

**International
Graduate Student
Packet**

Department of Biology

2021 – Fall

Biology Graduate Students Association

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Welcome to the Biology Department

Becoming a graduate student represents a major change in one's life. For some of us, the changes are more drastic and involve embracing a different culture from the one we grew up in. At the same time, we must welcome both the challenge of grad school and the challenge of communicating in a different language, of tasting new foods and of internalizing new customs. This is certainly no easy task! Therefore, we prepared this handbook to facilitate the transition of international students to the Department of Biology at the University of Florida.

This handbook represents a collaborative effort from graduate students, staff and faculty of our department. It reflects personal and collective experiences of current and past graduate students that may assist the incoming international cohort of 2021. Also, our awesome graduate secretary, Susan, contributed with practical information regarding important financial practices to be adopted before coming to the United States. We hope this handbook is useful in preparing you for the enriching experience of being a gator grad student in the Department of Biology.



Marta Wayne
Department Chair



Brad Barbazuk
Department Chair
as of 08/16/2021



Matthew Leibold
Graduate
Coordinator



Susan Spaulding
Graduate
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According to *Open Doors*¹ research, the number of international students across the U.S. has increased from 671,616 (2008/09) to 1,094,792 (2017/18) in the last ten years. In the academic year of 2017/2018 Florida was ranked as one of the top ten states in the country, housing approximately 46,000 international students. Within the state, UF stands out as the institution with the highest number of international students, where 6,885 out of the 56,079 enrolled gators come from countries other than the U.S.

In 2017 there were about 4,000 international graduate students enrolled at UF. Our department is home to 41 international graduate students out of the 118 graduates enrolled.

The presence of international students in the US greatly impacts the country's economy. According to NAFSA², more than 455,000 jobs were either created or supported because of international students in the academic year of 2017/18. In some areas, international students represent the major driving force of the graduate program. In 2015, 81% of 40,519 enrollments in Electrical Engineering corresponded to international students, according to the NFAP Policy Brief³. Academic and innovative contributions are also highly impacted by the presence of international students; it is estimated that a 4.5% increase in patent applications would be a consequence of a 10% increase in the number of international students.

Even though these numbers seem impressive, the biggest contribution international students can give cannot be measured. In a globalized world, establishing connections with researchers from different parts of the world contributes both to expanding the work of researchers and improving the quality of research. In this context, international graduate students stand out as important links facilitating this connection. Moreover, a diverse community promotes a healthier and welcoming environment and international graduate students, faculty and staff are important drivers of such diversity.

¹<https://www.iie.org/en/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors>

²http://www.nafsa.org/Policy_and_Advocacy/Policy_Resources/Policy_Trends_and_Data/NAFSA_International_Student_Economic_Value_Tool/

³<https://nfap.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/The-Importance-of-International-Students.NFAP-Policy-Brief.October-20171.pdf>

Financial Information

Moving to a new country can be expensive and we want you to be aware of the need to bring funds with you. There are many things to consider: where to live, should I find a roommate or two, how much will it cost to move in, etc.? Many apartment complexes require you to pay the 1st and last month's rent in advance, as well as a security deposit against possible damage to the unit you're renting. Within the campus there are a few housing options for graduate students that do not require financial proof and are usually affordable. However, these apartments are very popular (it is best to apply 10-12 weeks before you plan to move in) and you have to apply to get in line. The application process requires a UFID number and Gatorlink ID. It costs around 30 dollars to apply and each Friday at 9:00am newly available units are published on the website. The Gainesville Regional Utilities provides water/electricity/gas and also requires a deposit. Cable and internet may also require one. It's best to be financially prepared for these expenses when you arrive. New graduate students should bring 3-4 months of living expense funds, if possible.

Once you arrive in Gainesville, it is required that you check in with the International Center at the University of Florida the first business day after you arrive. In addition to this being a requirement, they can be a very helpful place to provide information specific to international students. Also, make sure you visit Gator One Central as soon as possible (at the Reitz Union) to make your Gator ID card. The ID is proof of your connection to UF as a student and it allows you to ride the bus for free (check this link for bus information and schedule <http://go-rts.com/>). It is also important that you apply for a Social Security (SS) card as soon as you are able (starting 10 days after you arrive on US soil). The SSN (Social Security Number) is required to be hired at UF. In addition to the SS card, Susan Spaulding will need to see/copy the following documents, so please bring them with you when you visit her office in 215 Bartram Hall to begin the payroll process:

Passport/Visa

I-94 form

I-94 travel history

I-20/I-797 or EAD card

Social Security card

Other payroll forms will also be needed. Susan will give them to you to complete. Your payroll process may take up to two months to complete, during which time you will not receive your stipend so it is best to be prepared for no income for the first few months you are at UF. You will be retroactively paid back to your start date of 8/16 once the processing is complete. Susan will do all that she can to expedite you being paid as soon as possible. If you are having financial difficulties before being paid, please speak with your research advisor.

Once you are in the payroll system, you will begin receiving your biweekly paychecks. They are direct deposited into your bank account. There are many bank options available for starting a bank account in Gainesville. Within the university there is a Wells Fargo branch located at the Reitz Union that is conveniently close to the Biology Department and the Museum. Your tuition waiver will be entered after you are in the payroll system. Please note that each semester you are registered, you will be required to pay miscellaneous fees that equal to about \$750 for each of the Fall and Spring semesters and \$490 for the Summer semester. Graduate students who are employed as a teaching or research assistant have their fees deferred to late in the semester. This date can be found on the Academic Calendar on the Graduate School's website.

