

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SURVIVAL GUIDE



**SCHOOL OF PLANNING
AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

CONTRIBUTORS

"YOU MISS 100% OF THE SHOTS YOU
DON'T TAKE ~WAYNE GRETZKY"
~MICHAEL SCOTT



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SPPASA International Chair, 2022-2023

Major: Urban and Regional Planning

Focus Area: Transportation Planning

Hobbies: Playing volleyball, kayaking (in summer of course!), cooking, reading, letting Alyssa think she is better than me in video games

Advice for Incoming Students: Make sure you hang out with your peers in the program, throw international food parties in the drafting room, and get mentally ready for cold weather!



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SPPASA President, 2022-2023

Major: Urban and Regional Planning

Focus Area: Housing & Community Development, GIS

Hobbies: Hiking, paddle boarding, cooking and baking, beating Sepehr in video games

Advice for Incoming Students: Spend time with your fellow students! Get out on the weekends together to try new food, explore Iowa, or just be outside. Our cohort took Lifetime Leisure Skills classes together, hiked at Maquoketa Caves, ate several dinners at Exotic India, and even took a summer trip to Chicago.

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HOUSING



Housing in Iowa City can be tricky. We suggest living in Iowa City near campus or near a bus stop (Cambus or Iowa City bus). As you search for apartments, please note that landlords should not charge more than two months rent for a deposit. The University compiles some housing options on its website – this includes units and roommate searches. The University also compiles some other housing resources. We don't necessarily recommend the University's Aspire apartments. They are expensive compared to other options and the bus isn't as frequent. The following websites can be a good place to start searching for housing options:

- **Facebook Groups or Facebook Marketplace:**
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/iowacityapartments/> or
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1570284356556092/>
- **Craigslist:** <https://iowacity.craigslist.org/search/hhh#search=1~gallery~0~0>
- **Seville Apartments:** <https://www.barkerapartments.com/seville-3/>
- **Westgate Villa:** <https://www.barkerapartments.com/westgate-villa/>
- **Emerald Court:** <https://www.barkerapartments.com/emerald-court-2/>
- **Oakcrest St. Apartments:** <https://www.renthouser.com/oakcrest-condominiums> or <http://www.hpmic.com/>
- **Benton Dr. Apartments:** <http://www.rivercityprop.com/>
- **Penningroth Apartments:** <http://penningrothapts.com>
- **Aber and Sunset Apartments:** <https://www.pacemgmt.com/>
- **Apartments Near Campus:** <https://apartmentsnearcampus.com/>
- **Apartments at Iowa:** <https://apartmentsatiowa.com/>

TRANSPORTATION

FIRST THINGS FIRST WHEN YOU ARRIVE... HOW TO GET TO IOWA CITY!



CEDAR RAPIDS TO IOWA CITY:

There are a few ways to get to Iowa City from the Cedar Rapids Airport.

1. If you have a friend with a car, ask them to pick you up.
2. Email SPPA's Administrative Assistant, Casi at casi-mcdaniel@uiowa.edu. She will ask around to help find you a ride!
3. If you know a friend that lives in Iowa City, but doesn't have a car, you can still ask them to get you an Uber/Lyft to your desired location.
4. The University hosts an [airport shuttle](#) around the start of semesters and around holiday breaks.

We recommend getting a flight from Chicago to Cedar Rapids as it is quicker than taking a bus from Chicago to Iowa City. However, you can take a [Greyhound bus](#) if you wish.

EVERYDAY TRANSPORTATION:

There are also some options for transportation around Iowa City/Coralville once you arrive.

- Purchasing a [bus pass](#)
- [Iowa City bus routes/stops](#)
- [Coralville bus schedules/routes](#)
- [University of Iowa bus \(Cambus\) routes, schedules, maps](#)
- [Iowa City Bike Library](#): Allows you to check out a bike (ranges from \$75-\$300). If you return the bike within six months, you'll be refunded - minus a \$50 sustainability fee and any damages.
- There are also plenty of other bike stores in Iowa City. Facebook marketplace or craigslist may have bikes as well. Just be careful with purchasing items online. You don't want to be scammed.

FOOD



HERBS AND SPICES WILL BE MORE DIFFICULT TO FIND IN IOWA. BRING YOUR FAVORITE COOKING INGREDIENTS IF YOU CAN.

