

First Steps

If there are some mistakes or changes, please correct them in the electronic copy for the following persons. He or she will probably be as happy as you to get a smooth start in the American way of living. The list has shown to be the most efficient way to do things. If you can't do a step now, don't wait; proceed with the next one.

If you use this paper, please update it by correcting mistakes and changes and adding comments.

Inform Francisco Zaera about your travel plans and arrange a meeting with him in the first few days; his office is in the Chemical Sciences Building, room 146.

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Some information for International Visitors

In Riverside, \$1500 - \$3000 are needed to rent an apartment (1 Bed, 1 Bath). So, this is the minimum that must be available (expenses for food, etc., have to be added). A recommendation of at least about \$3000 to \$4000 to cover the gap to the first salary (not before the next month) is a good estimate. Bring a credit card with a generous limit so that you can spend money online and on site from the first day.

You can rent a car (from Hertz, Enterprise, Avis, etc.) for the first few days or weeks. Some options are available, such as renting the car at the Los Angeles airport and returning it in Riverside. In the first days, you will have to go to different places, especially if you want to look for apartments on site. There is some public transport in Riverside and Southern California, but it could be better developed.

If you prefer to look for apartments on site in Riverside, you can book a motel room for a few days (1-2 weeks). You can compare the prices and options, for example, on [booking.com](https://www.booking.com). For example, there is a Motel 6 close to campus. You can also think about booking an Airbnb or vrbo. If you have a car available, you can also look for motels in Moreno Valley, the neighboring town.

For international visitors, most of the information, including visa and travel to Riverside, will be provided in advance from the international scholar office when you prepare to get your USA visa.

1. Getting a SIM card

There are many companies providing cell phone services. Check online to compare prices. You can buy a SIM card online and ship it to your address if you already have one (or ask a group member to receive it for you). The faster option is to go to a shop (e.g., Best Buy, T-Mobile) and buy it on your first day. Many people buy a cell phone or sim card with AT&T (www.att.com), Verizon (www.verizonwireless.com), T-Mobile (www.t-mobile.com), or Sprint (www.sprint.com). You will need to provide an American telephone number in many places (administration, online shopping, etc.). Having mobile internet is also very useful.

2. Getting an apartment

There is a Housing Services Center on Canyon Crest Drive run by the university. Please visit the website, <http://housing.ucr.edu/>, first. Here, they might be able to set you up and find a roommate if you want. Otherwise, you will have to do this by yourself.

There are not many options for post-docs from the Housing Service, but sometimes you receive a list of the surrounding apartment complexes from the Extension Center, which is helpful because you can phone them to see if something is available and how much the rent is. I would recommend comparing prices and pictures online first, for example, on [apartments.com](https://www.apartments.com). So, you have only to visit a few interesting ones instead of many more. I recommend you decide one after visiting other apartments, too.

There are several apartments close to the chemical sciences building. One is University Village, and the other is Dwell Apartments. For the University Village apartment, the information is as follows. It is a 6-minute walk from the Chemistry department and also the cheapest for a one-bedroom apartment. For a twelve-month lease, the rent is \$1600 per month as of February 2024.

Several apartment complexes are north of the campus (Blaine St, Iowa Ave, Spruce St, etc.). Also, west of the campus is something available, although Riverside Eastside may not be the best neighborhood. A more wealthy neighborhood is Canyon Crest, south of the campus, with some a little bit more costly apartment complexes.

Rent is more or less than \$1600 to 2500 for one bedroom in the apartments around the campus. Maybe you can find something cheaper in the area, a little further away from the campus. There are some furnished apartments, but it would be more expensive than you expected.

There is also short-term housing information, so visit the following web page: <http://housing.ucr.edu>. Actually, it is difficult, especially to stay in a furnished apartment for a short term. Most students who want a furnished apartment stay in one of the campus apartments unless they rent a room in sharing house. Sharing a house is a good way for the short term and cheaper, but I think it is not suitable for families.

UCR also offers some information for off-campus housing: <https://housing.ucr.edu/help-desk/off-campus-housing>

You can decide to rent an apartment (temporarily) when you are still outside of the US, or you can decide to come to Riverside first and stay in a hotel for a few days/weeks. If you decide to take the second option, take the chance to visit some of the places in person. The pictures and information online can differ from the real-life impression. Look online for, let's say, the best three options, and visit them in person. You can schedule a tour through the apartments on their website, or you have to contact them by phone or e-mail, depending on the complex. Usually, the apartment complexes have a leasing office that is staffed Mo-Fr or Mo-Sa (you will find the exact hours on Google Maps or their webpage). If you have spare time and are in the area, you can also give it a shot and just walk into the leasing office. Don't get the first place you see – even if they say it might not be there when you come back. Relax and look around to avoid making a costly mistake. It will be a place where you spend time every day...

