A pamphlet for new coming students
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Read Me

We hereby share some priceless information and experiences that we hope will be helpful to you. Please be informed that each report has been written by different Iranian students with unique backgrounds and lifestyles that may be different from your own. We suggest that you use this as a resource to give you some ideas of your options here to then ultimately make your own choices. However we do provide you with some suggestions you may or may not like. Keep in mind that some of this information may become outdated depending on when you read this document. All in all, ISAUSC does not accept any responsibility for any inconvenience.
Urban Columbia

The Columbia, South Carolina area encompasses six counties, including Richland (including the city of Columbia), Lexington, Kershaw, Calhoun, Fairfield, and Saluda. With approximately 650,000 people (population of the city alone is about 130,000). Columbia is South Carolina’s largest metropolitan area. The city lies at the confluence of two rivers, the Sluda and the Broad, which merge at Columbia to form the Congaree River. The distances between counties are not in the walking range and you should have a car. The public transportation is hard to use and sometimes waste of time here.

There are some other beautiful parks near the Columbia area such as:

Saluda shoals Park- A 300 acre park along the banks of the Saluda River.

Sequicentennial State Park - On 1419 acres in the Northeast Columbia area, this park features a beautiful 30-acre lake surrounded by trails and picnic areas.

Harbison state forest - The park encompasses 2,177 acres of forestland only nine miles from downtown Columbia and features 18 miles of trails designed for walking, jogging, hiking and bicycling that range from moderately easy to difficult.

Also there are many lakes and rivers in the nearby area, offering those interested in boating, fishing, canoeing, and kayaking the chance to participate in these activities. Some of the best attraction near the Columbia downtown is:

Lake Murray:

Although initially constructed in the 1930’s as a hydroelectric generating facility, Lake Murray has become a major recreation destination in central South
Carolina. Bordering Lexington, Chapin and Irmo, and only a short drive from Columbia (half an hour), Lake Murray is enjoyed by thousands of people every week. At 41 miles long and 14 miles wide at its widest point, Lake Murray covers an area of 78 square miles with 649 miles of shoreline. With dozens of Lake Murray marinas, boat landing and ramps, it is easy to find a place to put boat into the water. There are plenty of places to rent boat for a few hours or a few days. You don’t need a boat, however, to enjoy Lake Murray. There are several parks and recreation areas where can spend the day swimming, fishing, sun bathing and cook-out.

**Riverbanks Zoo and Garden:**

One of Columbia’s greatest assets is Riverbanks Zoo and Garden. Riverbanks Zoo is a sanctuary for more than 2,000 animals housed in natural habitat exhibits along the Saluda River. Just across the river, the 280,000 m² botanical garden is devoted to gardens, woodlands, plant collections, and historic ruins. Riverbank has been named one of America’s best zoos. It is about 10 min drive from down town of Columbia. For more information visit this site: [http://www.riverbanks.org](http://www.riverbanks.org)

**Congaree National Park:**

Congaree National Park provides a sanctuary for plants and animals, a research site for scientists, and a place for walking and relaxing in a tranquil wilderness. Activities at Congaree National Park include hiking, primitive camping, bird watching, picnicking, canoeing & kayaking; Ranger guided interpretive walks and canoe tours. The trails are easy to walk, the shortest one is about 45 min and the longest will take half a day to walk. The best times to visit are in fall, winter and spring. Summer will be hot and humid and it will be the chance of the flooding of the river. It is located at the south of the Columbia and will take 40 min from down town driving. You can find more detailed information at [this link](http://www.riverbanks.org):
Weather Conditions

Columbia is located in southeast of the United States and roughly 1hr driving distance from Atlantic Ocean in Charleston. Therefore, it is expected to have a humid climate with mild winters, warm springs and autumns, and very hot and humid summers. The average low and high temperature for the whole year are summarized in the following chart. There are distinct four seasons in Columbia. Spring is very nice weather and so much T-shower raining is expected especially in April. Summer is hot, and the weather can be comparable to Babol in Iran. Usually limited raining and windy days has been observed in summer. Fall is almost nice weather like spring but much more raining is expected. Last month of fall and first two months of winter are almost cold. Columbia usually does not have much snow in winter. However, in the past two years, Columbia had very good experience of snow falling, although totally no more than one week and the temperature didn't go be below -5°C. The storm, heavy rain and ice rain are most common in Columbia's winter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Jan</th>
<th>Feb</th>
<th>Mar</th>
<th>Apr</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>Jun</th>
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<th>Dec</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average high °C</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average low °C</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Airplane Tickets

