

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY-COMMERCE

Welcome from
Texas A&M University-Commerce's
Office of International Student &
Scholar Services



Welcome to Texas A&M University-Commerce!

Since 1889, Texas A&M University-Commerce has been known as a leader in providing an excellent education. It's because we care about people and relationships. Texas A&M University-Commerce provides a personal educational experience for a diverse community of life-long learners.



Our purpose is to discover and disseminate knowledge for leadership and service in an interconnected and dynamic world. Our challenge is to nurture partnerships for the intellectual, cultural, social, and economic vitality of Texas and beyond. For a brief virtual tour of campus click [here](#).

This handbook has been created by the International Student Services Office (ISSS) to help our new J-1 Exchange Visitors as they prepare for their visit to Texas A&M University-Commerce. For more information about the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program go to the [Exchange Visitor Program Welcome Brochure](#).

It is the mission of the ISSS to serve the international students, scholars, and their family members at our university and to enhance the global awareness of the Texas A&M University-Commerce community. Our goal is to assist international students and scholars in their transition to life in the United States and at Texas A&M University-Commerce, and to assist them in maintaining their immigration status. Some of our services include:

- Orientation for all new and transfer international students and scholars
- Advisement for cultural adjustment
- Immigration advising
- Employment authorization
- Cultural and educational programs
- Serve as liaison with university faculty/staff and members of the community

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The J-1 Exchange Visitor category was developed to implement the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act (Fulbright-Hayes Act) of 1961. The overall purpose of that Act, and the objective of the Exchange Visitor category, is "to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchanges."

Texas A&M University-Commerce hosts J-1 Research Scholars, Professors, and Short-term Scholars and promotes the exchange of ideas, research, mutual enrichment and linkages between research and academic institutions in the United States and foreign countries. To learn more go to the [Exchange Visitor Program Welcome Brochure](#). For more information about your rights and protections as a temporary worker in the U.S. please review the [U.S. Department of State’s website](#).

I. DS-2019 and Visa Process

J-1 Information Form: Included with this email is the J-1 Information Form. This form will need to be completed and all applicable information will need to be provided. Once you have completed this form please email to John.Jones@tamuc.edu along with the following documents:

- Copy of passport
- Funding letter (if applicable) or financial information (see section II for more information)
- If any dependent's will travel with you we will need a copy of their passport and additional funding information (see section II)

Form DS-2019: Once we have received the information form and supporting documents we will issue your DS-2019 for your J-1 visa. We will email you the SEVIS number and our school's program number so you may schedule your visa interview and pay the [SEVIS I-901 fee](#). Your academic department will either pay to have your DS-2019 mailed to you or you may also set-up mailing through our website at [Mailing Options](#). Below are the mailing options:

- **U.S. Postal Service International Priority Mail**- documents are sent at student's expense and average delivery time is 1-2 weeks but may take longer in some countries. Tracking is not available.
- **Express Mail (DHL or FedEx)** is at the student's expense and is the most reliable option to have your DS-2019 delivered in a timely manner. We strongly encourage scholars to use this option.

SEVIS I-901 fee and Visa Process:

Once your DS-2019 has been issued we will email you your SEVIS number and our university's program number. This information is used to pay the SEVIS I-901 fee and schedule your visa appointment. You must pay the SEVIS I-901 fee as soon as possible.

- You may pay online at [SEV I-901 fee](#). Be sure to print a payment receipt and take it with you to the visa appointment.



- You will need to schedule a visa appointment with the U.S. Embassy/Consulate nearest you. You may go to www.usembassy.gov for more information.
- Complete the DS-160 and pay the applicable fees. For an instruction video on how to complete the DS-160 click [here](#).

You will need to bring the following documents with you to the visa interview:

- Signed DS-2019
- Invitation letter from A&M-Commerce
- Financial documentation
- Valid passport
- Photos (as specified by Embassy/Consulate)
- DS-160 Application payment receipt
- SEVIS I-901 fee payment receipt

II. Financial Requirements for DS-2019

Your academic department may have agreed to pay you a salary during your stay here at A&M-Commerce. Your invitation letter will specify this salary and any benefits included with your invitation. Please note that health insurance is generally a separate cost and is not included with any salary.