Traditional U.S. Stores:

- **Walmart:** For the most part, you can find whatever you may need for cooking at a decent price at Walmart. You can also find items such as furniture, kitchen utensils, self-care products, computer accessories, and anything else you can think of!
- **Aldi:** Low-cost groceries (mostly food but some self-care and home items).
- **Target:** This store is similar to Walmart, however, things are a bit more expensive than the products you can find at Walmart. There is a small Target in the downtown area which is convenient for students who do not have a car.
- **Fareway:** Local Midwest grocery store known for their fresh meat. More expensive than Aldi but cheaper than Hy-Vee.
- **Hy-Vee:** A grocery store chain with lots of options but it will be one of the more expensive options
- **Costco:** Bulk grocery and home goods. This can be inexpensive if you use a lot of certain items. However, it **does require a membership**, so find someone with a membership to go with.

Some of these stores have grocery delivery services if you're not able to physically make it to the store. [Walmart](#) is \$12.95/month or \$98/year for delivery. Aldi delivers using [Instacart](#). You don't need a membership for that, but you will be charged delivery fees depending on how much you order and when you need it delivered. Instacart's membership is \$99/year or \$9.99/month which gets you unlimited free delivery on orders of \$35 or more. Costco and Hy-Vee are also listed on Instacart. [Hy-Vee](#) also has their own delivery service that is \$12.95/month or \$99/year. This will get you unlimited free deliveries with a \$24.95 minimum purchase and free express 2-hour pickups.



MORE FOOD...

International Food Stores:

- **Al-Salam Market:** This store has a lot of middle eastern and Arabic groceries, which is nice for most of the international students coming from the middle east. You can easily get there via Iowa City bus number 10. This is usually the place that has good lavash bread as well as some good dairy if you are from Iran and don't have easy access to these items (787 Mormon Trek Blvd, Iowa City, IA 52246).
- **Global mart:** Similar to Al-Salam, but less accessible if you live in Iowa City (89 2nd St #7, Coralville, IA 52241; middle eastern food market).
- **Iowa City African Oriental Market:** This store has both middle eastern and African groceries, however fewer middle eastern items compared to the stores listed above (1055 US-6 East, Iowa City, IA 52240).
- **Asian Market:** This store has mainly Asian groceries (Chinese, Korean, Japanese). It is always fun to check out snacks and types of noodles they have to offer (624 S Gilbert St, Iowa City, IA 52240).
- **Chong's:** Similar to Asian Market, Chong's has more variety in the items offered in addition to having some cuisine from India (905 2nd St, Coralville, IA 52241).
- **Asia+:** We recommend going there and checking out the number of snacks they offer. It is located on-campus, in the Old Capitol Mall (201 S Clinton St STE193, Iowa City, IA 52240).
- **Taj International Foods:** As the name implies, this store provides a variety of options for Indian spices and groceries, as well as some Iranian spices (2419 2nd St #2, Coralville, IA 52241).

FOOD! EVEN MORE



Note: Based on experience, you can get almost everything you need from [Amazon](#). In addition, Amazon offers a student membership that allows students to get free deliveries for 6 months and then half a regular membership price afterward which is really helpful for newcomers.

University Meal Plans:

Students living both on-campus and off-campus can get a [University meal plan](#). The meal plans are likely more expensive than cooking your own meals but may be a good option if you're on campus a lot and don't cook.

Resources for Limited Income:

We recognize that food insecurity is real, especially for students. You are not alone, and there are resources to help. The University of Iowa has a [food pantry on campus](#) that is free to students. You will sign in with your student ID and there are some restrictions on the number of items you can get, but they have many of the essentials! There are also other food pantries in the area:

- [CommUnity Food Bank](#)
- [Coralville Community Food Pantry](#)

CELLULAR DEVICES



One of the essential things when you start a new chapter of life in a foreign country is communication – in other words, getting a SIM card or even a new phone (some phones such as Xiaomi and Huawei are not supported by cellular service providers here in the U.S.). Some of the service providers here in the U.S. are Verizon, AT&T, T-Mobile, and Mint Mobile, and each of them have their own special bundles, pricing, service quality, etc. There are generally a few ways to get a SIM card when you arrive to Iowa City:

1

JOIN A FAMILY PLAN

The easiest way is if you know someone who has a family plan available with one of the service providers, and they have a spot in their family plan to add you. As the new addition to the family plan, you should pay the owner of the family plan the monthly charge based on the service you are receiving. The perks of being added to a family

plan is that you can get a new phone on the plan in a post-paid contract, which means that you'll get the phone and then the service provider will break the phone price into 24-months or 36-months of payments. This way you don't need to spend a ton of money on a brand-new phone, especially the first month of your arrival.

