



## EMBARKING ON A NEW EXPERIENCE!

As we eagerly await your arrival to Florida Gulf Coast University, I reflect on my own experiences of living, working and learning abroad. Undoubtedly, each time I have left the U.S., I learned more about myself, more about others and of course, more about the world in general. International and cross-cultural experiences have contributed greatly to my perspectives and enriched my life.

I hope that you also look forward to the enriching experience that awaits you. The degree you pursue and your immersion in our academic community and the U.S. culture will give you valuable career and life skills for success in a diverse and contemporary world.

*Your success here will depend on many things, but most importantly it depends on you!* You will have certain responsibilities you must meet, decisions to make and numerous opportunities to explore. The best way to plan for your success is to prepare well for your arrival, maintain a positive attitude, understand and follow regulations and procedures, and participate in the variety of experiences we offer. This will maximize your opportunities, make your transition easier and prevent problems.

Our information and services, beginning with this **Pre-Arrival Guide**, are designed to support you in making the best of your experience. We have provided you with information, forms you must complete and submit to FGCU, and a checklist to be sure you are prepared to attend the university.

We hope that the quality of our courses, faculty, staff and student life experiences surpass your expectations. We are here to assist you and we welcome you to Florida Gulf Coast University!!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Elaine Hozdik'.

Elaine Hozdik, Director  
International Services Office

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## ***HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE***

The purpose of this guide is to assist you step by step in traveling to FGCU to become an international student. It contains valuable information to help you obtain the immigration documents required to study in the United States, prepare for travel, prepare for your academics and plan your new life as an international student. **Read it thoroughly and keep it with you. For additional information and current resources, please also review our website at: [www.fgcu.edu/international](http://www.fgcu.edu/international)**

## ***DOCUMENTS, INSTRUCTIONS AND FORMS TO COMPLETE***

Enclosed with the Pre-Arrival Guide are several immigration and university documents, forms and instructions that you must read, complete or submit as instructed. A “Task List and Deadlines Prior to Arriving to FGCU” is included to assist you to complete all necessary processes.

## ***FGCU INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICES***

At Florida Gulf Coast University international student services are provided through the International Services Office (ISO). The office provides cross-cultural adjustment, immigration advising and assists students to become successfully integrated into the University's academic and social experiences. We provide information for international students on compliance with immigration regulations and procedures and to participate in opportunities such as campus employment, travel, school transfer and practical training. We want to help you succeed in your experiences at Florida Gulf Coast University and in the United States. International and exchange students should use this office as a primary resource while enrolled at FGCU.

## ***THE UNIVERSITY DESIGNATED SCHOOL OFFICIAL (DSO) AND RESPONSIBLE OFFICERS (RO)***

The university Designated School Officials (DSO) and Responsible Officers (RO) are responsible for all international student affairs and have been authorized by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the U.S. Department of State to admit, enroll and monitor all activities of international students and exchange visitors (students and scholars). The DSO/RO's are also responsible for ensuring that FGCU complies with all immigration regulations. Most international student's activities are regulated by the USCIS and the U.S. Department of State and authorized only through the DSO/RO. Therefore, you should maintain contact with the university DSO/RO, throughout the entire time you are enrolled here. At FGCU, the DSO's or RO's you will be working with are: **Ms. Elaine Hozdik**, Director and **Mr. Timothy W. Gjini**, Assistant Director of ISO and Global Initiatives Office.

## INTERNATIONAL SERVICES OFFICE CONTACT INFORMATION

### STAFF

- Elaine Hozdik, Director and PDSO/RO
- Timothy Gjini, Assistant Director, DSO/ARO
- Joan Lindauer, Executive Secretary

### CONTACT INFORMATION

#### **International Services Office (ISO)**

10501 FGCU Blvd. S.  
Fort Myers, FL. 33965-6565  
USA

PHONE: (239) 590-7925

FAX: (239) 590- 7977

TTY: (239) 590-7930 (for persons who are deaf)

E-mail: [internationalservices@fgcu.edu](mailto:internationalservices@fgcu.edu) or  
[tgjini@fgcu.edu](mailto:tgjini@fgcu.edu)

Web site: <http://www.fgcu.edu/international>

You may share this contact information noted above with your family, to be used for **emergency purposes only**. We suggest you give your personal contact information (your expected address in the U.S. or at FGCU) to your family and friends.