All right, so you are ready to fly to your dream land. Here I try to cover some important points that you need to know to plan your flight to US. As you may know, in Iran all flight plans (especially international flights) are arranged by flight agencies. So it should not be difficult to find a flight that matches your personal preferences. You normally go to a flight agency and ask them to find a couple of flights with different routes and you reserve your preferred flight before confirmation. Once you are ready to leave Iran you confirm the flight. I know that you have the experience of a flight to another country since you already had to go for an interview for your student visa (Unless you traveled by car to one of the neighbor countries for visa interview). One important point here is that you should be planning ahead of time for your flight to US. So be prepared and reserve a flight as soon as you can. You can reserve a flight 2 to 3 month before your departure date. Don’t leave it to the last week or month since it will be more difficult and expensive to find a flight close to your departure date. Always reserve 2 to 3 different flights for different dates. This will give you some flexibility when you are ready to departure. Please ask your flight agency for reservation policies. You may need to cancel the non-preferred reservations in a specific time frame to prevent any cancellation fees. While reserving a flight consider the following criteria:

- Flight length
- Arrival & departure times
- Time between connection flights
- Route
- Cost
- Airline
If you are coming to Columbia, SC as your final destination then the airport Code for Columbia airport is CAE. So ask your flight agency to use CAE as your final destination. You can also use Columbia, South Carolina. (Never use “Columbia” alone since we have couple of cities in US in different states with the name of Columbia!).

As the time of writing this guide, I’m not aware of any direct flight from Iran to any US airport. So most probably your flight will be through one connecting airport in Europe or a Middle Eastern country. Since the available flight schedules for different companies will change monthly, I would not be able to give an exact flight route or airline to follow. The Columbia airport is NOT an international airport and you will not be able to find a direct flight to Columbia airport from Europe. So normally you will have a two stop flight from Iran to Columbia, SC. Your flight will be from Iran to a major airport in Europe or Middle East and from there to a major airport in US and finally to Columbia. Here are some examples of the flight routes that students had in the past.

- Tehran- Frankfurt- US by Lufthansa
- Tehran- Amsterdam –US by KLM
- Tehran- Milan –US by Alitalia
- Tehran- Paris – US by Air France
- Tehran – London –US by British Airways
- Tehran –Dubai –US by Emirates
- Tehran – Doha – US by Qatar Airlines
- And many other options…..

The first airport in the US that you arrive at from a foreign country is call “Arrival Airport” (For documentation purposes). Some of the major arrival airports in US that you may arrive at (based on your flight route and airline) are:

- New York, John F Kennedy International (JFK)
- New York, Newark Liberty International Airport (EWR)
- Atlanta, Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL)
- Washington, Dulles International Airport (IAD)
- Chicago, Chicago O'Hare International Airport (ORD)
- Charlotte, Charlotte Douglas International Airport (CLT)
- Houston, Houston George Bush Airport (IAH)

These are just some examples and you may arrive at any other international airport at US. Also depending on your airline you may have limited options in choosing your arrival airport. For example one airline may just have a flight to JFK and not to the other airports. Other than personal preference there would be really no difference in choosing your arrival airport. All of them would be the same and you normally follow the same procedures after arrival. Since your final destination is Columbia, SC then you normally wait at the arrival airport for your connecting flight to Columbia which would be a Local flight. Some big airports like JFK and ORD are somehow busy and you may need more time after arrival for the arrival procedures and moving to your departure gate. While you are on the plane to your arrival airport, the flight attendants will give you a **U.S. Customs and Border Protection Declaration Form**. This form is given to all passengers on international flights to US and should be filled in before landing. It’s a very simple form for custom declaration and you should specify what you carry with yourself while entering the US. This form is collected by flight attendants or you may have to give it at arrival gate to an officer. All international students arriving at US will have a short Interview at the airport’s immigration office after arrival. It’s an easy interview with couple of questions about why you came to us and what you will be studying and so on. Please notice that this procedure may take 3 to 4 hours since many people will arrive at the same time and you may have to stay in line for your interview for a long time. So while planning your flight, always leave 3 to 4 hours between your connecting flights in the US. Recently we heard that there will be no arrival
procedures for international student at US. Since I was not sure about that I tried to cover this section.

Flight delays are very common in US especially in big airports. If after your arrival you faced a long delay, or even if you missed your connecting flight, don’t panic. Stay calm and talk with the airline staff. They normally give you an option to go with the next available flight or they will provide you with accommodation if you have to stay overnight. Always there is a small chance that you lose your luggage. Sometimes your luggage may arrive with the next flight. Always carry all your important documents with you onboard and never put them in your luggage. Normally at your arrival airport, you need to get your luggage from the international arrivals and hand them over to your local departure flight. If you lost your luggage you need to go to lost and found office at your final destination and claim your luggage. Always contact “International Student Services” or “Iranian Student Association at USC” to arrange for your pick up at Columbia airport. Provide us with your flight plan and we will arrange for your pick up at any time. We hope to see you here soon. Have a safe and fun trip.
Suitcase, Men’s Clothing

For classics, such as suits, classic shoes, tuxedos, the preference is to bring all of them with you. Or buy them if you have time and the money. The reason is that, in Iran, you can easily find any classic that fits your taste with reasonable price and good material. You have a lot of options, you can dictate the “dookht”, you know where to find what you want, and so forth. Here on the other hand, they styles are different, the prices are higher and the “dookht” is also different. So, bring your classics for your convenience. The same story for classic shoes, I wouldn’t risk it. You might want to buy one or two (or three!) pair of them to bring with you. Take the space you have into account, keep the balance somehow. But you don’t have to bring too many classic clothes with you as you won’t probably need them more than twice a year for occasions like Nowrooz/Shabe Yalda or a conference/formal presentation maybe. Note that, for ties, shirts, socks and belts, you don’t need to worry.

