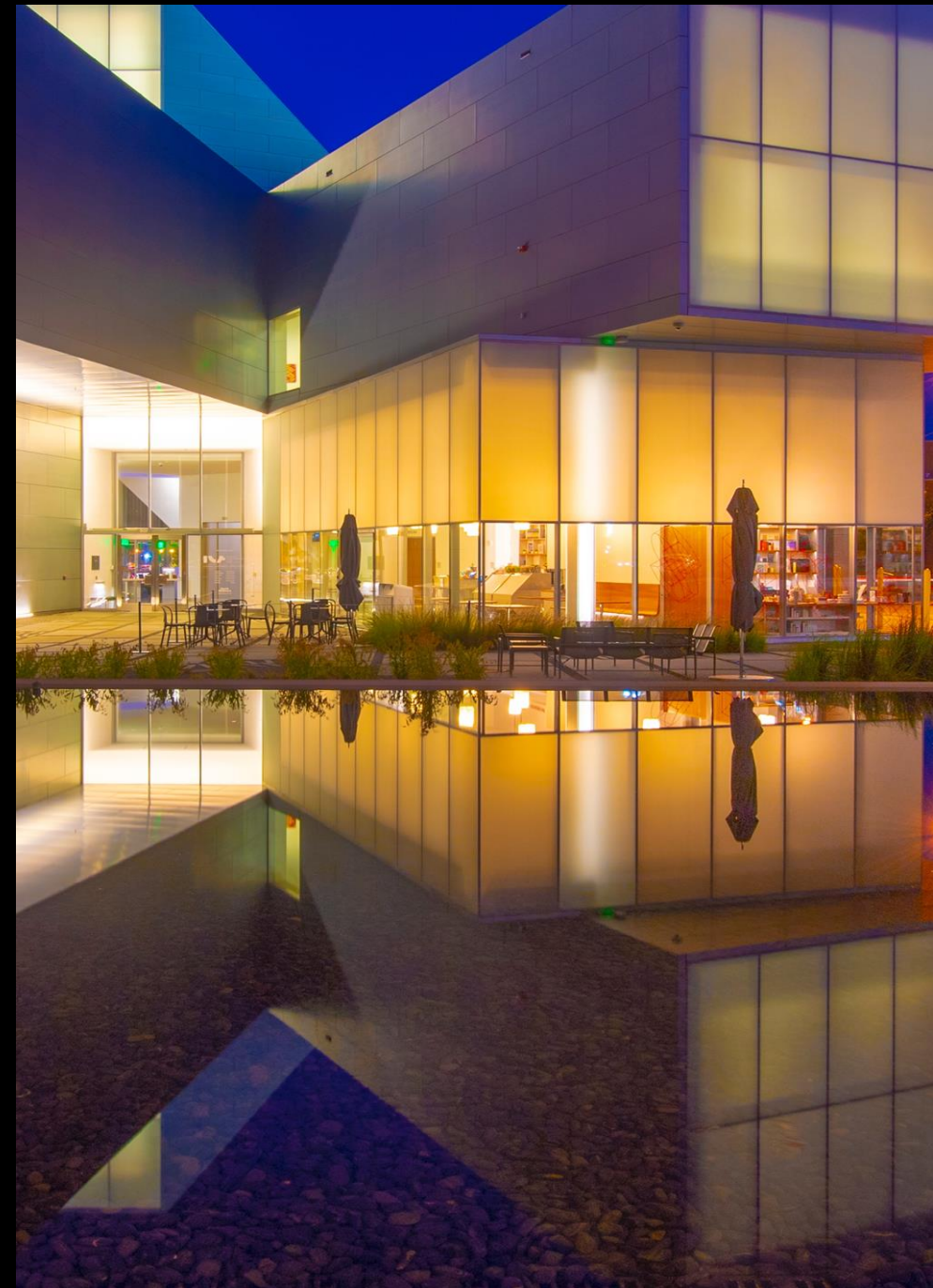


Studying in the United States

Arrive Ready Series
VCU Engineering

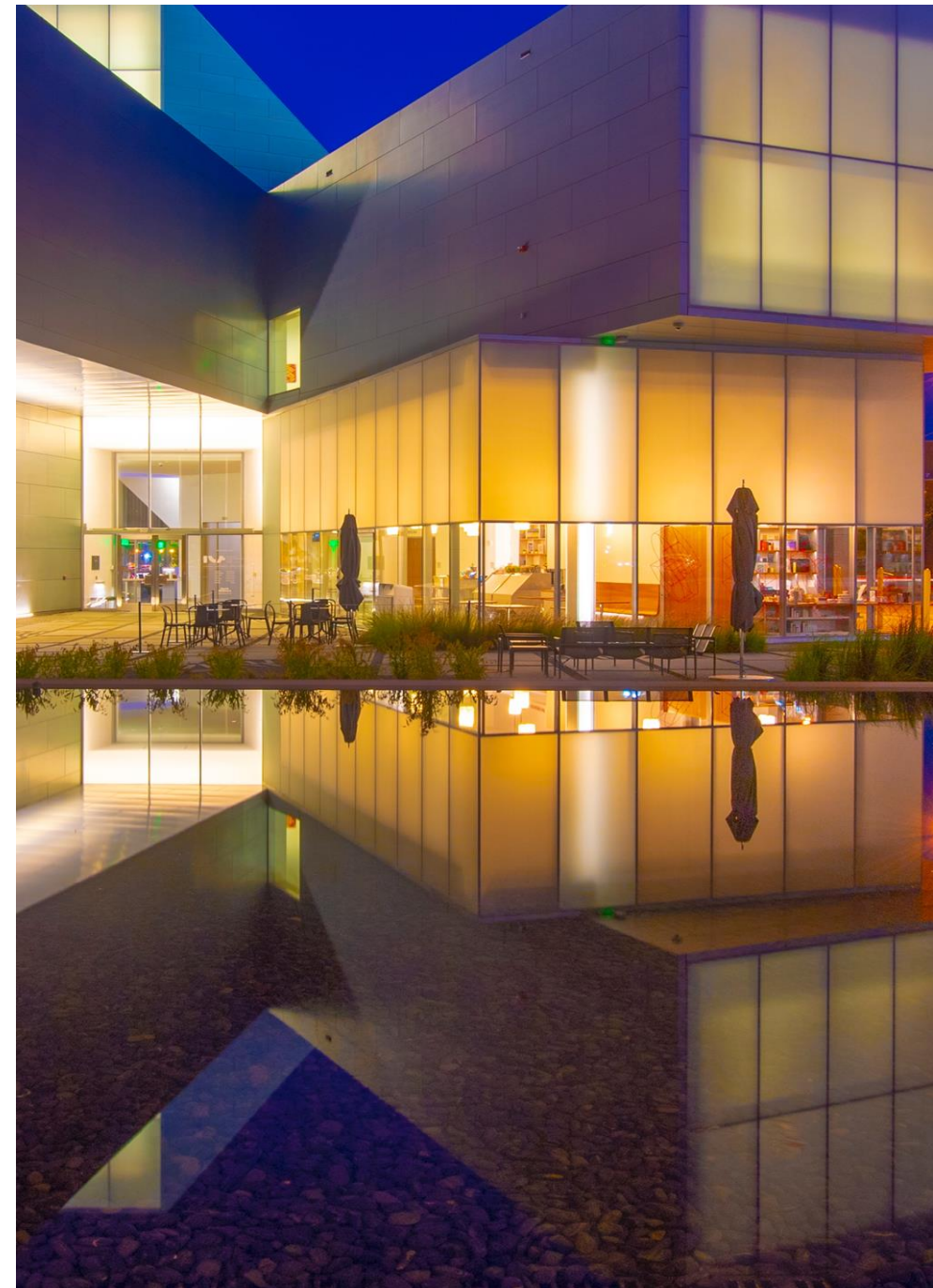


Today's Session

- **Applying for the F-1 Visa**
 - Jessica Watson – Global Education Office (GEO)
- **International Student Supports and Events**
 - Marci Fradkin – Global Education Office (GEO)
- **Meet a Student!**
 - Nour Bargaoui – PhD in Computer Science
- **After Arriving in the United States**
 - Johnny Ramey - Office of Graduate Studies (OGS)
 - Submitting official paperwork
 - Educational norms, OPT / CPT, etc.
- **Question and Answer, Reminders, and Resources**

VCU Global Education Office

Applying for the F-1 Visa



Obtain a Form I-20

- Following your admission, contact Immigration Services to obtain a Form I-20, [Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Status](#).
- You will need the I-20 to apply for an F-1 visa and schedule a visa interview at a U.S. embassy/consulate where you live.
- To receive an I-20, you must submit the following documents to geois@vcu.edu:
 - VCU Request for an I-20 Form
 - VCU acceptance letter
 - Passport
 - Evidence of sufficient financial support

Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

I-20, Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status
OMB NO. 1653-0038

SEVIS ID: N0004705512

SURNAME/PRIMARY NAME Doe-Smith	GIVEN NAME John	CLASS F-1 ACADEMIC AND LANGUAGE
PREFERRED NAME John Doe-Smith	PASSPORT NAME	
COUNTRY OF BIRTH UNITED KINGDOM	COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP UNITED KINGDOM	
DATE OF BIRTH 01 JANUARY 1980	ADMISSION NUMBER	
FORM ISSUE REASON INITIAL RE-ENTRY	LEGACY NAME John Doe-Smith	

SCHOOL INFORMATION

SCHOOL NAME SVDP School For Advanced SVDE Studies SVDP School For Advanced SVDE Studies	SCHOOL ADDRESS 9800 Navy Lane, Ft. Washington, MD 20744
SCHOOL OFFICIAL TO CONTACT UPON ARRIVAL Melissa Robertson PDSO	SCHOOL CODE AND APPROVAL DATE BLL18F4444000 01 APRIL 2015

PROGRAM OF STUDY

EDUCATION LEVEL POSTGRADUATE	MAJOR 1 Political Science, General 45.0001	MAJOR 2 None 00.0000
NORMAL PROGRAM LENGTH 12 Months	PROGRAM ENGLISH PROFICIENCY Required	ENGLISH PROFICIENCY NOTES Student is proficient
PROGRAM START DATE 01 SEPTEMBER 2015	PROGRAM END DATE 31 JULY 2017	

FINANCIALS

ESTIMATED AVERAGE COSTS FOR: 9 MONTHS	STUDENT'S FUNDING FOR: 9 MONTHS
Tuition and Fees \$ 23,000	Personal Funds \$ 3,000
Living Expenses \$ 6,000	Scholarship and Teaching Assistantship \$ 29,000
Expenses of Dependents (if)	Gifts From Another Source \$
Scholar \$	On-Campus Employment \$
TOTAL \$ 29,000	TOTAL \$ 32,000

REMARKS
Orientation begins 8/25/2015. Please report to SESS upon arrival.

SCHOOL ATTESTATION
I certify under penalty of perjury that all information provided above was entered before I signed this form and is true and correct. I executed this form in the United States after review and evaluation in the United States by me or other officials of the school of the student's application, transcripts, or other records of course taken and proof of financial responsibility, which were received at the school prior to the execution of this form. The school has determined that the above named student's qualifications meet all standards for admission to the school and the student will be required to pursue a full program of study as defined by 8 CFR 214.2(f)(6). I am a designated school official of the above named school and am authorized to issue this form.

☒ SIGNATURE OF: Melissa Robertson, PDSO DATE ISSUED: 21 April 2015 PLACE ISSUED: Ft. Washington, MD

STUDENT ATTESTATION
I have read and agreed to comply with the terms and conditions of my admission and those of any extension of stay. I certify that all information provided on this form is true and correct to the best of my knowledge. I certify that I seek to enter or remain in the United States temporarily, and solely for the purpose of pursuing a full program of study at the school named above. I also authorize the named school to release any information from my records needed by DHS pursuant to 8 CFR 214.3(g) to determine my nonimmigrant status. Parent or guardian, and student, must sign if student is under 18.

☒ SIGNATURE OF: John Doe-Smith DATE: _____

☒ NAME OF PARENT OR GUARDIAN SIGNATURE: _____ ADDRESS (city/state or province/country): _____ DATE: _____

ICE Form I-20 A-B (12/2016) Page 1 of 3

Apply for the F-1 Visa

- 1. Pay the SEVIS I-901 Fee.** Visit www.fmjfee.com for payment instructions.
- 2. Complete the online Nonimmigrant Visa Application** (Form DS-160). Visit the U.S. Department of State website to access Form DS-160, pay the required DS-160 fee, and upload the required personal photograph.
- 3. Schedule your visa interview.** Your visa interview should be scheduled at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate in the country where you live. A list of U.S. embassies and consulates can be found on the U.S. Department of State website. This website also contains a specific list of the items that should be taken with you to your interview.
- 4. Prepare for your interview.**

Understanding Visa Validity

When scheduling the timing of your visa interview and preparing to travel to the U.S., it is important to understand: (1) the validity period of your F-1 visa and (2) the number of entries permitted with that visa.