If you are interested in acquiring a driver's license issued in the state of Florida visit this website <https://www.flhsmv.gov/driver-licenses-id-cards/general-information/> for more information. Keep in mind that some countries, such as South Korea and Canada, have established a Reciprocity Agreement with Florida in which case you may simply exchange your home country driver's license for Florida state driver's license. Check before you start your application. More information on this is available on the later section.

A Social Security Number may also be required for some unexpected things such as a phone contract or buying expensive items so you may need to wait until you have your SSN before getting those things set up. Some banks, i.e. Wells Fargo, allows setting up bank accounts without the SSN, provided that you present two documents of identification, i.e. Passport, Gator ID, valid credit/debit cards with your name printed on them. T-Mobile and AT&T are mobile phone service providers which allows setting up a phone contract without the SSN.

Welcome to UF!

Applying for the Social Securing Number

As soon as arriving in the US, complete the mandatory check-in on the UFIC website. Once the check-in process is complete your continued I-20 would be issued. You can apply for the Social Security Number (SSN) only after you have been in the US for 14 days. Once those 14 days are completed send the following documents along with your UFID, to Debra Anderson at danderson@ufic.ufl.edu, with SUBJECT: Social Security Application:

Continued Attendance (CA) I-20

New Students will receive the CA I-20 after check-in is completed

Paid Internships – Send I-20 with CPT authorization on page 2

On-campus employment- CA I-20

Valid Passport, with F1 visa. Canadian citizens may not have the F1 visa

Printout of I-94 Record (not the history) – most recent entry to the US:

<https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94#/home>

Completed SS-5 Application Form: <https://www.ssa.gov/forms/ss-5.pdf>

Complete SSA Questionnaire for non-citizens (given below)

- 1) Are you currently in the US/Gainesville FL?
- 2) When did you arrive in the US (date)?
- 3) Have you ever applied for a Social Security Number (SSN) before?
- 4) Are there any days or times you cannot go to the SSA for an appointment?

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ANSWERING SSA QUESTIONNAIRE:

All students will answer YES to question #1 and #4 with the following information below in remarks:

#1 – Enter the date you arrived (you are currently living in the US

#4 – As an F1 student I am eligible to work Questions #2 and #3 will depend on each student's individual experience and should only be answered yes if it pertains to your specific situation. Otherwise, answer NO to #2 and #3.

UFIC – SSN Authorization Letter: will be provided by UFIC Employers

Offer Letter – Offer letter must contain the SSA requirements.

Health Insurance Information

The healthcare system and health insurance can be new for some of us. Graduate assistants are eligible and can participate in the GatorGradCare health insurance plan. It is important to remember to enroll in GatorGradCare during the specified period every academic year (typically every fall and the deadline is usually September 14th for annual enrollment). Reminders to enroll are emailed to us and a link is provided for enrollment. We do not have to pay out-of-pocket for enrollment. A charge will appear on our 'Charges Due' page under campus finances on your ONE.UF account until the health insurance waiver goes through. Health insurance cards will be mailed to the postal address we provide during enrollment and it is important to keep the card with us at all times.

Services are available by providers who participate in the insurance network. The student health care center (SHCC on main campus and at Shands) provides services to students and it's recommended to get an appointment ahead of time (unless requiring urgent care) since the SHCC is usually busy. You may receive one free physical annually, with additional visits to the SHCC costing \$20 per visit. GatorGradCare provides pharmacy benefits through a provider so some medications are free or subsidized. However, it is possible to purchase certain medications over-the-counter from pharmacies and supermarkets.

GatorGradCare provides some dental services (one free cleaning and check-up per year), online therapy and yearly health assessments (we will receive emails about the health assessments)

The Counseling and Wellness Center (CWC) offers services to students and appointments can be made over the phone. Talkspace is another resource where UF Graduate students enrolled in GatorGradCare have access to free, unlimited online therapy.

Some links which are useful;

General information about GatorGradCare:

<http://gatorcare.org/gatorgradcare/>

Summary of health plan benefits:

https://ufh-gatorcare-a2.sites.medinfo.ufl.edu/files/2018/08/GatorGradCare-Final_7_2018.pdf

Dental services provided by UF dentistry:

https://ufh-gatorcare-a2.sites.medinfo.ufl.edu/files/2015/03/grad_dental_2015.pdf

The Student Health Care Center

<https://shcc.ufl.edu/>

The Counseling and Wellness Center

<https://counseling.ufl.edu/>

Talkspace

<https://redemption.talkspace.com/redemption/gatorcare>

Benefit booklet (information in detail)

<https://ufh-gatorcare-a2.sites.medinfo.ufl.edu/wordpress/files/2019/06/GatorCare-BOP-BB-Plan-05901-05902-05301-05302-with-transporation-6.11.19.pdf>

Resources for international students on BGSA website

<https://bgsa.biology.ufl.edu/resources/international-students/>

Important Dates You Need to Know

It is important to keep an eye open for important dates, especially to avoid extra fees. Below are some important dates for the Fall semester of 2021.

UF academic calendar

Advance Registration: March 29 - August 19, 2021

Regular Registration: August 20, 2021 (11:59 pm)

- Be aware of the \$100 late fee after the deadline at 11:59pm.
- Holds must be cleared before students can complete registration.

Classes Begin: August 23, 2021

Tuition & Fees: September 03, 2021, no later than 3:30pm. Usually, the tuition is covered by the department and the deadline for the fees is extended to later in the fall and spring.

