

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT GUIDE TO COLUMBIA'S SCHOOL OF GENERAL STUDIES

Academic Life at Columbia

What is a liberal arts education?

Columbia University's School of General Studies is an undergraduate liberal arts college. A liberal arts education values a diverse range of intellectual experiences and pursuits with the understanding that a foundation in all academic disciplines creates a more well-rounded student prepared to approach problems and intellectual challenges from multiple disciplinary perspectives. At Columbia, the liberal arts education is embodied in the Core Curriculum.

What is University Studies?

University Studies is a course taken by GS students in the first semester, designed to introduce the Columbia undergraduate experience and to provide essential resources and administrative information to smooth the transition to campus. The course runs for the first seven weeks of the term, and multiple sections are offered to accommodate different student schedules.

What is expected from me in the classroom?

Depending on the scope and size of the course, the expectations of you in the classroom may vary. Generally speaking, in larger lectures, you may listen to an instructor more than you participate in class discussions. Smaller seminar courses often require a high level of class participation, more so than most other countries or cultures. Professors want to engage in an intellectual conversation with you and hear your opinions, while always grounding your arguments in the sources provided. They also want to know that you are thinking critically about the assignments and the lecture; as such, class participation is often reflected in the final grade of a course.

My course has a recitation or a discussion session, what does that mean?

Recitation and discussion sections are typically associated with large lecture courses and generally have ten to twenty students in the classroom. These sections give students space to interact with the classroom material and a teaching assistant in a smaller, more intimate setting. You should use recitation and discussion sections to seek clarification on topics covered in lectures, discuss section readings or lectures of interest, and build connections with your peers. For further guidance, speak to your advising dean or work with the [Academic Resource Center](#).

My professor and/or teaching assistant (TA) runs office hours. When should I attend them?

You can attend office hours for a variety of reasons, including to obtain:

- A better understanding of a difficult concept,
- In-person feedback on an exam or paper,
- Advanced feedback on a thesis statement or paper outline, or
- To discuss a question from class in greater depth.

Some students like to attend office hours because it can feel less intimidating than asking questions in front of the entire class. You may also use office hours to speak with a professor whose academic work is of interest to you. Moreover, during and after your academic career, you may need reference letters for academic or professional applications. Office Hours can be a useful way to deepen personal and academic interactions with a professor, aiding with reference letter requests or suggestions on internships and research opportunities.

How much work should I expect outside of class time?

Most courses average between 3-4 hours of in-person class time each week, and we suggest planning for 2-5 hours of additional study time per point of credit—meaning a 3-point class should include roughly 6-15 hours per week of work outside the classroom. This may vary depending on whether the course is a humanities course (which may require less additional work outside of class) or a science course (which may require the full 15 hours of additional work outside of class).

Can I study with other students?

Study groups can be a critical way to get to know your classmates while also gaining a deeper understanding of difficult concepts. It can provide an opportunity to both learn your course material better while building community. Please review the ARC toolkit on your flash drive, to learn more about how to create an effective study group without compromising the Honor Code.

Plagiarism: We expect that all work that you produce for a course is your own. That being said, some professors allow collaboration on projects. If you have any questions as to whether or not you are permitted to work with other students on an assignment, please make sure to ask your professor or TA.

I am choosing a major. What do I need to consider as an international student?

A liberal arts education allows you to explore different areas of academic interest before declaring a major. However, your major may impact your application for a visa to work in the US after graduation. Because there are several factors to consider (your interests, your employer's interests, and immigration law), advanced planning and research are imperative.

Meeting with the Center for Career Education (CCE), advisors, and GS advising deans can help you clarify and pinpoint your interests. We recommend you review CCE resources, including [Info for International Students](#) (for tailored information about jobs on- and off-campus), [GoinGlobal](#) (for a list of companies that sponsor H1-B working visas), and [Uniworld](#) (to research US firms operating abroad and learn about foreign firms operating in the US). In addition, it is also recommended that students review the International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO) [employment](#) resources and join ISSO workshops to understand major and career connections, and eligibility and processes to secure employment authorization during and after your program of study.

Advising at Columbia

Columbia's School of General Studies provides a wide array of advising support.

What is the role of my advising dean?

The Office of the Dean of Students is the primary source of student advising at the School of General Studies. [Your advisor provides guidance on both University- and GS-specific policies and procedures.](#) Advisors are here to help you create a long-term plan for your time at Columbia. You should contact your advisor immediately if any personal or health emergency prevents you from attending class or completing coursework during the semester.