- Go to the Department of State [visa reciprocity webpage](#)
- Select the first letter of your country of citizenship
- Choose the country name from the dropdown
- On the next page, select the letter “F” for F-1 visa.
- View the specifics related to the validity period of the visa and the number of entries permitted

Your visa interview must be scheduled such that you have enough time to enter the U.S. before your visa expires - this is especially important for students with short visa validity periods or with only one entry per visa.

The screenshot shows the Travel.State.Gov website, specifically the U.S. Visa section. The page has a dark blue header with the U.S. Department of State logo and navigation links. The main content area is white with a red sidebar on the left containing a list of countries (A-Z) and a 'Filter Countries' button. The right side of the page features an 'Explanation of Terms' section and a 'Visa Classifications' table.

Explanation of Terms

Visa Classification: The type of nonimmigrant visa you are applying for.

Fee: The reciprocity fee, also known as the visa issuance fee, you must pay. This fee is in addition to the nonimmigrant visa application fee (MRV fee).

Number of Entries: The number of times you may seek entry into the United States with that visa. "M" means multiple times. If there is a number, such as "One", you may apply for entry one time with that visa.

Validity Period: This generally means the visa is valid, or can be used, from the date it is issued until the date it expires, for travel with that visa. If your Validity Period is 60 months, your visa will be valid for 60 months from the date it is issued.

Visa Classifications

Visa Classification	Fee	Number of Entries	Validity Period
F-1	None	One	3 Months
F-2	None	One	3 Months

Prepare for Your Visa Interview

The following resources are available to help you prepare for your visa interview:

- [10 Points to Remember When Applying for a Student Visa](#)
- [Sample Interview Questions & Answers](#)

Additional Tips:

- You must be able to articulate why you chose VCU (as opposed to another academic institution). What about VCU stands out to you?
- Be prepared to discuss why you have chosen your degree program and articulate your academic goals. Consider how this program will be connected to your current/future career.
- Be truthful and only answer what is asked of you. Do not preemptively offer additional details.
- Be organized. Have your documents neatly ordered in a folder or small case to easily access if the visa officer requests them.
- Consider your image. Are you making a positive impression? This includes how you choose to present yourself on social media and other public platforms that can be viewed by visa officers.

Enhanced Social Media Vetting

- New and returning visa applicants will be subject to enhanced vetting, including review of their social media accounts
- While under review, your application may be initially “refused” under INA 221(g) - [administrative processing](#).
- Visa officers may ask you to set all your social media accounts to “public” to facilitate this review.
- Note that any derogatory information discovered by the Department of State during this review can be used as grounds for inadmissibility.
- There is no estimated timeline for completion of the review process.



Visa Processing

- VCU is unable to contact the embassy/consulate on your behalf or expedite your visa processing.
- Processing times are determined by a number of factors that are out of our control, including the number of visa applicants in your city and the time of year.
- Visa appointment times are often released in batches. It is important that you schedule the first available appointment date, no matter how far out. New appointment dates may be released or someone may cancel and you will be moved up in the queue. You can also try a nearby city for appointments. **KEEP TRYING!**



Visa Processing

- **Emergency/Expedited Appointment Requests.** If you are within a few weeks of the Program Start Date on your I-20 and have been unable to secure an appointment, you do have the option to request an emergency/expedited appointment. You must reserve the next available appointment date **BEFORE** contacting the embassy or consulate to consider your request.
- **Deferral of Your Program Start Date.** Please contact your academic department to **request deferral of your admission if you are unable to arrive by the start of classes on January 12th.**
- Following your deferral, you must obtain a new I-20 from GEO Immigration Services.



Prepare for Arrival

PROGRAM OF STUDY

EDUCATION LEVEL MASTER'S	MAJOR 1 Computer and Information Sciences, General 11.0101	MAJOR 2 None 00.0000
PROGRAM ENGLISH PROFICIENCY Required	ENGLISH PROFICIENCY NOTES Student is proficient	EARLIEST ADMISSION DATE 15 JULY 2024
START OF CLASSES 20 AUGUST 2024	PROGRAM START/END DATE 14 AUGUST 2024 - 12 MAY 2026	

