

International Students Frequently Asked Financial Questions

What are my options for opening a bank account?

You are not required to have a social security number to open a checking or savings account, according to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Some banks and credit unions will accept a passport number and country of issuance, an alien identification card number, or other government-issued ID number.

Many banks offer discounted rates for students. Contact different banks and credit unions to find out what types of accounts they offer, what fees they may charge, and what types of identification they accept. You should also look for a bank that has branches or fee-free cash machines (known as ATMs) close to campus.

Some banks will waive fees for student accounts. However, they may charge for ATM withdrawals or checks.

If you expect to have a large amount of money that you won't need to access immediately, look into opening a savings account as well. You'll earn interest on the funds and can transfer money from savings to checking to pay your bills.

Here are a few banks close to Saint Paul College that require only a passport and student ID to open a checking account:

- [U.S. Bank](#) - \$25 minimum opening deposit, no monthly maintenance fees
- [Bremer Bank](#) - \$100 minimum opening deposit; \$3 monthly maintenance fee
- [Wells Fargo](#) - \$25 minimum opening deposit with "Everyday Checking"; \$10 monthly service fee unless you're over 24 or maintain at least a \$500 balance.
- [St. Paul Federal Credit Union](#) - \$0 minimum balance requirements and no monthly maintenance fees.
- [Bank of America](#) - \$25 minimum balance requirement with "Bank of America Advantage Safe Balance Banking"; no monthly maintenance fee unless you're over 25
- [Huntington](#) - \$0 minimum balance requirements and no monthly maintenance fees with "Asterisk-Free Checking."

Finally, any payments made to the college that's paid from overseas can be paid using [Flywire](#), which is an international money transfer service that connects directly with Saint Paul College. Note that an international bank transfer through this service may charge the least expensive fee of \$25.

Consider downloading an app, such as My Currency Converter & Rates, to help with currency calculations.

How do I get a credit card?

Upon your arrival, you likely have no credit history in the United States, making it hard to get a conventional credit card. However, you may or may not need one. If you plan to live in the United States for several years and need to build credit history, consider applying for a credit card. A credit history can be important to rent an apartment, qualify for a low-interest loan and get favorable rates on car insurance if you plan to get a car.

However, some landlords don't check credit history, and you should save money for a car, if possible, rather than take out a loan. Therefore, it isn't absolutely necessary to get a credit card if you're staying for a few years.

Additionally, credit cards can get you into a lot of trouble if you don't pay off the balance each month. That's because credit card companies charge around 20% interest per year on unpaid balances. This means, if you don't pay off a \$1,000 bill in time, you will be charged an additional \$200 per year. If you pay off the complete balance each month, no interest or fees should be charged.

If used correctly, credit cards can be useful, and can even earn you "rewards" in some cases. However, you must be extremely careful to pay off the full balance each month to avoid high fees and interest.

An alternative is to apply for a secured credit card. This card works like a regular credit card – and helps to build your credit history – except that you would deposit money into an account as collateral. After a few months of making payments on time, you can qualify for a traditional credit card, if needed.

Note that irresponsible use, such as making payments late, will negatively affect your credit score. It's worse to have a bad credit history than to have a no credit history.

What is the best way to budget my money?

It's very important to create and stick to a budget so you don't run out of money. You could use a free app, such as Mint, to help you do this. Or you could use Google Sheets or Microsoft Excel to enter in your income and expenses each month. Below is a sample budget. Make sure your expenses don't exceed your income. You may want to build in some margin in case you have a big or unexpected expense in the future.

Income per month	
\$2,000	Money from home
\$500	On-campus job or internship
\$2,500	TOTAL
Expenses per month	
\$500	Tuition
\$200	Health Insurance
\$800	Housing
\$400	Food
\$400	Miscellaneous (haircut, entertainment, clothing, bus, etc)
\$2,300	TOTAL
Remainder (try to save for emergencies)	
\$200	

What are the best ways to send/receive money? (Wire transfer and fees versus common apps like Zelle, Venmo and CashApp.)

To send or receive money electronically, consider downloading an app such as Venmo, Cash App, or Zelle. There is no charge to send money with these apps as long as you are using a debit card or checking account. Some apps work better with certain banks, so you may need to try a few out.

A wire transfer is an expensive way to send money from one bank account to another, with fees ranging from \$25-50. However, it could be a good option if you need to send money internationally, want it instantly, or are sending a lot of money.

[Flywire](#) is an international money transfer service that connects directly with Saint Paul College. Note that an international bank transfer through this service may charge \$25.

What do I need to know before purchasing a vehicle?

Purchasing a car is a major financial decision. A reliable used vehicle will cost around \$3,000 minimum in today's market – and you should try to save and pay for the car in cash rather than take out a loan, which will cost you more due to interest.

In addition, you need to factor in the cost of car insurance, car maintenance (such as regular oil changes), sales tax, license tabs and other fees.

Below are some helpful tips:

Searching

- Try searching for used vehicles on Facebook Marketplace, Craigslist or online auction sites, such as Cranky Ape. Ask your friends if they know of anyone selling a car in your budget range.
- Check Kelly Blue Book and Edmunds to compare estimates of the car's value to its actual price to ensure it's a fair price. Consider reaching out to a friend who has purchased a car – or even one of the auto instructors at the college – for their opinion on the car you're thinking about purchasing.

Before Buying

- Check to make sure the car registration is up to date (the license tabs are not expired). If it isn't, that's a red flag.
- Look up a report on a car's history through CarFax. You'll need to ask for or obtain the VIN or license plate number to do this. If it has been in an accident or not been regularly maintained, that's a red flag.
- Verify that the seller has proof of insurance on the car. Again, if the seller doesn't have proof of insurance, that's a red flag.

Buying

- Meet in a public place, if possible, preferably where there are security cameras, such as in the parking lot of a bank or police station.
- After you agree on a price, fill out a bill of sale or title. Make sure the VIN number is included on this legal document as well as the purchase price, odometer readings, names and addresses of both parties.
- Ensure the seller signs the title, gives it to you, and contacts the DMV to relinquish responsibility. You also need to take the signed title to the DMV in order to tell the state that you are the new owner and pay the required sales tax, which is about 6.5 percent of the purchase price.
- If the name of a bank is listed on the title, you will need to ask the seller for what's called a "lien release form" The seller should get this from his or her bank. It basically states that the bank has no claim to the car because it has been paid off by the seller.

How can I get help paying for college?

Borrowing money can be more difficult if you aren't an American student. That's because students visiting on a student visa aren't eligible for federal student loan programs.

You may be eligible for private student loans if you have an eligible co-signer. This might be a relative or close friend living in the United States who would be responsible for the payments if you defaulted. Other lenders (whether based in the U.S. or your home country) may allow you to borrow money as an international student, but the rates and terms may be less favorable.

Although federal financial aid is not available to international students, you may be able to apply for scholarships through the state or school. Check with your college advisor.