

Indian Student Association

UMASS, Amherst
(www.umass.edu/isa)

New Students Guide – 2011

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FAQ for Incoming Graduate Students

"The FOB Handbook"

1) I'm going to be new to Amherst and to the US. I would like to know something about the housing options there.

Maybe you can live on-campus-

We know very few international grad students who live on-campus. By on-campus we mean living in the dormitories. UMass has these huge dorms for students a short walk away from school. The rent for a shared room is \$325 and for a single room is \$500. Chances are that you may not get a single room in the first semester itself. You have common kitchens, common bathrooms etc. Note that the meal plans are not a part of living in the dorms and have to be bought separately.

Or off Campus-

The advantage in living in an off-campus housing set-up is that it is cheaper. And it is more convenient. Off campus, isn't really way off the campus, as most places are accessible by the PVTB buses. Your house maybe just a 15 minute walk to or 10 minute sprint if you are the athletic type, or terribly late. It is more convenient because you have your kitchen to try out your cooking experiments in, a fridge shared between roomies to stock up stuff in, a bathroom shared between a few people only. It is the feeling of living in a house, which is very comforting. It may cost you anything between \$250 and \$300 to live in a shared room, and \$340 or up to live in a single room. Ofcourse these figures are very tricky and may vary from one apartment complex to another, from one house to another. But, you get the idea (hopefully).

This is what the map looks like:

[Sunderland]--[North Amherst]----[UMass]----[South Amherst]----[Belchertown]

North Amherst:

1. Puffton Village
2. Brandywine
3. Townhouses
4. Presidential
5. Crestview

South Amherst~Belchertown

1. Colonial Village
2. Boulders

Sunderland:

Sugarloaf Estates
Cliffside Apartments

ALL the above are on the bus routes. You can have a look at bus maps on PVTB.com. Look for Route 30 and 31.

Everything costs just about the same. Since all these places are on the bus route, it doesn't matter where you live. Popular among indians are Puffton Village, Townhouses and Colonial Village.

2) Where do I look for housing?

There are Classifieds forums for all these located at isa.netboards.org. There will be posts there listing vacancies. Contact the posters directly. If not, then you and your friends can look for housing while in India itself at <http://www.cshrc.org>.

3) What kitchen stuff should I get along? What should I bring along? Get basic cooking amenities with you.

Get a set of cooking vessels

1. Kadai
2. Frying pan
3. Tava
4. Serving spoons
5. Pressure cooker with a spare set of gasket and valves
6. Plates
7. Knife (neatly covered and placed in checked luggage) and
8. Tumblers
9. Few microwaveable containers are advisable. They are also cheaply available here at Walmart, Target.
10. Carry your favorite masalas (garam masala), a few spices in small amounts such as mustard, jeera, haldi etc. according to your need.
11. Carry with you your favorite home-made pickles doublewrapped in plastic after tightly sealing to avoid oil leakage.

What should I NOT carry?

DO NOT carry

1. Glassware or chinaware such as mugs and bowls. These are available cheap around here (Walmart, Target).
2. All of commercially available masalas (Everest, MDH) are available in the Asian stores in and around Amherst, so do not carry bulk loads.
3. Grocery items such as rice, dal, rava, poha or atta.
4. Maggi products, pickles, chutneys, etc are available aplenty.
5. FRUITS, VEGETABLES, SEEDS of any kind are NOT allowed to be carried inside the United States. Spices are allowed in small quantities.
6. Electric appliances. The voltages here are different and Indian make appliances cannot be used.

4) What clothes and personal things should I get along?

What should I get along?

1. Undergarments (when you run out of these you need to do laundry)
2. Sweaters (should be good for Fall)
3. Jeans + Tops (your usual college wear)
4. 2 Set of Formal Clothes
5. 2 Set of Traditional Clothes
6. Sneakers (1 pair)
7. A few socks
8. Pillow Covers (2)
9. Bed Sheets (2) (Different sizing system here – Twin/Queen – is what you might have here.
10. Towels – Bath (2)
11. Towels – Hand (2)
12. Soap (1 bar)
13. Medicines (Crocin, Saridon, anything for colds and aches)
14. Toothpaste (1)
15. Toothbrush (1)
16. Spectacles (as many pairs as you think you would break)
17. Lenses (try getting disposables)
18. Lens solution (1)
19. Lens prescriptions (you cannot buy lenses without prescriptions here)

What should I not get along?

