

DAY to DAY in the USA



Welcome to your guide regarding life as a student in the USA and – more specifically – at VIU in Fairfax, VA! Refer to this collection of resources, tips, and guidelines as you adjust to your new life in the United States.

- [Banking](#)
- [Cell Phone Tips](#)
- [Internet Safety](#)
- [Religious Centers & Places of Worship](#)
- [Renter's Guide: How to be a good neighbor, roommate, and tenant!](#)
- [Shopping & Restaurants](#)
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Banking

Choosing a Bank

There are many banks to choose from in the Fairfax area, each offering a range of financial services. Many of our students choose either Bank of America or BB&T because they are located close to VIU's campus. When selecting your bank, you may want to consider some of the following points:

- Does this bank offer free checking accounts?
- Are there any promotions offered when I open a checking account? (Some banks will give you \$100 when you open an account!)
- Does this bank have many ATM locations? Are there extra fees associated with ATM transactions?
- Does this bank have an international presence? Will I be able to access this account from my home country?

Opening an Account

When you have selected a bank, you will need to provide the following documents to open an account:

- Passport & I-94
- I-20
- Some banks may require a school ID card or letter of enrollment (status letter)



Checking vs. Savings

A *checking* account will be necessary for paying bills. With a checking account, you will be able to write checks and – more importantly – use a debit/ATM card. Having a debit card reduces the need to carry large amounts of cash, which can be dangerous. Also, having a debit card means you will be able to make online purchases.

A *savings* account will be helpful if you have a large sum of money in your account. Most banks will pay you a small amount of interest each month for the money held in your savings account. You may also find that having a savings account is helpful when planning and budgeting your funds.

Resources

[“Opening a Bank Account” – InternationalStudent.com](#)

[List of Banks in Fairfax, VA](#)

[Currency Converter – xe.com](#)

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Cell Phone Tips

Contract vs. Pre-Paid

With most service providers, a *contract* plan locks you into a 1-2 year agreement. A contract plan usually will have lower rates than a pre-paid plan, but there are often fees charged if you break the contract. If you do not have a Social Security Number, you may have some difficulty signing a contract. Some service providers will allow you to sign a contract with the payment of a security deposit.

In addition to contract plans, many service providers also offer *pre-paid* plans. Pre-paid plans allow you to pay your phone bill on a month-to-month basis, but the service charge will probably be higher than contract plan rates.

Choosing a Provider

There are many cell phone companies operating in the DC/Metro and Northern Virginia communities. Listed below are some popular options. This is not a comprehensive list! You may want to search for others.

- [AT&T](#)
- [Cricket](#)
- [Sprint](#)
- [Straight Talk Wireless](#)
- [T-Mobile](#)
- [Verizon Wireless](#)
- [Virgin Mobile](#)



When selecting a provider, you should consider the following points:

- What are the requirements if I do not have a US Social Security Number?
- Should I select a pre-paid plan or a contract plan? How long is the contract?
- What fees are associated with the plan? (i.e., cancellation fees, call fees, activation fees, etc.)
- How many calling minutes does the plan include?
- What are the charges for additional services like internet and texting?
- What are the charges for international calling?

Save on International Calls

There are popular services now – such as ooVoo and Skype – that allow you to make internet voice or video calls for free to other users. Consider taking advantage of these free services when placing calls to your family or friends back home!

Resources

[Phone Plan Rate Comparisons – ABTolls.com](#)

[ooVoo](#)

[Skype](#)

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Internet Safety

Browse Safely

- Keep your web browser up-to-date
- Scan your computer regularly using an anti-spyware program
- Scan your computer regularly using an anti-virus program
- Only download files from trusted sites
- Never open unidentifiable email attachments or click mysterious links
- Avoid giving your personal or financial information, especially in an email
- It is best to shop only on well-established and popular sites

Avoid Scams

If the deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is! Beware of emails, pop-ups, or advertisements that offer you something for free – especially if they are asking you for personal information. If you are unsure if an email, pop-up, or advertisement is authentic, do some investigating before you take action. You may want to perform a Google search or consult with a VIU staff member.

Resources

["How can I tell if something might be a scam?" – fraud.org](http://fraud.org)

[Free Software \(Office, Security, Internet, etc.\) – VIU IT Department](#)



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Religious Centers & Places of Worship

Finding Your Worship Community

VIU is fortunate to be located in an area of diverse cultures. Regardless of your religious or spiritual practices you should have little trouble finding a religious center to fit your needs. Because there are many churches, temples, mosques, and other religious centers in our area, we recommend that you use a search engine to locate a place of worship.