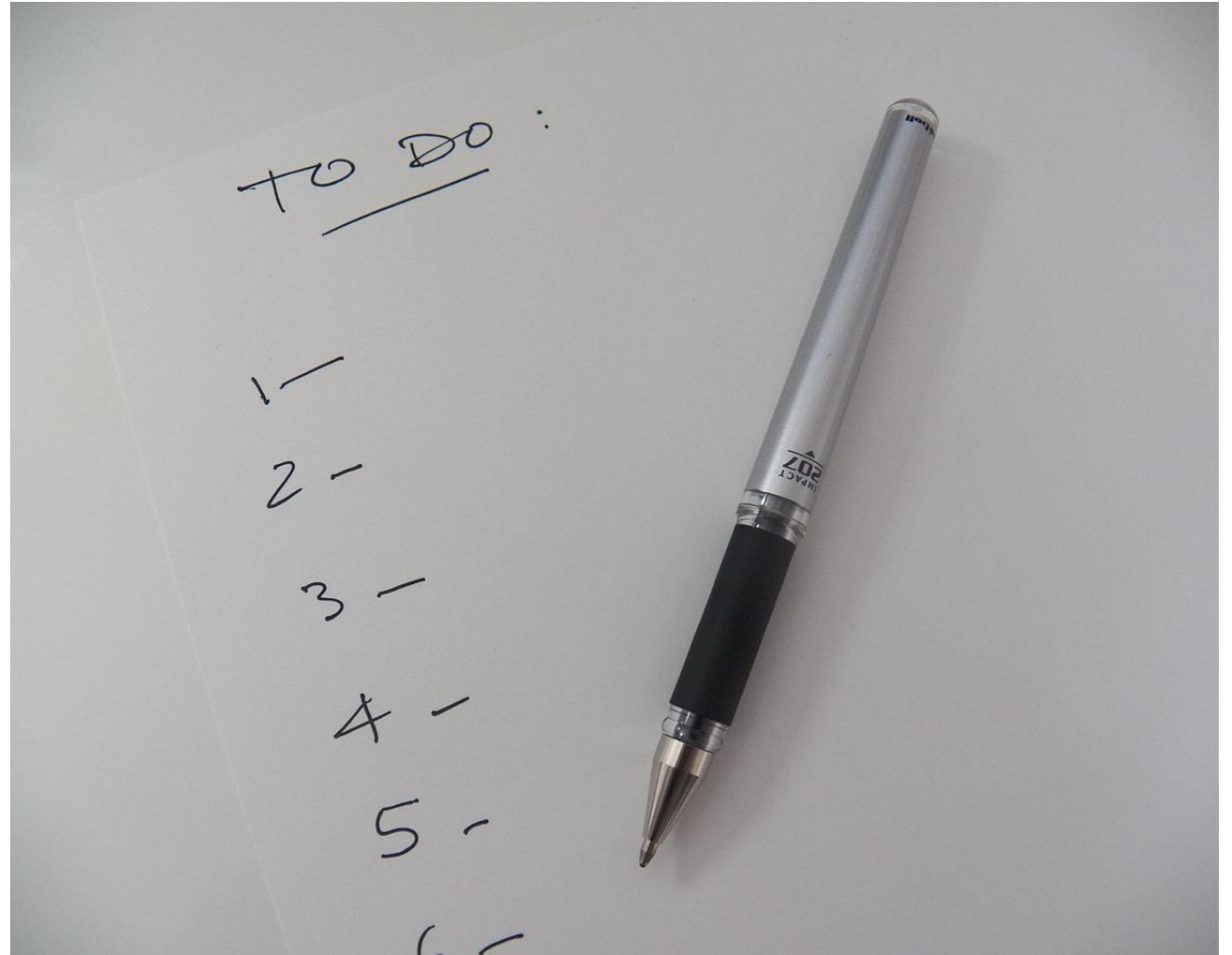
- You may arrive in the U.S. no more than 30 days before the Program Start Date on your Form I-20. **Check the “Earliest Admission Date”** field in the “Program of Study” section of your I-20 to avoid entering too early.
- **Avoid late arrival.** You should leave yourself as much time as possible to settle into your housing, attend orientations, register for classes, etc. You may arrive no later than your I-20 “Start of Classes” Date.
- Review the [CBP arrival website](#) to prepare for your entry at a U.S. airport.

Register for a Full Course of Study (FCS)

- F-1 students must enroll in a [full course of study](#) (FCS) each Spring and Fall semester.
 - Graduate students must enroll in a **minimum of 9 credits** each semester to meet the FCS minimums.
 - At least **6 of those 9 credits must be in-person or hybrid** (not 100% online).
- Enrollment during the summer session is entirely optional.
 - Students who choose to enroll during the optional summer session are not required to meet the FCS minimums. There are also no restrictions to online enrollment in the summer.
- Your enrollment must be completed and in compliance with the FCS minimums by the end of the Add/Drop period on January 18, 2026 to ensure timely SEVIS (I-20) registration.

