

# **UCLA International Partner & Children's Handbook**

**Created by the Dashew Center for International Students & Scholars**

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# *Welcome to California!*

## **Introduction**

**Welcome to UCLA! We hope this handbook, which was assembled and created by the Dashew Center for International Students and Scholars (DCISS), finds you and your family excited to move to sunny Southern California.**

**As your partner begins the next step of her or his career at one of the world's best universities, you may have many questions about life here in the United States.**

**The following sections and links will provide information, references, and resources to help you, as the international partner of a student, staff, or employee at UCLA, build a successful life here in Los Angeles.**

## Section 1: Pre-Departure Expectations

It's important to remember that moving anywhere, even to a new apartment or home within your home country or city, can require changes to the routine of daily life. Similarly, moving to the United States from abroad will also require adjustment and patience.

The Resources page on the Dashew Center website ([www.internationalcenter.ucla.edu](http://www.internationalcenter.ucla.edu)) has information on a variety of topics and should be your first stop for up-to-date information on everything from fun upcoming cultural and educational programs to attend, to lists of immigration attorneys, and much more in between.

Additionally, the following sections of this handbook contain supplemental information to help you plan for your family's arrival.



*"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness..." -- American author Mark Twain*

## Section 2: Money & Banking

When you arrive in Los Angeles, also known as “LA,” you will need easy access to money in U.S. dollars for immediate expenses for hotels, food, university fees, transportation, and to arrange housing. If UCLA is paying your partner, it may take more than a month until they get their first paycheck. We do not recommend bringing large sums of cash into the U.S. on your arrival journey, as you may need to declare large amounts of cash at Customs and there are many safer options available. Contact your home country bank before you depart for details about the following:

**Traveler's Checks:** Money stored using Traveler's Checks is immediately available if checks are in U.S. dollars, and they can be replaced if lost or stolen. However, checks in large sums can be difficult to use. Checks in a foreign currency may be subject to exchange fees.

**Electronic Banking:** Using your home country bank card, you may be able to withdraw cash immediately from Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs). Exchange rates are usually fair, but there may be a daily limit (\$200-\$1,000) on how much you can withdraw and/or transaction fees (\$1-\$5) for using the service.



**International Credit Cards:** Many Americans use credit cards for even small purchases (a cup of coffee, for example). If you have a credit card from an international brand or bank (Visa, Mastercard etc.), your credit line funds are available immediately and exchange rates are usually good. However, not all US stores and businesses accept international credit cards.

**Bank Checks/Drafts:** These financial transactions are useful for moving large sums of money, but funds may not be available for 3 days to 3 weeks after deposit (depending on which bank is used).



**Wire Transfers:** This is the safest way to transfer money, but you must open an account at a US bank first. There may be a fee for using the service. Check out this [dedicated banking section of our website](#) to find a U.S. bank and learn more.

**Foreign Currency Exchange:** If you decide to bring non-U.S. money on your journey to Los Angeles, understand that currency exchange businesses are less common here than in other parts of the world. An area the size of a city might only have one dedicated currency exchange operator, and changing money at U.S. banks can be expensive. However, if you do bring non-US currency with you, you can use International Currency Exchange locations at [LAX](#) to change currency, trading convenience for unfavorable exchange rates.



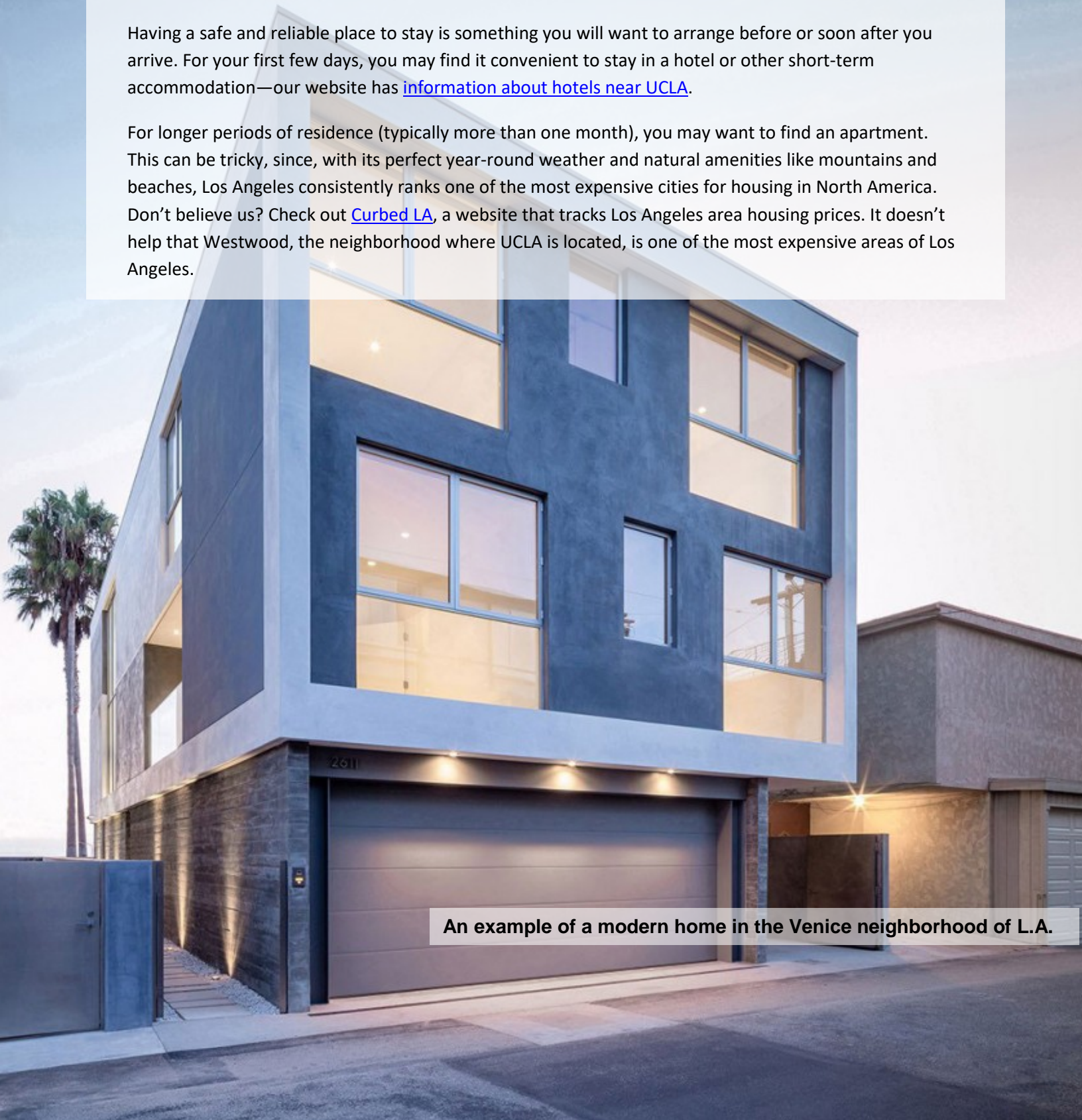
# Section 4: Housing

One of the first and most important questions you may have about moving to Los Angeles is:

“Where will we live?”