## 2. PREPARING TO BECOME A STUDENT AT FGCU

### ***PRE-REGISTRATION FOR CLASSES***

All new international students will be pre-registered for the first semester of classes, prior to attending the International Student Orientation. Pre-registration is required to ensure that you will be enrolled full time and that you are able to enroll in classes appropriate for your major and level of study. Each student is assigned to an Academic Advisor during the entire time the student attends the university. The Academic Advisor assists the student to select appropriate courses and successfully register for classes. They also review the student's personal academic file to ensure the student is completing required classes on schedule. Classes are selected based on individual student circumstances such as degree program requirements, university requirements and transfer hours.

During the International Student Orientation or Eagle View Orientation, you will meet your Academic Advisor and have the opportunity to make adjustments to your class schedule, if necessary. Your Academic Advisor may contact you in advance via e-mail, to arrange for initial communication about your first semester classes. You may also contact the Academic Advising staff at any time, via e-mail, at <http://www.fgcu.edu/Info/Advising.asp> or by phone at (239) 590-7875.

### ***INTERNATIONAL STUDENT HEALTH INSURANCE***

Health care and medical services in the U.S. are generally not socialized. Instead, it is privately funded and can be very expensive. That is why students must have personal health insurance. Health care services on campus are currently located in the Student Health Center and used for basic health care needs.

**International students must comply with the State of Florida Board of Regents (BOR) rule requiring all international students to have health insurance in order to register or enroll in university classes.** Rule 6C-6.009(6), provides that as of Fall 1992, no foreign student in F-1, F-2, J-1 or J-2 non-immigrant status shall be permitted to register or to continue enrollment at a university without demonstrating that he or she has adequate medical insurance coverage for illness or accidental injury.

All international students must maintain an approved health insurance policy that meets the requirements of the State of Florida (and U.S. Department of State Exchange Visitor Program for J-1 students) while enrolled at FGCU. Florida Gulf Coast University offers an approved health insurance policy, which is available to all students. **All international students or exchange visitors (with F-1/J-1 visas) will be automatically enrolled in this insurance program to ensure that each student meets these requirements. Under this plan, the fee for one semester of insurance will be assessed to the student's tuition and fees and must be paid no later than the first week of classes.** Although the health insurance fees are determined annually by the insurance company, students can expect to pay **approximately \$650** for the first semester. **The health insurance fee will be charged to your student account each semester you are enrolled at FGCU.**

Students may request a waiver of automatic enrollment in the university insurance program, if they provide satisfactory evidence of comparable health insurance through another company. The medical insurance compliance (waiver) form must be received in our office by the deadline posted each semester. **The deadline for the Fall semester is August 1<sup>st</sup> and the deadline for Spring is December 1<sup>st</sup>, of every year. Health insurance waivers will not be accepted after this date, and a health insurance charge will be posted on your student account.** Remember that although you may have some form of health insurance, the university can only accept your insurance if FGCU determines it **meets the minimum requirements established by the State of Florida, (and U.S. Department of State Exchange Visitor Program for J-1 students).** Many health insurance programs originating outside the U.S. do not meet the Florida requirements. Waiver forms and instructions are included in the Pre-Arrival packet and are also available at our website.

**It is your responsibility to submit proof of health insurance each semester to the International Services Office. Failure to do so may prevent you from registering for classes and could result in administrative holds being placed on your record. It could also lead to complications with your immigration status.** For specific information on forms and instructions, please refer to the “Required Health Insurance” enclosed as a separate document in this Pre-Arrival Guide.

### 3. PREPARING TO TRAVEL TO THE U.S.

#### ***GET A VALID PASSPORT***

Your passport should be valid at least six months into the future of your arrival date to the United States. In other words, make sure that your passport will remain valid through the duration of at least your first two semesters. Obtaining a new passport while in the U.S. could be difficult and might require traveling outside of the U.S.; therefore we recommend that, if possible, you obtain a passport that will remain valid for the entire duration of your intended period of study in the U.S.