Who advises me on my major?

Each academic department has its own advising model. The primary point person in most academic departments when it comes to questions about your major or major requirements is the [Director of Undergraduate Studies](#). You should reach out to your major department for questions about major-specific transfer credit, course selection, and research opportunities.

When should I use the Peer Advisors?

[GS Peer Advisors](#) are students who work in partnership with the Dean of Students Office to provide support and advice about the opportunities and challenges at Columbia. Peer Advisors are available to discuss academics, campus resources, personal concerns, and the transition to the School of General Studies. They are also a great resource for the student experience. You can ask them about courses they liked, student groups that they would recommend, and their experiences with internships, fellowships, or study abroad.

What about the fellowships advising dean?

A fellowship is funding that helps open the door to extraordinary study, research, and work experiences. While it's true that some fellowships require US citizenship, others accept applications from international students. Many fellowships are offered by departments and programs within Columbia and are available to students of all nationalities. To learn more about fellowships, please read the [fellowship program facts](#), and explore the listings for available fellowships. You may then make an appointment with the GS fellowships advisor and visit the [GS Fellowships database](#).

Can international students go on a term abroad?

Sometimes international students say “I am already abroad, why would I study abroad?” Well, as one student said, “abroad is not a place!” Sometimes having a second or third international experience can add value to your undergraduate education, allowing you to better understand yourself, your long-term academic and professional goals, as well as your place in the world. Study abroad opportunities are available for a semester, full academic year, or summer to all Columbia undergraduates. The advisors in the [Global Engagement](#) office help students learn more about these opportunities. All GS students should consult with their advising dean to discuss their long-term academic plan, and the [GS study abroad page](#) as well.

What should I do if I am considering graduate school?

If you are considering graduate school, whether in the U.S. or overseas, you should begin the process by consulting your professors and the graduate school advisors at the School of General Studies. Faculty members can provide valuable insights into suitable graduate programs within your field, while the graduate school advisors at GS can assist you with the practical aspects of researching and applying to graduate and professional schools. You should begin engaging with graduate school advising around two years prior to the semester you hope to begin graduate school.

In addition, the School of General Studies offers a distinctive resource in the form of our Graduate School Coaching Program. This program delivers workshops during the Spring (focused on exploration), Summer (initiating the process), and Fall (for active applicants) terms. Individual counseling is also available to support you throughout the phases of exploring and applying to graduate schools.

Furthermore, GS proudly facilitates various dual-, combined-, and joint-degree initiatives in collaboration with Columbia University's esteemed graduate and professional schools, including SEAS, SIPA, GSAS, Mailman, and Columbia Law School. For further details, please see [visit the GS Bulletin](#). Interested students are also encouraged to reach out to gsgradcoaching@columbia.edu for more information.

Undergraduate Premedicine Planning and Advising

Students considering premedical studies in preparation to apply to medical, dental, or veterinary school or education in another health profession are encouraged to speak with their advising dean as early as possible, as the coursework required for health professional schools may need to be started soon after matriculation. Interested students may also request a Premedical/Prehealth Advisor (by submitting a Special Advisor Request Form in the Student Success Portal), who will be able to advise them on the specific order and combination of courses to be taken to fulfill their premed

requirements. More information about the undergraduate premedical curriculum and an overview of the medical school application process can be found in the [Premedical Handbook for GS Undergraduate Students](#).

English Language Concerns

What is the [ALP Essay Exam](#) and why do I have to take it?

As a condition of admission, some students may be required to take the Columbia University American Language Program (ALP) Essay Exam prior to finalizing course registration, as determined by the Admissions Committee at the time of acceptance. Enrollment at Columbia is contingent on taking the exam. Students receive information regarding whether or not they need to take the exam in their admissions materials. There are no exceptions to this requirement.

The exam is graded out of 10. If you receive a:

- **Level 10:** You will register for University Writing and a regular schedule of courses for the GS degree.
- **Level 9:** You will register for a 3-credit, level 9 ALP course and up to three other GS courses.
- **Level 8:** You will register for a 6-credit, level 8 ALP course. The 6-credit ALP course does not count towards the credit requirements for the GS degree. You should register for an additional two other courses toward the GS degree.
- **Level 7 or below:** A score below level 8 will require a deferral of the offer of admission to facilitate further, full-time, English language study. You cannot take any regular courses at the School of General Studies until an ALP score of level 8 is achieved.

