

**WHEN SUGGESTING EDITING, DO NOT RE-WRITE/DELETE ANYTHING. LEAVE IT AS A COMMENT PLEASE. -DOORY-**

Preface: The aim of this document is to provide you with a repository where you can find useful references for pertinent issues that earlier graduate (international) students have faced.

DISCLAIMER: This document was last updated on November 2020. Please note that the information provided here is subject to change. In case any corrections need to be made, please contact the DEI.

## Table of contents

# UF International Center

### 1) **Advisor:**

Upon joining UF as an international student you will be assigned an advisor based on your last name. Contact your assigned advisor for questions regarding the following but not limited to:

1. Maintaining F1 visa status
2. Getting permission to enroll in fewer credits
3. Help regarding OPS for internships
4. Application for OPT for post graduate jobs
5. Getting travel signature on I-20 before traveling internationally
6. Getting an invitation letter for inviting friends/family on visit visa
7. Renewing I-20 before it expires.

### 2) **I-20 extension:**

Depending on when your I-20 expires, you will receive an email from International Student Services to submit an online request. You will need the following documents:

1. Apply early: Please allow sufficient time for ISS to review the request form.
2. Letter of support from the department: Email LORI for this letter (lori@chem.ufl.edu)
3. Proof of financial responsibility: Available on the extension request website
4. Recommendation Letter: The extension request website will ask you to nominate your supervisor or graduate advisor to fill this form.

### 3) **Office Hours**

Virtual Office Hours	
Monday	11:00 AM to 12:30 PM EST
Tuesday	3:00 PM to 4:00 PM EST
Thursday	2:00 PM to 3:30 PM EST
Friday	10:00 AM to 11:30 AM EST
Zoom Link for each day: <a href="https://ufl.zoom.us/j/99370950903">https://ufl.zoom.us/j/99370950903</a>	

# Driving License or State ID

## 1) For those who already have a foreign driver's license:

- Students from Canada, France, Taiwan and South Korea, they'll take your foreign license and give you a Florida license.
- Germans are exempt from the written test but have to take the road test.
- For everyone else, if you bring your country's original driver's license you will be exempted from the drug test and the alcohol course but will have to follow all the other steps like a new driver.

## 2) For those who do not have any driver's license:

### • Step 1: Learner's permit

- You need to make an appointment for the learner's permit test. This can be taken at all Tax collectors office in Gainesville (Archer, Downtown and North)
- Handbook to study for taking learner's permit test - pass 32/40 mcqs (<https://www3.flhsmv.gov/handbooks/englishdriverhandbook.pdf>)
- You need to take the following documents with you on the day of the test
- Passport with visa
- Proof of non-immigrant classification provided by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (Form I-94); and
- F-1 or J-1 status documentation (Form I-20 or DS-2019); and
- Two original proofs of residence (cell phone bills, utility bills, original, apartment lease, etc) (Check full list in the link).
- SSN cards if one has been issued.
- Actual link for reference:  
<https://www.flhsmv.gov/driver-licenses-id-cards/what-to-bring/non-immigrant/>
- Cash/Credit/Debit card
- Quick vision test (having prescription glasses is fine)

After these steps have been completed, they will take your picture and issue you a card right away.

### • STEP 2: Driver's License

- Make an appointment for Road Skills test at the DMV (ONLY in the Gainesville North DMV/Tax Collector)
- Driving test with an examiner. Things to bring:
  - Car
  - Proof of insurance for the car
  - Learner's Permit
  - All the paperwork you did before for the learner's permit
  - Cash/Credit/Debit Card
- Reference website:

<https://www.flhsmv.gov/driver-licenses-id-cards/licensing-requirements-teens-graduated-driver-license-laws-driving-curfews/class-e-knowledge-exam-driving-skills-test/#:~:text=The%20Class%20E%20Knowledge%20Exam%20consists%20of%2050%20multiple%2Dchoice,correctly%2C%20or%20score%2080%20percent.>

