UF
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

Guide Book
for freshers

(Celebrating 3000 downloads!)

What can I expect to find in this guide?

I've tried to cover the most frequently asked questions that I've noticed new students asking on Facebook, WhatsApp groups and on Edulix. Do note that this document is neither official nor curated by UF (University of Florida).

Frequently asked Questions
Is UFL better than this other university I've gotten an admit into?
How is the internship/job scene at UFL?
How difficult is it to make TA/RA at UFL?
Are part time jobs easy to get?

I've been admitted, now what?
Accepting an admit offer, scholarship and other initial paperwork.

How do I go about getting the visa?
Everything from paying the SEVIS fee to the final visa interview

Preparing for your travel
What you need to take and what you may not.

Making travel arrangements
How to get to Gainesville.

Housing
The best places to stay while at UF.

Banking
Paying tuition fees, setting up bank accounts and so on.

Shopping
Where you can get what you need.

Academics
Choosing your first courses.

Health insurance
Something most people have problems doing right.

Computer Science Exclusive:
Graduation plans and requirements, how to prepare and look for jobs, Course reviews, Company specific job application tips. **Possible Microsoft Referral** !

Before You Read Any Further

This guide was made for the sole purpose of avoiding redundant questions in WhatsApp groups, Facebook groups, in Edulix and so on. Most of the email I get from people, are questions that have already been answered here. People still go about asking redundant (and largely under-detailed or pointless) questions. **Please do not defeat the purpose of this guidebook.**

Also, despite numerous revisions of this guidebook, I notice that I've almost always left behind missing words, malformed sentences, grammatical errors and more. (I'm clearly not the most patient of people). I haven't taken the trouble to re-write sections taken from external sources (For example, attending the Visa interview etc). So, you might find some sections with considerably lower quality of language. Do overlook them.

Don't forget to read the last section. I'd appreciate constructive critique/feedback.

Remember, share the link to the guidebook, and not the PDF file itself, so others can have the newest versions as I complete them.

Thank you for sharing! With more than 3000 downloads from (excluding those who shared the PDF file itself) students, prospective students, and others (I've heard from all kinds of awesome readers), please do keep suggestions coming in!

Start at page 9 – find out which section you "belong to".

Table of Contents

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(Though, I'm not sure why)

About the Author, and a Disclaimer

I'm Dev. I graduated with a master's degree in Computer Science (Batch of Spring 2016), and have been with Microsoft, Redmond since. I also recruit for them, and have visited UF as part of the recruiting team during Microsoft's recruitment drive there. My research interests are Security, Applications of Cryptography, and Parallel Computing.

I've solely authored 4 IEEE (and 1 UACEE) publications, and co-authored 1 IEEE publication. My research has earned a Best Paper Award nomination at IEEE CCECE 2014, been cited a total of >70 times till date, and has been included in 2 textbooks and a standard graduate level textbook (Protocols for Secure Electronic Commerce, 3rd Edition), currently used as a course textbook in universities like CMU. Placing among the top world performers in the NSA codebreaker's challenge 2016, I received official recognition from the NSA (National Security Agency) in the form of a personally signed letter of commendation of "programming, vulnerability analysis, code-breaking and problem-solving skill", personally signed by 2 technical directors of the NSA.

Primarily a C++ developer with a proclivity for all things .net as well, I take special interest in reverse engineering and low-level programming. Recent work at Microsoft involved developing a migration infrastructure from the ground-up, to migrate all of Microsoft's 1.2 billion users from TableStorage to CosmosDb without service interruption. The infrastructure was designed to be generic, and continues to find use as a highly scalable bulk data processor. Also, designed and implemented global storage logic for Microsoft Teams' GroupCallPickup feature. My early contributions to the company led me to get selected to appear in an official Microsoft University Recruitment Advertisement.

Everything I've been graced to do, I attribute to the grace of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, without whom I am nothing. I wouldn't have been here without my parents' encouragement and support, and my brother who taught me programming in the 6th grade, and almost everything I've come to learn since then.

I've written this guidebook to the best of my knowledge. All opinions and advise mentioned here are my own viewpoints, and I am not responsible for any "consequences of any kind" that may arise because of any of the content (or errors) in this guidebook.

I've gradated, and I'm looking for someone to carry on revising this guidebook at the end of every semester. If you're interested in doing this, please feel free to email me. You can find my contact details in the last section. Lastly, this book is dedicated (with all my heart) to everyone mentioned in the last page.