For J-1 Exchange Visitors who will be funded through personal funds or a government scholarship, we will require proof of this financial support before we can issue the DS-2019:

- If your financial support will come through a scholarship then we will need a copy of the scholarship letter with either the funding award amount or the letter will need to specify the expenses that will be covered through the scholarship (living expenses, health insurance).
- If your financial support will be through your own funds, family member, or private sponsor then we will need a bank statement (checking or savings account) or a certificate of deposit reflecting a minimum balance of \$17500 (\$1500 a month) which is the estimated cost for living expenses for one year. Additional funding of \$3000 (\$250 a month) per dependent is required if any dependents will travel with you as a J-2 dependent.

III. Traveling to the U.S.

When Should You Plan to Arrive in Commerce: J-1 Exchange Visitors may arrive up to 30 days before or after the start date. Please be sure to provide the ISSS with a copy of your travel itinerary. ***If you are unable to report to the ISSS within 30 days after your program start date on your DS-2019 please contact your academic department and the ISSS immediately.*** Failure to report to the ISSS no later than 30 days ***after*** your DS-2019 start date will invalidate your DS-2019 and jeopardize your ability to travel to the U.S.

Navigating through Port of Entry: U.S Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has provided a video for information about what to expect at port of entry. Click [here](#) for more information. Please see below for more information about navigating through port of entry (customs) once you arrive in the U.S.

Be sure to keep the following documents with you when you travel to the U.S. Do not put these documents in your checked luggage.

- DS-2019
- Passport and visa
- Financial documents
- Invitation letter



I-94 Arrival/Departure record: Students **entering the U.S. through an air or sea port of entry** will have an electronic record I-94 Arrival/Departure created at www.cbp.gov/I94. You should be able to access your electronic I-94 record within 2 days of entering the U.S. Students who **enter the U.S. through a land port of entry** (example...U.S./Mexico border) will be issued a paper copy 94. You will also complete a CBP Customs Declaration form once you have arrived in the U.S.



U.S. Customs Interview: When you go through customs you will be interviewed briefly by a port of entry officer

- The officer may ask you questions like “Why are you traveling to the U.S.?” or “How long do you plan to stay here?”
- Have all the documents listed above ready to present to the officer
- The officer will scan your fingerprints and take your picture.
- Once you have passed through customs you may collect your luggage and exit customs for transportation to your destination

What Items to Not Bring?

- A large amount of cash. Students are strongly discouraged from carrying a large amount of cash due to possible questions with customs and also due to safety concerns.
- Any prohibited or restricted items listed [here](#).

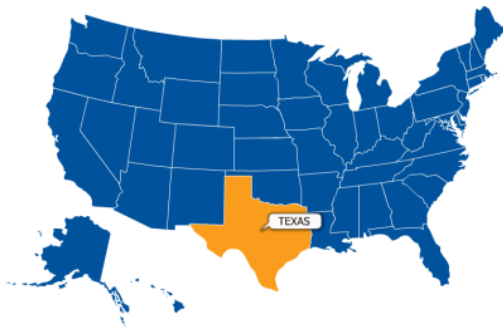
Who can assist me with pre-arrival questions or concerns?

- Students may contact the ISSS with any questions or concerns.
- Students may also contact one of A&M-Commerce’s international student groups with any questions or concerns. Click [here](#) and select Cultural/Social Organizations for a list of international student groups.
- Students may also visit or contact an [Education USA Center](#) in their home country.

IV. Arriving in Texas and Temporary Housing

Shuttle/Transportation Options from Airport: Commerce, TX is located about 1 and a half hours from the Dallas/Forth Worth International Airport (DFW). Your host professor or academic department should arrange transportation for you from the airport to Commerce, TX and you will need to be sure to discuss this with them. If no transportation is provided please contact the ISSS immediately.

Temporary Housing: You may need to arrange temporary housing before you arrive until you are able to find permanent housing or move into on-campus housing. ***Be sure to discuss your housing options with your host professor or academic department prior to arrival.*** Go to [Commerce, TX Hotels](#) for more information.