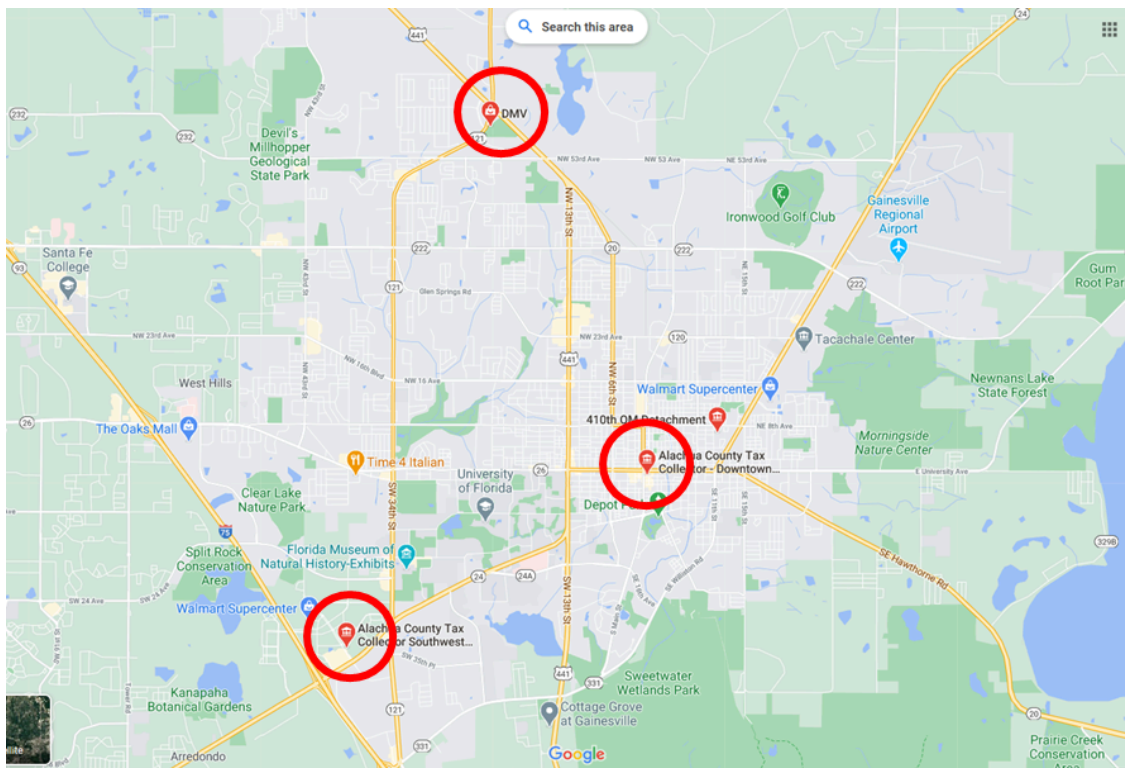
If you fail three times you will have to take an extra course to obtain the driver's license.

### 3) Driver's License Renewal:

Depending on your I-20 and other necessary documents including country of origin, the validation of Florida Driver's license will be determined. To renew before expiration, visit any DMV location in Gainesville with the most recent aforementioned documents. If renewing after the expiration date, there is an additional fee of around \$30.

### 4) Location:

The three DMV locations are circled on the map, but the actual driving test can only be done at the north location. All other administrative things, such as renewals and written tests can be done anywhere.



### 5) Parking in Gainesville:

Parking illegally can get you towed/fined. If you get towed in town, prices to get your car back are often between \$100-150 and you have to get yourself to the pickup location, which varies by company.

### 6) Parking at UF:

You need a parking decal to park on campus. The parking restrictions change depending on the day/time of day. As graduate students, a green decal will be appropriate. Parking restrictions can be viewed here:

UF Parking: <https://parking.ufl.edu/parking-at-uf/campus-parking-restrictions/>

UF parking decals: <https://parking.ufl.edu/decals/students/>

If you park illegally on campus you get a \$35 parking citation. You can appeal these at:

<https://taps.t2hosted.com/Account/Portal>

## Transport (other than cars)

### 1) Bus system:

Free RTS bus rides around the town are offered to everyone with gator1 ID card.

Download the Rider or TransLoc app to check RTS bus routes and estimated time.

WARNING: The service reduces on routes after 5pm, on weekends and holidays: Use

<http://go-rts.com/rts-schedule/> to make sure the desired buses are still in operation.

### 2) SNAP:

(Student Auxiliary Nighttime Patrol): A free safe ride offered by UF student government for going anywhere on campus. 6:30 pm – 3:00 pm Fall/Spring and 8:30-2:00 AM Summer.

Download the TapRide app and set up an account. Refer to

(<https://parking.ufl.edu/transit-commuting/snap/>) for extra info.

### 3) Cycling:

You need to wear a headlight when riding at night or you could get fined. Riding on sidewalks are prohibited unless cycling lanes aren't available.