Pre-Arrival Checklist

- ✓ Accept your offer of admission (OA)!
- ✓ [Claim your eID](#) and set a password to access your online accounts
- ✓ Request your Form I-20
- ✓ Apply for an F-1 Visa
- ✓ [Register](#) for classes
- ✓ Prepare for arrival



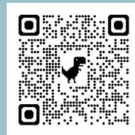
Pre-arrival Meetups

Our Pre-arrival Meetups are designed to help answer all of your pre-arrival questions and get you on the path to starting your academic journey as an international student here at Virginia Commonwealth University.



For more information please visit :

global.vcu.edu/students/started/



TOPICS COVERED IN THE MEETUP:

- F-1 visa application
- Travel to the U.S.
- Housing
- Orientation information
- and MORE!



Global Education Office

Stay Connected!

Join Immigration Services for an upcoming virtual [Pre-Arrival Meetup](#) to learn more information about each of these topics.

Our next Meetup is scheduled for:

November 5, 2025

8:00 a.m.

[Register Here](#)

And explore our beautiful campus in the heart of downtown Richmond, Virginia on a [virtual tour](#).



WE ARE THE UNCOMMON.

Questions?

Immigration Services

Global Education Office

Virginia Commonwealth University

+ 1 (804) 828-0595

geois@vcu.edu

<https://global.vcu.edu/students/immigration/>



WE ARE THE UNCOMMON.



Thank you!



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Marci Fradkin – Global Education Office