But you can leave all your sport clothes behind if you don’t have enough space for them in your suitcases. Anything you can find in Iran you can find here for a less price. And one thing to remember is, you may spend a lot of money on sport clothes in Iran and once you are here you find out they don’t match with the atmosphere here. So, if you are decided to get your sport clothes in Iran, give it a second thought.

Warm clothes! Don’t worry! You won’t need them much. But bring those you already have and the ones you like most. I wouldn’t buy warm clothes from Iran to bring here as you can find anything you can imagine here.
Suitcase, Women’s Clothing

As all of you know there is a restriction on the weight of your suitcases, and also on the number of them that you can carry with yourself to the plane cabin, only a small briefcase or backpack will be allowed, therefore; you’d better to get know about allowed weight, size and the number of the suitcases and luggage in each airlines, for example: Lufthansa airline the backpack or bag weight is 8 Kg and you can have two suitcases that each of them should be less than 20 Kg. To be certain you have to check them before start packing; their rules may change each year. What to bring and what not is a question which is mostly ask. The copy of your transcript, passport, visa, I-20 and other important documents which are separated from their originals should be carried with yourself to the airplane for more safety and easy accessibility. It is also wisely to have a copy of them in Iran too, may be in a case you need them. Carry the most part of your money (the amount that you need for your first month’s costs before opening a bank account in the US, which should be around 2000$ or more) in the trip check form. If in case you are not able to change your money as soon as you enter in the US you’d better to have 200$ cash in form of 1$, 5$, 10$, 20$ for your primary costs. Prepare a list of items packed in your suitcase, in the case of missing suitcase you can easily asked for them by having your packed list. Put items that you may need them upon your arrival in the bag or backpack that you want to carry it with yourself into the plane cabin like cosmetic items, cardigan and all your legal, educational and medical documents. Not only your delivered luggage to the loaded section of the airplane but also your carried bags to the plane cabin will be scanned by the scanners in the airport and even may be searched. Random inspection may be also done, all passengers also United States citizens are also included in this checking process. Do not lock your luggage, or use only the locks which are approved by the transportation safety administration. Do not put your books on each other because the screening machines are unable to detect
them. You should know about the items that are not allowed to be carried in the plane cabin like gels, liquid and sprays. Other items that may not be allowed in your hand bag can include nail clipper, scissors, razor, pocket knife and any sharp pointed tools. You can put them in your luggage which will be delivered to the loaded part of the plane. Also, knowledge of customs regulations is important. Some items require a special license to enter the United States of America or are totally prohibited, including any medication and drugs which are considered illegal in the United States of America. According to the weather here in Columbia the time when you reach here is warm. Trying to bring more summer clothes seems much more reasonable. Just in case it also seems wise to bring a rain coat for a rainy weather. There are too many stores and shops here that you can buy your warm clothes which are not only better but also cheaper than in Iran. For example regarding buying jackets and coats you can find a Calvin Klein brand jacket which is really warm around 75 $. Here in US you must try to buy your cloths at the end of the each season because the prices are really cut off. For fall coming students who should be in Columbia in mid of the Aug is the best time for buying clothes. Just trying to bring indoor clothes such as a sleep clothes because the fashion here is completely different from Iran and sometimes you need to come along with it. Don’t be stressed about going for shopping because in most of these stores when you spend money more than the borderline that they mention shipping will be free and you can easily buy them online. About shoes you can also easily check the price online and compare with Iran then make your decision. As a girl when you come here and become a friend with the foreign girls from other countries or US you may get involved in KHALEHBAZI and sometimes you need to give others birthday gifts or souvenir. Do not enclose your gifts because of the security scanning in the airport. It seems wise to bring something like KHATAM( maybe you want to give something to your PI), small earrings, waved necklaces, headbands, something which is especially from our own country it is really interesting for your foreign friends. Try to bring your
hard disk books instead of the heavy one and do not forget your laptop. Although you can use the library computers, you really need it. Here your Lappi become your close friend. The most important thing that you should bring with yourself is the voltage convertor, as you know the voltage here is 120 V, it is really hard to find a convertor here and sometimes they are really expensive. If you want to bring your epilation device, hair dryer or any other electrical devices, pay attention to the allowed voltage too. Bringing some medications like pain killer, antihistamine, antacid, digestive, and everything that you need them may be helpful for the couple weeks. About the contact lenses here you cannot buy them from the stores you need to see a doctor then order them, bringing your new pairs from Iran to save your budget.

