

# Welcome to The College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Houston!

We're so glad that you are joining one of our graduate programs! Current graduate students and faculty from across the college have compiled this document to help you prepare for the coming academic year, and to make the transition a little easier.

But first and foremost: please don't hesitate to reach out to the Graduate Director or Graduate Advisor in your department if you have questions. We are here to help!

## GETTING ORIENTED

As a graduate student you will be interacting with three different levels of the university. You have been admitted to a degree-granting program that is run by a department. These departments make up the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences –informally known as “CLASS”. At the university level, the UH Graduate School sets general admissions rules and many curriculum rules and requirements. The UH International Student Services Office (ISSO) helps international graduate students with visas and similar issues. Offices and staff at all three levels collaborate to help students navigate their studies. But in general, if you have a question or a problem, start at the department level. That's true even before your first classes start.

Here are general resources worth reviewing as you look ahead to the start of the academic year. In fact, these are good resources to revisit at all stages of your academic career!

**\*[The Graduate School webpage for newly admitted students](#)**

This tells you how to enroll, how to get your CougarCard (your campus i.d.), how to pay, and when the graduate student orientation takes place. The [Graduate Funding](#) web page is also helpful.

**\*Your **department's** graduate program web pages & graduate handbooks**

These will have information about course requirements and sequences, program-specific rules about how to stay in good standing in your program, and expectations concerning qualifying exams & thesis requirements (as applicable).

**\*The [Graduate Catalogue](#)**

This contains university level policies, such as how to remain in good standing at the university level, who is eligible for certain types of scholarships, how long you have to finish an incomplete, etc.

\*[The CLASS Graduate Studies web page](#)

This has information on college policies, including how, when and where to submit a finished thesis or dissertation. You don't need to know that yet, but it won't be long before you will!

\*[UH Information for New International Students](#)

This page has information on everything from visas and required documents to health insurance and airports.

## GETTING SETTLED IN HOUSTON

If you are moving to Houston, it's worth knowing that a) the Houston metropolitan area is very big, and b) Houston is a car-oriented city. When looking for housing consider checking the distance AND the weekday commute times to UH; housing is generally more affordable in areas outside Houston's "Inner Loop", but some locations may be further than they look due to perennially bad traffic. There are good options for those who want to live closer or rely on public transportation, including on-campus housing, and housing located in Midtown or in EaDo ("East Downtown") on the light-rail line between UH and downtown Houston. Many apartment complexes offer virtual tours of their properties. If you need to sign a lease before you arrive in Houston, your department may be able to find a current graduate student who could drive by the building to take a look before you sign the lease.

[University of Houston Housing](#) Many graduate students find it convenient to live on campus at least their first year. There are multiple apartment-style options; Cambridge Oaks and University Lofts have the reputation of being more oriented towards graduate students.

[Houston Area Realtors Apartment Rental Site](#)

[Houston Metro Bus & Rail Maps](#)

If you haven't yet visited the UH campus, here are two good resources for helping you visualize the campus and navigate:

[Virtual campus tour](#)

[Campus map](#) Click on the buildings on the map to see what they look like.

## MAKING IT OFFICIAL PART 1: TO BE DONE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

There are many small steps to complete before you can be fully enrolled (and, if applicable) employed at UH. Here is a list of some of the main items to cross off your list. This is not a complete list – every student’s situation is different. But these are items that most students need to take care of.

\*Submit your **official transcripts** for **ALL** previous institutions if you submitted unofficial transcripts when you applied. If you have recently completed a degree, be sure that the degree is officially conferred before you request the transcript. The BA/BS degree award must show up on the transcript.

\*International students: please carefully read the ISSSO [check in page](#) for important information about visas, required documents and a required orientation for international students.

\*Activate your **Cougarnet** account. Visit [AccessUH](#) and create your account using the seven-digit student identification number located at the top of the offer letter that you received through ApplyWeb.

\*Apply for a [CougarCard](#): this is the UH official ID card; it also serves as an electronic access card for some buildings. You can also load money onto it and use it like a debit-card for on-campus restaurants, bookstore and other businesses. Distribution of student CougarCards has been disrupted by campus closures. Check the web site for information on details on how to sign up for this once distribution resumes.