New Graduate Student Orientation: The week of August 16, 2021

Teaching Assistant Orientation: The week of August 16, 2021. Information can be found at: graduateschool.ufl.edu/admissions/orientation

Important Documents to be Prepared

- Signed I-20
- Mandatory Immunization Health History Form
 - Make sure that this is emailed on time to the UF Health Compliance Office. This document is mandatory in order to register for courses. If there is a delay in obtaining this form and if that is delaying your registration for courses, contact Susan Spaulding regarding it.
 - The form and more information are available at:
<https://healthcompliance.shcc.ufl.edu/immunization-requirement/immunizations/>

Grant Opportunities for International Students

As a graduate student, grant writing is one of the most important skills to develop. Writing a grant is necessary to obtain funds for research at large; field work, lab work or attending conferences demand quite a bit of money. However, grant writing also helps you develop a better structured project as well as it improves your writing. Unfortunately, some grant opportunities are restricted to domestic graduate students, especially the ones related to NSF. Therefore, international graduate students should take advantage of every opportunity available for them. Below, we list some important resources that you will be able to apply to during your stay as an international graduate student in the Biology Department.

Departmental Grants

The Biology Department offers grant opportunities every year for graduate and undergraduate students. The deadline is usually set for the Final Exams week of each Fall semester. The results are announced during the Biology recruiting weekend, which takes place early in February. To access all the grants available check the following link:

<https://biology.ufl.edu/graduate/awards/>

Other Grants

- Florida Museum of Natural History Travel grant (offered multiple times per year; notices via email)
 - Available for students advised by faculty associated with the Florida Museum of Natural History
- [Lewis and Clark Fund for Exploration and Field Research](#)
- [Torrey Botanical Society Graduate Student Research Fellowship](#)
- [International Association for Plant Taxonomy](#)
- [Society of Herbarium Curators](#)
- [Society for the Study of Evolution Graduate Research Excellence Grants](#)
- [The American Society of Plant Taxonomist Graduate Student Research Grants](#)
- [University of Florida Biodiversity Institute Fellowship](#)
- [Botanical Society of America Graduate Student Research Awards](#)

- Tropical Conservation & Development Program
 - Field Research Grant
 - Assistantships
- Graduate Women in Science Fellowships
- National Geographic Early Career Grant
- American Association for the Advancement of Science
- GBIF Young Researchers Award
- The Society of Systematic Biologists

Taking Advantage of the Services Offered by the University

The University of Florida is huge and full of opportunities other than academic. There are many sports facilities spread around campus, such as the famous Ben Hill Griffin Stadium (aka The Swamp, aka Steve Spurrier-Florida Field), where football games take place during the Fall semester. The Stephen C. O'Connell Center (aka Exatech Arena, aka The O'Dome) is a multipurpose stadium that hosts the basketball, volleyball, swimming, diving and, gymnastics championships. There are other facilities where lacrosse, baseball and other sports take place. If you love sports you will find many events to attend, especially because most of them are free for UF students. For the football games even students must pay, but you can purchase tickets for a cheaper price and even buy the whole season package.

If you like to exercise, check out UF's fitness facilities - available for all students who pay fees (graduate students included). Besides using the training center and courts, you can attend as many classes as you would like. The classes include from total body to yoga and are scheduled from early in the morning to late at night. It is very easy to register for any class and you can do that online. Since we must pay the semesterly fees taking advantage of this service seems only logical, and we don't have to pay extra for enrollment at an outside campus fitness facility. There are also other opportunities such as intramural sports, outdoor activities at Lake Wauburg, massage therapy, fitness assessment, etc. Make sure to visit the website and check everything that is offered.

The University of Florida also provides many opportunities to get engaged with arts. Curtis M. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts is a nice theater where students can purchase very cheap tickets to attend dance, music, and drama performances. The center is located by The Harn Museum of Art, which houses beautiful exhibitions and is free for the entire community. Another important building close by the art center and the art museum is the Florida Museum of Natural History. Established in 1891, this museum is free to UF students and has amazing exhibitions, including a Butterfly Rainforest, home to free-flying butterflies and beautiful tropical plants. The Hippodrome (downtown Gainesville) also has movies, shows and arts events.

In addition, there are many organizations open to international graduate students, such as WiSE (Women in Science and Engineering), BGSA (Biology Graduate Students Association), GAU (Graduate Assistants United), and NRDI. These organizations allow you to expand your

experience beyond classes and your thesis/dissertation and usually help you improve your speech and discussion abilities.

The Arts and Crafts Center located in the Reitz Union offers classes on ceramics (throwing, sculpting, and hand-building), painting, and jewelry making. Student memberships are available to use the facilities and resources. Leisure courses are available every semester and cover a wide range of interests.

<https://www.union.ufl.edu/acc>

<https://leisure.union.ufl.edu/#/>

Testimonials from our International Students

Manasee Weerathunga, PhD student (Sri Lanka) – International Student Representative, BGSA