Resources

[Worship Communities Search Engine – patheos.com](http://patheos.com)

[Yellow Pages Business Directory](#)

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Renter's Guide: How to be a good neighbor, roommate, and tenant!

No matter what your living situation is during your study at VIU, you will be a neighbor, a roommate, or a tenant – or any combination of the three! You will certainly have a more enjoyable living experience if you are able to practice courtesy and respect. Refer to our guidelines below for some ideas!

Be a Good Neighbor

- Introduce yourself
- Control your noise levels, especially early in the morning and late in the evening
- Park appropriately – don't block anyone's driveway
- Keep trash in a collection bin, and only put it out when it will be collected

Be a Good Roommate

- Share the household chores, especially in common areas
- Respect your roommate's privacy and personal space; you should talk about what items and spaces you will share ahead of time
- Control your noise levels, especially early in the morning and late in the evening; know your roommate's sleep schedule
- Be prepared to compromise
- Talk about problems as soon as they arise
- Spend time together outside of your home
- Clean up after yourself



Be a Good Tenant

- Pay your rent on time
- Keep your living space clean
- Ask your landlord before you paint walls or make other significant changes to the living space
- Maintain a good relationship with your neighbors and your roommates
- Dispose of your garbage appropriately

Resources

["How to Be a Good Neighbour" – wikiHow.com](#)

["How to Be a Good Roommate" – wikiHow.com](#)

["How to Be a Good Tenant" – wikiHow.com](#)

["Living with a Roommate" – VIU Housing Department](#)

["Tips for Renters" – VIU Housing Department](#)

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Shopping & Restaurants

General Shopping Near VIU

- DISCOUNT RETAIL
 - [Big Lots](#) (department store)
 - [Burlington Coat Factory](#) (clothing store)
 - [Marshalls](#) (clothing store)
 - [Ross](#) (clothing store)
 - [T.J. Maxx](#) (clothing store)
- GENERAL RETAIL
 - [Fair Oaks Mall](#)
 - [Fair Lakes Shopping Center](#)
 - [Tysons Corner](#)
 - [Walmart](#)
- GROCERY
 - [Giant](#)
 - [Lotte Plaza](#)
 - [Safeway](#)
 - [Shoppers](#)
 - [Super H-Mart](#)
 - [Wegmans](#)



General Shopping & Restaurant Resources

- [Find Coupons – RetailMeNot.com](#)
- [Search Thrift Stores – TheThriftShopper.com](#)
- [Search Restaurants – UrbanSpoon.com](#)
- [Yellow Pages Business Directory](#)

Check back with us! We will soon be able to provide you with a list of shopping locations and restaurants specific to different regions.

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Social Etiquettes

Bodily Functions

Many Americans consider the following behaviors to be rude in public:

- Burping (Especially if you are at the dinner table!)
- Nose-picking
- Spitting
- Yawning (When you are having a conversation, especially a formal conversation, you should try to cover a yawn with your hand.)

Conversation

- Some **topics of conversation** are typically considered inappropriate, unless you are speaking with close, personal friends. You may want to avoid talking about the following, especially with strangers or people you have just met: abortion, politics, racism, religion, sexuality, wealth/money.
- Americans value their **personal space**, especially when in conversation. Do not stand too close when you are talking or standing in lines. Try to keep about 2 feet of space between yourself and your conversation partner. Of course, as you get to know a person over time the space barriers may become less important.
- **Saying “thank you”** is a valued etiquette in the USA.
- **Shaking hands** is a typical form of greeting, especially when you are meeting someone for the first time. Both men and women shake hands.
- Usually Americans reserve **touching** and physical forms of affection – such as hugs or kisses – for close friends and family members. (Kisses are not used as a greeting.) Avoid excessive physical contact with someone you have just met or do not know well.

Eating

- **Loud chewing or eating** is often viewed as rude. As much as you can, avoid chewing with your mouth open, loud chewing, and slurping (even when you are drinking).
- When eating at a restaurant where you are attended to by a waiter, it is standard to **tip your waiter** at least 15% of the total bill. If you receive exceptional service, it is better to leave 20% or more for your waiter. Only leave less than 15% if you receive very bad service.
- When you are served dinner at someone’s house, it is polite to **wait until everyone is seated at the table before beginning to eat**.



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Hygiene

- American women usually **shave** both their legs and underarms.
- Generally, Americans consider **wearing underarm deodorant** a vital part of their daily hygiene routines.
- Americans are very conscious of **washing hands**, especially before preparing food, before eating, and after using the toilet.