Having a safe and reliable place to stay is something you will want to arrange before or soon after you arrive. For your first few days, you may find it convenient to stay in a hotel or other short-term accommodation—our website has [information about hotels near UCLA](#).

For longer periods of residence (typically more than one month), you may want to find an apartment. This can be tricky, since, with its perfect year-round weather and natural amenities like mountains and beaches, Los Angeles consistently ranks one of the most expensive cities for housing in North America. Don't believe us? Check out [Curbed LA](#), a website that tracks Los Angeles area housing prices. It doesn't help that Westwood, the neighborhood where UCLA is located, is one of the most expensive areas of Los Angeles.



An example of a modern home in the Venice neighborhood of L.A.



## Strategies for Finding Housing

Unless your family has unlimited money, you will need to make compromises between price, convenience, and quality of housing in Los Angeles. However, it is possible to find a cozy, safe, and affordable place to live. Keep these tips in mind as you balance needs and wishes with your financial resources:

- Have a cell phone and a laptop computer to inquire about vacancies that become available. You will find that many apartment leasing offices don't answer calls and have voice mail or email only. You will need the phone to receive returned messages at all hours of the day. You may want to prepare a script when leaving telephone messages for the landlord, mentioning that your partner is a new student or scholar at UCLA and that you are interested in the property.
- In general, areas that are farther from UCLA have cheaper housing. However, the farther you are from UCLA, the more time it will take for your partner (or you) to reach campus.
- Rent or borrow a car; your search will go faster if you can drive. Los Angeles covers 1,302 square kilometers!
- Become familiar with housing vocabulary (see section below).
- Walk or drive around neighborhoods you like and look for "For Rent / For Lease" signs posted in the windows of houses and apartments.
- Drive or walk through neighborhoods to see what the building exteriors look like before making an appointment for viewing. When you find a place you like, immediately let the landlord know that you are interested. Have a check or money order ready to pay the deposit, as an available apartment can go off the market in a few hours. If you take too long to decide, someone else might get it!
- You may be eligible to live in housing owned by UCLA, depending on your partner's status at the university. Check out this [eligibility chart](#) on the UCLA Housing website to determine what housing your family can [apply for](#).
- It may be easier for your partner to come to Los Angeles first to find and secure housing before your family arrives.
- Housing vacancy postings are generally made available online a month or less before the occupancy or lease start date, so it may be helpful to begin your search no sooner than a month before arrival.

Once again, you'll want to visit the [Housing section of our website](#) for important information and links to housing resources.

## Housing Vocabulary

Knowing these terms can help you better understand the housing search:

**Single or Studio:** A single room apartment with a small kitchen and a bathroom.

**In-law House:** A smaller structure behind or next to another property that can be used as private living space. Sizes and features of in-law houses vary; they may be a converted garage or pool house.

**Townhouse or Condominium:** A private home or spacious and luxurious apartment that sometimes has its own laundry, pool and recreational facilities.



*Photo 1: An example of an in-law house*

**Lease:** A legal contract signed by both the manager and the renter regarding the length of stay, price, and conditions of a rental agreement. It is important to not sign a lease for more than the amount of time you will stay. You are responsible for rent the entire length of the lease. Violation of the lease agreement can result in a heavy financial penalty. Residents should understand all of the conditions of the lease before signing. Any negotiated variation

should be in writing, initialed, and dated by both the tenant and the manager as an amendment to the lease.

**Credit Check:** A process in which the landlord verifies your credit history and confirms your bank information. International students or scholars who do not have a credit history in the U.S. should not need to pay for a credit check, but it may be necessary to negotiate an agreement with the landlord in this case.

**Deposit or Security Deposit:** An additional amount you must pay when moving into an apartment (usually at least one or two month's rent) to guarantee occupancy, payment of rent, repair of damages, and professional cleaning after you leave. In most cases, the deposit is returned to you in full if there is no damage to your apartment at the end of your stay (there may be a slight deduction for cleaning). Inspect the apartment carefully when moving in and record any damages (in writing and/or with cell phone pictures), so you won't be charged when moving out.

**First, Last, Deposit:** This means that to move in, you must pay the first and last month's rent amount, plus the security deposit amount. Most rental apartments require this, but it is possible to find those that only require the deposit amount and the first month's rent.

**Rent:** Payment made for living accommodations, usually on a monthly basis.

**Utilities:** This refers to the extra charges for gas, electricity, internet, cable television, and water service at a property. Plan on spending an extra \$25-\$100 per month on these items, depending on your lifestyle. Some utilities may be included in your rent (water and trash collection are common examples of included utilities), but you should ask your landlord which ones are.

**Sublet:** A special arrangement where you live in someone's apartment in their place. Sublets are attractive because they are often short-term opportunities with furnished rooms and no deposit. However, it is usually best to ask the person renting if their manager or landlord knows about your agreement, in case the lease prohibits you from taking his or her place.

### Neighborhoods to Consider

The following West Los Angeles neighborhoods or areas tend to be popular with UCLA students, staff, and faculty for their relatively short commutes to campus, good public transportation options, and access to amenities: Culver City, Palms, Westwood, Beverly Hills, Santa Monica, West Los Angeles, Venice, Mar Vista, and Brentwood.



Map 1: This map highlights areas in West LA that are relatively close to UCLA (the yellow star), and which tend to be popular with international visitors and locals conducting work or study at the university.

Other areas that are farther from campus, but which still attract UCLA community members include: Koreatown, West Hollywood, and communities in the San Fernando Valley (often known simply as “the Valley”).

Again, keep in mind that though neighborhoods that are farther from UCLA may be cheaper, traffic in Los Angeles can mean that you and your family will spend more time (and money!) driving.

### Housing Issues, Advocacy, & Tips

During your stay in the United States, though uncommon, you might experience problems related to your housing and will want to seek outside help or resources.

The UCLA Office of Student Legal Aid has a list of such resources, including a section on Tenant-Landlord issues. You can review that [Community Resource here](#) and may want to follow up with one of the agencies listed.

Additionally, the following tips might also be helpful in the event that a dispute arises:

**Review the lease.** Carefully review all of the conditions before you sign on the dotted line. Your lease or rental agreement may contain a provision that you find unacceptable -- for example, restrictions on guests, pets, design alterations, or running a home business.