What can I do to improve my English skills?

First year students looking to improve their English skills can enroll in the International section of University Writing (ENGL GS1010) designed for non-native speakers. This section is identical in content and rigor to native-speaking sections with added support and instruction on American academic writing.

You can strengthen your English skills by practicing with native speakers such as floormates, peers, and friends. Television shows, radio shows, and US-based news publications can help build vocabulary and comprehension skills.

In addition, you should consider joining a student group! Student groups are a great way to spend time with people who are interested in the same things that you are, while also practicing your language skills in a space that is not intimidating.

The American Language Program hosts the [Language Exchange Program \(LEP\)](#), available to any Columbia student learning a language. This program is a great way to connect with a native English speaker interested in language exchange.

The Columbia [Writing Center](#) is a free resource and can be used for academic writing consultations in any subject. Some of the consultants have a specialty in English as a Second Language. As an international student, you are eligible to set up a recurring appointment.
<https://www.college.columbia.edu/core/uwp/writing-center/faq#schedrep>

Work Authorization in the US for International Students

When should I work with the [International Student and Scholar Office \(ISSO\)](#)?

The ISSO will help you maintain your visa status, assist with immigration and document services, help you obtain US work authorization, provide programs and workshops around your visa and job search, as well as provide you with advice on maintaining your visa status throughout your time at Columbia. ISSO's website is extremely comprehensive. We strongly encourage you to review their website for the most up-to-date information regarding visas and employment.

I would like to get a job on campus. What do I need to know?

[Full time F-1 and J-1 students are eligible for “casual” employment on campus](#). This does **not** include work-study positions (a government-subsidized financial aid program for US citizens and permanent residents). On-campus work is limited by immigration regulations to a maximum of 20 hours per week, except during official school vacation periods. [More information about on-campus employment is available on the ISSO website](#), including forms you will be given to get on the University's payroll and how to apply for a Social Security Number (needed for all employment). Interested students are also encouraged to check out the Center for Career Education's [Getting a Job On-Campus resource](#) for information offices on campus that hire international students.

How do I get work authorization to take a paid internship or job off-campus?

Undergraduate students are eligible for [Optional Practical Training \(OPT\)](#) or during the summer may be eligible for [Curricular Practical Training \(CPT\)](#) which is a benefit of F-1 status.

For eligibility, application timelines, and steps to apply please review the ISSO guides linked below and speak with your advising dean:

[Curricular Practical Training \(CPT\)](#)

[Optional Practical Training \(OPT\)](#)

What is [Curricular Practice Training \(CPT\)](#) and how can I get it?

In consultation with their GS advising dean, students can take a 1.0 fieldwork course which, in addition to providing a unique opportunity to connect Columbia's core curriculum to your internship experience, will also permit an application for CPT. For more information regarding this course, please reach out to your advising dean.

What is Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a benefit of F-1 student status that allows students to gain experience in their field of study by applying for off-campus work authorization. OPT may run from 1-3 years [depending on your major](#).

[OPT may be granted and used before graduation](#) for part-time work during the school year or full-time work during vacation periods. [Remaining OPT may be granted to complete after graduation](#). You must apply for OPT to be granted work authorization for paid work off-campus. The [ISSO](#) will assist with this.

[If the internship is unpaid \(no compensation of any kind\)](#), please check with ISSO before you proceed with the position. The experience may still require the use of your OPT.

Do international students need to file and pay US taxes?

Yes! All international students in F-1 (and J-1) status are required to file at least one tax form if present in the U.S. at any time in the previous calendar year—even if they had no US income. Please visit the [ISSO](#) website for more information.

Career Advising for International Students

What does the [Center for Career Education](#) (CCE) offer to me?

CCE works with international students and alumni to help them define career goals, gain meaningful work experience, and connect with employers and alumni through:

- Individual career counseling, workshops, and [online resources](#) to help with internship/job applications, interviewing, networking, negotiations, and the decision to pursue graduate school. See the [CCE events](#) page for more information.
- [LionSHARE](#)/Handshake: CCE's database of jobs and internships and system to register for employer and skill-building events, and [Internship and Mentorship programs](#)
- [Career Fairs, Industry showcases](#), and other networking and career exploration events
- [Alumni Connections](#)
- [Career Exploration Resources](#), including majors and industries

Regarding my career search, where and when do I start?

