A Guide for Iranian Students at USC
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1 Introduction

“Iranian Graduate Students Association” (IGSA) is a nonpolitical, nonprofit, volunteer student organization established in 1994. IGSA is considered as one of the university’s most active international student organizations. By conducting social and cultural activities, IGSA has always pursuing the following objectives:

- Promote an understanding of the Persian culture at USC
- Foster friendship among different cultural groups
- Provide a source of union and support for the Iranian community at USC

This newsletter is an effort by the IGSA officers to help the Iranian newcomer students of USC to get familiar with their environment easier, faster, and in a more efficient way. It consists of the information related to the studying life, campus, activities, and last but not least the cosmopolitan city of Los Angeles. Although we tried to put together the most up to date information, we suggest that you always double check the details.¹

Welcome to USC!

IGSA officers

¹ The Iranian Graduate Student Association (IGSA) does not guarantee the accuracy and quality of the information in this newcomers guide. The content in this guide does not necessarily reflect the opinion of IGSA officers.
What to Do When You Arrive (Flowchart)

Arrival at LAX

LAX to USC cost
Taxi: ~$40
Shuttle: ~$20
Friends: 😊

Cost is ~$60/day

Need Motel?
Yes

Need Motel?
No

Friend’s Place

First things to do...
- Activate you USC email account
- Passport verification at OIS
- USCard
- USC Credit Union checking account
- Cell Phone
- SSN (RA/TA)
- Registration holds or warnings
- Registration:
  PhD 2 courses
  MSc 3 courses

Housing ready?
Yes

Yes

Housing ready?
No

~2 weeks looking for place

Next things to do...
- California ID
  (DMV ID or driving license)
- Bicycle
- USC Health center
- Degree verification
- Apply for credit card

No
2 First Steps...

2.1 Passport Verification

Before registering for classes or receiving the USCard, all new international students are required to complete the Passport Verification procedure in person. This is to ensure that the required documents are placed on file at the Office of International Services (OIS). Passport Verification can be completed in the following stages:

1. Complete the New Student Information Form
2. Make photocopies of the first page of your I-20, I-94, Visa, your passport information page, "after" entering US.
3. Attend Passport Verification Session or go to OIS and bring the photocopies and your I-20/passport. You will also need to fill out some forms there.

2.2 USCard

A USC ID card is a must for all USC students and should be carried at all times while on campus. The card, which identifies you as a currently enrolled student, also entitles you to various other privileges and potential uses on and off campus. Once you open an account with the USCard Office, your ID becomes a debit card which allows you to purchase a variety of products and services the university offers. USCard entitles you to the following privileges:

- **Purchasing Power** at over 40 Locations
- **Access** to your USC TrojanHousing
- **Access** to USC Computing Facilities
- **Use** of the University Library System
- **Use** of the Lyon Center and Other Recreational Facilities
- **Student Season Football Tickets** – Entrance to Athletic Events
- **Student Discounts** at the Ticket Office and other locations
- **Check Cashing** at the Cashier's Office

Students can deposit money to their optional student "Discretionary Account" (debit account). These funds may be used to purchase items at any location accepted by USCard.

For more information and details you can visit:

http://www.usc.edu/uscard/
2.3 USC Credit Union

USC Credit Union is located on campus and offers the same services as a bank. It is highly recommended to open an account with USC Credit Union, especially if you work on campus and/or receive financial aid funds, because everything can be direct deposited with no hassle. When you open a checking account, they usually issue you a debit card right away. This is very helpful since you can deposit all your money to your account and be able to shop using your debit card.

A typical students account package includes the following features and services:

**Free Cardinal Checking** - A no-frills account perfect for any student. There are no monthly fees and no direct deposit or minimum balance requirements.
- Unlimited free withdrawals at all USC Credit Union on-campus ATMs.
- Free Home Banking, Online Bill Pay, & Telephone Teller access

**Savings Account**

**Home Banking** (Get account information and perform transactions online anytime.)

**Free Bill Pay** (Send electronic payments online to virtually any person or business. Set up automatic payments to ensure no missed or late payments.)