\*Apply for a **parking permit**, if you need one. Currently these are not being issued; keep checking the [Parking](#) web site for information. There are parking maps that can help you determine the right parking zone. Or, if you want to take public transport or cycle to campus, in the past there have been subsidy programs through the [COAST](#) program; check the web page for current details.

\***Health Insurance.** All students must have health insurance, either through UH or through some documented other coverage. To see the enrollment deadlines for the 2021-2022 academic year, and for other details, see the [Student Health Insurance](#) webpage.

\*If you haven’t already done so, check with your department advisor about **enrolling for fall courses**. New students can and should enroll in courses before arriving at UH. The last day you can enroll yourself in fall courses is August 30, 2021. Advisors MAY be able to enroll you for a few days after that, depending on department policies.

\*If you will be **employed** at UH in any capacity:

-Your department should contact you during the summer to get information to start the hiring process. A background check is a mandatory part of this process (except for some international students who have this as part of the visa process.) This should all be completed BEFORE you arrive on campus.

-You will need to have a bank account that will accept direct deposit of your paycheck.

-Once on campus you will need to visit the Human Resources (“HR”) department to complete the I-9 and e-verify process establishing your identity and your right to work. [The HR I-9 web page](#) lists the documents you will need for this process. International students: please look at the “Resources” tab on this page for information for international employees.

-After you are added to the list of active employees, you will be required to complete several online trainings that are mandatory for all UH employees. You will be notified about these through your UH e-mail.

-If you have any state debt (for instance, a parking fine or fee at another Texas university) you will need to clear this before UH will be able to hire you.

-TA and RA positions are paid on a monthly basis. For payment purposes, the first employment month in the fall semester starts on September 1, and *your first paycheck will arrive on October 1*. Your actual work may start slightly before the semester if you are helping prepare classes; check with your department about this. (If you are paid on a 9-month basis, your last paycheck will arrive June 1).

## MAKING IT OFFICIAL PART 2: ONCE YOU ARRIVE/AROUND THE START OF THE SEMESTER

**\*Orientations.** These are held to help you get off to a good start with your studies, mostly in the week before classes start. At these sessions you will learn about important resources to assist you, and you will learn about policies that affect you as students and (in some cases) as university employees.

\*[Graduate School](#): Required for all new graduate students. Tuesday, August 17<sup>th</sup>.

\*Department: most departments have one or more orientation sessions for new students. Check with your department.

**\*International Student Document Check in:** Required for all international students. See [ISSO webpage](#) for schedule of sessions and which documents to bring.

**Parking & Traffic** Especially during the first two weeks of the fall semester, parking slots can be hard to find and traffic around UH can be very heavy. Expect this and allow plenty of time to get to your orientations and first classes.

Some “[life hacks](#)” from the UH Graduate School

## GETTING OFF TO A GOOD START

Current and recent graduate students suggested some campus resources that may be helpful as you launch into your first semester.

**The UH Libraries.** Books and journals and so much more! The [UH libraries](#) offer many services, including database access, inter-library loan, individual study carrells, and more. Each department has an assigned research librarian who can help with research needs in your area. Many services can be accessed on-line, but it's worth visiting the physical libraries as well to see all that they have to offer.

**Free software training.** The UH [Hewlett Packard Enterprise Data Science Institute](#) offers software training courses for programs such as Python, Linux, R, and others.

**Free software.** Free or reduced cost software for UH students can be downloaded from University Information Technology. Look for the “software download” icon on your AccessUH screen. Obtain free access for some common programs through [the UH Library's virtual license arrangement](#). Available programs include Adobe Photoshop, Stata, Matlab, and Endnote.

**Student Health Center.** You can use your UH student insurance at the [Student Health Center](#) on campus. The Health Center offers vaccinations, check-ups and non-emergency care. There are also on-campus options for dentistry, optometry and an on-campus pharmacy.

**Counseling.** Adjusting to a new program, a new school and even a new country can be difficult. If you are feeling stressed or sad and want to talk, [UH Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) is there to help. It has a free “Let's talk” program, and consultation services to steer you to more specialized resources. There are also tele-health opportunities. You can reach CAPS any time at 713-743-5454. In case of emergency, call 911.