#### ***OBTAIN AN F-1 STUDENT VISA OR J-1 EXCHANGE VISITOR VISA***

You will need an **F-1 student visa** or **J-1 exchange visitor visa** to be able to study in the United States. The type of visa you apply for will depend on your program of study (degree seeking or exchange student). **Unless you are already in the United States under another visa status, you must go through the following process to obtain an F-1 or J-1 student visa.** Once you have been officially admitted to FGCU, the university DSO/RO will issue a Form I-20A-B, Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) or a DS-2019 for Nonimmigrant (J-1). **The I-20/DS-2019 form will be sent to you directly by the University DSO/RO, along with your official admission letter.** The I-20 is required to apply for an F-1 student visa, whereas the DS-2019 is required to apply for a J-1 visa. These forms will also be used for you to travel outside of the U.S. and for employment authorization once you become a student; **therefore, it's important for you to keep it in a safe place. We also recommend that you make copies of the documents the DSO/RO has sent to you, to keep for your personal records.**

To get your visa, you will have to apply for one at the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate office, preferably in your home country. Contact the consular office in advance to become familiar with their office hours and procedures. Read the information thoroughly and prepare for the visit to the consular office carefully. Plan sufficient time to get your student visa, as it may require several weeks of processing.

To apply for your visa you will need:

- A completed application, Nonimmigrant visa Applicant, Form DS-156, together with a Form DS-158. Both forms must be completed and signed. Some applicants will also be required to complete and sign Form DS-157. A separate form is needed for children; even if they are included in a parent's passport (these forms are available at the consular offices).  
[http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/forms/forms\\_1342.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/forms/forms_1342.html) <https://evisaforms.state.gov/ds156.asp?lang=1>
  - Current, valid passport
  - The I-20 or DS-2019 form
  - Evidence of financial support as indicated on the I-20 or DS-2019 form (copy of your financial statement is sent to you by the DSO/ARO with your I-20 or DS-2019 form)
  - One passport-size type photograph, 1 1/2 inches square (37x37mm)
- \* Pay a non-refundable \$200 SEVIS fee prior to applying for your F or J visa by going to [www.fmjfee.com](http://www.fmjfee.com) After this, pay a nonrefundable \$131 U.S. dollars application fee and submit (Note: fees, forms and instructions are subject to change):  
[http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types\\_1268.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1268.html)

In some cases, officers might request other documents to prove your eligibility for a student visa, such as evidence of strong ties to your country or ability to support yourself, as well as evidence of English proficiency, school records and academic preparation. You may be interviewed briefly and asked questions related to your intentions of being a student in the U.S. Answer these questions directly, in English and honestly.

## **10 POINTS ON APPLYING FOR A STUDENT OR EXCHANGE VISITOR VISA**

**1) TIES TO YOUR HOME COUNTRY.** Under U.S. law, all applicants for nonimmigrant visas are viewed as intending immigrants until they can convince the consular officer that they are not. You must, therefore, be able to show that you have reasons for returning back to your home country that are stronger than those for remaining in the United States. "Ties" to your home country are the things that bind you to your hometown, homeland, or current place of residence. Strong "ties" differs from country to country, city to city, individual to individual. Some examples of ties can be a job, a house, a family, a bank account. "Ties" are the various aspects of your life that bind you to your country of residence: your possessions, employment, social, cultural and family relationships. If you are a prospective undergraduate or graduate student, the interviewing officer may ask about your specific intentions or promise of future employment, family or other relationships, educational objectives, grades, long-range plans, and career prospects **in your home country**. Each person's situation is different, of course, and there is no magic explanation or single document, certificate, or letter, which can guarantee visa issuance.

**2) ENGLISH.** Anticipate that the interview will be conducted in English and not in your native language. One suggestion is to practice English conversation with a native speaker before the interview. If you are coming to the United States solely to study intensive English, be prepared to explain how it will be useful for you in your home country.

**3) SPEAK FOR YOURSELF.** Do not bring parents or family members to the interview. The consular office wants to have an interview with you, not with your family. A negative impression is created if you are not prepared to speak on your behalf.

**4) KNOW THE PROGRAM AND HOW IT FITS YOUR CAREER PLANS.** If you are not able to articulate the reason you will study in a particular program or participate in an exchange visitor program in the United States, you may not succeed in convincing the consular officer that you are indeed planning to study, rather than to immigrate. You should also be able to explain how studying in the United States relates to your future professional career when you return home.

**5) BE CONCISE.** Because of the volume of applications received, all consular officers are under considerable time pressure to conduct a quick and efficient interview. They must make a decision, for the most part, on the impression they form during the first minute or two of the interview. Consequently, what you say first and the initial impression you create are critical to your success. Keep your answers to the officer's questions short and to the point.