As the International Student Representative of BGSA, it is my utmost pleasure to welcome all of you to the UF Biology family. Moving to a foreign country for grad school is a big step for all of us in our lives. I have no doubt that it is what all of us had been dreaming of doing since a long time and therefore that all of you are happy and excited to be in UF soon. At the same time, it is normal that moving to a new country, away from home comes as a big change which can be nerve-wracking at times. For me, moving to the US all the way from my home country, halfway across the globe, was a fairly frustrating experience. Things like arranging the paperwork, getting visa, finding accommodation, managing finances, booking air tickets and packing bags can be overwhelming, given the limited amount of time available for doing all that. Added to that, understanding the instructions and details of paperwork to be completed can be challenging given the language limitations that some of international students have, while the pandemic makes most things double the hassle than they usually are. Nevertheless, don't let any of that discourage you or put you down because, remember that you are not going to be alone in this. All the new international students, who would be your peers in UF, would be going through more or less the same predicament and communicating with each other and helping each other would ease the burden. Building contacts with the peers of my cohort and keeping in touch with them even before arriving at the UF and getting their help in arranging paperwork and other administrative formalities helped me tremendously to deal with the move. That way you would not only be relieved to know that you are not alone in the struggle but also would enable you to have already made friends by the time you arrive in the UF. If you are feeling nervous about dealing with language issues involved with paperwork and administrative work like visa applications, health insurance applications etc. feel free to get the help of your peers while there would be a whole lot of people here in the UF who are more than happy to walk you through the processes. Homesickness, jetlag, language and cultural differences could be trying experiences to come up with during your move but those are perfectly natural and common experiences that any new international student would face. But UF Biology would have a plenty of people to show

you how to get the paperwork sorted, take you to new places in town, help you with settling down and hang out with you doing fun things. I personally, together with the peers of my cohort would be delighted to help all of you at our level best to make you feel at home, because we know how challenging it could be, having gone through the same channel.

Always keep in mind that you are coming to the UF as an ambassador of your home country, your culture and your language. UF being a highly inclusive and friendly atmosphere, everybody here would be happy to share what you bring with you. So take every opportunity to share your culture with your peers while embracing and enjoying what they have to share from their cultures with you. Being an international grad student at UF Biology would be the ideal arena for you to receive a world-class experience in academia under the guidance of eminent faculty which would inspire you to be the scientist that you have always aspired to become. The atmosphere at UF Biology being culturally diverse, scientifically advanced and warmly inclusive, bonds and connections would be made which you shall treasure for the rest of your scientific career. All of us here at UF Biology are looking forward to welcome you into the family which I could promise you to be a happy, warm and comfortable home for you for the next few years!

Claudia Garnica, PhD student (Colombia)

Professors and students in the Biology Department are very welcoming. The beginning of the program for me was a little overwhelming due to the change on the language and the pandemic ... of course. But after a few months, I adapted easily to biking to campus every day and connecting with my cohort. After some time in Gainesville, you get to enjoy a lot of natural areas around the city, cultural experiences, and some breweries to relax. You might have difficult moments, missing your hometown or adapting to this new place, but I encourage you to build a support group with friends, to hang out and find support. This is a big community to learn about science and enjoy!

Nick Gardner, PhD student (U.K.)

The biology department and UF as a whole has been very welcoming, and made my transition to a new country as easy and smooth as I could imagine. The first thing to notice as a biology grad student is just how huge the department is, which means there are many opportunities to meet and collaborate with inspiring people from a vast range of fields. Also, there is a lot of collaboration with other related departments like Wildlife Ecology and Conservation, for example. Take every opportunity to bond with your cohort! The stress of my first semester was much easier to overcome with the support of my peers. The department has so many kind people who want to help you, so there is always someone to reach out to! Welcome to UF, we're looking forward to meeting you all!

Angkana Huang, PhD student (Thailand)

Coming to expand my horizons in how great education offered elsewhere in the world can be, UF Biology nowhere disappointed me. Frankly, there were many moments where I thought, “Wow, if I were taught this way back then, I would have liked this topic much better!” Being surrounded by enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and yet super approachable fellow Graduate students has made my time here wonderful. All of us, staff and faculty included, are one big family. It is deeply reflected everywhere from meetings, seminars, to corridor chats. Our voices are always heard, valued, and taken seriously. Our presence and perspectives are always respected, non-second to the faculties. If, beyond decent education, inclusiveness is what you value, this is the right place for you.

Testimonials from our Scholars and Staff

Ana Longo, Assistant Professor (Puerto Rico)

Welcome new graduate students! Although I am not an international faculty, I am a member of an underrepresented minority (Puerto Rican/woman in science) and I can tell you that UF has been very welcoming compared to other institutions. The culture of our department is very collegial, and I consider it a privilege to be part of such a vibrant community with world class scholars who are super approachable! For new people, it is always hard to know every single resource available at this university. Fortunately, UFL website is packed with useful information. If you still cannot find what you are looking for, please reach out to any faculty/staff/fellow grad students and I'm sure we will gladly help you. Take advantage of the opportunities to mingle with other faculty/students and establish your support group as soon as possible so you don't feel isolated.

Francis E. "Jack" Putz, Distinguished Professor (United States of America)

Welcome to the Department of Biology, the University of Florida, Gainesville, Alachua County, Florida, and the USA. I hope you find this to be as good a place to live and work as I have since 1982. While the heat and humidity may come as a shock to some of you, it will diminish in a month or two. You'll also quickly become accustomed to the afternoon rain showers and lightning shows, which will taper off in late October. Winter is our dry season--it may be hard to believe, but by December, you'll need gloves and a warm hat. To get around town and to enjoy the many natural areas in Gainesville's "Emerald Necklace" of parks and protected areas, you'll want a bicycle--plenty of good used ones to be had at local shops and on-line. Be sure to stop by the UF Police Station to see if they are still giving away lights and helmets, both of which you'll need--note that the police assess hefty fines for traffic violations on bicycles, so stop at stop signs and etc. I encourage you to enjoy the many amenities this community offers, from plays at the Hippodrome to free downtown concerts at Bo Diddley Plaza and Depot Park to evening birdwatching strolls at Paynes Prairie Sheetflow.