V. Orientation and Check-in

All new J-1 Exchange Visitors are required to attend orientation and check-in in person with the director of the ISSS, John Mark Jones, as soon as possible once they arrive in Commerce.

- You or your department may call 903-886-5097 or email John.Jones@tamuc.edu to schedule a check-in time
- Be sure to bring your DS-2019, passport, and visa along with your current address in the U.S. (including temporary address)
- You will need to provide proof of health insurance during check-in (see section VII below)
- Failure to report to the ISSS no later than 30 days from the start date of your DS-2019 may jeopardize your ability to remain in the U.S.



VI. How to Communicate with the ISSS

The ISSS has a number of different ways that you may contact us with any questions or concerns. Also, included in your I-20 packet is a list of the international student groups at A&M-Commerce and their contact information:

- Facebook search International Student Services at Texas A&M University-Commerce for the ISSS and search Texas A&M University Commerce- International Students for the student page.
- Skype to TAMUCISSO
- On Twitter you may follow @ISSOTAMUC
- In Google Hangouts you may search International Student Services at Texas A&M University-Commerce
- Email intl.stu@tamuc.edu or phone 903-886-5097
- The ISSS is located in Halladay Student Services building Room 104 (building B17 on [campus map](#)).



Our office is open year around Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm Central Standard Time U.S. We will only close for university recognized holidays.

VII. Off-campus Housing

There are a number of different rental options for new international students in Commerce, TX. ***AM-Commerce does not endorse nor is affiliated with any of these services or companies. They are independently owned and operated.***

Below is a list of many of the local apartment complexes and rental companies.



You may also find more information by searching through Google “apartments Commerce, TX” or you may also go to http://www.commerce-chamber.com/real_estate.php. Students may also post on the ISSS or A&M-Commerce international student Facebook pages for more information:

- **Village Creek Apartments:** 2231 Live Oak Street, Commerce, TX
www.villagecreektamu.com 903-246-3120
- **Churchill at Commerce:** 731 Culver Street, Commerce, TX
www.churchillcommerce.com 903-886-4444
- **Bradford Place Apartments:** 3301 FM 3218, Commerce, TX
www.bradfordplaceapartments.com 903-886-8855
- **GANT Apartments:** 1814 Hunt Street, Commerce, TX 903-886-6863
- **Maple Place Apartments:** 2112 Monroe Street, Commerce, TX
www.commerceapartments.com 903-886-4050
- **Oak Meadow Townhomes:** 150 Maple Street, Commerce, TX
www.oakmeadowtownhomes.com 903-886-8881
- **Regency Square Apartments:** 220 Taylor Street, Commerce, TX 903-886-7038
- **American Eagle Properties:** 1224 Main Street, Commerce, TX 903-886-4430
- **Valentine Properties:** 1505 West Neal Street, Commerce, TX 903-886-8881

VIII. Health Insurance Requirements

All J-1 Exchange Visitors and their J-2 dependents are required by the U.S. Department of State to have medical, repatriation, and evacuation insurance during the duration of their program at A&M-Commerce. Failure to meet this requirement is a violation of the Exchange Visitor Program rules and will jeopardize your ability to remain in the U.S. Below are the minimum requirements for the health insurance:

- Medical benefits of at least \$100000 USD per accident or illness
- Repatriation of remains in the amount of \$25000 USD
- Medical evacuation in the amount of \$50000 USD
- Deductible not to exceed \$500 USD per accident or illness

The policy must be backed by either the full faith and credit of your home country government OR the company providing the insurance must meet minimum rating requirements established by the U.S. Department of State (an A.M. Best rating of "A-" or above, an Insurance Solvency International, Ltd. (ISI) rating of "A-1" or above, a Standard & Poor's Claims-paying Ability rating of "A-" or above, or a Weiss Research, Inc. rating of "B+" or above).