**Debit Card** (Pay with our MasterMoney debit card. Use it anywhere in the world MasterCard debit cards are accepted.)

**ATMs** (There is no surcharge when you make withdrawals at over 24,000 CO-OP Network ATMs in all 50 states including 7-Eleven store ATMs— that’s 4,000 more free ATMs than the biggest bank in America.)

Website: https://www.usccreditunion.org/

3 Registration Holds or Warnings

There are two types of notices on your USC registration account (REG and JHH buildings) which you can deal with through their office (up to this point you probably have a USC map in your bag): Holds, and Warnings.

If you have a hold, then you cannot register for your first semester. It usually happens when there is a document or something important missing from your file. Try to bring all your documents (diploma, transcript, and anything else if mentioned in your admission letter) in original copy and original translated copy. They need to see the original Persian documents too, but they won't keep it. It will really help if you could bring your original translated transcript in a sealed envelope.

If you have a warning, then it usually means you cannot graduate unless you clear this, which means you, as a newcomer, don’t need to worry about them for now. Some warnings (e.g. health and vaccination) need to be dealt with during the first semester.
4 Housing

Housing options are either USC Housing or Off-campus housing.

**USC Housing** is the most hassle-free way of having a place to live. You need to fill out their application ([http://housing.usc.edu](http://housing.usc.edu)), pay the $30 fee and wait for an assignment. Due to the large pool of applicants, applying in advance is a must. You can find most of the information regarding housing in the yearly housing brochure. Details you won't be able to find in it, are as follow:

- They are connected to USC so they do not need your credit history or a large security deposit. You usually don't have much of a choice in different USC housings. Just take it if you were lucky enough to have one and try to leave in it for a year.
- You can always file a re-assignment but you need a good reason: roommate problem, noisy environment, unsatisfactory conditions, etc.
- It's safe
- It's designed for a student life: laundry on-site, quite, no party, no pet, tram (USC Bus) stop, etc.

**Off campus housing:** If you didn't have any luck with USC housing then your choices are actually more than before and sometimes better than before but for a price: You need more time to find, you usually need to pay more, and you need to be more responsible. There are companies that by following USC housing footsteps, are trying to provide you with housing:

Nupac Apartments ([www.nupac.com](http://www.nupac.com))  
First Choice Housing ([www.firstchoicehousing.com](http://www.firstchoicehousing.com))  
Stuho ([stuho.com](http://stuho.com))

CDI Management ([www.uscspots.com](http://www.uscspots.com))  
The Medici ([www.themedici.com](http://www.themedici.com))  
The Visconti ([www.thevisconti.com](http://www.thevisconti.com))  
www.forrent.com

And also there are individuals who you can find their ads in Craigslist and USC.forsale web sites (described in shopping section of this document). You usually need to be physically here for off-campus housings so you usually need a temporary housing at least for a week to stay (motel, friend/relative).

**Safety Concerns:** Some areas around campus, especially west side (left to Vermont), are considered to be not safe. If you are in USC housing then you are OK. If not, try to find a place for yourself in the north side (in this box: Vermont, Figueroa, 23rd st, and Jefferson)

5 Cell Phone

In order to apply for a cell phone, you need to have a good credit history. This is generally not possible if you are a newcomer. Therefore you either have to leave a deposit of about $500 or share your cell
phone plan with a family member or a friend who already has one, and is willing to get a family share plan. If you do not like to pay a deposit and/or share a cell phone plan with a friend or relative, you may consider “pay as you go” deals and plan. These plans usually end up in higher monthly costs than a typical 2-year contract plan, but they do not require good credit history or deposit.