Drawings, paintings, poetry, (noob) photography, musical compositions, handicrafts:
http://dreamersion.com/artwork/

J.A Dev
November 20, 2019

Section Index

Admit received

Is UF better than this other university of my choice?

I've seen questions like being spammed all over the place. Honestly speaking, one should be able to answer this by them self without necessarily having to ask anyone actually studying there. But, in any case, I'll make my opinion clear and (hopefully) backed by evidence.

If you find yourself trying to choose among universities ranked similarly in general terms, choose the one that's got the highest rank. If you're interested in a specialization, go for the one with a higher respective rank. For universities that are equally ranked (like ASU and UFL), it doesn't quite matter where you join. It depends more on how much work you put in once when you're at the university. According to me, things don't matter much in universities that are ranked within the top 35 in the US. Well, of course, the higher the rank, the "better". But, you need to understand that it isn't exactly a "life changing decision" when you're faced with trying to choose between similarly ranked universities. It's obviously easy choosing between USC and UF. I'm sure that the more aware of you (those of you with specialized interests) would more easily differentiate quality in research from among various universities. It's the ones with a more "general" outlook that seem to have problems choosing between universities.

Too long; didn't read: If you've got a specialized interest, choose the one more famed for it (Algorithms and security are two CS fields I'm aware of UF being known for. I'm not sure about other departments. People say that it's famous for construction management and material science as well). If the other university of choice is more closely situated to the West (and similarly ranked, this is the important part), go for the one closer to the West. If you've got no idea about your interest, choose the one that's better ranked. But, you've got to believe me when I tell you this: No matter what you choose, it more depends on what you do when you get to a university. UF has a good rank and has a reputation good enough to get companies to come here, but you'll have to work for the rest. The only thing you'd need to consider is whether the opportunities at a university (Rank>40) are so bad as to retard your efforts no matter how hard you work. UF isn't this. This is all I can tell you and according to me, this is what anyone can (reliably) tell you. Of course, universities in the West would probably have greater exposure to a greater number of companies, but then again, it doesn't mean that one would find it easier to get into a company just because more companies come to the university.

Is it difficult to get a typical job/internship in Florida/Gainesville?

"Typical internship" and "in Florida" are two seriously ambiguous things I've been asked so many times. I've seen people interning in places where it's unpaid and where they don't even have a typical office here in Gainesville. At the same time, I've seen people going off to places like Colorado and even Seattle (big companies, obviously). UF has good companies visiting it; Facebook, Google, Microsoft come here. So, other intermediate companies visit, too. Getting a "good internship" more or less depends on the initiative and direction that you take. The only thing anyone can most certainly tell you is that there aren't exactly any "well known" companies here at Gainesville. It is, after all, a university town of just 128,000 people (Which in comparison, is large. Cornel's Ithaca has less than 32,000 in population. You can quite easily infer how Ithaca, too, wouldn't have any "well known" companies there. This certainly wouldn't be your premise to waive off a Cornel admit, would it? The same goes for Gainesville).

This requires a section by itself. Refer to SECTION-V.

Is it difficult to make TA/RA?

I'm going to only speak for CS when it comes to this. I don't want to throw people off to unrealistic expectation by trying to gauge things by rule of thumb. So, before I answer the question, I'd like you to know that this by itself is a really ambiguous question. This varies from professor to professor, from course to course, semester to semester, and finally, year to year.

I've been told that the CS department is generally well funded, which means that your attempts to make TA/RA shouldn't be put off by a lack of funds (trust me, this all one can infer with certainty). I've seen professors who've taken in students for OPS (which is something like an RA, except that you probably won't be paid as much) the second they just put across a statement of interest (I won't name this professor for obvious reasons. He doesn't deserve spam or students who go in only for the sake of getting trying him). I've also seen professors who're extremely horrible to even please, let alone get assigned an RA from. In fact, these professors are so hard lined that they openly declare they don't relatively grade papers; they don't care if the whole class falls below a B grade. They set As to a 93+ score (which no one might even make). These professors are both the easiest and the most difficult to please. Difficult in the sense that it's difficult to actually score an absolute score of 93+ on the subject (professors who do this are generally in charge of the less taken, specialized subjects. (Again, I won't be naming them here for obvious reasons). They're easy to please because, well, make the score and you've got almost nothing else to prove when you approach him. This is most definitely not the case for others. But, then again, I've also seen a professor in charge of Analysis of Algorithms, give hearty consideration to people both on and off course.