If you decided for one apartment, you typically have to go through an application process and sign the lease agreement. This will take a few days. You will have to pay the rent for the first month and a security deposit (it varies, something in the order of magnitude of \$1000). You will need an American residential address to open an American bank account. Consequently, you must find an alternative way to pay the first rent and the security deposit. Tell the staff from the apartment complex that you come from abroad, and you do not have an American bank account yet. Typically, they will ask you to pay with cash or money orders (they may ask for specifically one of the above). You can get money orders from Moneygram or Western Union; they often have counters in supermarkets (for example, Moneygram in Stater Bros). You need a debit card (not a credit card) to pay for the money order.

Take with you:

- Passport with Visa and DS-2019 (proves your salary and employment by UCR)
- the letter you have received from UCR or Francisco Zaera as an invitation
- Checks or cash for rent and deposit (some request money orders or cashier checks)

Come out with:

- Your permanent address in Riverside (street address and apartment number)
- Date and Time to move in
- Information about the utility companies and their contact information.

3. Checking in with the International Students and Scholars Office

Check-in with UCR's International Scholar Center (<https://international.ucr.edu/scholars>) located on the 2nd floor in the Student Services Building. They need to activate you in the SEVIS system. But more importantly, they will give you a warm welcome in Riverside and in UCR's international community. They will answer all your questions, too. If you are on a J1 visa, the person responsible for you is Makbule Koksall (makbule.koksall@ucr.edu).

Take with you:

- DS 2019
- I-94
- Passport

Come out with:

- SEVIS activation
- Signature for travel authorization on your DS 2019
- Membership in UCR internationals' Whatsapp groups

4. Getting Hired by UCR

Much of the paperwork will be done online before you come to Riverside. Nevertheless, you have to make an in-person appointment with Harvest Shared Services. They will ask you by email to make an appointment some weeks before you start in Riverside. If you need help with the process, you may contact Barbara Outzen-Hill (barbara.outzen@ucr.edu).

Harvest will ask you for your social security number. You will not have one if you are new in the US. Don't wait until you have one. Harvest can do the onboarding without it, and you can provide them with the social security number via email once you receive it.

After completing the paperwork with Harvest, you will be issued your UCR NetID. This takes about 2 days. If your name is Gerhard Ertl, your idea will be something like "gerharde". You will need this ID for all of UCR's online services, UCR Learning Center, UC Path, UCR mail, etc.

Take with you:

- Passport with Visa and your I-20 or DS-2019 and all the rest of your documents.
- Social security number if you already have one.

Come out with:

- Your UCR Net ID will be issued to you within a few days.

5. Getting keys

You can get keys to the lab and the gas cylinder cabinets from Barbara Outzen-Hill (barbara.outzen@ucr.edu, office in Chemical Sciences 248). She will also give you the password for access to the building after work hours.

6. Getting Started in the Lab

Contact Ilkeun (ilkeun@ucr.edu) to get started in the lab. He will assign you a desk in the lab.

You will have to read through some safety-related documents. They are on our website (<https://zaeralab.ucr.edu/docs-manuals>) under laboratory safety manuals.

You must also take a few online safety trainings at the UC Learning Center (<https://ucrllearning.ucr.edu/>). You will need your UCR NetID to access them. After finishing the online training, you have to provide Ilkeun with your training transcript.

Ilkeun will invite you to join our LHAT. After you have joined LHAT, you can do an online PPE training (<https://ehs.ucr.edu/laboratory/ppe>). After completing the training, you can get a free voucher for a set of PPE from EH&S. You have to make an appointment to get the PPE from EH&S (<https://ucrebs.simplybook.me/v2/>). Unfortunately, these appointments can be scarce. Usually, we have some spare lab coats in the lab that you can use in the meantime.

Ilkeun will give you on-site training in the lab, including chemical waste training.

Before starting lab work, you have to provide Ilkeun with a complete list of the chemicals you will use. Ilkeun will send you the list with the locations of the chemicals in the labs.

After that, you must write detailed protocols describing how to use each chemical. After all questions are resolved, Ilkeun will send you the corresponding SDSs and SOPs.

Ilkeun will guide you through the process in detail. This process will take several days.