**Get everything in writing.** To avoid disputes or misunderstandings with your landlord, get everything in writing. Keep copies of any correspondence and follow up an oral agreement with a letter, setting out your understandings. For example, if you ask your landlord to make repairs, put your request in writing and keep a copy for yourself.

**Demand repairs.** Know your rights to live in a habitable rental unit -- and don't give them up. Landlords are required to offer their tenants livable premises, including adequate weatherproofing; heat, water, and electricity access; and clean, sanitary, and structurally safe premises. If your rental unit is not kept in good repair, you have a number of options, ranging from withholding a portion of the rent, to paying for repairs and deducting the cost from your rent, to calling the building inspector (who may order the landlord to make repairs), to moving out without liability.

**Talk to your landlord.** Keep communication open with your landlord. If there's a problem -- for example, if the landlord is slow to make repairs -- talk it over to see if the issue can be resolved in a friendly manner instead of through a nasty legal battle.

**Protect your security deposit.** To avoid any misunderstandings, make sure your lease or rental agreement is clear on the use and refund of security deposits. When you move in, walk through the premises with the landlord to record existing damage. Take photos of the apartment or existing damage with a cell phone camera and keep them until you move out and receive your deposit.



## Section 5: Identification



## Your Passport & Arrival Documents

When you first arrive in the United States, your passport will be a critical form of identification used for a range of activities from completing official customs and border arrival documents and procedures at your Port of Entry (usually LAX airport), to buying a bottle of wine at a local grocery store.

As soon as you are able to obtain other types of photo identification (such as a California Driver's License or ID Card), keep your passport in safe storage at home, since you can always carry a photocopy of it in your wallet or purse. Note, however, that you are not required to have your passport in your possession at all times. Feel free to go for a walk to the park or visit a neighbor's house without taking your passport with you.

Having photocopies of arrival documents, such as your I-94 Admissions Record, visa stamp, and I-20 or Ds-2019 Form (or other documents, depending on your specific visa status) will also help you considerably when replacing them in the case of loss or theft.

## Social Security Card / Social Security Number (SSN)

### What is it?

A Social Security number (SSN) is a form of ID without a picture on it. This number, which is usually issued to Americans at birth, is required for everyone who works in the U.S., including non-immigrants.

It is not a work permit, nor is it a health insurance benefit. The Social Security Number was technically created by the government to collect taxes from employees' paychecks to provide stipends to qualifying elderly and disabled people, but it is now used for many other official purposes, from medical records to phone plan applications. Certain nonimmigrants (such as F-1 and J-1) are not required to have Social Security taxes deducted from their pay.



Photo 2: An example of a Social Security card

### Eligibility

As the partner of an international student or scholar at UCLA, you may or may not be eligible for an SSN, depending on the circumstances. If you are eligible to work in the U.S. and plan to do so, you must apply for a Social Security Number. In general, the following people are eligible to apply:

- F-1 students with a job offer letter and work permission
- J-1 students with a job offer and work authorization from their DS-2019 sponsor
- J-1 visiting scholars
- J-2 dependents with work permission (also known as an EAD card) from the US Citizenship & Immigration Service
- Individuals with other types of immigration status allowing employment

Note: F-2 dependents are not eligible for Social Security Numbers.

Visit the [Dashew Center website](#) or contact us for more information about your eligibility and how to apply.

An SSN is issued once per lifetime. If you have previously had an SSN, but do not have the card or do not remember the number, you can apply for a duplicate card if you meet the eligibility requirements above.

### Business Uses

Most businesses do not need an SSN from you unless it is for credit purposes (loans, credit cards, etc.) If a business requests an SSN solely for ID purposes, you can request that the business create an ID for you. You do not need an SSN to open bank accounts. If a bank clerk insists on seeing your SSN, ask to speak to a manager.

## California Driver's License

Our website has a special section devoted to the [California Driver's License and ID Card procedures](#), but please feel free to review the information below.

California law states that if you are a visitor in California and have a valid driver's license from your home state or country, you may drive here without getting a California driver's license as long as your home state/country license remains valid. However, if you take a job here, become a student or move here, you must get a California driver license if you want to drive. An International Driving Permit is not recognized in the State of California. Therefore, it is highly recommended that you apply for a California driver's license if you will be in California for an extended period of time to avoid any confusion about your documentation (not all police officers will recognize your home country license). To obtain a California driver's license you will need to visit a local Department of Motor Vehicles Office (DMV). Make an appointment online [www.dmv.ca.gov](http://www.dmv.ca.gov) to avoid standing in long lines. You will need to prove your identity and residency in the state of California.



*Photo 3: Driving Highway 1, which winds along the Pacific coast, is a quintessential California trip*

### Required Exams & Learning How to Drive

If this is your first time to apply for a driver's license in the U.S., you will need to take both a written examination and a driving test. If you can show proof that you have a valid driver's license from another state in the U.S., you will only be required to take the written examination. To study for the required written examination, you can download copies of the California Driver's Manual along with sample tests from the DMV website listed above. The test is available in many different languages and if you do not pass it the first time, you can take it up to three times in one day! Once you have passed the written test, you can make an appointment to take the driving test (often scheduled several days later).

You will need to bring your own car. The car you use must be insured and registered with the DMV. Once you pass the road test, you will be issued a temporary driving license until your permanent one arrives in the mail 4 to 6 weeks later. Check the website for current hours of operation. Be aware that the DMV is busy and notoriously slow. For faster service you can download the forms needed for a driver's license from the website and make an appointment online.

In an effort to assist DMV customers for whom English is their second language, the California Driver's Handbook (<https://www.dmv.ca.gov/pubs/pubs.htm>) is available in English, Spanish, Armenian, Chinese, Korean, Punjabi, Russian, Tagalog and Vietnamese. There is also an MP3 audio format in English, designed as a complement to the printed hand book.

If you don't already know how to drive, you can take a driver's education course. There are many to choose from, and oftentimes, they provide training online. Whichever course you decide to follow, make sure it has been certified by the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). See this web site to get started: [https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/dmv/detail/pubs/brochures/fast\\_facts/ffdl33](https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/dmv/detail/pubs/brochures/fast_facts/ffdl33).

### California State Identification Card

The DMV issues ID cards to persons of any age. The ID card looks like a driver's license, but is used for identification purposes only. A regular ID card is valid for 6 years. You may find it helpful to use the identification card instead of carrying your passport with you for certain activities (going to a bar, casino etc.).







## Section 6: Transportation

It's no secret: Los Angeles is infamous for its traffic, which poses challenges to nearly everyone in the city. Also, the public transit system may not be as developed as it is in your home country, and going from one place to another, especially without a car, may require planning and patience.