IX. Cell Phones in the U.S.

Most cell phone providers in the U.S. require either a Social Security Number (SSN) or a high security deposit for setting up a contract for your cell phone service. These contracts usually last from one to two years and you are required to stay with the provider or you will have to pay a fee to cancel your contract. Many providers also have a pre-paid options in which you pay on a monthly basis for the service. There is no contract and you may cancel service or switch to another provider at any time. Below are more details about each type of service:

Contracts

- Most cell phone companies charge for all calls, outgoing AND incoming, though many have free calling within their network.
- Some plans give you a set number of minutes per month. Overage minutes are charged at a much higher rate. Check your plan to see if weekend and nighttime minutes are free.
- If you don't have a US Social Security Number, expect to pay a deposit (the deposit should be returned at the end of the contract). Some

providers have become more friendly toward international customers recently.

- Text messaging (SMS) typically carries an additional charge if not included in a plan. Ask about adding texting to your plan if not included.
- For most companies, you must have a compatible phone. Ask specifically if you want to use one you currently have.

PLEASE NOTE: Once a contract has been signed, you will be obligated to pay the entire contract period. If you decide to break the contract providers will usually charge a high fee to cancel the contract. Contracts generally last from one to two years.

Pre-Paid

- If you intend to make calls to your home country, ensure this is possible with your specific plan.
- May be month-to-month subscriptions or “add minutes as you go.”
- No deposit required.
- Cheaper phones— generally basic features such as SMS and calling.
- Cost ranges from minimal to comparable to contract services.

Local Providers

1. AT&T
 - 1611 State Highway 50 # A, Commerce, TX inside Shell Gas Station
 - Wesley Street, Greenville, TX (local authorized AT&T retailer)
2. Sprint
 - 3130 Interstate Hwy 30 West Suite B, Greenville, TX
 - 151 Industrial Drive E #300. Sulphur Springs, TX
3. Verizon
 - 380 Shannon Road E, Sulphur Springs, TX
4. T-Mobile, Metro PCS, AT&T, Sprint, Verizon
 - 2701 State Highway 50, Commerce, TX (inside Walmart)
 - 1710 Live Oak Street, Commerce, TX (Metro PCS and other providers)

X. Banking in the U.S.

The city of Commerce has a few different banking facilities and some provide more services for our international students and scholars than others. You may review the local Yellow Pages to find the banks in the area and/or consult other international students and scholars.

There are different kinds of banks accounts to choose from. The three most common are:

- **Savings Accounts-** This type of account allows your money to earn interest over time. Some savings accounts charge a fee for frequent withdrawals and keeping a balance below a designated amount. This type of account is best if you need to deposit money for safekeeping over an extended period of time.
- **Checking Accounts-** This type of account is designed to hold your money but also allows you to access it whenever needed through checks and check cards. Some of these accounts earn interest and some have restrictions on the number of checks you can write. Most have minimum balances and penalties for going below the minimum balance.
- **Certificate of Deposits (CD's)-** These are savings certificates that earn higher interest rates than savings and checking accounts. They also require you to keep money in the CD for a specific length of time.

University Option for Refunds and Banking: A&M-Commerce utilizes a third party company called [Higher One](#). Refunds for tuition and fees are processed through Higher One using the Pride Choice Card. Students may also open a full-service checking account through Higher One and account choices include OneAccount, OneAccountEdge, and One AccountPremier. For more information click [here](#).

Social Security Number: J-1 Exchange Visitors will be eligible for a Social Security Number once they arrive in Commerce. While not required if not paid directly through the university, the SSN is helpful when applying for certain benefits in the U.S.

XI. Driver's License and Texas State ID Card

A Texas Driver's License is not only a document demonstrating permission to drive but it is also a nationally accepted form of identification. The Texas state ID card is only used as an identification card. Driver's license and state ID's are issued by the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS). Any international student and their dependent may apply for a driver's license or state ID.

Go to [Texas Driver's License](#) for more information and for a list of acceptable documents to apply for driver's license. A social security number (SSN) is not required to apply for a driver's license. The written driver's test may be taken online and you may contact DPS or the ISSS for more information.