There are various companies from which you can get your cell phone "plan". A calling plan determines the number of minutes you can use your cell phone in a month (including both incoming and outgoing calls), for the amount you pay. Usually companies have lower rates for nights and weekends, and they also cover in-calling, which means you can talk to another cell phone from the same company for free. You will also have to buy the device from the same company. However, devices from Iran can be fixed to use by some of the companies. For example a simple calling plan could be this: $40 a month, 400 peak minutes (whenever use), unlimited night (9pm to 6am) and weekend minutes, unlimited in-calling. When you get a "Family Share plan" with a family member or a friend, you get more minutes to use them on more than one cell phone. You share the payments, and the minutes. For example: $90 a month, 1400 peak minutes, and unlimited night/weekend/in-calling minutes.

Different companies have their own calling plans, prices, and coverage area (You should pay attention to the coverage map). The most popular companies are:

Verizon: http://www.verizon.com/  
T-Mobile: http://www.t-mobile.com/  
at&t: http://www.wireless.att.com/  
Sprint: http://www.sprint.com/

Once you get a cell phone, if you are not satisfied with the coverage area or your plan, you can usually return it and get a cell phone from another company within one month. After one month, you will have a 2-year service agreement with your company and if you want to switch to another network before the end of your contract, you need to pay an early termination fee.

6 Social Security Number (SSN)

The United States' Social Security system assigns a 9 digit number, which is called Social Security Number (SSN), to every individual to be able to track them, and keep their records in many different aspects. You will also build your credit history on it. Afterwards, when applying for a credit card, loans, cell phones, and some other applications, you will need to provide them with your SSN so that they can check your records.

In order to be eligible to apply for an SSN you need to be a US Citizen, a Permanent Resident, or if you are on an F-1 visa, you should be employed (fellowship student are not usually considered as employed).

Steps to follow:
1. First step is to find an on-campus job. Your alternatives are Research Assistantship (RA), Teaching Assistantship (TA), Grader, or any other on-campus so-called "Student Works" such as working in the USC bookstore, restaurants, or various other offices located on university campus. Therefore, the first step to take is to find an on campus job.

2. Make copies of the job offer, which should be issued by the department you work for, or a document which shows that you have an on-campus job, your I-20, your F-1 Visa, and I-94. Hand them in to the International Students Office (OIS). They will instruct you to collect a letter for the Social Security Administration in a couple of days.

3. Take the letter issued by OIS along with your passport, I-94, and I-20 to the social security office which you are referred by OIS. The address of this social security office is mentioned on the top of the letter. It is located at Northwest corner of the intersection of Hoover Street and Adams Boulevard (10 minutes walking distance from the main campus). Fill out the required forms, and wait for the card to get delivered in mail. Since you will receive the card in mail, it is more secure to provide a reliable mailing address.

For more information you can also check out following website: http://www.ssa.gov/

7 Driver License and California ID

It is better to apply for your Driver License and California ID when you have your SSN ready, so that it takes you less time. However, you are still able to apply for them even without an SSN.

1. Have your Passport (F-1 visa, and I-94) and your I-20 and take them to the DMV office. You will have to fill out some forms, take some photos in the DMV office, and pay a total of ~$50 for both cards.

2. Obtain a "California Driver Handbook" which is your guide to the written exam.

3. After preparing, you should take the written exam for a class C (Regular) license, which does not require any appointments but you can make an appointment online to avoid waiting in long lines. The written exam is also available in Persian and you can ask friends for sample questions. You are allowed to make as many as six mistakes for the first exam and three for the second and third exam. Once you pay driving license fee, you can take the written exam for three times.

4. After passing the written exam successfully, you need to get an appointment for the "Behind the wheel Test", which could last up to 3 weeks depending on the applications load. During this period, you can practice with your friends' car, or have a couple of instruction sessions to help you pass the exam in
the first time. The closest DMV office to USC campus is located at Exposition Boulevard and Hope Street, which is less than 15 minutes walking distance. You can find other useful information at: http://www.dmv.ca.gov/

8 Courses

8.1 Text books

If you do not like to buy a text book, you can borrow it from a friend or you can possibly borrow the book from the library if it is not reserved. If you like to buy a text book, you may either buy it as used or new. Trojan Bookstore usually has both used and new text books; however, the prices are often high. The other way to buy the books is to go online and search for the used and new books, compare their prices and hopefully you will find a book at the price you like. Specially, when you shop online you can possibly find an international edition of the books – which have the same content but different publication quality – for lower prices. Here is a list of websites that you can use for books:


Note: When you shop online, make sure you are buying the right edition of the book!