However, despite all that, most visitors find a way to make their commutes work for them, and as the partner of a student or scholar at UCLA, you might end up surprised at how easy it can be to traverse a city as gigantic as Los Angeles.

Before reading further, please note that our website contains a wealth of information about [transportation and getting around](#), as does the official [UCLA Transportation website](#).

The following sections provide information on ways to travel around Los Angeles, using UCLA/Westwood as a focal point.

## Public Transit

Despite what you may have heard, Los Angeles *does* have a public transportation system. Regional and local buses and trains provide connections to areas throughout Los Angeles County, often at reasonable fares. Making a trip during peak traffic hours can be slow-going, but once you figure out the predictable pattern of LA traffic and can avoid the worst times, trips taken on public transit can be incredibly speedy and convenient!

[Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority](#), also known as “Metro,” provides train and bus transportation throughout the larger L.A. region. To learn more about Metro routes and exact fares (which range between \$.75 and \$1.75 for one-way trips), please visit their website.

While Metro can be useful if you need to travel longer distances across the city, the three local agencies below may be more convenient for journeys closer to the UCLA campus and the West Side of LA:

[Santa Monica Big Blue Bus](#) – these buses mainly connect Westwood, West Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Venice, and Culver City, but some special buses also go to the Los Angeles Airport (LAX), Koreatown, and Downtown. A typical local fare ranges from \$.50 to \$1.25.



*Photo 4: Santa Monica's big blue buses serve much of the West L.A. area around UCLA*

[Culver City Bus](#) – these buses mainly connect Westwood, Culver City, Marina del Rey, Playa Vista, Century City, and Venice, but some buses also go to LAX. A

local fare costs between \$.35 for some riders (students, Seniors etc.), up to \$1.00 for a base adult fare

[UCLA Bruin Bus](#) – these free shuttle buses mainly connect the UCLA campus with Westwood. Some special buses also go to UCLA off-campus apartments and to UCLA Bruin football games in the fall.

## Buying and Owning a Car

Many people in Los Angeles choose to drive a personal car to go from place to place.

While driving a car can provide you and your family with flexibility and freedom, carefully consider the costs of buying, owning, and driving a personal vehicle in California, including: the cost to buy a new or used car, car insurance, maintenance and repair, fuel, time lost in traffic, parking availability, and license and registration requirements. The website [NerdWallet](#) features a calculator that reveals the true cost of car ownership, including all of these costs beyond the price of the car.

If you and your family already own a car and are driving from Canada or Mexico, visit the [Customs and Border Protection webpage](#) on this subject to obtain the necessary import forms and learn procedures.

If you and your family do decide to purchase a car in the U.S., you will want to read the following sections:

### **New and Used Car Dealers**

Both new and used car dealers can be excellent sources for finding a quality used vehicle. These cars may be serviced by the dealer and sold with limited warranties. Ask the dealer how you may contact the car's previous owner if you want to get more information. You can check on a car's history through a service called Carfax at [www.carfax.com](http://www.carfax.com).



*Photo 5: "Off-Road" driving is a popular pastime in some parts of the U.S.*

### **Internet Services**

Shop online for cars and you can make comparisons, get price quotes from dealers, obtain insurance and extended warranties, and even handle financing. Before you buy, do some comparisons of different web sites using similar vehicles to see if their prices are fair. There are several online resources that will allow you to compare different styles and models, evaluate prices and option packages. [www.carsdirect.com](http://www.carsdirect.com).

### **Kelly Blue Book**

[Kelley Blue Book](http://www.kbb.com) provides information about car resale values in the U.S. and gives you an excellent resource for comparing prices, especially for used cars. The "Blue Book" is the nation's number one selling automotive book featuring 15 years of used car values on more than 10,000 models of cars, trucks and vans and is available in bookstores, auto supply stores and other locations.

### **Car Registration**

You must register your car with the state within twenty days if you brought it with you from another state and within thirty days if you purchase it in California. Failure to do so can result in a penalty and other legal difficulties. Registration can be accomplished at the DMV. If your car does not have a California emissions control system, you may have to pay \$300 in fees or have your car retrofitted. Your car may also have to undergo a smog control test. This will cost about \$100. The test can be done at most gas stations, but look for an official "Emissions Control" sign. Don't panic if your car fails the first time. You may only need a tune-up. Consult the Vehicle Registration booklet which you can download from the DMV website for registration fees at [www.dmv.ca.gov/vr/vr.htm](http://www.dmv.ca.gov/vr/vr.htm).

### **Car Insurance**

Drivers have a financial responsibility for personal injury and property damage caused during accidents. The State of California requires that all drivers be insured for this. Major insurance companies include AAA, Allstate, State Farm, and GEICO (Government Employees Insurance Company). Hint for international drivers: a California driver's license is required to get your car insured. Shop around and consider different insurance companies—prices vary. Ask the company if they offer special discounts for a good driving record or any other incentives.

## Parking

In a city like Los Angeles where space is so valuable, areas devoted solely to storing unused cars can be expensive compared to other areas of the United States. Carefully read street signs for parking limits and street cleaning times. Failure to obey these signs or parking in illegal spaces will result in parking citation fees of \$30 and up. For parking rules and regulations, read the California Driver’s Handbook available [www.dmv.ca.gov/pubs/](http://www.dmv.ca.gov/pubs/).

## Rideshare Services (Uber, Lyft etc.)

Many residents of Los Angeles use rideshare services, such as [Uber](#) or [Lyft](#), for occasional or even everyday trips around the city, as the annual total costs of using these services can sometimes be less than the total annual cost of car ownership and parking for some people. Also, many Americans use the service as a safe way to avoid Driving Under the Influence (DUI) of alcohol or other legal drugs after a night out, as penalties for a DUI in the United States can include heavy fines and prison time, and driving while impaired in general is extremely dangerous.

Typically, rideshare services require users to download their respective app onto a smartphone. Once an account has been created and credit card information has been linked to the account, a user can arrange pick up by a freelance driver associated with one of these companies. A single fare for one-way travel depends on factors like: distance traveled, number of passengers, pick up location or destination, peak hours or demand, and/or whether the vehicle is privately reserved or whether riders are grouped together with strangers with destinations along a route (sometimes called a “pool”).

After being dropped off at their destination, rideshare users can rate their driver and/or electronically give a tip for excellent service.

As a safety precaution, always confirm your driver and car before entering any vehicle. Pro tip: ask the driver for *your name* before you get in the car instead of saying your name first.