1. Clothes Hangers
2. Pillows
3. Winter Coats
4. Winter Gloves
5. Winter Caps
6. Iron
7. Ironing Board

8. LAUNDRY SOAP... SURF EXCEL, ARIEL etc. CANNOT BE USED IN WASHING MACHINES HERE

5) Should I get a laptop along?

If you have a laptop already – get it along. You can buy good laptops here for good deals. If you want to see the kind of deals that are available, you can check out <http://www.bestbuy.com> and see the “weekly deals” that are available. You could get a good, new laptop for half the price sometimes! These deals are mostly on HP, Toshiba and Sony Laptops. For deals on Lenovo, IBM or Fujitsu you would have to look on their respective sites. You can also check deals2buy.com This site accumulates deals available from all over the internet.

6) Which books should I get along?

Get all the books that you can! Look on your course pages and try to get the books listed under required reading. Each book costs around \$100 if you buy it from the bookstore. You might find it cheaper on ebay, but not as cheap as you would find a reprint in India.

7) What about medicines?

Anything that cures your colds and aches, try to get it along. Crocin, Disprin, Saridon etc. *Carry a prescription made out in your name for all the medicines that you are carrying.*

8) How do I get the money to pay the fees?

The Bursar's Office at UMass accepts payments in the form of checks and money orders, payment to “University of Massachusetts”, with your name and student ID on the reverse. Fees are not due till about one month after classes start. You could either bring a check/money order (payable to UMass) for the amount from India, or, you could bring the money with you (answered on the next question), open a bank account here (which will not take more than a few hours to open), deposit the money in your account and then pay the University from this account. More information on billing, payment methods, deadlines, etc, can be found on the Bursar's Office

website at <http://www.umass.edu/bursar/index.html>

9) How do I carry money to the US? In what form?

There are different ways in which you can bring money to the US. Some of the most common (and some less common – but equally easy) ways are:

- Traveler's Checks – This is probably the most common way of carrying money to the US.
- Money Orders/personal checks – These should be in US dollars, but be aware that it could take a lot of time the money to actually be credited to your account here. Not recommended, apart from maybe a check/ money order payable to the university towards fees.
- Travel Currency Cards – These are issued by most banks in India. Different banks refer to these by different names, for example, SBI calls this a Vishwa Yatra Card. These are very often Visa cards and work similar to a debit card. As long as you have a balance on the card, you can use it (subject to any bank-specific charges). The advantage of this card is that, if, at some point in time, you are in need of money, your parents in India can 'refill' the card in Rupees, and the money (equivalent Dollar amount at the exchange rate on the day that they refill the card) will be available to you here.
- Cash – You are allowed a small amount of cash (and you should keep maybe \$500 in hand for – apart from money that you may need to pay towards atleast first month's rent).

nce you get here, you can open a bank account (Bank of America in Amherst) in a couple of hours. You will be

given a few checks to get you started and will receive check books and a debit card within 7 days.

10a) How do I reach Amherst from my arrival Airport?

ISA will pick you up from Boston or Hartford airport, wherever you are landing. Due to timing and distance issue, we don't promise pickups from NY. So would recommend all to enter via Boston or Hartford.

10b) Are the pick ups charged?

You will only have to pay for the car fuel and rental costs (if any). Our rough estimate would be that the per head cost would come upto \$60-\$70.

PS: Even the bus journey would cost you close to \$55, but with lot of hassles. Trust us, you don't want to lift your bags and move around after that 20 hr flight. Catching cabs from the airport to the bus terminus at South Station can be a pain.

11a) I am in Amherst, now what?

1. See campus maps here: http://www.umass.edu/visitorsctr/Campus_Map/
2. See bus schedules here: <http://www.pvta.com>
3. Get your U-Card Made at Franklin Dining Hall
4. Open a bank account – lot of us use Bank Of America
5. Submit the required forms at University Health Services (UHS)
6. Meet your advisor
7. Familiarize yourself with the campus and the people around.
8. If you don't have a place to live in – contact Kartik to arrange temporary accommodation or hit a mail on the yahoo group.