9 Facilities

9.1 USC Recreational Sports

USC University Park Campus (UPC) is home to several recreation and athletic facilities including the Lyon Center, McDonalds Swim Stadium, Intramural Field, Cromwell Track and Field, McAlister (North Campus) Field, Figueroa Recreation center, and the Physical Education Building.

*Lyon Center and McDonalds Swim Stadium are fully accessible.*

Recreation facilities are open to USC students, faculty and staff with valid current USC identification. You need to fill out the “WAIVER OF LIABILITY FOR USE OF THE LYON RECREATION CENTER & MCDONALD’S SWIMMING POOL” form online and then you will have free access to the swimming pool and the Lyon center for with your USC ID.

For more information and hours you go to USC RecSports website at:
9.2 Leavy Library

Leavy Library is located by Gate three. If you need to use a computer or need a room for group study, Leavy is the best place to go. The library is divided into four floors: computer basement, media center (where you can rent DVDs), computer center + study hall and no conversation study hall. The USC online library system allows you to view and reserve specific books. You can often find the classroom books available for a two hour checkout. Using your USC ID you can also check out electronics such as recorder and video camera.

9.3 Trojan Bookstores

The Bookstore is the official source for USC clothing, gifts and school supplies. The USC Computer Store offers academic pricing on the latest computer software, hardware and accessories. You can also buy general books and course books from the Bookstore.

Website: [http://www.uscbookstore.com/](http://www.uscbookstore.com/)

Note: The prices at Trojan Bookstores are not necessarily the best you can find!

9.4 Trojan Transportation

9.4.1 Trams (Buses/Shuttles)

Trojan Transportation offers three basic bus routes for North Campus students and staff members commuting to USC: Route A, Route B, and Route C. Additionally they have the Parking Center and Union Station trams as well as intercampus tram routes.
Although public transportation in Los Angeles is below standards, but still you might be able to use it for some events and fun stuffs. For this, you may use metro.net, amtrak.com and metrolinktrains.com webs along with USC bus routes/schedule page to plan your trip.

9.4.2  Campus Cruiser

Campus Cruiser provides a safe and reliable service to and from a residence or any campus facility within their boundaries. Campus cruiser works from 5:00pm to 2:45am. Campus Cruiser service area is reflected in the map below.

If you need a ride to/from USC, you can call 213-740-4911. A representative will ask you your location, where you are going to, your last name and the number of people. They will then assign you a car, give you an estimated waiting time, and a call confirmation number that you can use to track your cruiser online or use is as reference when calling back.

Website: http://transnet.usc.edu/

10  Shopping

10.1 Online Shopping Tools

You can purchase products or services over the Internet. Online shopping provides more freedom and control than shopping in a store. There are usually more deals available online than in stores, especially for electronic devices. You can compare the features and prices of the products and make a decision to purchase an item based on the “customer reviews”. Most online stores accept credit cards and some of them also accept PayPal or Google Checkout as a form of payment. Once a payment has been accepted the goods or services can be delivered in many ways, such as (free) shipping, in-store pick up, download, etc.

A list of popular online stores:

www.amazon.com  www.ebay.com

The following websites are used among USC students to address school needs:

http://groups.google.com/group/usc.forsale/  www.uloop.com
Craigslist is a central network of online communities, featuring free classified advertisements (with jobs, internships, housing, personals, for sale/wanted, services, community) and forums on various topics:

http://losangeles.craigslist.org/

Price comparison service allows individuals to see lists of prices for specific products. Most price comparison services do not sell products themselves, but source prices from retailers from whom users can buy:

http://www.pricegrabber.com/

A list of websites for product reviews:


A list of websites that help you find online deals and coupons:


10.2 Stores

10.2.1 Grocery Stores Close to USC:

Ralphs: (@ Vermont Ave./Adams Blvd. intersection) (has free shuttles if you don’t have a car)  www.ralphs.com