### 4) Uber/Lyft/ZipCar:

ZipCar: a subscription/account is needed where you have to verify to rent the vehicle per hour.

Uber: UF has a promo deal for riding with Uber with 25% discount in the campus area.

Check the link for accurate promo info: <https://www.uber.com/blog/florida/uf-safe-rides/>

### 5) UF Ride Share:

There are two Facebook pages where UF students post if they are going to/coming from other cities. Some people offer free rides whereas some require sharing gas fee.

- UF RideBoard (23k members):  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/154188317997936/>
- UF RideBoard-Carpool-Rideshare (3k members):  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/UFRideBoard/>

### 6) Car Rental:

As a UF Chemistry TA/RA you are an employee as well, meaning you can rent cars through Enterprise, Avis, Budget and Hertz with a discount for business use and leisure use.

- **Business use:** Only if your professor/supervisor has agreed to pay for the costs and requires those receipts with a valid business reason.
- **Leisure use:** All others are categorized as leisure use with discounted price but note that the car insurance is not covered. Hence, you have to pay a small fee for insurance at the rental place or use your own car insurance from your own car (always check if it's valid for rental cars).
- **Link for the state contract:** <https://elink.enterprise.com/en/unifl.html>



## Lifestyle

### 1) Craigslist:

No verifications and screenings for any transactions, therefore be wary of scammers.

### 2) Free and For Sale Facebook group:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/386949108003579/> Generally more trusted source of purchasing and selling as plenty of students use the Facebook page, but precautions should always be taken.

## Apartment searching

There are a variety of websites and options when looking for apartments/roommates. You can choose to share a lease with others or live by yourself. Many places have move-in specials so it is encouraged to ask the leasing/management office about if there is any.

### 1) On Campus

You have to pay a \$25 fee and they will let you know when the apartments are available and you can select them. New listings are put on Fridays at 9 am and get filled up quickly.

- Pros:
  - i. Cheaper options for living by yourself or with your family.
  - ii. Close to work; bus access/cycling/walking distance (except Tanglewood Apartments)
  - iii. Free UF internet and some cable.
  - iv. Close to gyms/rec centers (except Tanglewood Apartments)
- Cons:
  - i. Washers/Dryers are communal.
  - ii. Don't allow non-family related roommates.
  - iii. Pets are not allowed (Need supporting letter).

### 2) Off Campus

A lot more variety in terms of location, room vs apartment vs condo vs house, furnished/unfurnished, roommates, pets allowed or not, washer/dryer in unit, pool and other amenities etc.

- Facebook roommate matching: You can find options here and be roommates with fellow students.
- Websites: <https://www.swamprentals.com/>
- Off Campus Life's Housing Locator: <https://housing.offcampus.ufl.edu/>

Virtual Appointments Off Campus Life has virtual appointments to provide you one on one assistance with your off-campus housing search.

website here <http://www.offcampus.ufl.edu/appointments/>

Topics covered include rent averages, lease information, sublease tips, apartment tour questions, roommate tips, safety information, transportation information and the opportunity to have your questions answered by Off Campus Life staff.

Note: some places may require a certain credit score, it might help if you tell them you are international graduate assistants that are employees of the University.

Note: You can also sublease if you are not happy with the place you are living in.

## Social Security Number, SSN

After being in the US for ten days you can apply for SSN. YOU NEED THIS TO GET YOUR PAYCHECK. You'll get a letter from the department with your employment number.

Things you need:

- Letter from the school official that identifies you, confirms your current school status, and identifies your employer and the type of work you are or will be doing.
- Letter from the department that describes your job, employment start date, the number of hours you are or will be working, your supervisor's name and telephone number and date and signature from your supervisor.
- Passport with VISA
- I-20
- I94 Travel History
- Proofs of address

Note that you will also be asked for evidence to show you do not have a SSN. For more information: <https://www.ssa.gov/ssnumber/ss5doc.htm>

NOTE: DO **NOT** GIVE THIS INFORMATION OUT TO ANYONE. KEEP THIS SAFE AT HOME. NUMEROUS SCAM CALLS ARE GOING AROUND ASKING FOR SSN VIA EMAIL/PHONE CALLS. KEEP IN MIND THAT NO GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL WILL EVER ASK YOUR SSN VIA EMAIL/PHONE CALLS.

## Passport

To enter the US, you need to have more than 6 months validity of your passport. Once the passport has expired you can't re-enter the US. Lost/expiry date/embassy/please make sure copy/picture of passport/visa/driver's license. If lost please report it to GPD and file a lost/stolen passport and contact UFIC.