ISA Contacts:

President : Aniruddha Upadhye 413-695-0863

Vice- President: Santosh Khasanvis 413-695-1531

11b) Please give me some details about the temporary accommodations:

Many of the new students do not have a place to live when they land. To help them out, we will give temporary accommodations at the place of seniors for upto 2 weeks or until you get a place to stay. This works mainly because of vacancies created by seniors who have already graduated or who are out during the summer.

PS: Temporary accommodations have absolutely no money involved in it. It is free of cost. Please contact Anirudha or Santosh if you need temporary accommodation.

12) Where should I go for groceries?

Groceries:

From UMass you have a bus going every hour to BIG Y and Stop and Shop. See Route 37 on PVTA.com

Asian Stores/Hampshire Mall:

These fall on the same route. The bus is available from UMass too. See route 30 and route B43 on PVTA.com

Medicines

There is a CVS in Downtown / South Amherst. There are over the counter medicines which do not require prescriptions. Medicines that require prescriptions can be bought from the pharmacy at UHS with a UHS doctor's prescription.

13) When should I apply for a Social Security Number?

You can apply for an SSN once you are on the University's payroll. You cannot be on the university's payroll for long enough unless you have an SSN. So you must apply for an SSN sometime after you get an on-campus job and before you are forced to stop working for the lack of an SSN. To apply for the SSN you need to go to Holyoke.

14) What purpose does an SSN serve?

An SSN is a unique identification number which contains ALL your life in those digits. With the SSN your medical records, driving records, crime records everything can be accessed by the authorities at a go. Be very careful with your SSN, make sure it does not fall into wrong hands once you get it.

The cool things you can do with an SSN is get your own cell phone, learners permit, driving license and credit card.

15) I need to get myself a cell phone.

Unfortunately, to get a cell phone you need to have a Social Security Number first. So if you have a kind relative or a friend, you can request them to get you a cell phone once you are here. Or you could hold out until you can get your own cell phone.

16) Vodafone or Airtel?

None. Here we have Sprint, T-Mobil, AT&T and Verizon to choose from. Most people in Amherst use AT&T, since made on the Cingular to Cingular network are free. It would cost you ~\$40 a month to pay the bills.

17) How do I reach Amherst from Logan International Airport (Boston) on my own?

ISA will do airport pick ups for all the incoming students from both Boston as well as Hartford. So ideally you don't need to worry about getting to Amherst once you are in Boston or Hartford. However, if you would like to know what are the other options, then read below:

We are trying to give you a step by step account of what you need to do once you get off the flight at LOGAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT.

Immigration formalities are done at the port of entry (first airport in US that your flight lands). The Actual Immigration formalities take just 2 minutes per person but the total waiting time depends on the queue. They just check your I-20 and pass your handbag through the scanner. Next you get to the baggage collection belt (you wont need to search for anything - they are all located one after another). You will find pushcarts around the place. Most of the times these pushcarts can be used without charge. Carry a lot of \$1 bills and quarters (25 cent coins) just in case you need pushcarts and there aren't any free ones available.

Once you reach Boston please call us if you wish to be picked up from the Amherst bus stop. You would need lots of quarters to call (around 4 per call. Be prepared to make a few phone calls). Dial 1-413 followed by the 7 digit number that is listed below, in the same order till you reach someone.

ISA President : Aniruddha Upadhye 413-695-0863

ISA Vice-President: Santosh Khasanvis 413-695-1531

There are two ways to reach Amherst from Boston.

BOSTON AIRPORT - FRAMINGHAM - AMHERST

One way to reach Amherst by bus from Boston is to take the Framingham Logan Express Bus service. The bus starts from Terminal E and reaches the Peter-Pan bus terminal at Framingham. It should cost you around \$9 to reach Framingham. From there you should take another bus to Amherst. Ask for a student concession on the ticket. In any case the cost for your ticket from Framingham to Amherst would be around \$25. You may need to change buses once more at an intermediary stop called Springfield. Ask the bus driver if you need assistance. You need to check the timings of the bus from Framingham to Amherst. You can check the schedule on-line by going to Peterpan home page and typing the departure city as Framingham and destination city as Amherst. The result will be the bus schedule from Framingham to Amherst. You must check the schedule before you start from India and plan accordingly. There are not many buses from Framingham to Amherst. So check your schedule and plan accordingly.