XII. Lion Identification Card (Student ID Card)



The Mane Card Office produces the official identification card for Texas A&M University-Commerce. The card is referred to as a [Lion Card](#) and the account associated with the card is called Lion Cash. All scholars are eligible to apply for a Lion Card once they arrive on campus. The Lion Card provides scholars with the ability to utilize campus food services, and gives card holders Lion Cash spending options. It is also used to gain admission to certain events sponsored by the university or student organizations and to academic resources such as James Gee Library and Campus Recreation Center. The Lion Card program establishes security for the card holder as there is only one valid card per person. Participating off campus merchants accept Lion Cash which can be used to purchase food, gas and other merchandise.

XIII. Campus Safety and Parking Permits

Texas A&M University - Commerce has a safe campus surrounded by a residential community within the town of Commerce located in North East Texas. We understand many parents and students are concerned about safety on college/university campuses. We acknowledge that concern and accept our responsibility to enforce security policies and practices.

The University Police Department (UPD) is responsible for law enforcement on the campus of A&M-Commerce and provide daily patrols across campus to ensure the safety of the university community. UPD offers a number of services to the university community including vehicle assistance, delivering emergency messages, lost and found, weather monitoring, crime prevention programs, and much more.



The Pride Alert Warning System (PAWS) is a campus wide system that is used to communicate many types of serious incidents. PAWS utilizing text messaging and emails to communicate important information including campus closures, severe weather, and campus emergencies. Students may sign up for PAWS through their myLEO.

Parking permits are required to park your vehicle on campus at the main Commerce campus. Permits may be purchased at the Cashier's Office in the McDowell Administration (BA) building 1st floor lobby or through your my LEO. The estimated cost is \$40 for whole year (fall-summer), \$32 for spring and summer, or \$24 for summer only. For more information click [here](#). Visitor or temporary parking permits may be requested online by clicking [here](#).

XIV. 2-Year Home Residency Requirement and Bars on Repeat Participation

Two-year Home Residency Requirement: Many exchange visitors are subject to what is known as the two-year home country residence requirement because of their J-1 status. If you are subject to this requirement, upon completion of your J-1 program in the U.S., you must return to your home country for at least 2 years before you are eligible to change status to an H-1B or apply for permanent residence. You can be subject to this requirement for 3 reasons:

- Government financing (either foreign or U.S.)
- Exchange Visitor Skills List (list of critically needed skills by home country)
- Foreign medical training

The U.S. Department of State (DOS) in Washington, D.C makes all final determinations regarding the two-year home residence requirement. It is sometimes possible to obtain a waiver of this requirement so that you do not have to spend the 2 years in your home country. It is your responsibility to apply for your waiver. Go to the [Department of State](#) website for more information.

12-Month Bar: If you participate in a J program for more than 6 months, you are not eligible to enter the U.S. as a J-1 Research Scholar for 12 months after completion of your current program. Go to [12 & 24-month Bar](#) for more information.

24-Month Bar on Repeat Participation: If you participate in a J program in the Research Scholar or Professor category, you are subject to a 24-month bar on repeat participation in those categories. This bar also applies to J-2 dependents. Go to [12 & 24-month Bar](#) for more information.

The ISSS has a number of different ways that you may contact us with any questions or concerns. Also, included in your I-20 packet is a list of the international student groups at A&M-Commerce and their contact information:

- Facebook search International Student Services at Texas A&M University-Commerce for the ISSS and search Texas A&M University Commerce-International Students for the student page.
- Skype to TAMUCISSO
- On Twitter you may follow @ISSOTAMUC
- In Google Hangouts you may search International Student Services at Texas A&M University-Commerce
- Email intl.stu@tamuc.edu or phone 903-886-5097
- The ISSS is located in Halladay Student Services building Room 104 (building B17 on [campus map](#)).

Our office is open year around Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm Central Standard Time U.S. We will only close for university recognized holidays.

Please remember that the International Student Services Office (ISSS) is here to assist you as you prepare for your program at A&M-Commerce and during your stay here. Feel free to contact us anytime with any questions, concerns, or suggestions.

Jacques Fuqua, Interim Director