Here is some of the store and shopping centers websites to get know about the prices here and also the fashion and the style that people dress here.

**Macy’s**: is really liked by most of the girls here and it is a chain store, you can easily return everything that you have bought according to the return policy if you do not like them. You can also easily do apply for its credit card and get the benefits of its coupon and sales.

**Belk**: It is a chain store and is one the girls’ favorite in US.

**jcpenney**: You may like it.

**Victoria’s Secret**: You can find the best underwear and bras here. Then you become addicted to it. It is not comparable with any other brands.
Suitcase, Cooking

Polo Paz e Irani (Pars Khazar 110 dare)

Sabzi Khoshk

Peste (sayer e khoshkbar mesl e Gerdo va Badaam ba kifiat hube inja mojood hast)

Ajil e Shirin (age doost darid)

Lavashak

Lape

Kashk e Khoshk (age estefade mikoni)

Zaffarn va bazi Advijat mesl e Zardchoobe va Felfel e Seyah

Zereshk

Nabat

Farsh e Sabok e Khanegi

**Tosie:** Az avardan har goone mavad e ghazayi e dige khod dari konid, hame chiz inja hast vali ba taam hay motefavet, arzesh e avordan nadare

**Tosie:** khodam ye seri ketab avordam ke be dard nakhord, be nazar e man ketab az Iran nayarid
Suitcase, Other

First of all, I strongly suggest you to bring your necessary personal things which you need every day. Because you are so confused of your movement during the first days and so it may be difficult to go shopping and provide these stuffs!

You can find all of electrical tools at very good prices here so you do not need to carry these kinds of things during your trip. However, if you prefer to bring something, it will be suggested to have the suitable outlet convertor. If you have, bring your personal laptop, otherwise you can buy a suitable laptop with an acceptable price online in US.

Try to buy the crucial and essential tablets such as Acetaminophen and Adult Cold as much as you can (do not worry! You will not be in trouble in the airports just leave them inside your big suitcases).

Besides, if you would like to smoke hooka in US!!! You can bring a small hooka including all of stuffs (gardoone and anbor :D). It is very rare and expensive here.

Also, you better to have some beans (hoboobot such as loobia and lappe) to make you favorable Iranian foods if you are a good cooker. (limoo amani yadetun nare!!!!!!!). Although you can find different types of rice cooker here, I suggest you to buy a rice cooker from Iran (bache ha migan Pars Khazar!!) because it works better for our Iranian food habits (maslan age tahdig behkain bezarin...)

Moreover, make sure that you have some suitable winter clothes. It would be very cold in some periods of January and February!! (az ma goftan bud, nagin nagoftin!!!)

At the end, do not forget to bring enough money for the first days to afford some preliminary and essential expenses like deposit for your apartment, cell phone, electricity and so on.
Accommodation, Single, on-campus

Here is the information regarding accommodation in Columbia around campus, this table gives you some examples which could be one of your reasonable option (BTW, it's not 100% exact and also based on January 2011 prices).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Per Person ($)</th>
<th>Bedroom</th>
<th>Distant to Eng School</th>
<th>Total Rent $</th>
<th>Roommate Matching</th>
<th>Furnished</th>
<th>Electricity</th>
<th>Internet</th>
<th>Water</th>
<th>Cable TV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Park Circle</td>
<td>725</td>
<td>Studio</td>
<td>9 min</td>
<td>590</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOFTS</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 min</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>+</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Park Circle</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9 min</td>
<td>840</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carolina Garden</td>
<td>418</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 min</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clifts</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6 min</td>
<td>965</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asspayer</td>
<td>618</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 min</td>
<td>1100</td>
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<td>90</td>
<td>45</td>
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<td>Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Riverside</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27 min</td>
<td>1040</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Riverside</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27 min</td>
<td>1720</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>1981 Wheat</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13 min</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>90</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Real State</td>
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<tr>
<td>1635 Enoree</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12 min</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Real State</td>
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<tr>
<td>1843 Devine</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14 min</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Real State</td>
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</table>

**Contraction**: each one has its own policy. Usually you are asked to leave a deposit as your monthly rent or two times than monthly rent (especially when you don’t have SSN or credit history). Also you have to have a one year contract but if not, you have to pay more. The time by which your contract would be finished depends from where you rent; if you rent from a real state, it would be finished one year after you start; if you rent from LOFTS and Riverside, it would be until August no matter when you start; if you rent from Park Circle, it’s until January.

**Electricity, Internet and Cable**: some of them include everything and some don’t. If your contract doesn’t include, you have to find a company for your services and register. TimeWarnerCable and SCE&G are the companies almost all students use. If you don’t have credit history, you would be asked to leave a deposit again.
**Furniture:** all of them have refrigerators, carpet or parket. Some of them have couch, bed, dinner table, desk and TV which are specified within the table if they provide you. But if not, you can ask CCFI to help you for free. Also, some of them have dishwasher and dryer which are not shown within the table.