BOSTON AIRPORT - SOUTH STATION (BOSTON) - AMHERST

The second way to reach Amherst is to catch a bus from Boston Logan Airport to South Station bus terminal. To do that you need to take a bus from the airport terminal. Ask the people there for help and they will provide you information on how to reach South Station by bus. To reach south station from Logan airport, you have several options. Check out

http://www.massport.com/logan/getti_typeo_buses.html

which has info on all types of transport to south station. Among the bus services offered, the most frequent services are

<http://www.bonanzabus.com/logboswh.htm> You will give as your origin "Logan" and destination as "Boston" or "South Station".

http://www.concordtrailways.com/concord_manchester_bus_schedule_mf.htm if you are coming on a weekday and http://www.concordtrailways.com/concord_manchester_bus_schedule_ssh.htm if you are coming on a weekend or holiday.

http://www.concordtrailways.com/concord_trailways_bus_fares.htm Look under New Hampshire for fares. Also check <http://www.p-b.com/LDweekday.htm> and <http://www.p-b.com/busfairs.htm>.

Usually there is a bus every 2 hrs. Weekends there is a different schedule.

From South Station you have to take peterpan bus to Amherst. Goto the peterpan/greyhound terminal and ask for a ticket to Amherst. Ask for student's concession (show your I-20 and visa). Keep the passport handy. You might have to change buses in Springfield. Ask the driver if you have any doubts. The frequency is lot better in South Station. To check the schedule goto the peterpan website and type Boston as the departure city and Amherst as the destination city. You will see the schedules.

Once in Amherst, you should get down at Amherst Center bus stop (NOT Haigis Mall). Ask the driver and he would notify you when the stop is reached. Amherst Center is located in downtown Amherst. There is a peterpan bus stop there. You would also be having public telephone booths from where you can call us. Be prepared to wait for even an hour. We will definitely get someone to pick you up. Just stay put at the bus stop.

Have at least \$50-60 for expenses involved in the bus journey. Also quarters are used in lots of places so keep a separate sachet for it. As we have your arrival time, we will be expecting your call.

AGAIN: before you start on your journey from India.

1. Check your arrival time at Logan Airport, Boston.
2. Check for the earliest Logan Express service.
3. It takes 1-1.5 hrs to reach Framingham. See if you have any immediate connection to Amherst from Framingham.
4. Alternatively, check for earliest bus service from Logan to South Station on the bonanza bus or concord trailways.
5. it takes 25-30 minutes to reach south station from Logan. Check for earliest possible connections from south station to Amherst.
6. Draw a plan and get printouts of all the maps, schedules and this page and keep them in your hand luggage.
7. In case your flight arrives late or anything else happens, be prepared to make changes in your plans. That is why you need the schedules on hand. If you are going to Framingham, make sure you go to the Logan Express info desk and ask them how long it will take to reach Framingham from Logan.

New York to Amherst

In the baggage claim area of JFK airport, you will find ground transportation desks, courtesy telephones, and representatives of transportation agencies. Ask them about Peter pan bus counter. You may need to go to Port

authority bus terminal on 42nd street (Manhattan) by cab (less than 40 \$..its expensive, but better with luggage). Tell the driver about Peter pan bus terminal. There, you can ask people as you go in (at one entrance, you may find the wheel carriages for your luggage). There are 2 or three counters in different floors. Get the Ticket (ask for student discount) (its about 31\$ one way without discount). They will tell to go to the gate where the bus starts. Buses normally run till 11 pm in the night. Once you reach NY please call us if you wish to be picked up from the Amherst bus stop. Follow the instructions for calling given in the Boston to Amherst section.

Hartford to Amherst (Valley transporter - costlier option):

The immigration formalities would be completed in an airport you would land before transferring to a flight to Hartford. So, they are the same as above. Hartford is a small airport. So, there are a couple of information counters where you can get general info. Take the Valley Transporter. It's a taxi service that picks up people from Bradley airport and drops them off at specified addresses. It costs 35-50\$ to reach and address in Amherst. However the frequency is very good: its usually there every hour on the fifteen of the hour. For more info, check <http://www.valleytransporter.com/bradley.htm> . In this case you can come directly to the specified address (call/email us to get the address) and need not get down in Amherst Center.

Note: Make sure you call one of us before you land up here because we need to make sure someone is in the apartment when you come!

*****The key is: Keep us informed about your plans at every step if you need assistance.***