The most general advice I could give is for you to apply early. I'm talking seriously early. Months before joining would be a good start. I've got to say this: For the love of all things good, please don't spam professors in hopes of "getting in by just attempting to do so". If you've got an idea about his research or if you've got a genuine inclination in research in general or his research, try to get to him/her, but don't shoot out empty emails that just claim that you know something which you know too little about or know next to nothing about. Try to defend and conserve what little starting respect we've all been given at a university. Don't blow things out. It's something like a shot with your crush: make a bad impression once, you're never going to get a chance to change that first messed up impression trying to be someone you're not (unless ofcourse, he/she's not the person he/she claims to be either. You should probably stay away from him/her. Oh, look, here I go off track).

How difficult is it to get part-time jobs?

This is something I can answer in most definite terms. It is quite easy. I've seen people quite easily getting jobs at Starbucks, Subway and other eateries. Others make UF jobs which are frequently advertised (Visit this link). I've seen more find jobs at call centres (not very stressful as it may seem). So, you needn't worry about this.

Spring Vs Fall

Ah, an age-old question that Edulix has seen asked at least 500 times till date. Naturally, (we) Spring students have this worry concerning our incapability to intern a year before graduation. For those of you who do not know, we're not allowed to intern unless we've stayed in the US for at least 9 months. Yes, it is obviously more convenient for Fall students, but trust me, it's not impossible (or something that's semantically close to "Impossible"). So, you're okay.

Post Admit Offer summary

I think you'd know that you first need to accept the admit offer. I've seen people waver for a while before accepting it. I implore those of you who get better admit offers to remember to decline your UF admit offers to help others get what you no longer need. The more time they lose out, the more difficult it becomes for them to get their things in order.

Anyway, here's a list of things you need to do. I've also tried to answer some questions I've seen along with them.

1) **Accept the admit offer**. You'll need to print out the letter, sign it, scan it, and send it back. Yes, you probably can send a photo as well, but scanning the document gives little chance for them to get back to you with a complaint of loss of clarity. It has happened before, so why would you choose to take your chances?
2) **Accept scholarships** if you've gotten any. CS people tend to win an AA award. Make sure you print this out, sign it, and scan it.
3) **Wait for confirmation**. You'll be contacted by an international student advisor.
4) You'll be given a set of requirements for a **Certificate of Finance (see following section)**. You'll need to get to work on this.
5) Get your **immunizations** done. Again, I'll be writing more about this later in the guide. You'll have to fax it to UF.
6) Set up a GatorLink account.
7) Once your **holds** are cleared, you can choose your courses until the early **registration** period ends.

Remember, get to work as soon as possible. The immunization procedure, in particular, takes a lot of time. The following sections will be deal with finances and immunization exclusively.

Certificate of Finances

You'll be contacted by an international student advisor. He/she will be clear on the steps required to be completed in order to get an I-20 form sent to you. Anyway, I'm including a screenshot of the text I received from my advisor:

Dear International Student,

We have been notified by your academic department or the admissions office that you have been admitted to the University of Florida. If you decide to attend the University of Florida, we will be issuing a Form I-20 which will allow you to apply for an F1 student visa. The International Center will need some documents from you in order to start the I-20 process.

When responding to this message, please include your full name and UFID in your email. This will help us quickly access your student record and expedite our response time.

Current cost of attendance for the first year at the University of Florida

These figures are a minimum estimation of the cost of one year's study at the University of Florida. Theses figures are subject to change at any time.

- Graduate Students: $48,755
- Undergraduate Students: $47,285
- If your spouse and or child will accompany you to the US, additional funds to cover the dependent expenses will be needed; $6,000 for a spouse and $2,500 per child.

Notice that the figures given here correspond to the I-20 amount for CS in Spring 2016. This figure changes, so don't work towards this amount.

You'll have to download and fill the CFR form (Get it from here). Here's a screenshot of how it looked like during my term:

Note that you don't need to have a bank official fill that second last section if you've got a financial certificate ready. Here's a sample of mine: (Bank account statement pages not shown)

भारतीय स्टेट बैंक
State Bank of India

16-09-2015

TO WHOM SO EVER IT MAY CONCER

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ maintaining NRE Savings Bank ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ with our branch since 2011 and the following Deposit accounts since ▮▮▮▮▮ and his dealing with us are satisfactory:

Sr.No.	Type of Account	Account Number	Amount in INR	Maturity Date
1	Savings Bank a/c -NRE	▮▮▮	▮▮▮	-
2	Term Deposit a/c -NRE	▮▮▮	▮▮▮	11/09/16
3	Term Deposit a/c -NRE	▮▮▮	▮▮▮	28/11/17
4	Term Deposit a/c -NRE	▮▮▮	▮▮▮	01/01/18
5	Term Deposit a/c -NRE	▮▮▮	▮▮▮	09/05/18
6	Term Deposit a/c -NRE	▮▮▮	▮▮▮	24/06/17
7	Term Deposit a/c -NRE	▮▮▮	▮▮▮	11/07/18