Superior (@ University Village)

10.2.2 Furniture


Target: www.target.com  Costco: www.costco.com

10.2.3 Halal and Kosher Meat

Baghalto-Sharghiah (Halal)  Medina Meat Market (Halal)  Elat Market (Kosher)
10817 Venice Blvd  401 S Vermont Ave, Ste 10  8730 W Pico Blvd
Los Angeles, CA 90034  Los Angeles, CA 90020  Los Angeles, CA 90035
(310) 836-9841  (213) 384-2525  (310) 659-9250
11 Where to Eat?

11.1 Popular Dining Locations at USC

11.1.1 Tutor Campus Center (TCC)

Consisting of nine different dining options, the newly built Campus Center is perhaps the largest single dining complex at USC. Options include popular brands such as Panda Express, California Pizza Kitchen, Carl’s Jr., Coffee Bean, Wahoo’s Fish Taco and others.

11.1.2 University Village Food Court

Located in University Village, the international food court features Turkish, Thai, Indian, Chinese, Italian, Mongolian, Korean, and other types of foods.

11.1.3 Café ‘84

Located adjacent to the Lyon Center, Café ‘84 features Jamba Juice smoothies; Starbucks coffee; Casa Italiana; Café ‘84 Pizza; Wahoo’s Fish Taco; The Grill; Wok Crazy Mongolian-style stir fry; Krispy Kreme doughnuts; as well as a variety of pastries, baked goods, sandwiches, salads and convenience items.

11.1.4 Tutor Hall Café

Located in the Viterbi School of Engineering at RTH building, Tutor Hall Café features global cuisine, coffee, sandwiches, salads and beverages.

11.1.5 Residential Dining

Parkside Restaurant, located in Parkside Residential College, serves international cuisine specialties from four exhibition stations and also offers vegetarian selections, kosher meals, sandwiches and salads.

Everybody’s Kitchen (EVK), located adjacent to Birnkrant and New Residential Colleges, offers American cuisine entrees, Mexican and vegetarian stations, sandwiches, salads and desserts. It’s about $12 for all you can eat!
11.2 Persian Food

Flame, Shahrzad, Shamshiri, Attari, Ghanari, Shah-abbas

Hookah Places: Spot, Habbibi Café, Gypsy Café, Coffee Zinio

Other restaurants and places can be found at www.yelp.com

11.3 Fast Food and Chain Restaurants

Subway: http://www.subway.com/
Quiznos: http://www.quiznos.com/
Togo’s: http://www.togos.com/
Carl’s Jr.: http://www.carlsjr.com/
McDonalds: http://www.mcdonalds.com/
in-n-out Burger: http://www.in-n-out.com/
Pizza Hut: http://www.pizzahut.com/
Domino’s Pizza: http://www.dominos.com/
Chipotle: http://www.chipotle.com/
Baja Fresh: http://www.bajafresh.com/
Panda Express: http://www.pandaexpress.com/
Starbucks: http://www.starbucks.com/
The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf: http://www.coffeebean.com/

12 Regular Gatherings

Soccer: Sundays at 6:00pm (exact time might change depending on seasons)

If you like to play soccer with other Iranian students, you will like this event! For more details please contact “Majid Yahyaei” at “majid2140@gmail.com”.

IGSA soccer team is the 2008 “ISA Soccer Tournament” Champion and is looking forward to recruit newcomers....

IGSA organizes many cultural and entertaining activities throughout the academic year. These events provide a good opportunity for Iranian students to gather and socialize. IGSA sends out an email on its mailing list with the time and location
of the events. IGSA events include Yalda and Nowruz parties, concerts, poetry night, BBQ, movie and game nights, etc.

For subscription to IGSA mailing list, please visit http://www-scf.usc.edu/~igsa/

13 Landmarks

14 References

Websites:

http://www.usc.edu/

http://www-scf.usc.edu/~igsa/

https://www.usccreditunion.org/

http://www.wikipedia.org/