**My Recommendation:** For the first semester, I’d recommend renting from a manager; then you can later search to find a house or apartment to rent from a real state. Also, if you arrive here in August, I’d recommend Park Circle but LOFTS in case you arrive here in January. Moreover, it’d be great if you can find a roommate before you arrive and if you can’t, email the ISAUSC maybe the association can match you a roommate whether among current students or those who have plan to come.
Accommodation, Couples

Here is a summary of couples’ options for accommodation near USC campus. Carolina Gardens and Cliff apartments are USC’s property.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bedroom</th>
<th>Distant to Eng School</th>
<th>Total Rent $</th>
<th>Roommate Matching</th>
<th>Furnished</th>
<th>Electricity</th>
<th>Internet</th>
<th>Water</th>
<th>Cable TV</th>
<th>Management</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOFTS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 min</td>
<td>1038–1118</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park Circle</td>
<td>Studio</td>
<td>9 min</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>35–45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carolina Gardens</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5 min</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35–45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolina Gardens</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 min</td>
<td>705–740</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35–45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cliff</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6 min</td>
<td>870</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cliff</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6 min</td>
<td>965–990</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspayer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 min</td>
<td>1100</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>35–45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspayer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 min</td>
<td>850–895</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>35–45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Aspayer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 min</td>
<td>1050–1250</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>35–45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornell Arms</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15 min</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornell Arms</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15 min</td>
<td>830</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Deposit and lease term:

Usually one month rent is charged in advance as a security deposit. Moreover, some managers will charge you $50–$100 as a reservation fee. Lease term varies for different option. Lofts lease ends each years July 31st but for graduate housing (Carolina Gardens and Cliff) it ends on June 30th. Lofts and Park circle have short term lease too but usually you have to pay more.

Utilities and furniture:

If lease does not include utilities you need to contact companies like TimeWarnerCable for internet access and SCE&G for electricity and pay the amount
mentioned in the table. You need to pay deposit if you do not have credit history. Time Warner Cable charges around $50 a security deposit.

Refrigerator and stove are included in all the apartments but some managers like Lofts, Park circle and Aspayer have some more facilities like dishwasher. Park circle and Aspayer have washer and dryer in each unit. Carolina Gardens and Cornell Arms do not have carpeted floor but Cliff Aspayer and lofts are carpeted. Park circle has some units that are carpeted.

You can get a bed, chest, desk, dinner table, chairs and sofa by paying a certain deposit in Lofts. But, in park circle and Aspayer you need to pay a monthly fee for the furniture.
Accommodation, Single, off-campus

First of all, let me shed light on public transportation here in Columbia. Don't even think about using!! Consider the most awful public transportation in Iran, that would be better than here and the reason is that almost everybody has their own car. It’s almost a year I’ve been here and still haven’t used although I don’t have car. I was told about this situation in Columbia but I didn't believe until I got here 😊

So, if you plan to rent a place off-campus, you must have your own car. Also take into account the gas money you have to spend to commute between your place and your office. Not to mentioned that you might have problem with parking lots somewhere near your office. Without SSN, you can’t get your driving license, you can’t buy a car, and you probably can’t make a contract with real states!! And BTW, it might take you at least 2-3 weeks to get your SSN.

But if you have a car, I strongly recommend you to find somewhere off-campus cause you can find a decent place of better quality but half price as on-campus places. If it’s the case, find a roommate and search though the real states, you will definitely make it.

Woodlands of Columbia
Copper Beech
Columbia Craigslist
Columbia Property Management
The Wolfe
Columbia SC Real Estate
...

CCFI

Columbia Council for Internationals (CCFI) is an organization of people in the Columbia area who volunteer their services to provide hospitality at NO COST to students from other countries. Founded in 1965 at the request of the University of South Carolina, it is the official agency approved by the University for Community Contacts for foreign students.

The CCFI representative can meet you on arrival at airport, train or bus station, assist you with the information on temporary or permanent housing, and put you in contact with American families. Please fill out the applications.

You can get some furniture from CCFI by filling out this form. They would also deliver the stuff you choose to your place. But fill out the form when you arrive here and get your place because they would call you after 2-3 days. Consult your friend about what you are going to choose.
Bank Account

The best way to open a bank account is to simply participate in one of the orientation sessions presented by ISS (International Student Service) in “Byrnes Building” which a representative from Bank of America and Wachovia will be available to open accounts and answer banking questions of international students.

- Accounts may include checking, savings, and credit cards. Remember to bring your University ID card, Passport, I-94, I-20. There might be other documents needed which ISS can help you with that.
- Branches of Bank of America that are near to campus are located in five points (2111 Devine Street) and 1301 Gervais Street.
- Nearest branch of Wachovia is located in 930 Assembly Street.
- When opening a bank account, use your residential address in the United States and ask them if you can have a credit card in their bank.

