International Graduate Studies Preparation Program (IGSPP)

Pre-Departure Handbook

Developed by

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Canada

We acknowledge that the UBC Point Grey campus is situated on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Musqueam people.

This pre-departure handbook is current as of February 2019. Note that future editions of this handbook may contain changes to program requirements and policies.

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Welcome

Welcome and thank you for choosing the **International Graduate Studies Preparation Program (IGSPP)**! Now that you’ve been admitted, there is a lot to think about and prepare for. We have created this pre-departure handbook to provide you with important information and advice on how you should prepare for studying in Canada.

UBC Extended Learning gratefully acknowledges UBC Student Services for their [International Student Guide](#) upon which this guide is based.

**International Graduate Studies Preparation Program**

Many international students consider graduate (master’s) degrees from a top North American university necessary for achieving their academic and career goals. In the competition for admission to graduate school and to achieve success in these advanced degree programs, students require a number of specific skills. For those unfamiliar with North American academic culture, quickly developing these essential skills can be a challenge.

**IGSPP** is a full-time, 14-week program in which a small group of students spends approximately 24 hours each week in structured activities in the classroom and in the community. Guided by instructors and members of the UBC community, you develop the advanced academic skills needed to improve your chances of gaining admission to your ideal graduate school. You’re given the opportunity to engage with others, UBC graduate students and faculty members. The remaining time is spent in directed independent study to complete assignments, readings and research, as well as self-directed community exploration to pursue individual interests (sports, service learning) and to practise communication skills.
The University of British Columbia

The University of British Columbia (UBC) is a global centre for teaching, learning and research, consistently ranked among the top 20 public universities in the world and recently recognized as North America’s most international university. UBC has two major campuses, Vancouver and the Okanagan. Vancouver has three major sites: Point Grey, Robson Square in the heart of downtown Vancouver and Great Northern Way. The Okanagan campus was established in Kelowna in 2005.

UBC Extended Learning

Extended Learning supports diverse learners to deepen their knowledge and expand their skill set for academic success, professional advancement and personal enrichment. We design, develop and deliver exceptional learning opportunities and experiences by collaborating with UBC faculties and units, and community and industry partners. IGSSP is just one of the many programs and courses offered by Extended Learning.

Vancouver

With a population of 2.4 million people, Vancouver is British Columbia’s largest and Canada’s third largest city. Despite its size, Vancouver is considered safer than most North American cities, with clean streets and many pleasant residential neighbourhoods.

The term "Canadian" describes people of all origins who have made Canada their home. Vancouver is a diverse city and is home to people from all parts of the world. During your stay here, you are likely to meet many members of your own cultural and religious groups and enjoy many of the foods to which you are accustomed.
Arriving in Vancouver

Planning Your Arrival for the Program

We recommend that you arrive in Vancouver a few days before the program starts. This will help you adjust to the jet lag you might have and get to know the city a little.

On the first day of the program, please bring the following items with you:

- Your passport
- Your study permit
- Letter of acceptance from IGSPPP
- Your contact information in Vancouver (address, phone number(s), email address and emergency contact, etc.).

Please confirm your arrival **two weeks** before the program start date.

Late arrivals are generally not acceptable. Please contact us ahead of time to get approval if you have to arrive late for any particular reason. If you have not confirmed your arrival by the required date, you may, at the discretion of UBC Extended Learning, be deferred to the next available program intake.

You are welcome to visit our office during office hours (8:30am—4:30pm, Monday to Friday), but it is not required before the first day of the program.
Directions to Our Office

Our office is located at UBC main campus (Point Grey) at:

UBC Extended Learning - IGSPP
West Mall Swing Space Building, 5th Floor
2175 West Mall
Vancouver, BC
V6T 1Z4
Canada

Maps

You can search UBC campus maps, and download a printable campus map.

Travelling from the Airport

You can take a taxi or public transit from Vancouver International Airport (YVR) to where you will be staying.

Taxi: There is 24-hour taxi service from the airport. It is common to tip the driver 10-15% of the fare. It is best if you ask the driver to deliver you directly to your temporary accommodation.

Public transit: If you want to save money, it is also possible to travel by public transit, although it will require transferring buses and will take more time. Check translink.ca for the exact schedule from YVR/Airport to the address of your accommodation.

Public Transit

There are three ways to get around Metro Vancouver by public transit:

- Buses travel along most major streets. They run frequently to and from UBC.

- The Expo and Millennium SkyTrain Lines connect downtown Vancouver with the cities of Burnaby, New Westminster and Surrey. The Canada Line connects downtown Vancouver to the Vancouver International Airport (YVR) and the city of Richmond. The Millennium Line Evergreen Extension connects the Tri-Cities to the existing SkyTrain system.