**6) SUPPLEMENTAL DOCUMENTATION.** It should be clear at a glance to the consular officer what written documents you are presenting and what they signify. Lengthy written explanations cannot be quickly read or evaluated. Remember that you may have only 2-3 minutes of interview time.

**7) NOT ALL COUNTRIES ARE EQUAL.** Applicants from countries suffering economic problems or from countries where many students have remained in the United States as immigrants will have more difficulty getting visas. Statistically, applicants from those countries are more likely to be intending immigrants. They are also more likely to be asked about job opportunities at home after their study in the United States.

**8) EMPLOYMENT.** Your main purpose of coming to the United States should be to study or participate in an exchange program, not for the chance to work before or after graduation. While some international students do work off campus during their studies, such employment is incidental to their main purpose of completing their U.S. education. You must be able to clearly articulate your plan to return home at the end of your program. If your spouse is also applying for an accompanying F-2 or J-2 visa, be aware that F-2 or J-2 dependents cannot, under any circumstances, be employed in the United States. If asked, be prepared to address what your spouse intends to do with his/ her time while in the United States. Volunteer work and attending school part-time are permitted activities.

**9) DEPENDENTS REMAINING AT HOME.** If your spouse and children are remaining behind in your country, be prepared to address how they will support themselves in your absence. This can be especially difficult if you are the primary source of income for your family. If the consular officer gains the impression that your family member will need you to remit money from the United States in order to support themselves, your student visa application will almost certainly be denied. If your family does decide to join you at a later time, it is helpful to have them apply at the same office where you applied for your visa.

**10) MAINTAIN A POSITIVE ATTITUDE.** Do not engage the consular officer in an argument. If you are denied a student or exchange visitor visa, ask the officer for a list of documents he/she would suggest you bring in order to overcome the refusal, and try to get the reason you were denied in writing.

## ***IF YOUR STUDENT VISA IS DENIED***

If your student or scholar visa is denied, it may be due to:

- Not enough ties to home country: Under section 214(b) of the INA
- No clear academic or career goals
- Not having sufficient funds to support length of study
- Not prepared for the interview (student doesn't have all the documents)
- I-20 or DS-2019 beginning date is past
- I-20 or DS-2019 too early (You cannot enter the U.S. more than 30 days prior to the start of your program.)
- Transcripts showing poor grades
- Low TOEFL or SAT/ACT scores
- Poor verbal interview

If your visa has been denied, you have the right to request a written response from the consulate providing the explanation for denial. You may have the opportunity to apply again by correcting the problem that caused the denial. In some cases the denial may be a matter of a document missing or incorrect document information. Immigration law is extensive and complex. Again, there are numerous situations that can vary depending on each individual case. **If you have a complication regarding immigration and the information above is not sufficient to answer your questions, contact us for advisement. Remember: Visa issuance is not under the University's control, however; we can advise you on your options.**

## ***IF YOU ARE PRESENTLY STUDYING IN THE U.S. AND TRANSFERRING TO FGCU FROM ANOTHER SCHOOL***

If you are already attending another school in the U.S., **and** you are currently in F-1 or J-1 visa status, **and** you are not leaving the U.S. prior to enrolling at FGCU, please contact us to indicate that you will be transferring from your current school to FGCU. You do not need to get a new F-1/J-1 visa in order to continue to remain in the U.S. **However, you must report to the DSO/RO at FGCU no later than the start date indicated on your I-20/DS-2019.** If you intend to leave the U.S. prior to enrolling at FGCU you will need to apply for a new F-1/J-1 visa. To obtain an F-1/J-1 visa, in order to re-enter the U.S., use the new I-20/DS-2019 FGCU has issued. Follow the procedures noted above in the "Obtain an F-1/J-1 Student Visa" section.

## ***IF YOUR ADMISSION DOCUMENTS DO NOT ARRIVE ON TIME***

If your admission documents (I-20/DS-2019) do not arrive on time for you to obtain a student visa (F or J as appropriate), you should contact us immediately. We will attempt to resolve your situation based on options, if any, that are available to you at that time. Do not attempt to enter the U.S. on a W-T (visa waiver) visa as you will be denied enrollment at FGCU, and you will be required to leave the U.S. after a limited time.