2

START A FAMILY PLAN

Another way is to pair up with other newcomers to the U.S. and start your own family plan. However, in order to start a family plan, the registerer or the head of the family plan needs to have a Social Security Number (SSN) or Individual Tax

Identification Number (ITIN). This can be challenging and takes a couple months if everyone starts their programs here together at the same time.

3

MINT MOBILE, GOOGLE FI, TELLO, T-MOBILE, BOOST, ETC.

The other way, which most students who do not have any acquaintance or do not find anyone to pair up with do, is to get service from Mint Mobile or a similar company such as Google Fi, Tello, T-Mobile, or Boost. These services have improved over the years and

can be relatively inexpensive. Phone companies sometimes have special offers for getting a new phone and phone service, which can be paid over several months (basically like a post-paid method offered on family plans).

BANKING



One of the most important things that you may need to do in the first few days of your arrival in the U.S. is to open up a bank account and deposit the cash that you probably have brought from home. To do so, we would recommend opening up an account at Green State Credit Union, Chase Bank, Hills Bank, MidWestOne, U.S. Bank, Wells Fargo or another bank in Iowa City.

To open up an account, you are asked to have a few documents with you. You can either ask the bank clerks for that information or look it up online at the bank website. However, it would be helpful to know that there are two important documents that you need:

- Two forms of identification -> One can be your passport, and the other one can be your visa. In addition, you can use non-driver license ID and your student ID.
- Proof of Address -> This could be tricky as you may not have any documents in that regard. Therefore, you can use mail that has been sent to your address or you can use the address that you put as your residing address on MyUI webpage. Just take a screenshot of the section that has the address information in the UI website and you should be good to go.

CLOTHING



Iowa gets extremely cold in the winter. Be on the lookout for a warm coat and warm shoes/boots. Black Friday (the 4th Friday in November) can be a good time to purchase winter gear (or anything really!) at a discount. Some stores will have sales throughout the year too. The outlet mall located in Williamsburg (a 30-minute drive), often has great deals at discounted prices. Used clothing stores are also an option. Some used clothing stores are: Stuff Etc., Crowded Closet, Second Act, Goodwill, and Salvation Army. Finally, SPPA faculty and staff are more than willing to help you find warm winter clothes. Please reach out to SPPA's Administrative Assistant, Casi, at casi-mcdaniel@uiowa.edu.

If you are in need of professional clothing for an interview or a conference, the University has a [Clothing Closet](#) that is free for students to use.

NECESSITIES

Bring personal care items for the first couple days in case you can't make it to the store right away. Before bringing any medications, check that they are allowed through TSA at the airport.

LIFE IN IOWA CITY



IOWA CITY HAS A NUMBER OF FESTIVALS/ACTIVITIES THAT HAPPEN THROUGHOUT THE YEAR:

Summer

- Iowa City Farmer's Market: <https://www.icgov.org/government/departments-and-divisions/parks-and-recreation/farmers-market>
- Friday Night Concert Series: <https://summerofthearts.org/sota-events/friday-night-concert-series/>
- Iowa City Art Festival: <https://summerofthearts.org/sota-events/iowa-arts-festival/>
- FilmScene in the Park: <https://icfilmscene.org/visit-contact/filmscene-in-the-park/> and check their showing schedule
- South District Diversity Market: <https://www.facebook.com/southdistrictdiversitymarket/>
- Wilson's Orchard events: <https://www.wilsonsorchar.com/events/iowa-city>
- Downtown Block Party: <https://downtowniowacity.com/events/downtown-block-party/>
- Pride Festival: <https://www.iowacitypride.org/>

Fall

- Taste of Iowa City: <https://downtowniowacity.com/events/taste-of-iowa-city/>
- Iowa City Jazz Festival: <https://summerofthearts.org/sota-events/iowa-city-jazz-festival/>
- University of Iowa Homecoming: <https://homecoming.uiowa.edu/>
- Northside Neighborhood Oktoberfest: <https://downtowniowacity.com/events/northside-oktoberfest/>

Winter

- Hot Cocoa Crawl: <https://downtowniowacity.com/15637-2/>

IOWA WEATHER

VERY FUN AND PREDICTABLE!