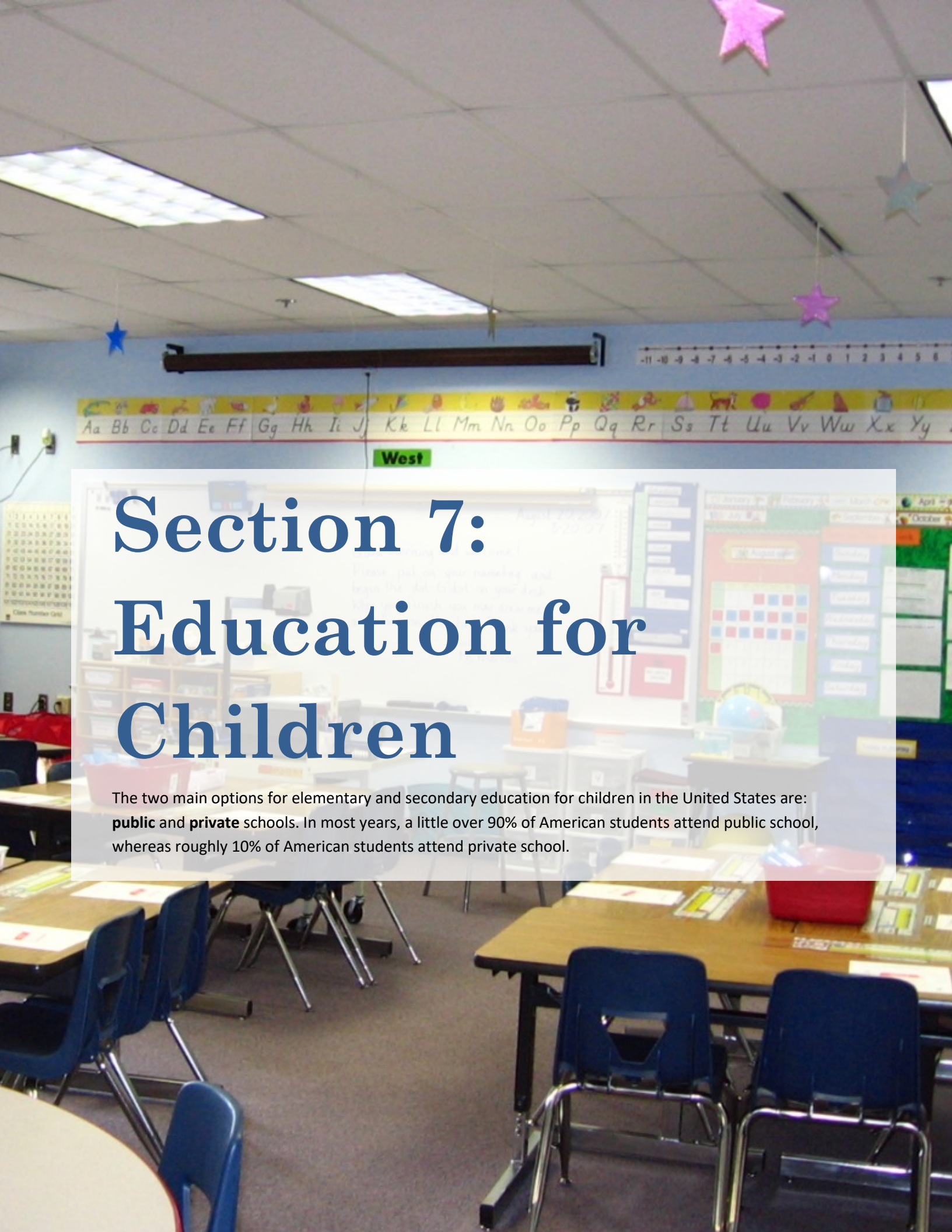
## Alternative Transit

Upon arrival, you may notice that fewer people walk or bike around Los Angeles vs. in cities in your home country. You may come to think that roads here are too dangerous to walk or bike.

There are many complex social, historical and economic reasons behind the urban layouts of U.S. cities, but it is important to know that it is possible to get around Los Angeles by riding a bicycle or walking, especially in certain areas (by the beaches, or around UCLA’s campus).

UCLA Transportation’s website includes comprehensive safety tips for both [walking](#) and [biking](#) as means of getting around.



A photograph of a classroom. In the foreground, there are several wooden desks with blue plastic chairs. The desks are arranged in rows. On the wall, there is a large yellow banner with the alphabet from Aa to Yy, each letter accompanied by a small illustration. Above the banner is a ruler with numbers from -11 to 6. A green sign with the word "West" is mounted on the wall. In the background, there is a whiteboard with some writing, a globe, and various educational posters and charts. The ceiling has fluorescent lights and several colorful stars (pink, blue, and yellow) hanging from it.

# Section 7: Education for Children

The two main options for elementary and secondary education for children in the United States are: **public** and **private** schools. In most years, a little over 90% of American students attend public school, whereas roughly 10% of American students attend private school.

## U.S. Education System Basics

**Preschools (Ages 2.5 - 5):** Preschool is not mandatory and therefore most preschools are privately-owned. You do not need to reserve a space in a preschool prior to your arrival, although spaces at some of the better schools fill up quickly. Before choosing a preschool for your child, visit several to decide where your child would feel most comfortable. Fees range from approximately \$375/month (part-time) to \$1200/month (full-time). Most preschools require children to be toilet trained. State law requires a nap or resting period for all children in preschool.

**Kindergarten (Age 5 or 6):** Kindergarten is the first grade of elementary school. It usually runs for a half-day only — either in the mornings or afternoons. To enter kindergarten in the public school system, your child must be 5 years old by December 1st to start school in September of the same year. Some private schools require that your child be 5 years old by September 5th or October 10th to begin school in September of the same year. Many schools require certain immunizations before the child can begin school. Bring copies of your child’s medical records to the U.S. for this purpose.

**Elementary School (Ages 6-11):** Elementary school includes Kindergarten through 5th grade (K-5).

**Secondary School (Ages 11-18):** Secondary schools include middle school for grades 6, 7 and 8 and high school for grades 9, 10, 11 and 12. In the public school system, elementary, middle schools and high schools may not necessarily be near each other. Many private schools include grades K-8, but there are other configurations depending on the school.

## Public Schools

In the U.S., a “public school” is local school funded by neighborhood, state, and some Federal government money. Attendance at a public school is the default option for many children because public schools are required to provide access to education to any child who lives within its service area (or district), ***regardless of their or your national origin, citizenship or immigration status, or how short or long your family is in Los Angeles for.*** Because public schools are partially funded by local housing taxes, the quality of these schools in Southern California varies considerably. For better or worse, schools in areas with valuable homes tend to get more money per student, while areas with less valuable property tend to get less money per student, though state and Federal funds try to correct imbalances within a system that many see as fundamentally unjust.



*Photo 6: LAUSD buses provide a free way for public school students to get to school*

In California, children must attend public school up until the completion of 12th grade, unless they are enrolled in a private school. Your children will be required to have certain medical exams and vaccinations before entering public school.