7. Getting a Social Security Number (SSN)

It is needed for tax and payroll information in UCR and for lots of things outside. You can make an appointment online and fill in some of your information. However, my experience was that this is ignored on-site and you still have to wait and provide all the information again.

You can either go to the office in Riverside or Moreno Valley. Some say that the one in Moreno Valley is slightly better organized. The addresses of the social security offices are:

Social Security Administration Riverside
10000 Magnolia Ave
Riverside, CA 92503

Social Security Administration Moreno Valley
22815 Calle San Juan De Los Lagos
Moreno Valley, CA 92553

1-800-772-1213
<http://www.ssa.gov>

They are open Mo–Fr, 9–4, so being there half an hour early means you can be ready earlier. Be prepared to wait for a few hours. You may have to see different officers and wait in between. So, take something to read or otherwise keep you entertained.

You need to provide a residential address. This will also be the address where your social security card will be sent to. Consequently, you already need to have an apartment (or at least the contract signed and knowing your new address).

Take with you:

- A letter from International Scholar Office (It is different for international students and international scholars, the ISS office can give you information.)
- Passport with Visa, I-94, and the DS-2019.
- All of your documents

Come out with:

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- the letter saying that you have applied for a social security number

Don't forget:

- to give them your address.
- To forward your social security number to Harvest, so they can update your payroll and tax information.

8. Getting a Bank Account

My recommendation is to choose one of the bigger banks, Chase, Bank of America, or Wells Fargo. That way, you will always have an ATM nearby to get cash without fees. You can compare the different options online, but they are quite similar. Usually, you should fulfill the requirements to get the account for free (or even receive a sign-up bonus).

You can open an account online, but this may not work if you are new in the US (for example, if you do not have a social security number). Before going to the bank in person, it is recommended to make an appointment online.

You must open a checking account to receive your salary and pay your bills. Apply for a credit card, too. Many places (rental car companies, hotels, online shops, etc.) accept only credit cards. Credit cards are America's most popular payment method. You will also get some cash-back benefits.

When you go there, ask for Direct deposit, Electronic Checking, and Regular Savings. These services will be completely free of charge.

Also, ask for checks in some places if you need to use them as a payment method. Also, for the address that will be displayed on the checks, include a telephone number. If you do not have a phone, use the lab phone (951-827-5736). Otherwise, when you write a check, you will have to write it each time.

Take with you:

- Passport with Visa and DS-2019 (proves your salary and employment by UCR)
- the letter you have received from UCR or Francisco Zaera as an invitation
- the letter saying that you have applied for a social security number (it can also work without, then you may need your foreign tax ID)
- Some money for deposit

Come out with:

- Account Number
- Checks ordered (if you need)

9. Getting utilities for your apartment

Your property manager has given you a list of the companies you need to contact, some apartment complexes have specific companies they work with.

a) Electricity:

Electricity is normally provided by:

**Riverside Public Utilities
Downtown Customer Service Center
3901 Orange Street
Riverside, CA 92501
<https://www.riversideca.gov/utilities/>**

They are open M-F 9-5 and S 9-12:30. You normally have to go there in person to get service. A deposit of about \$175 is needed and kept for one year. It could take one to two days to be activated; rush activation is available but costs an additional fee.

b) Water:

Water is also normally provided by Riverside Public Utilities; see electricity. A deposit and activation fee could apply.

c) Gas:

Gas is normally provided through an apartment leasing company or by:

**Southern California Gas - Riverside Base
4495 Howard Ave,
Riverside, CA 92507
T (general): 1-877-238-0092
www.socalgas.com**

They are open M-F 8-5. You normally call them, and they will activate the service.

Have with you:

- Passport with Visa and DS-2019 if you don't have an SSN yet
- Complete address of your apartment, perhaps a leasing contract
- SSN

Come out with:

- Electricity
- Gas
- Water

10. Getting Internet/Wi-Fi and Television

You can use either Spectrum or AT&T services to get an internet connection at the apartment. You can purchase the plans either online or in-store. The plans usually include a modem and a router. For television, you can get streaming services from Roku, Google, and Apple.

**Spectrum Store
3602 Riverside Plaza Dr Ste 111,
Riverside, CA 92506
T: (888) 406-7063**

M-S 10-8 S 12-5
<https://www.spectrum.com/>

11. Getting furniture and other stuff

Apartments are normally **not** furnished. You have many possibilities:

- leaving employees and students sell their stuff (look at advertisement boards on campus)
- Amazon and eBay online store
- Walmart online and in-store
- IKEA, if you like a more European style
- ...