**Banking.** There are many banking options in Houston. One credit union, [TDECU](#), has a branch on campus.

**Some other UH offices that are here to help:**

[UH financial aid office](#) and the FAFSA form: <https://studentaid.gov/>

[Center for Students with Disabilities](#)

[UH Veterans Services](#)

[Women and Gender Resource Center](#)

[LGBTQ Resource Center](#)

[UH Children's Learning Center](#)

## LIVING IN HOUSTON

Graduate school isn't only about academic work: it's also about making connections with other students and faculty, and about gaining new perspectives and yes, even about having fun! Here are some suggestions from students of a few fun places to know about.

### On campus:

**The Student Center** Visit here for several fast food restaurants, some open weekends and evenings. Food trucks can be found out front during the semester. Other amenities include a computer store (Cougar Byte), an ice cream shop and even a bowling alley!

**Coffeeshops** There are several coffee sources on campus, each attracting different crowds. Starbucks in the [Student Center](#) and [Health2](#) and other locations; the student-run CougarGrounds in the [University Hilton](#), and [The Nook](#). Vietnamese coffee and bubble tea are available at [Tealicious](#).

**CougarRed Fridays:** Show your school spirit on Fridays by wearing a Cougar Red t-shirt or tie or scarf or socks. Visit the cafeteria at [Moody Towers](#) or [Cougar Woods](#) and get an all-you-can-eat lunch for \$5. This is a good way to catch up with fellow students!

**[Recreation at the Wellness Center](#)** Your student fees give you *free!* access to this spacious facility, with features such as an indoor pool for serious swimming and an outdoor recreational pool, a climbing wall, a weight room, and fitness equipment. Campus recreation also offers lessons, group classes such as Zumba and Yoga, team sports. It rents equipment for weekend trips such as kayaks and bicycles.

**Arts Entertainment:** UH has nationally-recognized programs in music, drama and dance. Each semester students have opportunities to catch free or reduced-price performances by rising young performers, or from alumni and other famous guests. For performance schedules, see the events web page of the [McGovern College of the Arts](#).

**Sports:** UH competes in NCAA Division 1 athletics. To translate for the international students, that means that college sports is a big deal on campus. UH has a pretty new football stadium and a newly renovated basketball arena, so whether this is your first time seeing American football live, or whether you are a hardcore fan, attending games can be lots of fun. A certain number of free tickets are set aside for students for all games. There are restrictions on what you can bring. (Football games can disrupt traffic and parking lots too, so pay attention to sports at least enough to be aware of this.) Check the [UH Athletics](#) web site for more details.

## Off campus:

Where to begin? Houston is a great town for live music, for professional sports, and for restaurants. Many restaurants are quite affordable, with cuisines reflecting the diversity of Houston's population.

The [Houston Visitor Guide](#) offers some good suggestions for all activities, plus neighborhood restaurant guides.

For **fun neighborhoods** not too far from campus, try exploring EaDo ("East Downtown"), Downtown, Midtown, Washington Avenue, The Heights, Montrose, and Rice Village.

**Museums:** the [Museum of Fine Arts Houston](#), the [Contemporary Arts Museum](#), the [Menil Collection](#), the [Houston Museum of Natural Science](#), the [Houston Museum of African American Culture](#), the [Holocaust Museum](#), the [Buffalo Soldiers Museum](#), the [Children's Museum](#). Most museums have reduced rates with student id.

**Arts:** Houston has many professional arts organizations. The largest companies include the Houston Ballet, the Houston Grand Opera, the Houston Symphony, and the Alley Theater. All of them perform in downtown theaters. Touring Broadway shows perform at the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts. There are also many smaller performing arts organizations for music, theater and dance, as well as live readings by authors.

**Arts & Live Music:** You can find out about live music and happenings on the events websites of [The Houston Chronicle](#), the [Houston Press](#) and [CultureMap](#) (among others).

**Outdoor fun:** Hermann Park, Memorial Park, the [Houston Zoo \(free with UH student id!\)](#), the beach at Galveston, [birdwatching at High Island and other wildlife sanctuaries](#) (especially in the spring and fall migration seasons), hiking and camping at [Brazos Bend State Park](#).

In conclusion: We hope that this brief guide has answered some of your questions and sparked your curiosity to explore the University of Houston campus and our wider region. The faculty, advisors and current students in your chosen program look forward to personally welcoming you to the University of Houston!