Some other important information that could be useful to new comers is presented here. I have gathered them from this link. This website is created for undocumented immigrants in Texas and only some information provided here is useful for students in the USC.

To open a bank account, simply go to a bank that accepts foreign identification to open up an account. When you sit down with a banker, inform them that you are a “foreign Student in the United States” and that you would like to open up a checking and / or savings account. Then present your documentation.

While your initial limit will be low (usually around $1,000), by adding your ITIN to your bank account and regularly paying off your credit card balance you will steadily build your credit. Eventually, the bank will be willing to raise your credit card limit or provide you loans based on the credit history of your ITIN.
Credit Card

What is Credit Card? A credit card allows its holder to buy goods and services based on the holder's promise to pay for these goods and services. The issuer of the card creates a revolving account and grants a line of credit to the consumer (or the user) from which the user can borrow money for payment to a merchant or as a cash advance to the user. A credit card is different from a charge card: a charge card requires the balance to be paid in full each month. In contrast, credit cards allow the consumers a continuing balance of debt, subject to interest being charged. A credit card also differs from a cash card, which can be used like currency by the owner of the card. Most credit cards are issued by banks or credit unions.

What is Credit History? The way credit card owners pay off their balances has a tremendous effect on their credit history. Two of the most important factors reported to a credit bureau are the timeliness of the debt payments and the amount of debt to credit limit. Lenders want to see payments made as agreed, usually on a monthly basis, and a credit balance of around one-third the credit limit. The credit information stays on the credit report generally for 7 years. However, there are a few jurisdictions and situations where the timeframe might differ.

What is Over Limit Charge? Consumers who keep their account in good order by always staying within their credit limit and always making at least the minimum monthly payment will see interest as the biggest expense from their card provider. Those who are not so careful and regularly surpass their credit limit or are late in making payments are exposed to multiple charges. So be careful not to surpass your credit limit.

Can we use our credit cart in ATM to withdraw some money for the credit card? Many credit cards can also be used in an ATM to withdraw money against the credit limit extended to the card, but many card issuers charge interest on cash
advances before they do so on purchases. The interest on cash advances is commonly charged from the date the withdrawal is made, rather than the monthly billing date. Many card issuers levy a commission for cash withdrawals, even if the ATM belongs to the same bank as the card issuer. Merchants do not offer cash-back on credit card transactions because they would pay a percentage commission of the additional cash amount to their bank or merchant services provider, thereby making it uneconomical.

**How can one apply for credit card?** In order to apply for credit card, one should have both Social Security Number (SSN) and credit history. Without the former, getting a credit card is almost impossible. So try to get you SSN as soon as you get to United States. However, some universities will issue you a certificate indicating that you have been hired by the university. The university will give you a temporary number so you can use that number to open a bank account before you get your SSN. Still you need SSN to get a credit card. So, it seems that the most important thing that one should do when arriving to US is to apply for SSN.

**Some credit card companies offer credit card even though you don't have credit history.** In the following [website](#) you can find a list of credit card companies. **Read carefully the instructions and conditions of a credit card company before you apply for the credit card.**

At the end let me give a friendly advice: be careful about using your credit card, it is so tricky because you are using the money that does not belong to you 😊.
Cell Phone and Plans

There are several cell phone providers in the US and among those, the customer should look for the one which offers the widest selection of features and avoids hidden charges and costs. Excellent customer service is also necessary. In this review the most popular cell phone providers have been selected and compared in different aspects:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Rating</th>
<th>Verizon Wireless</th>
<th>AT&amp;T</th>
<th>Sprint</th>
<th>T-Mobile</th>
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<td>★★★★☆</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phones &amp; Features</td>
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<td>★★★★☆</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Benefits</td>
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<td>★★★★☆</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
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<td>★★★★☆</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help &amp; Support</td>
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<td>★★★★☆</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
<td>★★★★★</td>
<td>★★★★☆</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Type of Carrier

- **Contract-based**: ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔
- **Prepaid**: ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔

### Plans

- **Individual Plans**: ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔
- **Family Plans**: ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔
- **Unlimited Voice & Text**: $89.99, $89.99, $69.99
- **Unlimited Everything**: $99.99, $99.99, $50.00
- **Data Plans**: ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔

### Phones & Features

- **Free Phones Available**: ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔
- **Refurbished Phones**: ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔
- **Free Nights and Weekend Minutes**: ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔
- **Night Start Time**: 9:00 PM, 9:00 PM, 7:00 PM, 9:00 PM
- **Free Domestic Long Distance**: ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔
- **Free Mobile-to-Mobile Minutes**: ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔
- **Rollover Minutes**: ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔

### Additional Benefits

- **Conference Calling**: ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔
- **Voice Mail**: ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔
- **Caller ID**: ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔
- **Call Waiting**: ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔

### Fees

- **Activation Fee**: $35.00, $36.00, $36.00, $35.00
There are some other tips that can help to choose between these carriers as below:

1- Most of these carriers offer some decent free cell phones for a plan of $50 to $60 a month. But if you want to have an iPhone or a smart phone you should add a data plan to your basket which is minimum something like $15 to $20 a month.