Start in your first year by visiting [CCE's](#) website and the [International Student](#) section. Then visit CCE to speak with a career counselor to learn more about the resources to support your internship/job search as an international student. You may also want to connect with the [GS fellowships](#), pre-professional, and graduate school advisors in the Dean of Students Office.

How do I build my network?

Networking is the process of making connections and building relationships that provide you with information, advice, and further contacts, all of which will enhance your ability to make informed career decisions and tap into unadvertised internship/job vacancies. Networking can take place in a group or one-on-one setting. CCE offers alumni panels, career fairs, employer information sessions, site visits, online tip sheets, and networking preparation throughout the year. Other ways to build or expand your network include joining a student club or professional association, volunteering, and talking to professors, family members, and friends about who they might know in your fields of interest.

What are other ways I can develop skills or gain experience?

Joining a [student organization](#) on campus helps you begin to network with students, employers, and alumni. Student organizations have leadership opportunities to help you expand your knowledge of a particular industry or job function.

Volunteering can connect you with others and develop a variety of different skills. [Community Impact at Columbia University](#) connects you with volunteering opportunities in Morningside Heights and Harlem. [Idealist.org](#) and [New York Cares](#) also provide a number of volunteer opportunities.

I am interning internationally; are there events going on or any opportunities where I can meet other students and alumni?

To find events abroad, first check the [alumni events calendar](#) and the [International Alumni Clubs](#) websites. Alternatively, you may send an email to the [Columbia Alumni Association](#) with the region and dates in question to be put in touch with a Columbia connection on-site. The Center for Career Education offers advice on other ways to [connect with alumni](#).

Student Life at Columbia

I want to be involved in student groups. Are there groups that are good for international students?

Columbia has nearly 500 student organizations and you are encouraged to join any group(s) of interest. A great place to start is GS's [Get Involved](#) page. There is an incredible variety of student life opportunities, some run by the School of General Studies and others administered by other undergraduate colleges or the university as a whole. The breadth of resources can be confusing. To start your exploration of student life, please visit [GS's resource pages for student life](#).

Another space to explore is [Columbia LionLink](#). You will have to log in to get access to a large list of student organizations. Two large-scale events that showcase student groups at Columbia include a Meet and Greet with [student organizations](#) during New Student Orientation Program and the Activities Day fair held every September. You should plan to attend both!

Some [General Studies Specific Organizations](#) that may be of interest:

- The [General Studies Student Council \(GSSC\)](#) pursues academic, political, social, and administrative initiatives, and serves as a liaison between the student body, the GS administration, University offices, and student organizations. Members of the GSSC plan academic and social events on campus, enact policies that positively impact GS students, collaborate with the other Student Councils at Columbia, and work with University administrators. Every year the GSSC elects an international student council representative.
- **GS Alliance** is a student organization, recognized by the Student Governing Board, dedicated to the advancement of education and advocacy regarding issues of special interest to the LGBTQA community and its allies. *Contact:* gsalliance@columbia.edu
- **Koreans in GS (KIGS)** is a student organization, recognized by the Activities Board at Columbia, dedicated to building community among Korean students at GS.
- **Student of Color Alliance (S.O.C.A.)** is an unrecognized student group dedicated to providing a space to discuss issues affecting GS students of color, both domestic and international. *Contact:* socalliance@columbia.edu.

Are there mentorship opportunities for international students?

Absolutely! [GS offers a Peer Mentor program](#) for all students. You are strongly encouraged to engage with Peer Mentors to discuss campus resources, personal concerns, and the social transition to the School of General Studies.

I keep hearing the term “student engagement”. What does that mean and why should I get involved?

In the US, college is not seen as solely an academic pursuit. It is important for students to engage with their campus community not only academically, but socially as well. These social networks are invaluable to not only enjoying your time at GS but also in building your personal and professional networks that will serve you well beyond your time at Columbia. The School of General Studies runs a wide variety of [student engagement](#) events that assist students in making connections across campus including with faculty and alumni.

How can I learn more about my gender and identity in the U.S. and at Columbia?

College is a time for you to explore and learn more about yourself and others, including facets of your own and others' identities related to gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and socio-economic class. [Multicultural and Social Justice Education Programs](#) is a resource to engage in dialogues,

workshops, weekend retreats, and one-on-one conversations with a peer or staff member about identity, social justice, and leadership.