Sheets, covers, pots, utensils, and pottery can be bought in each supermarket, e.g., Walmart and Target.

12. Getting a UCR ID card (R'Card)

This will be used as identification and payment cards on campus. You can access most of the campus services, including the library, dining, and printing facilities. The UCR card office you need to go to get this card is in the Highlander Service Station, located next to the UCR Bookstore, and it costs \$36 (Feb 2024). The picture will be taken in the card office. Also, the card services will ask for an employee identification number. If you do not have a number yet, you can still get the card by asking to use a temporary number, not your social security number, for protection. Normally, you receive a staff or post-doc ID.

Take with you:

- passport with Visa or driver's license
- your employee ID or student ID number

Come out with:

- R'Card

13. Getting Parking Permit

Go to the Parking Services and buy a permit. Tell them how you regularly come to UCR (bike, walk, bus) and select a permit type; red, blue, or gold). You can find some information about the rates here: <https://transportation.ucr.edu/faculty-staff-permit-rates>. The bus services in Riverside are usually free for UCR staff and students. At the moment, you can use your R'card as a ticket.

**Parking Service
Linden Street**

Take with you:

- ID card

Come out with:

- A permit (allows you to park a car on UCR property)

14. Getting UCR library permission

The science library is located next to the physics building. Here you will find a wide range of books and journals. Go to the front desk to register for use. Use as address: Chemistry Department, Telephone x2-5736.

Take with you:

- R'Card

Come out with:

- registered R'Card for library use (they have to phone Barbara to prove your identity)

15. Getting a Californian drivers license

This is very important and will act as your official identification. You can either get a driving license or state ID. Both are the same, except on the state ID, it will say that you cannot drive. You can obtain these cards from the Department of Motor Vehicles or DMV. If you want a driver's license, you must pass both a written and practical test. For the practical test, you will need to use a car. The whole thing costs \$ 41. Detailed information can be found in the California Driver's Handbook: <https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/handbook/california-driver-handbook/>.

It will be greatly sped up if you make an appointment to take the written test. The phone and address of the closest DMV is:

6280 Brockton Ave
Riverside, CA 92506
T (local): 909-782-4100
T (general): 800-777-0133
<http://www.dmv.ca.gov/>

Take with you:

- complete address of your apartment
- SSN
- passport with visa and copy of the DS2019
- \$41 for fees

Come out with:

- come out with a temporary license/state ID (number especially is needed)

16. A final remark on taxes

In the beginning of the year you will have to file taxes in any case. You fill out the forms and then normally get some of the money paid back. Deadline is always April 15th, you have to have done it to this time. Otherwise, you could get into trouble. You must always file for federal (USA) and state (CA). The forms change slightly over the years, so visit the websites for the most recent ones.

The international students and scholars office holds tax workshops in February and March to provide you with some information. The ISS also offers an online tool (Glacier) that helps you fill out the forms. As a non-resident, you cannot submit your forms online; you will have to print, sign, and mail them. Do not use 'TurboTax' to file taxes as a non-resident.

USA (federal tax)
Form 1040NR
www.irs.gov

CA (state tax)
Form 540NR
www.ftb.ca.gov

Remark:

In the beginning, you will be a non-resident for tax purposes, which means you will be exempted from some federal taxes. But you have to file it anyway if you will get some back or not. Some countries have tax treaties with the US, so you can decide if you want to pay taxes in the US or your home country. Check the details; it may be that when you will stay longer in the US than the time of your country's tax treaty with the US (normally 2 years), you have to pay all the taxes for this period at once.

Getting started in UCR

Ordering supplies:

There are a number of different methods to order supplies.

You can get some supplied from the stock room (the person in charge is Pris) located on the first floor. Here you simply pick out those items needed, and on the form for the lab just fill in those item numbers. You will get your lab notebook, cleaning stuff, and tubing here. You can ask your lab mates for the access code to the room during off hours.

For more specific equipment, the order has to be requested by the procuring department by Ilkeun. You can find some information in Zaera's Lab Safety Instructions Doc on the website (<https://zaeralab.ucr.edu/docs-manuals>).

Machine shop:

The entrance to the CNAS machine shop is on the backside of the physics building. Ask a lab mate to show you the way if you go there for the first time. The two people working there are Eric and Jay. They are knowledgeable and helpful. You can ask them to make/repair you an item. Ask for a quote and confirm with Ilkeun that you can proceed.

Glass blowing:

It is next to the machine shop. The person in charge is Stephen. The procedure is analogous to the machine shop.