## ***IF YOU WILL BE ACCOMPANIED BY FAMILY MEMBERS DURING YOUR STUDIES IN THE U.S. (F-2/J-2 VISA)***

If you are traveling with family, your spouse and unmarried children may come along and stay with you during the duration of the academic program. Nevertheless, family members must meet all visa eligibility requirements, including evidence that they will have sufficient funds for their support, and that they will depart the U.S. when the student's or scholar's program ends. Each person will be required to obtain an F-2/J-2 visa.

**You should contact the University several months in advance if you intend to have family members joining you. (Please Note: Dependents of F-1 and J-1 student may not live on campus.)**

## ***MORE ON FOREIGN STUDENT VISAS AND FURTHER INQUIRIES***

For more information on foreign student visas and further inquiries please visit the United States Government official web site at: <http://travel.state.gov/index.html>

## **4. BEFORE YOU LEAVE THE COUNTRY**

### ***IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS TO BRING TO THE UNITED STATES***

- Official transcripts from secondary schools, colleges, or universities
- Medical and dental records, including certificates of immunization and vaccinations (especially important if traveling with young children)
- Information about medical conditions, treatments, prescriptions for medications (including generic brand and names) and eyeglasses (if required)
- Marriage certificate and birth certificate, as well as birth certificate of your spouse and children if dependents are traveling with you
- Driver's license

**Note: It's best if documents such as birth and marriage certificates are translated to English and certified in your home country. Retain certified photocopies of all documents in a safe place.**

### ***PERSONAL FINANCES AND MONEY MATTERS***

Managing your finances will be a key to successfully accomplish your goals as an international student. International students maintaining F-1 or J-1 status may work part-time on the University campus, but cannot support themselves from this source only. Therefore; you must ensure that you will have sufficient financial resources to support yourself while you are attending FGCU.

### ***ESTIMATED EXPENSES & PAYING UNIVERSITY TUITION AND FEES***

A separate page ("**Estimated Expenses for International Students** and instructions for **Paying Your Tuition and Fees**") is included in this Pre-arrival Packet to help you plan your personal finances. Your actual expenses may vary considerably depending on your living situation, course credit hours and personal expenses. You should review these expenses and be prepared to pay your financial obligations within all deadlines. Students

who fail to pay required fees by deadlines will be canceled from enrollment at the university.

### ***BANKING SERVICES***

You probably will need to open a bank account in the U.S. unless you are here for only a short term and conduct all of your financial transactions via your home bank. Information on “**U.S. Banking for International Students**” is included as a separate page in this Pre-Arrival Guide. We suggest you review this information before traveling to the U.S. More information on banking and managing finances will be given during the International Student Orientation.

### ***TRANSFERRING MONEY TO THE U.S.***

If you need to transfer money consult your local bank about the options, or contact a bank in Southwest Florida. An alternative for transferring money is to bring a certified bank check that can be cashed in your name in a U.S. bank and/or travelers checks. You generally have to wait a minimum of 10 business days for a deposited check to clear before you may access funds in a new account.

### ***MEDICAL CONSIDERATIONS***

Academic work will demand high physical and intellectual performance; therefore you must be in good health. Preventive medicine is helpful to maintain a healthy life. Periodic medical exams are an effective way to identify potential problems. It is advisable for you to have a thorough medical and dental exam in your home country, before departing for the U.S. It is also important to consult with your local pharmacist or doctor about any particular medication that you require, in order to know if it is available in the U.S. or if you need to bring a supply from home. Sometimes you can find the same drugs under different commercial names.

### ***TRANSPORTATION- Local Area***

Our local area has limited public transportation. A bus runs through campus on daily schedules to several community locations. The most effective way to travel off campus is by using a private vehicle. If you intend to own or operate an automobile you must have a valid driver's license, register your vehicle with the county government and have current automobile insurance. If you are going to live on campus, a bicycle with a lock may be very useful.

### ***WHAT TO BRING***

#### *Money*

Make sure that you bring sufficient money to cover your initial expenses and open a local bank account. Refer to the "Estimated Annual Expenses for International Students" document to analyze and estimate the cash amount that you will need upon arrival and during studies at FGCU.

### *Clothing and gear*

An important factor to consider is the weather. There are only two seasons: a cooler-dry season and a rainy-warm season. The temperature rarely drops below the freezing point. For most of the year the average temperature is 75° F. During the peak of the rainy season – May through September - the temperature and the rainfall increase considerably. An umbrella is essential, but you may purchase one here.