Other etiquettes

- The legal drinking-age in the United States is 21. Some Americans may be uncomfortable offering you **alcohol** if you are not of age because it is illegal. You should be well-informed of all alcohol-related laws. Driving your car or riding your bike while under the influence of alcohol or while intoxicated is illegal. Being drunk in public places is also illegal.
- Do not speak loudly on your **cell phone** in public places, especially while using public transportation. You should silence your phone when in formal meetings, in class, or at the movie theatre.
- In public places, there are often specified places where you are permitted to **smoke**. When you are at someone's house or car, always ask if you may smoke.
- Americans value timeliness. You should **always be on time** – or early, if possible! If a meeting, party, or other event is scheduled to begin at 3PM, try to be there at least 5 minutes earlier.

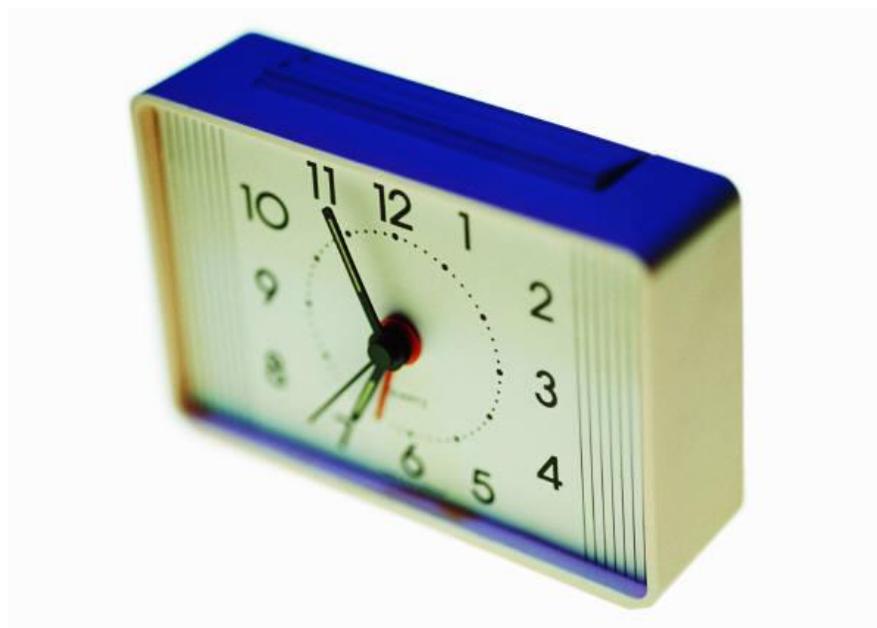
Resources

For more thorough reading on social etiquettes in the United States, refer to the following links:

["Etiquette in North America" – Wikipedia](#)

["Etiquette – What's that?" – InternationalStudents.org](#)

["United States: Customs, Habits, and Etiquettes" – Trip Advisor](#)



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Touring DC & Northern Virginia

Whether you are touring with friends on the weekend or taking a class trip, we hope you will find the DC/Metro area to be rich with sights, events, and amusements. VIU sponsors trips throughout the year, but we encourage you to explore on your own and with classmates! The Office of Student Affairs will happily assist you and provide you with resources if you need help making travel arrangements.

Resources

[Discounts & Coupons – Bloomspot](#)

[Discounts & Coupons – Groupon](#)

[Discounts & Coupons – Living Social](#)

[District of Columbia Visitors Resource Center](#)

[Going Out Guide – The Washington Post](#)

[Official Tourism Site of Washington, DC](#)

[Visiting Fairfax County](#)



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Transportation

There are many public transportation options available to our students. Whether you choose to walk, ride your bike, drive, take the Metro, or catch the bus you will find resources on this page to assist you in your commute to VIU!

SmarTrip Card

If you plan to use any public transportation in the DC/Metro area, it is wise to have a SmarTrip card. Being a SmarTrip passenger will make your commutes easier, and – more importantly – it will save you money, as fares are not as high for SmartTrip card holders.

You can purchase your SmarTrip card at a Metro station, [online](#), or at over 400 [retail stores](#) in the DC/Metro area.