### LAUSD Enrollment

To find a public school that works best for your child, check out: [www.greatschools.net](http://www.greatschools.net). By plugging in the zip code or address of where you will live in LA, you can find a map or list of nearby schools ranked on a variety of factors, including college readiness of graduates, course offerings, and overall learning environment.

To enroll your child in a public school near where you live in the LA Unified School District, follow the steps below:

- Find your [School of Residence](#).
- Enroll your child at the School of Residence with:
  - A [Student Enrollment Form](#)
  - Proof of the Child's Age
    - Birth Certificate
    - Baptismal Certificate
    - Passport
  - Proof of Residence / Address
    - Utility Bill
    - Rental/Lease Agreement
    - Property Tax
- Arrange required [immunizations](#).
- Provide Parent/Legal Guardian Identification (parent's Driver's License or Passport).
- Provide Emergency Contact Information.

### Private and Parochial Schools

"Private schools" are schools supported by a private organization or by private individuals. They may receive some government subsidies, but are mostly funded by tuition fees paid by students' parents, donations from alumni, and other support.

Because these schools charge tuition, they can select which students to accept, and some have rigorous admissions procedures and standards. Oftentimes, parents select these schools based on their ability to pay the tuition fees, which can be thousands of dollars per year. In 2018-2019, for a year of elementary education, the national average was \$7,770; for a year of private high school tuition, the average annual cost was \$13,030. Costs can be even higher in Los Angeles: Harvard-Westlake, for example, charges \$31,350 a year in tuition, and Buckley Elementary charges \$28,250 a year.

“Parochial schools” are private schools that are affiliated with a religious organization. In the U.S., historically, many parochial schools have been affiliated with the Catholic Church. Children in parochial schools learn secular subjects, such as math, science, and language arts, but also receive instruction in religion.

To find and enroll your child in a private or parochial school, contact the school that you are interested in directly. As with public schools, the quality of education delivered amongst private and parochial schools can vary, and note that these schools are not required to allow your child to attend.

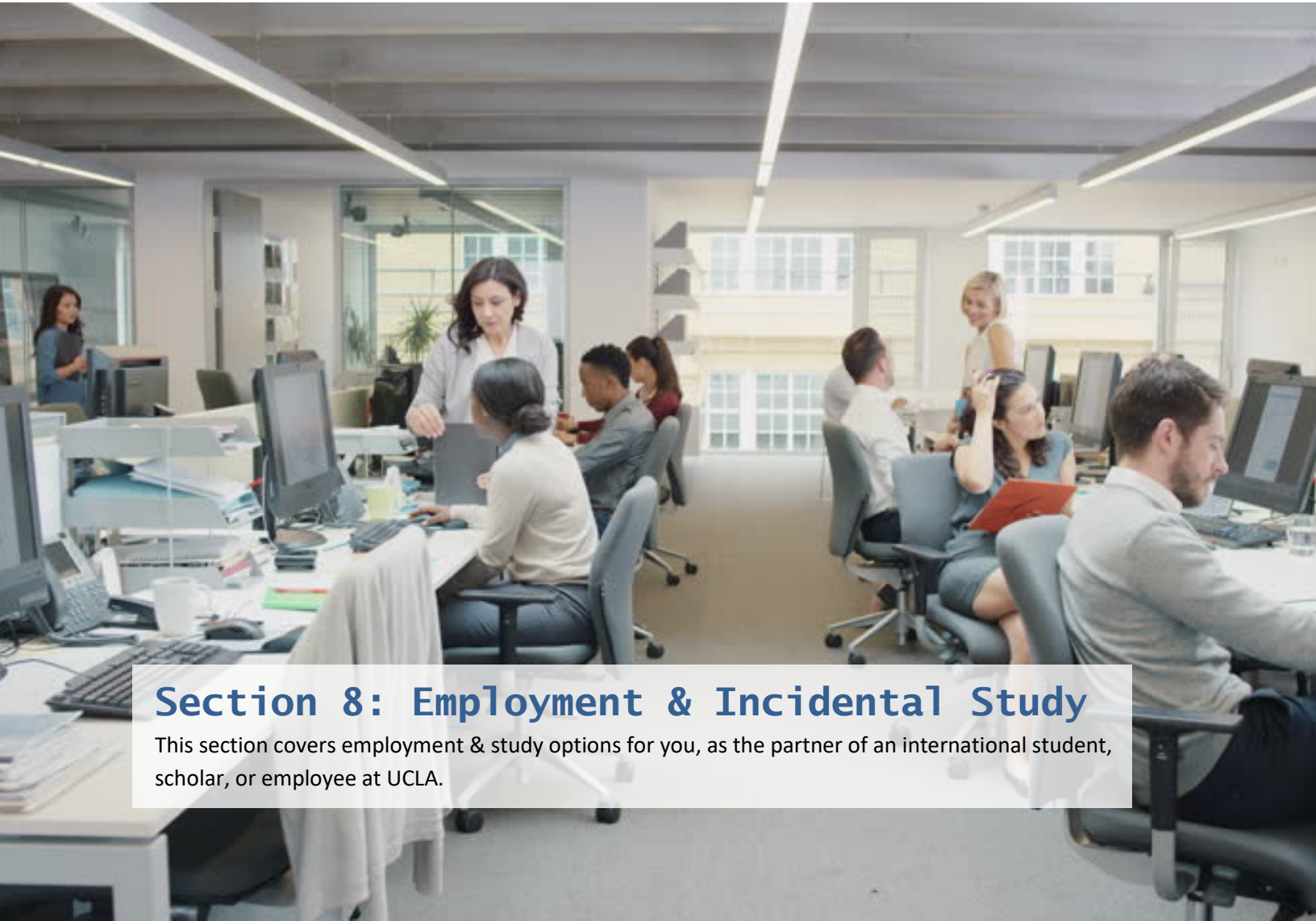


*Photo 7: A private school building in California*

## Homeschooling

Some parents choose to homeschool their children, which is legal in California. If you think this may be an option for you and your family, visit the California Homeschool Association website to learn more: <http://www.hsc.org/home-page.html>.





## Section 8: Employment & Incidental Study

This section covers employment & study options for you, as the partner of an international student, scholar, or employee at UCLA.



***The good news is that many common dependent visa statuses (J-2, H-4, F-2) allow for some type of incidental study after arrival in the U.S., but you or your partner will need to contact DCISS to find out exactly how extensive or limited that study may be.***

Note: if you know that you will study in the U.S. before your initial departure from your home country, you should check with your intended school or university (if it is not UCLA) to see what kind of visa status you will need in order to do so. "Incidental study" generally refers to study that a person, through a roundabout intent, happens to become interested in while in the U.S., whereas if the sole purpose of your visit to the U.S. is to study, that is not "incidental" and you may need to attain a dedicated student status.