José Miguel Ponciano, Associate Professor (Guatemala)

Hi and welcome to UF's Biology Department! I am from Guatemala and a long time ago was also an international student in the US. I came to UF as an international Faculty and I've been almost 10 years here. If you are an international student, I would recommend you to seek and meet as soon as possible other international students and/or faculty. A great way to do that is attending the ecology and the popbio seminars Friday afternoons, which are followed by our "Zoocial" gathering. That gathering right here in the courtyard of our building is regularly attended by many international students from other departments. I've always thought that one of the most important ways in which a student can learn, besides the mechanisms put in place by UF (like the international students' office) is through their peers. This is particularly true if as an incoming international student you have to learn to navigate the complexities of being on a student visa, traveling abroad often, learning the ins and outs of living alone here, getting your driver's license, shopping, eating, banking, etc... Don't wait for the international office to tell you what to do and when to do it, be proactive and any time you have a question about your I-20 or visa, go to their office and ask them. Finally, a great way to meet people is through sports, either group sports (volleyball, basketball, soccer or baseball) or individual (like running or swimming) and there are plenty of opportunities to practice them in UF sport facilities, to which you have free access (and they're fantastic!).

David Blackburn, Associate Curator (United States of America)

Welcome new graduate students! While I'm from the US, my lab comprises a number of international students and regularly hosts students and scholars from around the world. There is a diverse community of students traveling from and working in many countries...you may be surprised by the richness of our international student community! Making good connections with other students across UF as well as the UF International Center are important first steps as you get settled in Gainesville. Please seek out answers to questions you might have about visas early! While there is a supportive staff at UF, sometimes it can be a slow process having issues resolved. Seeking out activities both on campus and off campus are great ways to build your community here. If you have kids and are looking into schools, please reach out to students, staff, and faculty that can give you recommendations about child care, public schools, after school programs, sports, and more. There are many great options for kids in Gainesville, but sometimes takes some time to get connected, regardless of whether you're from the US or internationally. Faculty in Biology and the Florida Museum of Natural History are happy to provide suggestions and point you in good directions to make the most of your time as a graduate student at UF.

Gainesville Shopping Suggestions

Aldi

This is one of the most affordable stores for bulk foods, particularly produce. You can find great prices for snacks and dry goods as well. There is less selection for specialty foods than some larger stores. You need to bring a quarter with you to use the carts they provide as well as your own reusable bags. There are a few toiletries here along with household basics like (paper towels, cleaning stuff etc.) but the selection is less extensive than other stores. There are a few locations in Gainesville.

Trader Joes

This store has a great selection of affordable dry goods and unique snacks. They are also great for single serving frozen and pre-made foods. There are so many fun foods that it's easy to end up with a large bill if you don't pay attention, but you can find some great deals. There are only a few toiletries here. There's only one location in Gainesville on Archer Rd.

Publix

There are many locations around Gainesville and it is probably the most common store. They have a good selection of many foods. You can get many different brands and prices can vary depending on sales. There are also many toiletries, pharmacy goods and household cleaning supplies here.

Stores with Food/Home Goods/Furniture

Target

Great stop for all basics! The store brand is very affordable. They have furniture, kitchen/bathroom basics, toiletries, cleaning supplies, clothes, etc. It has pretty reasonable food prices (not as much produce selection). (Free delivery for many items if you spend more than \$35).

Walmart

Another store that is an all in one! There is a large selection of food as well as household goods. The store itself is very large. They also offer delivery for some items! I ordered a boxed mattress from Walmart when I moved to Gainesville and this worked out very nicely. (Still very comfortable and easier than trying to fit a full one in a car).

*There are a ton of other specialty furniture and home stores. Target and Walmart are my top recommendations because you can get things shipped and save yourself the transport, but other stores will likely do this as well! There are also many used furniture stores in Gainesville but the selection can really vary depending on when you go.

In courtesy of Abby Uehling (PhD Student)

Where to Shop for International Food

La Aurora Latin Market

3733 W University Ave, Gainesville, FL 32607

Oriental Food Market - Korean and Asian grocery store

3345 SW 34th St, Gainesville, FL 32608

India Bazaar - Indian market

3550 SW 34th St., Gainesville, FL 32608

Chun Ching Market - Asian grocery store

418 NW 8th Ave., Gainesville, FL 32601

Eastern Market - Asian grocery store

1349 NW 23rd Ave., Gainesville, FL 32605

La Tienda - Mexican restaurant & grocery store

2204 SW 13th St, Gainesville, FL 32608

Gainesville Russian Food - Russian grocery store

5200 NW 34th Blvd, Gainesville, FL 32605

Zeezenia Kitchen and Market

2325 SW 13th St, Gainesville, FL 32608

Falafel King (There is a small grocery store in back for Mediterranean food)

2415, 3252 SW 35th Blvd, Gainesville, FL 32608

Local Produce:

1. **Fresh Market**
2. **Ward's**
3. **Rainbow Produce**

Seafood:

1. **Northwest Seafood Inc.**
2. **West Coast Seafood Meats & Produce**

Bakery:

1. **Uppercrust**
2. **Vine Sourdough bakery**
3. **Sweet Buns**

Pharmaceuticals and cosmetics:

1. **CVS**
2. **Walgreens**
3. **Sephora**

Clothes and shoes

1. **Ross**
2. **Marshalls**
3. **Old Navy**
4. **Kohl's**

Stationery & Craft supplies

1. **Joann**
2. **Michaels**
3. **Hobby Lobby**

Instacart is a grocery delivery app which gives you the facility of selecting your shopping list from the grocery store of your choice through your phone and getting it delivered to your doorstep at the time that you prefer. Although it allows shopping from a limited number of stores such as Aldi, Publix and CVS, it is a useful facility for people who do not own cars, (which is the case with most international students who have just moved!). You can easily register for a monthly or annual subscription which would provide free delivery for orders over \$35, which is

a highly recommended and convenient facility compared to the inconvenience of lugging with a whole load of shopping by bus.