- SeaBus travels between downtown Vancouver and North Vancouver.

Metro Vancouver is divided into three fare zones, ranging from CAD$2.95 to $5.70 per single journey depending on how far you travel and at what time of day.
Most public transit users find it more convenient to purchase a **Compass Card**, a reloadable fare card available at major transit stations and at any authorized fare dealer outlet, such as Safeway, 7-Eleven, and Shoppers Drug Mart.

Please visit [translink.ca](http://translink.ca) for details on fares, monthly passes and schedules, and for information on how to **buy and use a Compass Card**.

**Note:** As a student registered at UBC Extended Learning, you are not eligible for the U-Pass / Compass Card program.

### Health Insurance

iMED medical insurance is required for IGSPP students for the entire duration of the program. Payment is due with the final tuition balance. If you plan on arriving early and would like to purchase health insurance to cover the extra days, please contact IGSPP registration staff at [igpp.exl@ubc.ca](mailto:igpp.exl@ubc.ca).
Accommodation

Temporary Mailing Address

Until you have your own local address in Canada, you can use UBC Extended Learning as a temporary forwarding address for your mail. Mail will be kept for three months. Your mail should be addressed as follows:

[Your Given Name and Family Name] c/o IGSPP Coordinator
UBC Extended Learning
2121 West Mall
Vancouver, BC
V6T 1Z4
Canada

Please remember to change your mailing address to your own Vancouver address as soon as you have it.

Where to Live

Before you arrive in Vancouver, you should find a place to stay. You may choose to rent a room or apartment, or to stay with a local family (homestay) when you attend the program. Rents usually range from CAD$600 for a basement suite with your own bedroom and shared bath/kitchen to CAD$1,600 for a one-bedroom apartment on the UBC campus. Actual rents vary depending on the location and facilities provided. Living with a local family (Homestay), with three meals provided by the host family, usually costs CAD$1,150 to $1,300 per month depending on the location.

To get the most out of your experience in Vancouver, we encourage you to live with a homestay family or with English-speaking students to improve your communication skills and cultural awareness.
**Housing Resources**

If you prefer off-campus rental accommodation, you’ll find valuable information on [UBC’s Student Residence website](http://www.ubc.ca/studentlife/residences/), such as finding a place, deciding where to live, considering costs and understanding your rights as a tenant.
Money and Finances

An important aspect of planning to study at UBC Extended Learning is having a realistic idea of the amount of money you will need for tuition and living expenses. You have already paid the full amount of your tuition for IGSPP. However, you need to consider your living expenses, which include accommodation, food, transportation, extended health insurance, personal expenses, etc.

Transferring Your Money to Canada

You must ensure that you can easily access funds to cover your living expenses during your first month in Canada. Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC), Bank of Montreal (BMO), Scotiabank and Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) all have branches located on the UBC Point Grey campus. Other major financial institutions with branches near the UBC Point Grey campus are HSBC, TD Canada Trust, and VanCity. Automatic teller machines (ATMs) of several other banks are also located on campus. You may need to bring your passport and your letter of acceptance from IGSPP when opening a new bank account.

There are several ways to transfer funds to Canada:

- You may obtain a bank draft for the amount you wish to transfer and bring it with you to Canada. Please be advised that it could take anywhere from 10 to 20 days for the bank draft to be processed.

- You may use a wire transfer service at your local bank (also called electronic or cable transfers) to send money to a new bank account in Canada. This money would be available immediately once transferred to Canada. Please check with your local banks about their processing times.
• If you have an electronic bank card for your bank in your home country, you may be able to withdraw money from your home account at an ATM in Canada. Check with your bank about the practicality of this option. Service charges can apply for using your bank card outside the country, and exchange rates change daily.

**We recommend that you do NOT carry large amounts of cash with you while travelling to and within Canada.** Currency exchange services are available at the Vancouver Airport and around Vancouver, and at many of the major banks or credit union banks. Major credit cards are accepted at most merchants in Vancouver, but traveller’s cheques are increasingly difficult to cash.
Immigration

Study Permit

Students who are not Canadian citizens or permanent residents of Canada must obtain a study permit from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada in order to live and study in Canada for more than six months. Please note your study permit is issued at the border when you arrive in Canada.

Temporary Resident Visa (TRV)

Citizens of some countries (for example, China) also require a temporary resident visa (TRV, also commonly referred to as a visitor visa or an entry visa) in order to enter Canada. A temporary resident visa is an official document issued by a visa office abroad. It is placed in your passport to show that you have met the requirements for admission to Canada as a temporary resident. If it is required, apply for your TRV when you apply for your study permit.