## SECTION 9: FAMILY & LEGAL MATTERS

The following sections provide information about issues or topics that may come up during your time in the United States. This information is provided as a courtesy; if you require legal advice, contact a trusted attorney.

## Having a Baby and U.S. Citizenship

If your baby will be born in the U.S. he or she will be considered a U.S. citizen. U.S. laws do not require that your baby give up citizenship from your home country (if they are considered as such by the laws of your country), but your home country may not accept the dual citizenship status. Contact your home country embassy in the U.S. to register their birth and if you have questions about citizenship. Parents of a U.S. citizen child are eligible to apply for U.S. permanent resident status when the child is 21 years old. To travel and re-enter the U.S., your child will need a U.S. passport.

## Unattended Children

In the U.S., there are strict laws about leaving young children alone, either in cars, in public, or at home. The law states that it is a crime to leave anyone in a car who is incapable of getting out without help. These laws stem from cases where young children have died from being left in cars with closed windows in warm weather. In addition, it is considered "child neglect" to leave very young children unattended (such as outside of a restaurant) or home alone.

## Car Safety Seats

California law requires that anyone riding in a moving car must be wearing a seat belt. Children must be secured in an appropriate child passenger restraint (safety seat or booster seat) until they are at least 6 years old or weigh at least 60 pounds. Infants under 20 lbs. must be secured in a rear-facing car seat. For more information, see this link: [cdph.ca.gov/vosp](http://cdph.ca.gov/vosp)



## Taxes in the U.S.

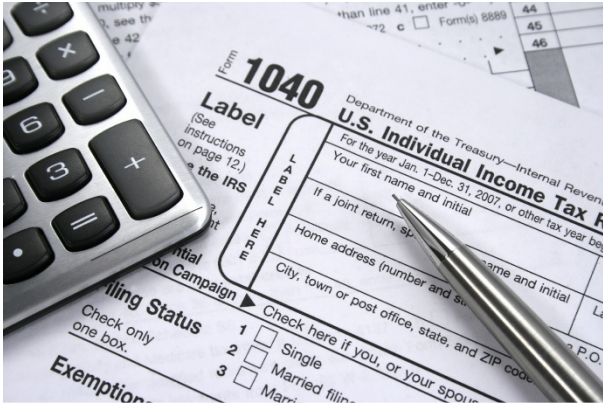
Taxes support collective endeavors within American society, touching all of our lives on a daily basis in areas that range from road provision to education and firefighting. An introduction to common taxes that you might encounter can be found below:

**Sales Tax:** Sales tax is an additional fee added to the regular price of any item sold, except for certain food items. Sales taxes vary by city and county. There is no way to get a refund of sales tax.

**Income Tax:** Income that is taxed includes wages, scholarships and earnings on investments. (A complete list of taxed income may be found in IRS and state tax guides.) The tax is withheld by the employer from the employee's paycheck as an estimated payment of the tax obligation. Some scholarships may have some amount of taxes withheld as well. International students and scholars who have been in the U.S. for any portion of a calendar year, must file an annual tax report (also called a "tax return") by the following year's tax filing deadline, which is usually April 15.

Our website contains [more information about taxes](#).

It is important to note that the Dashew Center for International Students and Scholars cannot provide tax advice, though we do put on workshops during tax season. Filing taxes correctly is an individual's responsibility, and remember that you may need to file even after you have left the U.S.



### Intimate Partner Violence / Abuse

Intimate partner violence and emotional abuse are behaviors used by one person in a relationship to control the other. Violence can be criminal and includes physical assault (hitting, pushing, shoving, etc.), sexual abuse (unwanted or forced sexual activity), and stalking.

Although emotional, psychological and financial abuse are not criminal behaviors, they are forms of abuse and can lead to criminal violence. Although both men and women can be abused, most victims are women.

Get help right away if you think you are in an intimate partner violence situation. Inform yourself of the options and resources that are available to you in the community. In the U.S., there are laws that offer some protection against abuse. If you feel you or your children are being threatened, here's what you can do:

1. Call 911 if you are in immediate danger. The police can escort you and your children safely out of the house and often will take you to a safe place. The police may arrest your abuser if they believe a crime has been committed. If your abuser is arrested, he may be released in as soon as two hours. You can use this time to find a safe place to go.
2. Try to leave the situation and go to a safe place, either a friend's house or a women's shelter. If you can, take your children with you. You can request an emergency protective order from the police so that your abuser will not be allowed access to you. However, you should still take other steps to keep yourself and your children safe. A legal protective order is not always enough to keep you safe. You do not need to be a citizen or legal resident to get a restraining order.
3. Tell someone you trust what is happening to you or call the National Domestic Violence Hotline. They can connect you directly with someone in your area who can help you -- 1-800-799-SAFE (7233).
4. If you are hurt, go to a doctor or a hospital emergency room. Tell them what happened. Ask them to make a record of your visit and injuries. Get a copy.
5. If your abuser is threatening to take your children away or take them to his home country, you can apply for a custody order at any time to prevent this. Contact a family lawyer or a domestic violence advocate to find out how to file for a custody order.



## **Section 10: The U.S. Medical System & Health Insurance Basics**

The following section will hopefully help you and your family understand the U.S. medical system and health insurance, and learn how to receive preventative care to stay healthy and curative care if you become ill.

## Medicine in the U.S.

The medical system in the United States may be radically different from that in your home country. Unlike many other developed nations, the U.S. does not have a single government-sponsored option for health insurance or medical care. Here, a vast industry of non-profit and for-profit hospitals, clinics, and private practices made up of individual doctors provide medical treatment and are called "**Medical Care Providers**" or "**Providers**" for short.

In the U.S., medical treatment, even for simple ailments (a broken bone, a cut finger that requires stitches, etc.) can be expensive, and especially so if one does not have insurance coverage. The average cost of fixing an uncomplicated leg bone fracture without surgery (aka "a broken leg in a cast") is \$2,500, to take one example. The cost of six stitches at an area hospital might cost \$1,500.

It's not all bad news about the U.S. medical system, however: we have some of the best, most highly trained doctors, nurses, and medical professionals in the world, and you can generally expect to receive excellent, modern treatments in sanitary environments at every facility. There are no months-long waitlists for certain procedures, and with health insurance, costs can be manageable vis a vis the quality of care received.



## What is Health Insurance?

"Health insurance," sometimes also called **medical insurance**, is a type of insurance that pays for medical costs and procedures for the insured person. Broadly, health insurance is a financial invention to spread risk amongst a large population and theoretically reduce costs for everyone using it.