The style of dress in Florida, and on campus, is comfortable and relaxed. Students dress in a variety of ways ranging from casual to more formal (for special occasions). It is acceptable in the U.S. for women to also wear long pants, jeans and shorts in addition to dresses. Men wear short and long pants with shirts. Many students wear extra clothing, like a sweater, in classrooms because of air conditioning. Both men and women wear "beachwear" for sunbathing and water activities. Plan to bring clothes for recreational or outdoor activities, more formal business and one or two special (dressy) events. Some students may prefer to wear their traditional clothing, which is also acceptable. We encourage you to bring a traditional outfit, representing your culture or country, to wear during our International Celebration and other special occasions.

### *Items of sentimental value, items that represent your origins and gifts*

Bring those articles from home that will make you feel more comfortable. You may want to bring items that identify your home country and/or culture, like a flag, a costume and music. Students like to bring gifts (for hosts or special friends) that represent their culture or home country. They don't have to be expensive; the intention is to share with others something about your home.

## **WHAT NOT TO BRING**

You can purchase everything that you will need for your stay, here in Southwest Florida. A few miles away from the University there are malls, where you can find a vast selection of shops. On campus you can purchase books, office material and other necessary items required for your academic program at our University bookstore. You are not required to bring any books; you will have to purchase your class textbooks and study material here.

Because of our agricultural industry, Florida generally does not permit you to bring any food, agricultural or animal products into the state. Therefore, you should not bring any of these items with you unless they are processed and pre-packaged. Additionally, you should never carry illegal drugs or weapons with you. You will be asked to declare your items (by completing a Customs Declaration Form) on arrival. The customs inspector may also ask to examine your luggage so be prepared to unlock it on request.

### **TRAVEL TIPS**

- Avoid last minute confusion, plan ahead.
- International travel can be strenuous. Be well rested before you travel, relax and adjust to the likely delays you may experience.

- Obtain certified copies of your documents.
- Obtain a valid passport and visa.
- Carry your I-20, passport and other related documents with you. **Keep this form and other immigration and travel documents with you at all times. Do not pack them in your checked luggage.**
- Make travel arrangements as early as possible. Buy your air tickets ahead of time. Last minute purchases are more expensive. Schedule your flight so you will arrive at FGCU on the day prior to the required International Student Orientation.
- Don't forget to reconfirm airline reservations 72 hours before departure.
- Advise the International Services Office (ISO) International Student Services of your itinerary, date and time of arrival and if you have difficulty arriving by the arrival date on your I-20 or DS-2019 (item # 5 in your I-20 or item # 3 in your DS-2019).
- Give your family your personal contact telephone number and address of where you expect to be in the U.S. Give the telephone number of the International Services Office to be used in case of an emergency only.
- Don't carry large sums of cash. Buy traveler checks or debit or credit cards you can use abroad. Remember to keep traveler check receipts separate from the checks.
- Label your entire luggage with destination and contact information.
- Make sure you can handle the amount of luggage you are carrying. You will probably have to change planes and check in luggage more than once.
- Travel simple and light. You can purchase many essential items here.
- Pack personal items and an extra outfit in the carry-on luggage, in case the rest of the luggage doesn't arrive at the same time, or you miss a flight connection.
- Safely pack all your valuables and items that could leak. Ensure you do not carry fluids or toothpaste in your carry-on luggage, due to flight security matters (check with your airline on current restrictions.)
- If you need to make phone calls, consider phone cards suitable for various types of calls (international, local, etc.), You can purchase them in various places such as airports, gas stations, supermarkets or online.

### ***EXPECTED ARRIVAL DATE TO THE UNITED STATES***

You are expected to arrive at FGCU on time for the **International Student Orientation**. This is a very important program you shouldn't miss. If you have travel problems or other delays in arriving for orientation, be sure to arrive at FGCU no later than the "report date" stated on your I-20 form (item # 5) or DS-2019 form (item # 3). **If you do arrive later than the Orientation date or the report date due to an unexpected emergency, you**

**must report to our office as required by U.S. immigration regulations. Failure to do so on arrival can result in termination of your student status in the U.S.**

### ***IF YOU DECIDE TO CHANGE YOUR PLANS***

If circumstances require you to change your plans to attend FGCU (i.e. you decide not to attend FGCU at this time), you will need to notify the Admissions Office at InternationalAdmissions@Fgcu.edu If it is the case that you will attend a later semester, you may also need to provide updated documents in order for FGCU to re-issue a new I-20/DS-2019. You should also notify ISO at InternationalServices@Fgcu.edu or (239) 590-7925 of your changed plans.