2- Now, most of the Iranian students in Columbia use the Sprint service and because phone calls from one carrier to the same one is for free, one might choose Sprint service.

3- Sprint charges customers a fee like $7 a month called surcharges which should be added to the monthly fee that the customer is paying.

4- For now just Verizon and AT&T provide customers with the new iPhone 4 cell phone so if somebody likes to have it, he/she should choose between these two carriers.

5- Some of these carriers have special discounts for students. For example if you provide AT&T with your university email address they offer a 15% discount to you on everything except for the data plan.

6- One should be careful with choosing the carrier because once you sign the contract and then after a while you want to cancel it, you have to pay some money as an early termination fee depending on how long you’ve been using the service.

7- You can also buy a cell for a short time until you decide. Wall-Mart has!
8- Here is a summary of your options with my recommendation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Talk</th>
<th>TXT</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
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<td>250</td>
<td>Unlimited 30</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>10$</td>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>20$</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT&amp;T</td>
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<td>200MB</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rollover</td>
<td></td>
<td>10$</td>
<td>15$</td>
<td>65</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>20$</td>
<td>2GB</td>
<td>75</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>200 MB</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>Unlimited</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
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<td>200 MB</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Unlimited</td>
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<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sprint</td>
<td>450 min</td>
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<td>300</td>
<td>Data Pack 15$</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unlimited</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

iPhone offered

My Rec. iPhone

Android offered

HTC offered
Groceries Stores

The grocery stores near USC campus are as follows:

**Food Lion:** This store is located in the Five Points area. It is close to the campus and therefore is the best choice for shopping when you don’t have a car or a bike. It has most of the basic stuff you need for cooking, dairy products, fresh vegetables and fruits and also a lot of ready-to-eat meals. (Address: 1001 Harden Street, Columbia, SC 29205)

**Publix:** There are two Publix stores near the campus. Depending on the place you live, you can walk, drive or use a bike to go this grocery store. It has most of the groceries and cooking stuff you need. You can find products with similar tastes to the ones you used to eat in Iran. (a: 501 Gervais St, Columbia, SC 29201-3045  b: 2800 Rosewood Dr, Columbia, SC 29205-3412)

**Earth Fare:** You need a car to go to this place. All the products sold in this store are organic and therefore the prices are higher than other grocery stores. You can find various types of tea, fruit, meat, vegetable, cheese … in this store. Also there is a small buffet in this store which is good for a light fresh meal. (Address:3312-B Devine Street, Columbia, SC 29205)

**Fresh Market:** You need a car to go this place. This store is not as large as the other grocery stores. All the products sold here are organic and therefore the prices are higher than other grocery stores. However they have a wide variety of cakes and cookies which you cannot find in other stores. (Address: 4840 Forest Dr Ste 13, Columbia, SC 29206)
Aladdin Mediterranean Grocery & Deli: You need a car to go this store. This is a small Mediterranean store where you can find Ahmad tea, basmati rice (in a large amount), some spices, halal meat, grape leaves, pomegranate paste, rose water.... (Address: 655 Saint Andrews Rd., Columbia, SC 29210)

Also there are other grocery stores which you can buy basic stuff:

Piggly Wiggly (Address: 3818 Devine Street, Columbia, SC 29205)

Kroger (Address: 3403 Forest Dr., Columbia, SC 29204)

BiLo (Address: 4464 Devine St.Columbia, SC 29205)

Other than the stores mentioned above you can find some groceries at Walmart, Target (they only sell canned food) and Sam's Club (where you need to buy stuff in big amounts and also you need to pay an annual fee to be a member).
Shopping Centers
Depending on what you are looking for you can try several places. Some are more popular, at least among Iranians here, such as TJ MAXX, Columbiana Center, Columbia Mall & etc.

None are close to campus so you definitely need a ride. To give a brief explanation for you to know what to expect to see in each, TJ MAXX is a good choice. There are several famous brands where you can find any types of men's clothes for a reasonable price.

The same story for Columbiana Center, but the prices are a little bit higher. Inside the Columbiana Mall, there is also BELK where again, is a collection of several brands. You may want to take a look at A&F, banana republic, GAP and Hollister Co. in Columbiana Mall.

Columbia Mall is another place you can go! Again, all types of men's clothes can be found there. In addition, you have Macy's there which is a collection of several famous brands.

One thing to have in mind is that Columbiana Center is not just a mall. You got Best Buy, WalMart, Sam's Club, and many restaurants around it. Alaedin, an Arabian grocery store that we go (you probably know it from other sections of this pamphlet) is almost close to this mall.