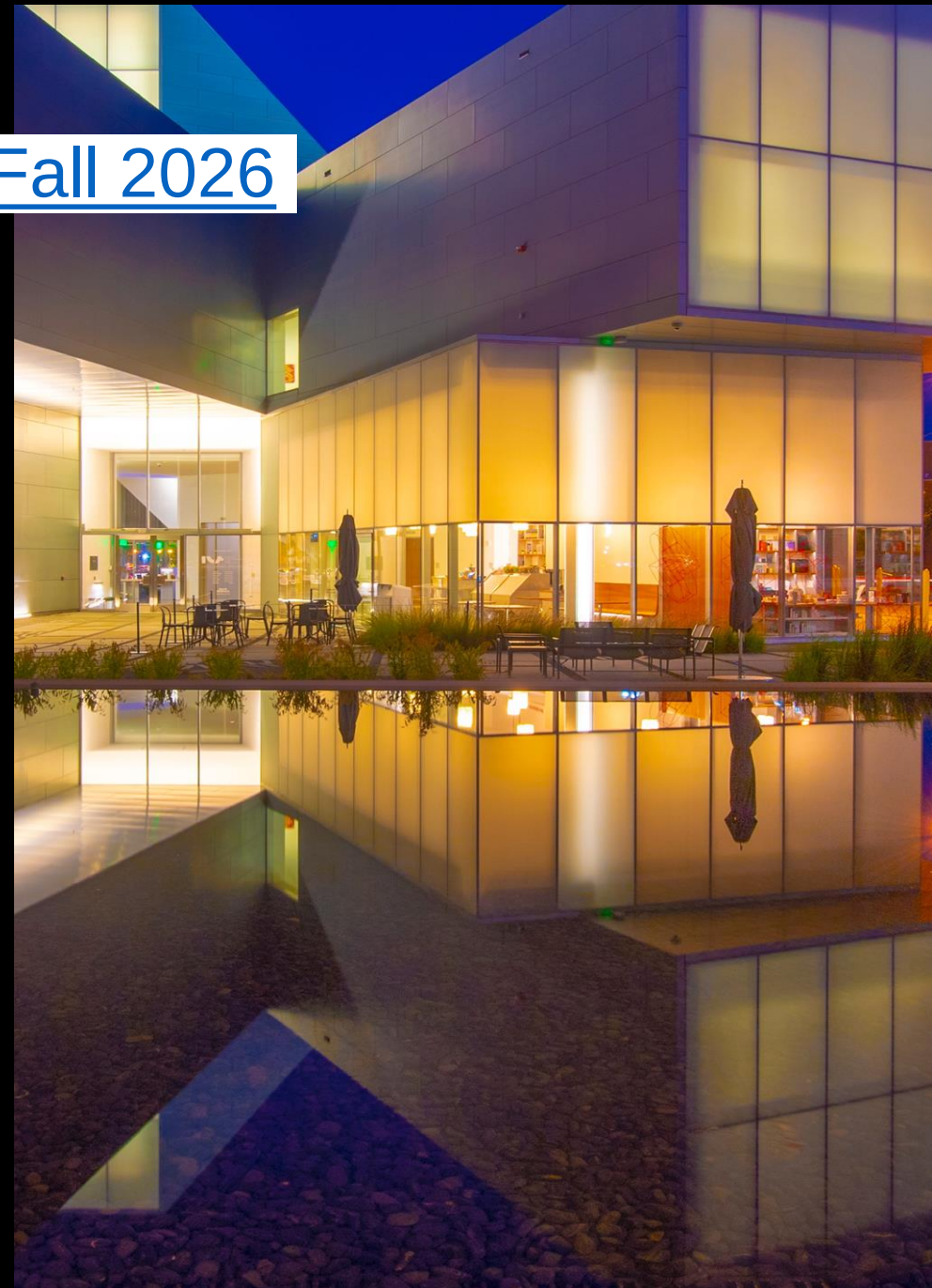
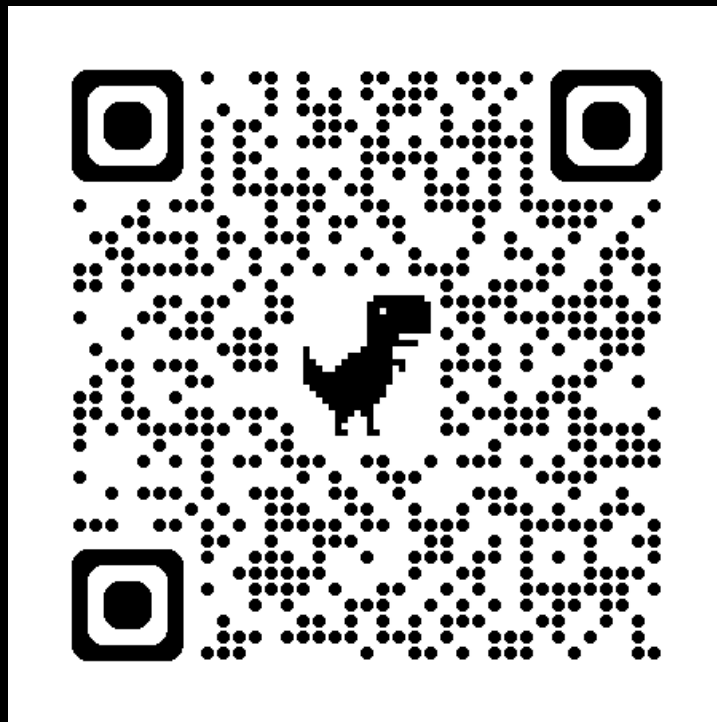
- Executive Director of Global Outreach
- International Student Supports



VCU

Global Education Office

VCU International Students Spring 2026 & Fall 2026 Cohort





VCU

Pre-Arrival Meetups



November 5, 2025

8 a.m.

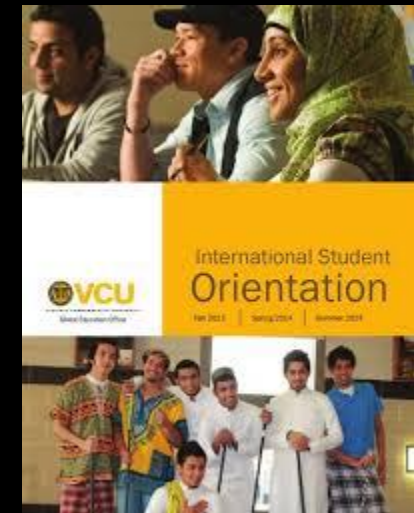
December 2, 2025

8 a.m.

January 5, 2026

8 a.m.





The **VISA** Series

VCU International Student **Achievement**

Join us for advisor-led workshops focused on topics relevant to the University's F-1 students.