Electronic Travel Authorization (eTA)

Visa-exempt foreign nationals will require an eTA for entry into Canada.
**Entering Canada (at the border)**

When you arrive in Canada, you are met by an officer from the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA). You will need to show the officer:

- the letter of introduction from the visa office that you received when your study permit was approved (this letter contains your permit reference number and the CBSA officer needs this letter to issue your study permit)
- your passport or other valid travel documents
- your IGSPP letter of acceptance
- proof of funds documents
- your temporary resident visa, if required.

Carry these items, and all other valuable papers and cash with you at all times. Do not put them in your checked luggage.

You may not be allowed into Canada if any of your documents are missing or if any of the information on your application or letters of reference is incorrect.

If there are no problems at the point of entry, the officer will let you enter Canada and will issue your study permit. You should:

- check the study permit to make sure your personal information is accurate
- check the expiry date on your study permit. You must leave Canada by this date.
Document Checklist

The following list will help you ensure that your important documents are in order prior to your departure.

- Valid passport and/or official government-issued identification
- Letter of introduction from a Canadian embassy, consulate or immigration office. Again, this is not your study permit but you need to bring this letter with you in order to obtain your study permit upon entering Canada.
- Temporary resident visa (if required)
- Original IGSPP letter of acceptance
- Proof of sufficient funds (such as a bank statement)
- Credit card(s) (if any)
- Identification document with photo (if applicable)
- Medical and immunization records (if any)

To avoid problems at a later date, you should carefully review the letter of introduction and the TRV to ensure that your name is spelled correctly and that the term dates and other information are correct. If the duration of stay given is shorter than your program, be sure to let the immigration officer know right away.

Make photocopies of important original documents and keep the photocopies in a safe place at home or give them to a friend or family member for safekeeping. We also recommend that you have all your documents translated into English if the original ones are in a language other than English.

In addition, as you are here to prepare for your further post-graduate study, you may also consider bringing the following documents with you for future use:

- Academic transcripts (should be issued in sealed and endorsed envelopes by your home institution(s))
- Copy of degree certificates (should be issued in sealed and endorsed envelopes by your home institution(s))
- A letter of reference from a professor in your university (should be translated and issued in a sealed envelope or sent directly from your professor to the institution you are applying to)
What to Bring

Clothes and Shoes
Pack clothing suitable for Vancouver’s weather. Temperatures vary from an average of 22°C during the day in summer and 6°C in winter.

Vancouver is famous for its rainy weather, so bring an umbrella, raincoat and waterproof shoes or boots. We also recommend that you bring a warm jacket, gloves and hat for the winter months. You may also want to bring other warm sportswear if you are planning to take advantage of Vancouver's many opportunities for outdoor activity. Comfortable walking shoes are strongly recommended as the UBC campus is very large and spread out.

Electrical Equipment
Any electrical equipment you bring should be compatible with Canadian voltage, which is 110 volts (60 Hz).

As you will work on many assignments and projects that need a computer in the program, we strongly recommend you to secure access to a personal laptop during your time in IGSPP.

Food
You probably do not need to bring any special spices, cooking utensils or foods from home, as Vancouver is a multicultural city and a wide variety of ingredients is available.
Restrictions and Limitations

The Canadian government allows students to bring a reasonable quantity of clothing, books, computers and other electronic items for personal use. Restrictions and limitations apply to alcohol, tobacco and certain foods and agricultural products. You may bring all personal electronics into Canada duty free. However, we suggest that you make a list of all the items you are bringing, including serial numbers of cameras, stereos and computers, and the approximate value of each. More information can be found on the CBSA website.
Safety Tips

Vancouver is generally a safe city. To ensure you have a wonderful stay, however, please keep in mind these suggestions:

- Walk on well-lit busy streets.
- Travel with another person while sight-seeing or shopping at night.
- Be aware of your surroundings, especially at night.
- Carry only small amounts of money and a few credit cards that you need.
- Keep photocopies at the place you’re living of all your identification, credit cards or anything that would have to be replaced if your wallet or purse were taken.
- Place your valuables, including cash, credit cards, passports and airline tickets in a safe location. You can rent a safety deposit box at a nearby bank to secure your valuables.
- If you’re on the UBC campus at night, take advantage of Safewalk.

UBC does not accept responsibility for valuables lost or stolen during the program.

Useful Telephone Numbers

UBC Campus Security 24-hour line: 604 822 2222
Vancouver City Police non-emergency number: 604 717 3321
For fire, police and medical emergencies, dial 911.
Helpful Links

UBC Extended Learning

The UBC English Language Institute (ELI)

The University of British Columbia (UBC)

UBC Faculty of Graduate Studies

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

Vancouver International Airport

Public Transportation

Tourism Vancouver

See you in Vancouver soon!