It is quite common and understandable that most international students function on a limited budget during the first month after moving to the US. Therefore, shopping for the things required for the initial settling down (i.e. household items, cleaning supplies, stationery) can be challenging.

Dollar Tree is a highly recommended place for shopping for such items required for initial settling in, where you can buy most of stationery, household items and cleaning supplies for the cost of \$1/item. Also if you are throwing a party of any kind, that the best place to shop for party supplies for cheap. There are a several locations in Gainesville.

Goodwill is the popular thrift shop in the town with a vast choice of second hand items. There you can shop for fancy household items, clothes and even electronic items of very good quality for a fairly lower price compared to that of brand new items.

Getting around in Gainesville

Bus services

Using buses to get around in Gainesville is very convenient because buses are regularly available in most parts of the town. Although buses run on a limited schedule during weekends and during summer, buses function during the entire week from early morning to late night. There are several bus routes which run between campus and shopping areas regularly making travelling to campus and shopping in the city very convenient. TransLoc mobile app and Google Maps come handy in checking out the up-to-date bus schedules. The best part of the bus service in Gainesville is that it is completely free for UF grad students once the Gator ID is shown to the bus driver.

More information available on:

<https://taps.ufl.edu/alternative-transportation/rts/>

Lyft

Lyft mobile app is a convenient method of getting personal rides to any part of the town at highly affordable rates. While being a safe and efficient service, it is also available at a discounted rate for UF students. More information of how to get the maximum benefits of this service can be obtained by the following link

<https://taps.ufl.edu/alternative-transportation/uf-safe-rides/>

SNAP

The Student Nighttime Auxiliary Patrol (SNAP) is a free, nightly, campus safety and transportation service for students.

More information available at:

<https://taps.ufl.edu/alternative-transportation/snap/>

More information on transportation and parking services in Gainesville and UF can be found from the following website

<https://taps.ufl.edu/>

Places to Visit During Your Stay in the Swamp

Gainesville is a great city, home to a little more than 130 thousand people. The city is surrounded by nature; Paynes Prairie Preserve Park is considered a National Natural Landmark, harboring impressive biodiversity. There are many beautiful trails that lead to Paynes Prairie, many of them are accessible by bike. Close to Paynes Prairie is Sweetwater Wetlands Park, a relatively recent development built to filter water running into the Alachua sink. It has created a wonderful environment for birds and other wildlife, including limpkins, sandhill cranes, snail kites, countless alligators, and occasionally wild horses. Kanapaha Botanical Gardens is a good place to find some solitude and a large variety of Florida and non-Florida plant life. Gainesville is home to another National Natural Landmark, Devil's Millhopper Geological State Park, featuring large stairs leading down into a limestone sinkhole, surrounded by a rainforest-like environment. San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park and Morningside Nature Center are also great places to view the variety of the city. On the outskirts of Gainesville there are many springs with crystalline blue waters that help keeping city dwellers cooling down during the hot and humid summer. For outdoorsy and nature lovers Gainesville is the perfect place to be!

For international students/staff with kids, Westside Park and Depot Park are two of the biggest playgrounds in town, and the Westside Park has a public swimming pool for the long summer months. First Magnitude brewery, Swamp Head, Boxcar, Cypress and Grove and One Love Cafe are probably the best places to have an adult beverage with friends and watch your kids play at the same time. The zoo at Santa Fe College and the Natural History Museum are both great for families and non-families alike, and in particular it is worth getting a membership at the zoo if you plan on going regularly. The Alachua Public libraries are a great resource too, particularly when it's hot outside; they have large kid's sections and if you become a member you can check out up to 100 books at a time!

There are a number of state parks and springs in North Central Florida which are not too far from Gainesville (ex- Ichetucknee Springs State Park, Silver Springs State Park, and Santa Fe river springs). Kayaking and tubing is available in some springs and rivers. It's enjoyable to visit the local springs and also provides an opportunity to familiarize with local fauna and flora. Orlando, Jacksonville, and Tampa-St. Petersburg are not too far from Gainesville and can be visited during weekends. They are all 2-2.5 hours away from Gainesville.

Suggestions for fun in Gainesville – by Marta Wayne

Welcome!!! Here are some suggestions for fun from the Biology Department.

Getting around town. Gainesville is on a grid with four quadrants (NW, SW, NE, SE). 0,0 is University and Main and all numbering counts up from this point, with the quadrant indicated. You can always figure out where you are relative to something else, but you can't always "get there from here" due to one-way streets etc. If a thoroughfare is part of the acronym APRL (April; avenues, places, roads, and lanes), then it is east-west, and if it is not, it is north-south. For example, we live at 2704 NW 4th Avenue, which is in the northwest quadrant, at the corner of 4th Avenue and 27th Street (don't laugh at our lawn if you drive by; we call it an exercise in experimental evolution).

Favorite indoor option: the Florida Museum of Natural History and attached Butterfly Rainforest. The museum generally has rotating exhibits that are great, as well as lots of stuff about northwest Florida that is fun to learn about. Kids from babies on up can enjoy this museum and its Discovery Room with lots of hands-on things to do. The Butterfly Rainforest is one of the best walk-through, live exhibits of Lepidoptera in the world.