## **5. ENTERING THE UNITED STATES**

### ***IMMIGRATION PROCEDURES AT THE PORT OF ENTRY***

As you travel to the U.S. you will be given an **I-94 form** to complete. At the port of entry to the United States, an Immigration officer will examine your documents. You will be asked to present your passport, I-20/DS-2019 form and I-94 form. After the documents have been reviewed, the officer will return your passport, I-20 and I-94 card. The officer will also stamp your I-20 or DS-2019, your passport and I-94 card with a D/S (Duration of Status) indicating that you can be allowed to stay in the U.S. for the duration of your program. **Keep these documents in a safe place.** These are important documents difficult to replace and are **extremely important since they legitimize your presence in the United States.** You will also need to bring them to the **International Student Orientation.**

**Canadian Citizens** do not require a visa to enter the United States, but it is recommended that Canadian students obtain an F-1/J-1 visa. They should also be prepared to show their proof of financial support and proof of Canadian citizenship at the port of entry. **AS OF JANUARY 2007, ALL CANADIAN CITIZENS, WHO SEEK TO ENTER THE U.S., MUST HAVE A VALID PASSPORT IN ORDER TO BE ALLOWED INTO THE COUNTRY.**

If the immigration officer determines that you are not properly documented to enter the U.S., you may be given an *I-515 Notice to Student or Exchange Visitor Admitted without I-20 form or DS-2019 form*. You should bring this form to the ISO office as soon as you arrive to the U.S. for further immigration processing, as it only provides a temporary admission to the U.S.

### ***CLEARING CUSTOMS AT THE PORT OF ENTRY***

All baggage must be presented for Customs inspection upon arrival in the U.S. regardless of your final destination. Once you have claimed your luggage, proceed to the Customs Inspection counters to complete Customs formalities. If you are connecting to another flight, you can recheck your baggage immediately outside the Customs area. Remember

that U.S. and Florida laws place restrictions on the type of products and amount of funds you may bring with you.

**All international students must report to the ISO upon arrival to the United States, and report any changes in your address, academic or immigration status to the DSO, throughout the time you are enrolled as a student.**

## **6. YOUR NEW STUDENT LIFE**

### ***INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ORIENTATION***

**All newly admitted international students are required to attend the International Student Orientation**, which is held a few days before each semester begins. The Orientation is designed to help you adjust to living and studying in the United States and to welcome you to our university. During the Orientation, you will receive very important information about Florida Gulf Coast University and immigration regulations that pertain to your presence in the U.S. and at the university. You will also meet University administrators and students who can assist you.

In addition, you will be required to attend the general University orientation (Eagle View Orientation). You will be automatically enrolled to attend this orientation. This orientation has a fee and will be charged to you as part of your first semester expenses. <http://studentservices.fgcu.edu/NewStudentPrograms/orientationmain.html>.

### ***IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS YOU MUST BRING TO ORIENTATION AND DOCUMENT PROCESSING***

- **I-20 or DS-2019** (and any other immigration documents you may have)
- **Passport (must be current, with U.S. visa stamp)**
- **I-94 card** (received on airline or at U.S. Port of Entry)

### ***CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT***

Experiencing a new culture is part of being a student in a different country. Studying at FGCU will be a new adventure and an opportunity to learn about the U.S. culture. Furthermore, this experience will broaden your understanding of the world and will help you learn more about yourself. For most international students the cross-cultural experience has both rewards and challenges.