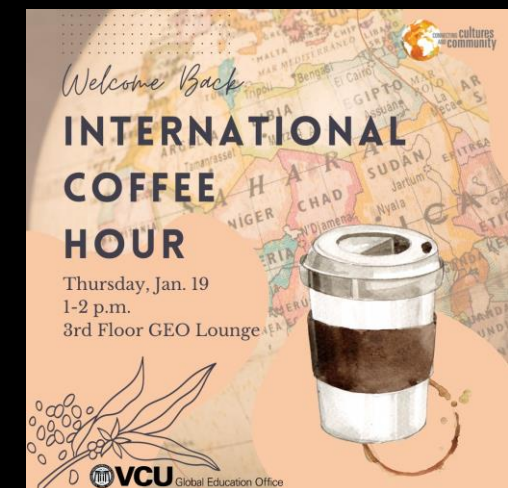
Topics include:

- Optional Practical Training (OPT)
- Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
- The Basics: Maintaining Your F-1 Status
- On-campus Employment
- F-1 Travel
- Post-Graduation Planning for F-1 Students

For a full schedule and to register, visit:
global.vcu.edu/students/immigration/visa-series



Global Education Office



VCU College of Engineering

Immigration **Services**

GEO Immigration Services (GEOIS) provides timely and reliable U.S. visa (and some related employment authorization) compliance support, as well as direct services to VCU's international students, scholars, employees, and visitors—and to the VCU leadership, faculty, advisors, and staff who work closely with them.

- Virtual [Pre-arrival Meetups](#)
- F-1 visa application
- Travel to the U.S.
- [Housing](#)
- Orientation information
- and MORE!



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Meet a Student

- Nourchene Bargaoui
- International student
- Current Ph.D. student – Computer Science

- Advice for incoming students / experience as an international student



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After Arrival

- **Official Paperwork**

- Transcripts

- Request from previous institution – cannot be copies / emailed from student
 - Send to vcuia@vcu.edu OR mail to:

- VCU Office of Admissions
912 West Grace Street
Box 843051
Richmond, VA 23284-3051

- English proficiency scores

- Request that they be sent to VCU (testing code 5570)
 - Learn more [here](#) (scroll to “Proof of English proficiency”)

- Will not be able to register for fall 2026 if these are not received



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College of Engineering

After Arrival

- **Educational Norms**

- Class attendance
 - Required for each class unless otherwise specified by the professor
 - No quota
 - “If I attend this number of classes, I do not have to attend additional classes.”
 - This is not common in the United States.
- Arriving on time
 - Generally expected and considered polite
- Course syllabi
 - Grading, attendance, AI use, group vs. individual work
- Academic Performance
 - Minimum cumulative 3.0 GPA – learn more [here](#)

- **OPT / CPT**

- Learn more: [OPT](#) | [CPT](#)



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College of Engineering

Academic and Student Supports

- [Academic Calendar](#)
- [Schedule of Classes](#)
- [Bulletin](#)
 - Go-to resource for curriculum requirements
- [Academic Resources](#)
- [On-Campus Resources](#)
- [GEO Student Supports](#)



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College of Engineering

Graduate Program Directors

- **Biomedical Engineering**

- Dean Krusienski, Ph.D., djkrusienski@vcu.edu

- **Chemical & Life Science Engineering**

- Thomas Roper, Ph.D., tdroper@vcu.edu

- **Computer Science**

- Kostadin Damevski, Ph.D., csgrad@vcu.edu

- **Electrical & Computer Engineering**

- Yanxiao Zhao, Ph.D., ecegradinfo@vcu.edu

- **Mechanical & Nuclear, Aerospace, and Engineering Management**

- Karla Mossi, Ph.D., mnegrad@vcu.edu

- **Pharmaceutical Engineering**

- Thomas Roper, Ph.D., tdroper@vcu.edu



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College of Engineering

Meet the OGS Team

- **Jeni Stanley-Shanks – Director**
 - Strategic oversight and external engagement
- **Lori Floyd-Miller – Academic Specialist**
 - Academic and program support
- **Johnny Ramey – Admissions Specialist**
 - Recruitment and new student support
- **Sam Stiver – Finance Analyst**
 - Tuition and funding
- Email: gradengr@vcu.edu



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College of Engineering

Reminders

- **Academic Life at VCU Webinar – November 19 ([Register here](#))**
 - Academic calendar, student supports, life in Richmond
- **Paperwork 1, 2, 3 Webinar – December 17 ([Register here](#))**
 - Tuition, fees, paperwork
- **Computer & Data Science Advising Sessions**
 - December 9
 - December 10
 - January 7
- **[Course Registration](#) – Opens October 30**
- **Launchpad (Orientation) – January 9 ([Register here](#))**



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Question and Answer

- Please enter in the chat
- You can also raise your hand to ask verbally



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