If you want a beautiful outdoor experience that takes half a day plus, stock up on picnic supplies (subs, etc.) at the Publix supermarket at 34th and University, and then drive up to Ichetucknee Springs State Park and go tubing or canoeing. Warning: the water is quite cold! 72 sounds warm, but it isn't when you are floating in it for a couple of hours... You rent tubes just outside the park and the outfitters run shuttles to pick you up—they'll explain the whole thing to you. You can do a 3 hour float or a 1.5 hour float. Bathing suits and lots of sunscreen required! It will take you an hour each way, more or less, to get to the springs. You can either take I75 northbound (there is a University Avenue/SR26 onramp) or you can take NW 43rd Street north from University Avenue until it dead ends into 441 and go left if you want a more scenic route. The river may be empty or crowded, no telling. Also, the later you wait in the day the more likely you are to hit thunderstorms (exciting time to be on the water) so check the weather before deciding for sure. To canoe, you can go to the north entrance and get a nice, long ride. You need to call the park first or check the website, because sometimes they limit canoe access. Getting there in the

morning is usually required to go canoeing, and they rent (and will shuttle you back to the parking lot) at the park. <https://www.floridastateparks.org/park/Ichetucknee-Springs>

Another long day trip is Juniper Run in the Ocala National Forest. You can rent a canoe or kayak and a van picks you up downstream at the end. It is beautiful and will give you a sense of the real Florida. You might even have the place largely to yourself at this time of year, which is really cool. I would advise caution in hiking alone in the rest of the forest— not to say absolutely don't do it, but keep your eyes open for 1) black bears and 2) meth labs, which are evidently not uncommon in that forest. It's also the lightning capital of the world (really!), so watch it if there is an electrical storm. Canoeing alone is ok as far as those specific safety issues are concerned, just the usual risk calculation involved in boating alone (slow moving, no rapids or anything like that). Yes, there are alligators, and you may have to get out if the water is too shallow to move your canoe over or under things. I've done it many times and I have plenty of respect for alligators, just be aware, that's all!

The newest natural treasure we have right here in Gainesville is Sweetwater Wetlands Park. This is actually a water treatment facility that manifests as a beautiful series of ponds and paths. The birding is excellent; you will almost certainly see limpkins, which are endangered, but locally abundant. If it is a hot day, go early, because there is no shade to speak of. You may also see alligators, water snakes, etc. More open than La Chua trail so slightly different species. Trails are crushed rock/gravel and the place is spectacularly beautiful. <http://www.sweetwaterwetlands.org>

There is also Homosassa Springs State Park, a little less than 2 hours away. You can see manatees here year round (they have rehab animals that can't live on their own any more). They have a small underwater viewing space to watch the manatees feed (the prehensile lips are so cute!), as well as for viewing fish. Depending on the time of year, you can see a range of hard-water tolerant ordinarily saltwater fish including jacks, snook, etc. Super cool. There is also a sort of mini-zoo of Florida wildlife including spoonbills that you may not see otherwise on a short trip. Bring bug repellent (very important) and time your visit to coincide with the manatee feeding times. Great educational programs on manatees too.

<https://www.floridastateparks.org/park/Homosassa-Springs>. If we have a big cold snap, you

could consider going snorkeling with the manatees at Crystal River (there are arranged tours or you can kayak on your own if you watch the safety programs). They usually come into the springs Thanksgiving to mid-February (look online for videos of Three Sisters Springs to see how they pile up!). It's a fun place to visit and fun to snorkel; be sure to rent a wetsuit though or you won't be able to stay in the water as long as you would like.

Of course there are also our two coasts, very different from one another (Cedar Key on the Gulf coast is a popular destination, and UF has a new, small marine lab there, the Nature Coast Biological Station which includes the older Seahorse Key Marine lab; you can't get to the latter without making arrangements ahead of time); St. Augustine or Flagler Beach on the east coast all would love some business after the hurricane's impact, and we have the Whitney Marine Lab there (again if you want to make arrangements to see this place, let me know). There is also the Okefenokee Swamp in Georgia, which is relatively nearby (3 hours each way?) but would make for a very long day trip. There are marvelous cabins in the park for an overnight. And, for the serious naturalist, the Lake Wales Ridge area is extremely interesting—the only part of Florida that has never been inundated—Bok Tower Botanical Gardens is a good destination down there, <https://boktowergardens.org> and you will probably see indigo snakes if you look under the azaleas alongside the ponds (an extremely cool animal). Archibald Biological Station in the area as well but you would have to set up a visit with them.

Food. Depends on what you like of course but I recommend, for a special Gainesville experience, Satchel's Pizza. It is a bit of a drive (20 min from campus perhaps?), and be prepared to wait a little bit even at lunch, but it is a fun place to wait at least. We have wonderful ice cream at Sweet Dreams Ice Cream. Mi Apa has excellent Cuban sandwiches and all kinds of Latin American breakfast (not Mexican- South American and Cuban). For Mexican, I love La Tienda if you want authentic Norteno food (note it's a very casual/authentic atmosphere also), Chuy's if you want more Tex-Mex-SW and fun atmosphere, La Pasadita if you want to not run into any students (date night!), and El Indio if you want it fast. If you want sushi, Dragonfly Sushi downtown is pricey but fancy and reliable. For dim sum, Yummy House won't disappoint. For local coffee check out CYM or Volta off campus, and Opus on campus. The best bakery in town in my opinion is The Vine (fantastic sourdough and lovely croissants) although some prefer

Upper Crust (their croissants are quite good too). And for a nicer (but still informal) foodie meal out, consider Emiliano's, Civilization, and The Blue Gill. If you are looking for fancy, try Mildred's, Mark's Prime, or Paramount Grill.