Are there specific resources for international military veterans?

If you are interested in learning more about opportunities for military veterans, please reach out to [Dean Keefe](#) to be included in the veterans newsletter. Many opportunities are focused specifically on those who participate in the U.S. military, but there are opportunities and events open to international veterans as well.

Housing

How can I learn more about participating in Columbia Housing?

International students are eligible for Columbia housing. If you are interested in participating in Columbia housing or live in Columbia housing and have questions, please make sure to review the information on resources on [GS's housing website](#). Please also review the information you received in your admissions packet.

What resources are there for me if I am interested in living in non-Columbia housing?

There are two main resources for you to use if you are interested in finding your own housing

- [Off-Campus Housing Assistance](#): A Columbia-specific resource for finding apartments, roommates, and sublets.
- [International House](#): Private non-profit residence for students and scholars.

Navigating Columbia's Health and Wellness Resources

Columbia University has numerous health and wellness resources available to students to help address individual needs and concerns, as well as unanticipated health challenges that may arise. The following information will help clarify how to best utilize these wellness resources and how to best navigate the various offices that offer assistance. For a general list of Columbia wellness resources, please visit Live Well, Learn Well: <https://wellbeing.columbia.edu/>

What should I do if I feel homesick?

Feeling homesick, and more generally, experiencing culture shock is a natural part of your experience in a new city, country, culture, and university. You should understand that there will be days in which you feel down, confused, frustrated, or just lonely. There are many ways to combat these feelings.

- Don't spend too much time alone and engage with other students. Review the Student Life section of this resource above. The more friends you make here, the easier it will be to feel connected and at home. It can be difficult to start the process of making new friends. The easiest method is to join student groups where you can meet other students who are interested in the same things that you are.
- Try to maintain similar habits to the ones you had at home. If you know you are someone who likes to go to the gym regularly, join Dodge Fitness. If you are someone who prefers to eat with others, invite your classmates to have lunch with you. Maintaining your regular routine makes transitioning to a new place much easier.
- Explore your surroundings. NYC is an amazing city. Set time aside each week or month to go to a new museum, explore a new neighborhood, or visit a new restaurant.
- Be open-minded. You are going to encounter situations and conversations that may be handled differently in your home culture. Ask questions if you don't understand something.

- Don't be too hard on yourself. You are in a new school and a new cultural environment. You will struggle personally and academically. Be gentle with yourself particularly during your first semester, as you are adjusting to this new environment.
- Keep in touch with people from home. Build a regular time to speak with your closest friends and family.
- Ask for help! Talk to your Academic Advising or the GS Peer Advisors for advice when you are feeling down.
- Alice Health Promotions through Columbia Health offers [wellness coaching](#) and other resources to help you transition to Columbia and navigate challenges.
- If you find that you are really struggling, you may want to consider discussing your emotions with a counselor. See the information about Columbia's Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) below.

How do I use Columbia's Health Services?

Columbia Health Services offers on-campus care in three primary areas; [Medical Services](#) (physical health), [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (mental health), and [Disability Services](#). Columbia Health is located at John Jay Hall on the third floor.

For regular medical services, you are automatically assigned a Primary Care Provider (PCP). Your PCP is a physician or nurse with whom you schedule routine appointments, such as an annual physical exam. [Most appointments can be scheduled online using the Columbia Health website.](#)

If you are ever feeling sick, you can call Columbia Health at (212) 854-7426 during office hours and schedule an appointment or speak with a health care provider. If you have an urgent care need, you can also stop by the [Urgent Care Center](#) during office hours without an appointment. **If you require emergency medical care, call Columbia Public Safety directly at (212) 854-5555 or 911 for emergencies. Use 911 for emergencies when off-campus.**

When Columbia Health Services is closed, you should contact Columbia Public Safety. You will be connected to an on-call physician who can help you decide whether you should seek care at a hospital emergency room or at Columbia Health the next day.

When should I use Columbia's Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS)?

In the US, it is very common for people to reach out to professional counselors to talk about a wide range of mental health issues. You can talk to CPS counselors just one time or more regularly to get advice about how to manage stress, anxiety, depression, or any other concerns you have about emotional strain. You should never hesitate to meet with someone from CPS if you are having any kind of mental distress. Many Columbia undergraduates visit CPS at some point during their academic careers. If a student wants to select a specific clinician, they are more than welcome to make a request. Specific clinicians are selected based on areas of [special interest](#), including Trauma Support, LGBTQ concerns, Religious/Spiritual Concerns, Multicultural Concerns, or Body Image issues/Eating Disorders. CPS adheres to [strict standards of confidentiality](#). Your professors, peers, and advisors will not know that you are seeking help at CPS unless you expressly permit that knowledge to be shared.