Your passport must be valid for at least six months beyond your period of stay in the United States.

## Campus Organizations

### 1) Graduate student council (GSC):

This is a student body that is for all graduate students at UF. This group is funded by the UF student government which is funded partly by campus fees that all students at UF pay per credit hour. GSC uses the funds to organize events and distribute travel grants for conferences and professional development. Events include movie nights, tailgate outside, hosting speakers, etc. Travel funds are based on an application system, every month they give several monetary grants out to applicants that have written a proposal and gave a budget for their travel plans. More information about the application cycles and required information is on their webpage and events are on the facebook page.

GSC: <http://gsc.sg.ufl.edu/>

GSC Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/UFGraduateStudentCouncil/>

## **2) Graduate assistant union (GAU):**

This is a union that you can become an active member of with a goal to come up for contract negotiations and rights/privileges for graduate students. They will send out regular emails with updates about their plans and negotiations with the UF administration.

## **3) International students organizations**

The University of Florida provides a wealth of cultural opportunities to allow student to expand their understanding of different cultures, engage with their own identities and find a home away from home. There are several organizations within UF that you can join such as:

- APIDA (Asia Pacific Islander Desi Affairs)- <https://apia.multicultural.ufl.edu/>
- Black Affairs- <https://blackaffairs.multicultural.ufl.edu/>
- Hispanic-Latino Affairs- <https://hispaniclatoaffairs.multicultural.ufl.edu/>
- LGBTQ+ - <https://lgbtq.multicultural.ufl.edu/about/>
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There are also a lot of organizations specific for different nationality and ethnicity. More information and a complete list should be found on <https://orgs.studentinvolvement.ufl.edu/Organizations>.

- Arab Student Association
- Asian American Student Union
- Bangladeshi Student Associations
- Beta Eta Sigma Honor Society
- Brazillian Student Organization
- Caribbean Student Association
- Chinese Student Association
- Chispas
- Indian Graduate Student Association
- Iranian Student Association
- Pakistani Student Association
- Vietnamese Student Association
- Taiwanese Student Association
- Korean Student Association

## **4) Black/POC organizations**

There are organizations that provide environments for Black and students of color to socialize and learn together both on and off campus. These groups provide spaces to surround students with other students who may look like them or share similar cultural backgrounds. A few of these organizations are listed below, and as stated earlier, some more information on these organizations can be found online at <https://orgs.studentinvolvement.ufl.edu/Organizations>

- African Student Union (UF ASU) - provides a space for African students to interact socially and academically



- American Indian Science and Engineering Society (UF AISES) - society that focuses on the advancement of American Indians in science
- Black Graduate Student Organization (BGSO) - provides a space for black students to interact socially and academically
- Black Student Union (UF BSU) - a UF union that is primarily undergraduate-eun, but focuses on the advancement of black students at the university, regardless of discipline
- Black Women in Medicine - an organization that focuses on and encourages the advancement of black women in medically related fields
- Caribbean Student Association (CaribSA) - a social organization that focuses on providing a space for Caribbean students and those interested in experiencing Caribbean culture to socialize and interact
- Society for the Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science (UF SACNAS)
- Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (UF SHPE)
- National Pan-Hellenic Council (UF NPHC) - UF is home to all members of the Divine 9; students who became members in their undergraduate institutions are welcomed to interact; those seeking graduate chapters are also welcomed to interact here at UF
- In addition to these, the Office of Graduate Diversity Initiatives (UF OGD I), also provides spaces and events for students of many differing backgrounds to meet and interact with graduate peers from various programs and disciplines.

#### **5) Chemistry Professional Fraternity (alpha chi sigma)**

Alpha Chi Sigma (AXΣ) is a professional fraternity specializing in the fields of the chemical sciences. It has both collegiate and professional chapters throughout the United States consisting of both men and women and numbering more than 70,000 members. The fraternity aims to bring together students and professionals pursuing a wide variety of chemistry-related careers. Beta Iota is the local chapter at the university of Florida. Joining the fraternity is fairly straightforward compared to other greek fraternities. In the beginning of each semester, they have rush hours with different events such as info sessions, game night, grad student night, formal etc. In order to join you need to attend one of the events and express your interests. Then you will be invited to a formal to meet with other fellow brothers and learn more about the fraternity. There is a one time fee, 200\$ for lifetime membership and after that in each semester you have to pay 50\$ to remain active. The entire pledging process from pinning ceremony to initiation takes a whole semester. You need to learn the history of the fraternity and go through wyvern hunt. It sounds like a lot and yes, there is time commitment as each of these events specially wyvern and initiation takes the whole day but still, the pledging process is really unique and fun specially for international students who aren't familiar with Greek fraternity culture in America. The people in this fraternity are friendly and they always look for more graduate students to join as they are primarily undergraduates. You also will have the opportunity to be involved in a lot of outreach and volunteer activities that they do each semester such as Project Downtown, Habitat for humanity, Alachua county humane society, etc. More info can be found in their facebook page-  
<https://www.facebook.com/AXS.BI.UF>.

