and must be approved by ISSS before completing registration or dropping a class.	<p>If your reason for not registering for a full course of study falls under one of the following exceptions allowed by federal immigration law, <u>you must receive approval from ISSS for this exception BEFORE dropping the class.</u> Failure to receive prior approval may result in loss of legal immigration status.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Verified temporary medical condition that requires a reduced course load• Initial difficulty with English, reading requirements or American teaching methods• Improper course placement• Final semester of study and full-time enrollment is not needed to meet degree requirements
Local (U.S.) Address: University of Southern Mississippi must have your current address in SOAR.	<p>You must maintain a current physical address (and mailing address, if different) with the University. Immigration requires that this be a physical street address, and not a post office box. If you move, you must contact the International Student Advisor within 10 days to update your information.</p>
Foreign (non-U.S.) Address: USM must also have your permanent address.	<p>You must maintain a non-U.S. address with the University. Immigration requires that this be a physical street address, and not a post office box. If your foreign address changes, you must contact ISSS within 10 days to update your information.</p>

<p>Employment: You cannot work in any capacity without specific authorization to do so.</p>	<p>You must not undertake any employment—including various forms of practical training—without prior authorization. Any unauthorized employment, including off campus employment without ISSS/USCIS/SEVP permission and employment (such as CPT) which is started without authorization, will invalidate your legal status and you will be ineligible for any future employment or other benefits of your status.</p> <p>Illegal employment also includes on campus work without authorization or, for students, working more than 20 hours in any week during the fall or spring semesters, except during vacation periods.</p>
<p>Passport: Your passport must remain valid to maintain your legal status.</p>	<p>Your passport must remain valid at all times, and it must be renewed 6 months before it expires. Without a valid passport, you do not have a legal immigration status and are ineligible for employment of any type, including on-campus jobs, practical training, etc.</p>
<p>I-20/DS-2019: You must have a current immigration document.</p>	<p>Your form I-20 or DS-2019 has an expiration date which must remain in the future if you are continuing to study in the U.S. Requests to extend expiration dates should be filed at least 30 days prior to the expiration date.</p>
<p>Dependents: Inform ISSS of dependent arrival and/or departure.</p>	<p>ISSS must be notified of any dependents who accompany you or later join you in F-2 or J-2 status. Issuance of the I-20/DS-2019 for potential entry of a dependent does not meet this requirement; you must notify ISSS of their presence in the US by providing the dependents' passports and I-94 forms.</p>
<p>Processing Time: Please allow a minimum 10 business days.</p>	<p>Due to the volume of immigration requests ISSS receives, we ask all students to plan ahead and make their immigration requests in advance of required deadlines. ISSS may take 10-15 business days to process requests, with the current advising load in Fall 2023.</p>
<p>Insurance Requirements:</p>	<p>All USM students and scholars are required to enroll in insurance. J-1 scholar health insurance plans are covered by the department in which they are employed, however dependent plans must be added and paid out of pocket. All J visa holders and their dependents provide evidence of enrollment in a J compliant health insurance plan to the international office. It is STRONGLY encouraged that all other dependents (F-2 visas and spouses/children in other visa statuses) are enrolled in a high-quality health insurance and an appropriate market rate. Contact ISSS for more information.</p>