Who else can I talk to besides CPS?

There is a community of advisers at Columbia to speak with about any feelings, challenges, or concerns that may arise at Columbia. You can always begin with your regular academic advisor who can guide you to the most appropriate resources on campus.

When offices are closed, there are still resources for support, depending on your needs:

- A great first stop is [Alice!](#)
- If you live on campus, you can speak to your resident advisor.
- [Nightline](#) (212) 854-7777 Peer listening hotline 10:00 pm - 3:00 am
- [Urgent physical or mental health concerns](#) (212) 854-7426
- CU-EMS: an ambulance service (212) 854-5555 or 99 from any campus phone
- Sexual Violence Response team (212) 854-HELP (4357)
- [Public Safety](#) Emergency: 4-5555 or (212) 854-2797

When should I work with Disability Services (DS)?

[Disability Services](#) works with students who have either physical or mental health needs that require accommodation to support student success. Accommodations may include alternate testing environments, being assigned a note taker, extended time for exams and papers, and much more. Students who have any reason to believe that they are eligible for support services should seek an [ODS consultation](#). ODS is located in Wien Hall, Main Floor – Suite 108A.

If I have questions about other health or wellness concerns, how can I find further resources?

The GS Health & Wellness team can be reached at: gshealthandwellness@columbia.edu. Students are encouraged to email the team at this address for any of the following reasons:

- To discuss a question about health and/or wellness resources on campus
- To discuss a personal issue around health or wellness
- To request meal vouchers from the Emergency Meal Fund or to discuss food insecurity
- To share ideas and concerns about health and wellness at GS

School of General Studies Alumni

Though it may seem early to be thinking about the GS Alumni experience now, connecting with Alumni both at home and here in NYC, can be a really exciting way to build community and network. The School of General Studies has its own dedicated [Alumni Relations](#) team which runs special events and programs throughout the year in NYC and abroad, including [Homecoming](#), Alumni in Conversation, [Reunion](#), and much more! You can connect with the Alumni Relations team via [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), or via email at gsalumni@columbia.edu.

Acronyms

Columbia frequently uses acronyms to talk about resources and offices across campus. There are several acronyms that it is important for you to begin to learn.

[ARC](#): Academic Resource Center

[BWOQ](#): Columbia Student Blog

[CCE](#): Center for Career Education

[CPS](#): Columbia Psychological Services

[CUID/PID](#): Columbia University Identification Number available in SSOL (starts with C00....)

[CUIT](#): Columbia University Information Technology

[CULPA](#): Columbia Underground Listing for Professor Ability

[DOS](#): Dean of Students Office

[GS](#): School of General Studies

[GSSC](#): General Studies Student Council

ISOP: International Student Orientation Program

[ISSO](#): International Students and Scholars Office

[NSOP](#): New Student Orientation Program

[OMA](#): Office of Multicultural Affairs

[RA](#): Resident Advisor

[SPEC](#): Columbia Daily Spectator (Columbia's Student Newspaper)

[SSOL](#): Student Services Online – where students register for classes, have access to their student account, and check grades

[UAH](#): University Apartment Housing

[UNI](#): Your Columbia ID that allows you access to all Columbia electronic resources (Example: abc1234)

[US](#): University Studies

[UW](#): University Writing

Other Important Legal Terms

What do [FERPA](#) (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) and [HIPAA](#) (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) mean?

FERPA stands for the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974. Under FERPA, when a student enters a university in the US at any age, all rights and responsibilities to the privacy of educational records are transferred to the student. Educational records can include grades, financial aid records, disciplinary records, student account information, Dean's Office files, and Residential Program files.

HIPAA is the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. HIPAA protects the privacy of student information in health and medical records, including electronic files.

While the type of information protected by FERPA and HIPAA will not be automatically disclosed, the University has protocols in place to contact families in the event of a medical emergency or when the student requests information be released. Importantly, the GS Dean of Students Office is here to engage with students and families in an open dialogue during their time at Columbia. We encourage students and their families to ask questions, attend events and information sessions while on campus, or contact us for additional information.