WEATHER IN IOWA CAN BE VERY UNPREDICTABLE. HERE ARE SOME WEATHER ALERTS YOU MAY HEAR ABOUT:

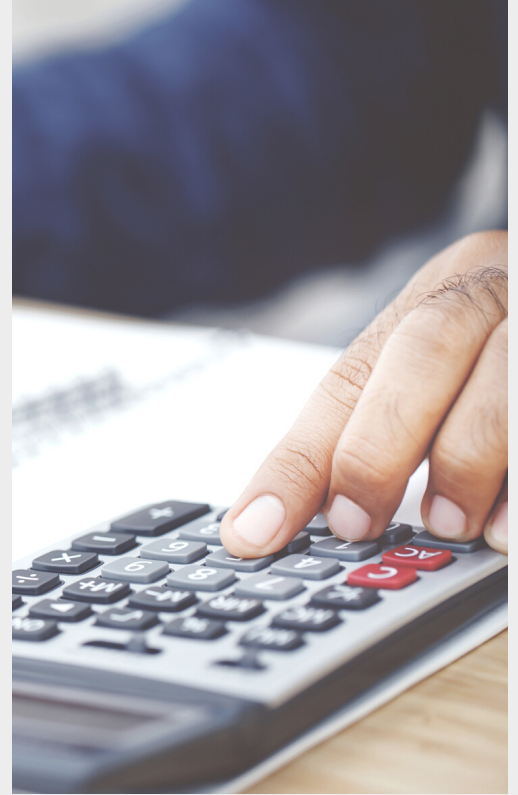
- **Tornado watch:** The conditions exist for a tornado to occur. A tornado is possible. Keep an eye on the weather, but there is no need for immediate concern. Thunderstorms are likely during this time.
- **Tornado warning:** A tornado is happening or is imminent. The tornado sirens will go off in the area. Seek shelter as quickly as you can. Stay away from windows and move to the basement or interior locations of the building. Check local news stations if you can to help determine the path of the tornado.
- **Red flag warning:** This is a warning for fire conditions. It typically occurs during dry, windy weather when fires could spread quickly. Burning or bonfires are prohibited during these times.
- **Winter storm warning:** This is issued for a significant winter weather event including snow, ice, sleet, blowing snow, or a combination of these. Travel is unadvised during this time as it becomes difficult or impossible. Please do not attempt to drive at this time.
- **Wind chill warning:** The wind chill is how the temperature feels outside. This factors in both the air temperature and the wind speed. The wind speed will make the temperature feel much colder. Wind chill warnings are issued when the wind chill becomes dangerously low. Cover up bare skin as best as possible and dress in layers. Try to spend as little time outside as possible.

Local news stations will keep you informed about weather alerts. [KCRG](#) is based in Cedar Rapids but covers Iowa City as well.

TAXES

Taxes can be confusing, even for domestic students. The Tippie College of Business offers assistance for students filing taxes through their [VITA program](#). For the 2022 tax season, appointments were available from February through mid-April.

If you use tax software, be very careful to use systems that are compatible with your filing status. For instance, TurboTax and TaxSlayer may not be appropriate for international students. Please check the details of the tax software to ensure that you can use it as an international student. It is better to take advantage of SprinTax or University services such as VITA (or any other similar versions of these services). If you have questions about filing your taxes, please contact International Students & Scholars (ISSS) prior to completing your tax return.



HEALTHCARE

The University [Student Health](#) clinic is located on the west side of the river in Westlawn. The [University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics](#) also have several offices including [urgent care](#) and [quick care](#) locations for same-day visits.

There is a CVS Pharmacy in the Old Capitol Mall (201 S Clinton St.) which is convenient for students. Walgreens and HyVee also have pharmacies for your prescription needs.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[University of Iowa International Programs](#) has information on pre-arrival and orientation as well as cultural and academic advice.

The University has a list of [basic needs](#) including healthcare, mental health services, child care, etc.

CONTACTS

If you have trouble contacting someone in the department, please use the [SPPA website](#) to contact another faculty member. The Director or Assistant Director would be a good place to start!

If you have any questions that were not answered in this document, please feel free to contact a faculty member. They are all happy to assist you in your transition to Iowa City!