For classics, i.e. suits, sportcoats, dress shirts, ties, classic shoes and tuxedos (I’m not the guy to help on this & I don't know if any of us has bought any classics here yet), you can try JoS. A. Bank, Suitable Co. and etc.

Outlets are most cost-efficient places to get your clothes. You can find pretty decent clothes for very reasonable price. BUT, unfortunately, the closest nice outlets to here can be found in Charlotte, NC. They have pretty much nice outlets in Charleston too. Cheap T-shirts (up to 12$), shorts, shirts, shoes (with really low quality though) can be found in WalMart!

At the end, one thing that you may want to try is online shopping. Once you get familiar with American size, you can simply look for anything online and find very very decent clothes for good prices.
Fast Foods

One of the most important issues for the new students especially Iranians is the food. Obviously, at the beginning of life in a new environment, there is no enough time and energy for cooking the delicious Iranian foods! So the only possible way is going to the accessible fast foods and trying them one by one.

There are some on campus fast foods with at most 10-15 minutes walking distance from any specific academic building. Some of them are as follows:

**Subway:** Very close to the Swearingen Engineering Center. One can choose the bread and sides for any choice of sandwich (830 Assembly St # B, Columbia, SC (803) 254-6777)

**Wendy's:** You can find 1$ sandwiches along with the regular ones and combos (804 Assembly Street, Columbia, SC 29201-3936 (803) 254-8829)

**Al Amir:** They offer some Arabic foods which are similar to the Persian foods such as kabab and jooje. They also have deals on Tuesdays (629 Main Street, Columbia, SC (803) 771-0515)

**Domino's Pizza:** Considering its close distance to the campus, Domino's is the best choice for pizza lovers! (1124 Devine St, Columbia, SC 29201 (803) 256-8151)

**Sandy's:** They offer delicious hotdogs (825 Main Street, Columbia, SC 29201 (803) 254-6914)

**Burger King, Pizza Hut, Chick-fil-A:** 2nd floor, Russell House building

**Pandinis:** 1st floor, Russell House building

**Five guys:** One of the best burgers in US! (931 Senate St # C, Columbia, SC 29201-3153 (803) 799-0441)
Driving License

General Information:

To get your SC driving license, there are two possibilities however in any case, you have to pass the knowledge and road test at some point:

1. **You do have a driving license in Iran:** After knowledge test, you can pass the road test at the very day and you would be able to drive a car right after your road test (if you passed that).

2. **You don’t have driving license in Iran:** After knowledge test, you will be assigned a *beginner’s permit* with which you can start driving a car BUT you have to have someone with a real driving license right next to yourself in your car. After 6 month having the permit, you would be able to take the road test and get the real one.

Knowledge Test:

You are supposed to read South Carolina Driver’s Manual but only Chapter 2, Chapter 3 and Chapter 7. More than this manual, you can also check this sample tests which by the way are not all from SC (Test1, Test2, Test3, Test4 and Test5).

Road Test:

You are supposed to have your own car for the road test because they don’t provide you any. However you can borrow a car from your friends or even rent a car (Hertz Co. would charge you 9$ per hour if you enroll in CoonectByHertz at USC).
Documents You Need:

1. Passport (including Visa and I-94)
2. I-20 form or DS2019
3. Certificate of Enrollment from the University of South Carolina (available either at registrar’s office for currently enrolled student or the international student service offices)
4. Certificate of Enrollment from the University of South Carolina (available either at registrar’s office for currently enrolled student or the international student service offices)
5. Social Security card or letter from social security administration stating ineligibility for social security number (Letter is valid for only 90 days)
6. **Original**(in Persian) Driving License from Iran (Important)
7. Translated Driving License from Iran
8. Beginner’s permit driving license (if applicable)

SC DMV:

Monday-Friday, 8:30 am – 5:00pm

1630 Shop Road, Columbia, SC 29202

803-737-8350
Buying a Car:

**Dealership:** There are some famous dealerships in Columbia that most of the time people have good experience with them but they are always expensive than buying from owner. Some famous dealerships are:

Dick smith, Dick Dyer Toyota, Toyota Center, jimhudson

**Car Owner:** There are three different ways to by a car from owner:

- Carolina trader news paper
- [Columbia Craigslist](http://www.columbia craigslist.org)
- Advertisements in university

In this case is always cheaper than dealership but it is possible you buy a car with mechanical problem. It would be nice that in this case show car to mechanic before you buy it. You can check the history of car via this [link](http://example.com) by paying 20-30$ that give a detailed vehicle history report include accident,...

Japanese car like Toyota and Honda have more fan in USA, they are well known as cars that last long, low gas mileage and retain their values. Mazda and Nissan are still considering good cars but American car usually doesn’t last long and getting high gas mileage (I never recommend buying American car with higher than 100kmi but for Japanese car is totally ok)