Our farmers' market is on Wednesday afternoons at the Bo Diddley Downtown Community Plaza, but doesn't officially start until 4. It is fun and there is lots of prepared food to eat, as well as music. There are also free concerts downtown on Friday afternoons, and we have another farmers' market on Saturday morning on Hwy 441 (Alachua County Farmers' Market).

Obtaining a Driver's License

<https://www.fit.edu/international-student-and-scholar-services/resources/obtaining-a-drivers-license/>

International students may drive with both a license from their country of origin and an International Driver's License for 90 days in the US before they have to obtain a driver's license issued by the state of residence. A Florida driver's license or a State of Florida identification card can be obtained at any Department of Motor Vehicles office.

All customers - regardless of their citizenship status - may go to any Division of Driver's Licenses office in Florida to apply for a new driver's license or State of Florida identification card.

Driver's licenses are issued for one year at a time, renewable until the end of the student's program. F-1 students who have completed a course of study or optional practical training can be granted a license for an additional 60-day period to allow them to prepare for departure or to process a transfer. J-1 students and scholars who have completed an exchange visitor program can obtain an additional 30-day period.

Dependents of F-1 or J-1 students and scholars (i.e. dependents in F-2 or J-2 status) are allowed the same period of driver's license validity as the F-1 or J-1 students and scholars.

For first-time issuance of a State of Florida driver's license or identification card, Florida law requires the following items from students in F-1 or J-1 status:

Passport; and

Proof of non-immigrant classification provided by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (Form I-94); and

F-1 or J-1 status documentation (Form I-20 or DS-2019); and

Two original proofs of residence (cell phone bills, utility bills, official, original transcripts from Florida Tech, apartment lease). Students who live on campus will need to obtain proof of residence from Campus Services.. Also, any official letter, for example a bank letter or letter from Florida Tech sent to your on-campus address will suffice as proof of residence, and SSN cards if one has been issued.

It is recommended that you take your foreign driver's license, if one has been issued. You may be exempt from the otherwise mandatory drug and alcohol traffic education course, the driving test, or parts of it. Complete information on the required tests and a link to the driver's manual can be found at <http://www.dmvflorida.org/driving-test.shtml>.

International driver's license

[International Student Driving Licenses | AAA Approved Driving Lessons](#)

International Students and Driving In Florida

Students can obtain a driver's license at the nearest Department of Motor Vehicles office. The driver's license remains valid for a single year and you can renew it until the end of your study program. Any F-1 student who has completed his/her course of study or the optional practical training may apply for another license that remains valid for 60 days.

If you already have your foreign driver's license, you should take it with you. You might be exempted from the compulsory driving tests and the Drug and Alcohol Traffic Education course.

International Student - Florida Driver's License and ID

Foreign Students with a valid driver's license from their country of origin are NOT required to take the DATA course to get their Florida Driver's License. You must do the following:

Pass the DMV Test - written test on rules, regulations, and road signs of Florida. Must be done at a DMV office if you are 18 or older.

Pass the Road Test - driving test with a DMV examiner. Done at a DMV office

Exceptions: Florida waves the requirement for both the DMV test (written test) and Road Test if you have a valid driver's license from: US Military, US Territories, Canada, France, Germany, Taiwan, South Korea.

Step by Step

Step 1: Study the Florida Drivers Handbook on traffic laws and roads sign. If you are age 18 or older you will need to go to a DMV office to pass the Permit Exam with a score of 80% or better. This exam is only available at DMV offices once you are age 18 or older. If you are age 15, 16, or 17 you can take the Permit Exam online.

Step 2: Pass the DMV Test (AKA Permit Test)

Once you complete both the 4 hour DATA Course and pass the Permit Exam you can receive a Learners Permit that allows you to practice driving. You must have someone age 21 or older in the passenger seat next to you with a valid driver license at all times with a Learners Permit.

Book the tests with the DMV, and links to the drivers manual

<https://www.dmvflorida.org/driving-test/dmv-test>

<https://www.dmvflorida.org/florida-drivers-manual/>

Packages for learners and drivers tests with driving school, car included

Licensing Packages | AAA Approved Driving School | Lessons & Testing

Licensing Packages | Gainesville Driving School

Jax Driving School: Driving School | Jacksonville, FL

Driver License – Alachua County Tax Collector

Practice learners test online

Practice Test - Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles

Free Florida (FL) DMV Practice Tests – Updated for 2021

Florida DMV Practice Test - FREE FL DMV Practice Permit Test

In courtesy of Chris Nolte (PhD Student)

Things to Pack and Getting Ready for the Journey

- Bring financial support sufficient for 3-4 months
- Bring with you any essential medications that you usually need
- Have printed copies of essential official documents (I-20, Passport). Keep documents scanned in your data storage as well
- Have passport details written down
- If you are using electronic equipment which has plugs which are not compatible with the flat parallel pins that are used in the USA, bring an universal travel adapter
- Pack clothing to suit the weather in Gainesville during the time of your arrival
A dress of your nationality could come handy!
- Items such as raw meat and viable plant material may not be allowed to be brought in at the airport
- When booking flights make sure that you have plenty of time between flights at transits. Have at least 3 hours in between flights at the port of entry to the US.
- Have the negative test for COVID-19 at hand, as required by the airline
- Talk to your lab mates, PI or any of the acquaintances at UF to arrange transportation from the airport to your lodging on the day of your arrival
- These videos may come useful:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bpt6HBRXdNE>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aN1NVB0eTrc>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TP8Y6iomqBE>