You can always reach out to Evelyn Martinez, the current MA or Tyler Wagner, the graduate advisor if you have more questions.  
 polypmse/fellows of chemical biology



# TAX

UFIC is providing a free non-immigrant tax filing program called Sprintax, **ONLY** for use by UF students/scholars. You will be provided access to Sprintax through a secure portal. You must use your gator link information to enter the program. Taxes are filed retroactively for the previous calendar year.

Do **NOT** use a resident tax program like Turbo Tax if you are **NOT** a us resident for tax purposes! You are **NOT** legally eligible to file a resident tax form unless you have met the substantial presence test (SPT) (which is part of the Sprintax program provided for you). The SPT normally takes 5 years of residing in the US (F1 visa)

- Documents needed before logging into Sprintax:
  - v. Passport
  - vi. Visa/Immigration Status information, including Form DS-2019 (if J status) or Form I-20 (if F status)
  - vii. Social Security Number (if applicable) or Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (if you have previously been assigned one)
  - viii. U.S. Entry and Exit Dates for current and all past visits to the U.S.; Travel history document available here:  
(<https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/history-search>)
  - ix. Forms W-2, 1042-S and/or 1099 (if you received any)
  - x. W-2 form: Is used to report earned income from employment and the amount of taxes withheld- either by mail from external employer or through MYUFL electronically
  - xi. 1042S: This form is used to report scholarship earnings and the amount of taxes withheld; used also to report tax treaty benefit for certain countries (treaty exemption amount exceeds \$3,000. (See IRS Publication 901: US Tax Treaties) – mailed to your local/ home address you have on file, by end of February
  - xii. 1099: form used to report interest earned on bank account savings or other investments. Also form used to report payments to independent contractors

## Additional information on specific situations

### 1) **Hurricanes:**

Hurricane Season starts from June to November. Since Gainesville is inland (about 2 hours from either coast), it is considerably safe and does not face the brunt of the storms. **However**, occasional severe storms do pass through Gainesville. If this happens you will be given a warning ahead of time. Use this time to stock up on necessary and non-perishable supplies as grocery stores will run out of supply quickly. Make sure to purchase non perishable food in case there is a power outage, it could take several days for the power to be restored. Avoid going out into the storm and stepping into/driving over water puddles as they might contain live wires!

Non perishable supplies such as

1. Bottled waters/water filters
2. Canned foods/non-perishable food/easy-to-prepare food
3. Flashlights/candles
4. Power bank/portable charging devices
5. First aid kit

make sure to have your passport and everything handy in case there's an emergency and you have to leave for a Hurricane.

### 2) **Strangers:**

People in America do initiate conversations/small talk and give compliments to random people. Therefore, don't be alarmed when people try to talk to you in buses, malls, grocery stores, etc.

### 3) **Spam calls:**

It is very common to receive spam calls from companies that are advertising from a call center or robocalls that are automated. Do **NOT** buy or agree to anything if you did not want to contact this company. To avoid spam calls, there are some apps in the store that you can download for free that will block spam numbers or mute your phone and show which spam organization called you. This is an example app:

[https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.webascender.callerid&hl=en\\_US](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.webascender.callerid&hl=en_US)

### 4) **Scams:**

It can happen that you receive a phone call where personal information is requested without valid reason. It is common for scam callers to try to steal your bank information, SSN, or other passwords. **Never** give this information over the phone. Be mindful that scam callers will pretend to need your information to help you out, which is not true. The same happens with emails, which are called phishing emails.

UF regularly warns people to check the sender's email address to prevent phishing, you can always report incidents or seek help from UF IT.

Note: Do not click on any links if the email looks suspicious. Occasionally there are phishing emails with UF email addresses as well.