[Learn more about SmarTrip cards.](#)

Public Transportation Options

- [CUE Bus System](#) – Operates within the City of Fairfax.
 - [Fares](#)
 - [Maps](#)
- [Fairfax Connector](#) – Bus service which operates within the County of Fairfax.
 - [Fares](#)
 - [Maps](#)
- [Metro](#) – Combination bus and rail service which operates within the DC/Metro area (including Northern Virginia).
 - [Fares](#)
 - [Bus Maps](#)
 - [Rail Maps](#)

Public Transit Tips

- Carry exact change (Your driver will not carry change!)
- No smoking ,eating, or drinking
- Use earphones when listening to a radio or other electronic device
- Make sure you board a bus or train headed in the direction you want to travel (Check a map if you are unsure!)
- Give the bus driver a wave to let him or her know you want to board the bus
- Let older passengers, small children, or passengers with disabilities have seating priority



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Bus Stops Close to VIU

There are a number of bus stops within easy walking distance of VIU. The ones most often utilized by our students are:

- JERMANTOWN RD & LEE JACKSON HWY
 - Located near Giant & 7-Eleven
- RT 50 LEE JACKSON HWY & WAPLES MILL
 - Located in front of the Marriott Courtyard hotel

Safe Walking Tips

- Avoid *jaywalking*. Jaywalking refers to any illegal or reckless pedestrian crossing of a roadway. You should always yield to drivers, use a crosswalk, and cross when the signal gives you permission.
- Look both ways down the street before walking.
- At night, always walk in a well-lit areas.
- For more information on safely crossing streets, [check out this YouTube video](#).

Applying for a Driver's License

Many students think they must obtain an international driver's license to drive in the USA, but **this is not true!** You may drive with your home country driver's license for no more than six months after your arrival in the USA, and then you may apply for a Virginia driver's license. If you don't have a driver's license from your home country you must obtain a learner's permit before applying for a driver's license or learning to drive. You will have to take an exam to show your knowledge of traffic rules and signs. To learn more, [visit the Division of Motor Vehicles website](#).

Resources

["Document Guide for Driver's Licenses and ID Cards" - DMV](#)

["Getting a Driver's License" – VIU International Student Services Office](#)

[Trip Planner - WMATA](#)

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Weather Center

What to Expect from the Weather

In Northern Virginia, we consider ourselves fortunate to experience all four seasons. What this means is we typically can identify Spring (March – May), Summer (June – August), Fall/Autumn (September – November), and Winter (December – February) as their own distinct seasons with distinct temperatures and other weather effects.

So what can you expect from the different seasons?

Spring:

- Average temperatures ranging from 33 - 76°F (0.5 - 24°C)
- Average of 3.8 inches precipitation per month
- Weather to expect: rain, new flowers and leaves growing on the trees

Summer:

- Average temperatures ranging from 61 - 88°F (16 - 31°C)
- Average of 3.7 inches precipitation per month
- Weather to expect: thunder storms

Fall/Autumn:

- Average temperatures ranging from 35 - 79°F (1.5 - 26°C)
- Average of 3.5 inches precipitation per month
- Weather to expect: rain (often heavy, due to hurricanes), leaves on trees changing to red, orange, brown

Winter:

- Average temperatures ranging from 24-47°F (-4.5 - 8°C)
- Average of 2.8 inches precipitation per month
- Weather to expect: snow

Fairfax, VA Weather Facts

(From [The Weather Channel](#))

- On average, July is the hottest month and January is the coldest.
- The highest recorded temperature was 104°F in 1988. The lowest recorded temperature was -18°F in 1984.
- You can expect the most precipitation in the month of May (considering averages).

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Weather Terms

- **Blizzard:** A blizzard is a snow storm lasting 3 or more hours which produces winds of 35 miles per hour (or more!) which causes snow to blow, thereby reducing visibility to less than ¼ mile.
- **Hurricane:** A hurricane is a large storm that forms over the ocean and moves in a spiraling motion. Sometimes hurricanes stay out in the ocean, but sometimes they move toward land.
- **Severe Thunderstorm:** A severe thunderstorm is the result of large fronts of air moving over one another. A severe thunderstorm is more dangerous than a typical thunderstorm in that it produces stronger weather conditions.
- **Tornado:** A tornado is a rotating column of air which extends from a thunderstorm to the ground.

How do I know if VIU is closed due to weather conditions?

You can always check the VIU homepage to see if we have cancelled classes for the day. You may also tune in to the following news stations or check their websites to see if we have cancelled classes:

- [ABC 7 \(TV\)](#)
- [Fox 5 \(TV\)](#)
- [NBC 4 \(TV\)](#)
- [News Channel 8 \(TV\)](#)
- [WTOP FM 103.5 \(Radio\)](#)
- [WTOP FM 103.9 \(Radio\)](#)

Resources

[NOAA National Weather Service](#)
[The Weather Channel](#)
[Weather Underground](#)