It may be easiest to understand what health insurance is through an example:

Brain cancer is statistically quite rare. Only 1.7% of the people who get a cancer at all get brain cancer; this amounts to 300,000 people, *world-wide*, a year. Yet brain cancer can cost \$150,000 to treat.

As a rational person, to protect yourself from brain cancer, you could:

- 1) Save and keep \$150,000 in your bank account ready for use in the unlikely chance that you get brain cancer.
- 2) Not save money to use in case you get brain cancer, and simply hope that you don't get it.

Both options are actually quite bad for most people: saving \$150,000 that you could use for other things (a car, a house, food etc.) on the off chance that you get a super rare form of cancer is not an efficient



use of money. On the other hand, if you save nothing, but ultimately do get brain cancer, you'd have nothing to pay for treatment with and would most likely die without it.

Health insurance tries to provide a third, middle option:

- 3) You pay a small sum of money (much smaller than \$150,000), called a **premium**, to a health insurance company every month. As long as you pay for coverage, if you get brain cancer, your health insurance company will cover most of the \$150,000 treatment cost.

As you can see, with health insurance, individuals can live their lives without having to save huge sums of money for medical care they might never need *or* without worrying that they'll be unable to afford treatment if they do get really sick.

It's true that large numbers of healthy people pay their health insurance premiums and will never need medical treatment. In that case, they will never see the money they pay in premiums come to good use—for them personally, but then again, they also have the benefit of good health and peace of mind to enjoy. Smaller numbers of people will have accidents and illnesses of varying degrees of rarity, but while they won't have good health to enjoy, they won't have to worry about paying for treatment and can focus on healing.

In your home country, your government might pool all citizens into one group and provide low-cost, national coverage—that's great if your system is like that, as there are some economic efficiency reasons that might make sense for your home country's population, and spreading risk amongst a larger pool is usually better.



*Photo 9: Pooling large groups of individuals into health insurance plans spreads risk throughout a population—providing herd-like protection*

The American system isn't like that though. Roughly half of Americans receive health insurance through their employers. Employers offer health insurance plans to employees as a benefit that can be used to retain and attract workers. Sometimes, employers are required to offer this benefit by law. Another half of Americans either rely on special government programs (Medicare, Medicaid) or private group insurance for insurance coverage, or don't have health insurance at all (9% of the U.S. population did not have coverage in 2017). This last group

comprises the most vulnerable people in American society—those who are unemployed, disabled, homeless, or struggling with poverty.

## Your Health Insurance

The kind of insurance that you and your family will have depends a lot on your partner's status at UCLA.

If your partner is a student at UCLA studying for a degree, you most likely will have coverage through UCLA's student health insurance, [UCSHIP](#). If your partner plans to waive UCSHIP, you might have coverage from your home country that meets the UCSHIP waiver requirements. In either case, your insurance is quite good, and you can contact the UCLA Ashe Center, the campus medical care hub for UCSHIP, for more information.

If your partner is a scholar or employee, there are a myriad of different options that might apply, depending on their visa status, appointment title at UCLA, funding source, and more. If you want to know more, have your partner contact her or his prospective UCLA host Department or contact DCISS for more direction.



In general, you will want to **enroll**, or sign up for, health insurance coverage for you and your family from the first day that you arrive in the United States.

### How to Use Your Health Insurance

While the idea of health insurance—to spread risk amongst a population—is quite simple, actually using it to receive medical care once you and your family are enrolled can be complicated. The steps below are generalized, and may not apply to every situation; you may need to contact your health insurance company to learn more. **Note: if you experience a medical emergency while in the U.S., call 911 and try to go to the nearest Emergency Care Facility immediately.**

Have your health insurance card and other personal information ready for these steps:

**Step 1:** Talk to trusted friends, use your health insurance company's "Find a Provider Tool," or use the internet to find a Medical Care Provider that can treat your specific illness or injury.

**Step 2:** Call or otherwise confirm that the Provider accepts your insurance. Some providers might not be in your health insurance **network**, which is a group of doctors and hospitals that your health insurance company has negotiated good rates (lower prices) with. Going to an **Out-of-Network** provider can cost a lot more.

**Step 3:** If the provider accepts your insurance, make an appointment.

**Step 4:** Go to your appointment and receive treatment.

**Step 5:** Before or after your treatment, the provider may ask you to pay for the portion of costs that your health insurance may not cover, such as your: **copayment**, or copay-- a flat payment made by you (especially for health services) in addition to that made by an insurer; any applicable **co-insurance**, or

the percentage of allowed charges for covered services that you're required to pay; and/or the **deductible**, a specified amount of money that you must pay before an insurance company will pay.

**Step 6:** Your medical provider may send you a bill for updated costs, even months after you receive treatment. You may need to make a **claim**, or a formal request for coverage or compensation, with your health insurance company using the bill in order to get some costs paid for.



Sometimes, your health insurance company might reject your **claim** if you try and apply for compensation for a procedure that is not covered by your plan. Cosmetic, dental, and other “elective” (or not strictly required for health) procedures may not be covered. It's important to read your health insurance plan booklet to understand what is and isn't covered.

Lastly, it's good to know your plan's **Out-of-Pocket Maximum**, which is the maximum amount of money you will pay for covered services during a benefit period (for example, over the course of a year). The out-of-pocket maximum never includes your premium, balance-billed charges, or services your health insurance plan doesn't cover. The out-of-pocket maximum will vary from plan to plan but can include copayments, deductibles, and co-insurance. Once you have paid the full amount toward your out-of-pocket maximum, your insurance will pay 100% of the allowed amount for your covered healthcare expenses.

If you have more questions about health insurance, feel free to contact your health insurance company directly. If you are completely lost, contact DCISS, and we can at least direct you to further resources.



## *Conclusion*

To conclude, UCLA is a large university set against the backdrop of a huge, megadiverse American city. Without a doubt, you and your family will soon be exploring your new home and all that life has to offer here in Los Angeles.

Know that the information above is by no means exhaustive, and we once again welcome you to review the sections under the [Resources page](#) of the DCISS website if you couldn't find what you were looking for in this handbook.

As always, if you have questions, please feel free to contact the Dashew Center. If we don't have the answer to your question, we are more than happy to connect you to someone or to a resource that does.

Ultimately, that's part of why we're here: to serve you, your partner, and your family, so that in either direct or indirect ways, UCLA can pursue its mission in the "creation, dissemination, preservation and application of knowledge for the betterment of our global society."

### **Credit**

Some of the information in this handbook is adapted or borrowed from the University of California – Berkeley's International Office "Arrival Guide". That guide was an invaluable aid in the production of this resource for the UCLA community, and credit must be given where credit is due: thank you to our NorCal colleagues!