### 5) **Homeless:**

The US has a significant homeless population. Some people might approach you and ask for money. Keep in mind that you are not obligated to help. If you do feel like helping, and

you have some cash/change on you, then you can feel free to share with them. However, it is advisable not to pull out purses and/or wallets in public. You may want to walk away a little, get the money, and then return it to the person.

#### 6) **Crime:**

Gainesville is, for the most part, a safe city. However, take adequate precautions to deter criminals.

Please keep your car doors locked and avoid leaving backpacks and valuables where they are visible. Most car thefts happen when cars are left unlocked at night.

Please keep your home locked and check who's at the door before opening it. If you notice someone suspicious loitering around your place especially at night do call UFPD/GPD/911.

If you live on campus call UFPD, off campus call GPD and if there is an emergency call 911 immediately.

Note: while people may walk through the front of your place or park there. Please keep your doors locked!

Avoid going through dark places by yourself at night. Keep UFPD and other emergency numbers on your phone.

## Social life in Gainesville

### 1) **Bars and Nightlife:**

- Legal drinking age is 21.
- Passports, driver's licenses, learners permit, Florida State ID all work (most venues don't accept international driver's licenses or IDs, only passports or US issued IDs). KEEP YOUR PASSPORT SAFE GET US IDs
- It's illegal to have an open alcohol container in reach while driving
- DO NOT DRINK AND DRIVE PLEASE as you can get ARRESTED with DUI charge (driving under influence) which results in severe consequences (such as termination of visa and deportation).

If you are drunk please use UF saferides, SNAP, Uber, Lyft or call a friend. DO NOT DRINK AND DRIVE or go with strangers.

### 2) **TIPPING:**

Tipping is customary in the US as a major source of income for a lot of workers', such as servers in bars/restaurants, delivery people and those providing beauty services, is through tips. The actual recommended percentage for tipping is anywhere from 15-20% of your purchase.

- Here's some examples of when/who **TO** tip:
  - i. You order at a sit down restaurant where someone brings you your food.
  - ii. Barber/Stylist
  - iii. Delivery Drivers for food (not packages or mail)
  - iv. Bartenders
  - v. Taxis/Uber/Lyft
  - vi. Hotel Valets/Porters/Bellhops/Room Service
  - vii. Cleaning services/Manicures/Pedicures other services
- Here's some examples of when/who you are **NOT** strictly required to tip (but tips are always welcome and appreciated):

- i. When ordering Carry-out
- ii. Bus drivers/mailmen
- iii. police/government officials
- iv. Grocery stores/Convenience stores/pharmacies (unless they bring your bags to your car)
- v. Plumbers, Handymen, Car mechanics
- vi. Fast food places (Not delivery)

**3) A note on Ordering at RESTAURANTS:**

My only advice to you is that if you are not sure on how to order, just ask them for help/directions on what they have and whether certain things will cost extra. Do not feel pressured by long queues behind you as most people are patient and you are paying for your food after all. Do not hesitate to politely ask the person to repeat themselves if you didn't understand them at first.

# Emergency Numbers and 911

## 1) Call 911 for emergencies such as the following:

- There's a fire
- Someone has passed out
- Someone suddenly seems very sick and is having a hard time speaking or breathing or turns blue
- Someone is choking
- Witnessed a crime
- You are in an accident or in danger
- Serious car accident

## 2) For all other non-emergency, call these numbers instead:

- UF Police Department: 352 392 1111
  - i. The goal of the Police Department is to ensure safety. Even if you are unsure if a crime has occurred, you may still speak with an officer to determine options available in making a report. You can document an incident, without pressing charges, to ensure safety planning and track for future incidences. You will be asked to share details of the event such as: location and what took place. If you're unsure of speaking with an officer, a victim advocate can be requested.
  - ii. UFPD also schedules FREE SELF DEFENSE CLASSES, seats might be limited though. These classes are mostly for women.
- Gainesville Police Department: 352 955 1818

# UF Legal Services

Student Legal Services is essentially a pre-paid legal service for full time UF students. Student Legal Services is staffed by four licensed attorneys who are available to offer students assistance in understanding and solving their legal problems.

- Phone: (352) 392-5297 (LAWS)
- Website: [studentlegalservices.ufl.edu](http://studentlegalservices.ufl.edu)
- Email: [sls@ufsa.ufl.edu](mailto:sls@ufsa.ufl.edu)
- Location: 3500 J. Wayne Reitz Union

Please check their website for more details: [studentlegalservices.ufl.edu](http://studentlegalservices.ufl.edu)