Cross-cultural adjustment is part of the process of living in another country. You will experience differences in culture, some that will highlight your experience here and others that could be the cause of discomfort. This discomfort is the "culture shock" stage of the adaptation process. Culture shock refers to the anxiety experienced when a person has a loss of the home culture, family and support system and is confronted with the task

of assimilating into a new culture. In a new place, people may walk and talk more quickly, interpersonal space might vary, food might be different, eating hours could vary, personal care habits may be different, traffic patterns may be confusing, and buildings may look different than expected. The housing arrangements at the university, the manner in which classes are taught, registration for courses, and other procedures may seem strange or confusing. **Culture shock is a very normal process that nearly everyone experiences.**

Your cultural base is the values that are important to you and the patterns of behavior that are customary in your culture. The more you know about your personal values and how they are derived from your culture, the better prepared you will be to see and understand the cultural differences you will encounter in the U.S. Keeping an open mind, a non-judgmental approach and a positive outlook will provide you with a rewarding and memorable experience. The ISO office and other international students will offer advice and support to you in achieving a successful cross-cultural adjustment. Suggestions for adjusting to our culture will be presented during orientation; and staff is always available to assist you through your stay in the U.S.

### ***UNIVERSITY LIFE***

FGCU is a new institution that is continuing to grow and currently has approximately 8200 students. Many new facilities and buildings are being added to the University complex every semester. The student population is also growing, as well as the international community. There are more than 60 nationalities represented so far, covering all continents. FGCU students are of all ages, from various parts of the U.S.

FGCU has preserved the environment and, therefore; we have several natural lakes and surrounding forest. You can often see Florida animals, such as: armadillos, raccoons, eagles, turtles, and sometimes even alligators and deer. It is very pleasant to be outside; it is common to see faculty, staff and students studying, jogging, bike riding, roller-blading or just laying in the grass around the campus. Students often gather on campus for performances, entertainment, informative programs, sporting events and to promote various student associations. There is always something going on at FGCU. You will get a good introduction to the University life when you arrive for the International Student Orientation.

### ***CLUBS AND STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS***

Over 100 student organizations (associations) and departments on the campus offer a wide variety of activities and events, sports and recreation. Student organizations at FGCU are related to sports, cultural heritage, profession, religion, life style, community service, academics, newspaper, student government and other interests. As a new student, we highly encourage you to join one or more of these organizations. They are a great way to meet people, make new friends and participate in campus life. A student organization that works very closely with International Student Services is:

**The International Club** which promotes international awareness through events, social activities, programs and services. Members are both international students and U.S. students, representing various countries on almost all continents. The club sponsors presentations on the home countries of international students, hosts the annual

“International Reception” and “International Celebration” for all international students and faculty, as well as, participates in fundraising and community service projects.

## **7. INFORMATION ON SOUTHWEST FLORIDA (SWFL)**

### ***THE WEATHER***

The main characteristics of Florida's climate, especially in central and south Florida, are humidity and generally warm temperatures. A dry-cool season, from November to May, is very comfortable, somewhat cooler and drier. Temperatures range from the high 70's to the mid 50's Fahrenheit; freezing temperatures are uncommon. The warmer, hot and humid season is June to October with temperatures ranging from the mid 70's to the upper 90's. The typical weather pattern is for daily, primarily afternoon, rains. Frequent lightning and heavy downpours are common. Tropical storms and hurricanes are possible usually between May and November. Understanding the hazards of our climate and being aware of emergency procedures are important. The University and local Government are well prepared for the possibility of a hurricane.

### ***THE SOUTHWEST FLORIDA ENVIRONMENT***

South Florida is home to the world famous Everglades National Park. This wetland environment is the habitat of many unique species of birds, for example, the Southern Bald Eagle (national bird and University's symbol). The Everglades is also home of crocodiles and alligators, and the endangered Florida Panther and Manatee. Southwest Florida's landscape ranges from the subtropical swamps to hardwood forests and slow moving rivers. In between are pine flatwoods, cypress and hardwood swamps, agricultural land, urban areas, many miles of white sandy beaches, and hundreds of lakes and rivers. The topography is flat, where the highest elevation doesn't exceed 30 feet.

### ***WHAT TO DO IN SOUTHWEST FLORIDA?***

The Southwest Florida area attracts many tourists and there are many opportunities for entertainment, recreation, leisure, dining, shopping, sports, museums, performing arts, films, and exploring nature. Other services such as hospitals and health care centers, finance and banking, service agencies, government offices and schools are found throughout the community. For more information on the local area, view the resources linked on our website:

<http://studentservices.fgcu.edu/International/EVPArrivalInformation.asp#4>

### ***ACKNOWLEDGMENTS***

Some information used in preparing this guide is from NAFSA: Association of International Educators, "International student Handbook; and other NAFSA publications and resources.