The funds on the Term Deposit accounts may be withdrawn at any time before maturity with 1% interest penalty.
The savings bank account and Term deposits are maintained in NRE status and hence the Indian rupee (INR) can be converted to US Dollars (USD) any time, by the account holder. The total is ▮▮▮▮▮ and approximate equivalent amount in USD ▮▮▮▮

Yours Faithfully,

Branch Manager.

You'll have to prove that the sponsor is actually willing to fund you, apart from just proving that he's got the funds to do so. You'll need to do this by getting an affidavit of support. I've attached a sample affidavit (**not mine; make sure the affidavit's better worded**!) below as a sample. (<u>You don't need this for the CFR. This is for the visa</u>)

How much funds I need to show?

This is course specific. The estimates on the I-20 come with a 9-12 month period or a normal 12 month period, the latter being a common occurrence. The general rule is twice the I-20 amount in most of the cases which should be covered by liquids and non-liquids. For cases where your program duration is 16 months, do your math and show an appropriate amount. But, remember, in case you can't make an exact double I-20, it's alright. It's more of a paranoid safety measure. But, you most definitely need to show a figure atleast, say 1.3 times the I -20 amount. VOs (visa officer) sometimes tend to want to feel certain that you're economically well enough, atleast well enough not to runoff in the US or emigrate.

In what forms can these funds be shown?

They say that funds for the first year must be shown in the form of Liquid Funds. Funds for the remaining duration of the course can be shown as Non-Liquid Funds. Also, it's better to not show property as a source of funds as one hardly sells it for funding his/her studies. However, properties/lands can be shown as an asset to establish strong home-ties, a reason for the VO's to believe that you have a strong base in your native country and won't immigrate to the country for which you are requesting a visa.

Liquid Funds:

Liquid Funds are those funds which are at your instant disposal. The following is a list of sources which can be shown as Liquid Funds along with the necessary documents required for each of them.

Savings Accounts:

Few people actually store huge amounts of money in Savings Accounts for obvious reasons. You will most likely be transferring money from a non-liquid source into your savings account to show for the visa interview. In this case carry documents as proof of transactions. In any case, be prepared to justify any significant deposits in your Savings Account with necessary documents.

Documents Required: Original Passbooks with transactions of at least last 6 months (optional), Bank statement, Proof of significant transactions.

Fixed Deposits:

A fixed deposit is a long-term deposit with a bank which yields a higher rate of interest. You can show either the Principal Amount or the Current Amount of a Fixed Deposit as Liquid Cash. Current amount will be higher than Principal Amount due to accrued interest but will require an official bank statement as proof. The Maturity Amount of a Fixed Deposit cannot be considered as Liquid Funds unless the Maturity Date is before the time when you will be needing the funds.

Documents Required: Original Receipts, Bank Statements for Current Value

Bank Loans:

A bank loan which has already been sanctioned can be shown as Liquid Funds. Be ready to explain what was used as collateral to obtain the loan, if required.

Documents Required: Original Loan Sanction Letter with the name of the university mentioned.

Scholarships:

Any monetary scholarship is also counted as Liquid Funds. These can be granted by various organizations, both from India and abroad. Make sure you are prepared to explain how you were eligible for the scholarship and your ties with the awarding organization.

Documents Required: Original Scholarship Letter, Documents proving ties with the awarding organization (especially for caste specific trusts etc.)

I-20 Student Application form

Before I get into this, let me first clear out something which some people (like me) have to deal with. For those of you who only have a "given name" in your passport and a missing surname field, I'd suggest you to do your best to split your name well in advance. It's likely that it's sometimes too late to do this, but there are certain advantages in doing so. There is potential that this will cause problems later if you apply for certain benefits such as a driver's license or social security number if you have a job offer. Please note that it is not required for you to change your passport, but if you have the ability to, I would recommend that you do so.

If you can't split your name, your entire name will appear in the surname field and the given name will appear blank on the visa. This works well.

Once your CFR gets through, you'll be asked to fill the I-20 application. Here's a screenshot of how I was informed of this:

We have received your CFR and are preparing to issue your I-20 document for your visa application. The link to the location of the "New International Student I-20 Application" which you need to complete and submit back to us is listed below. Read the instructions carefully. The information will be used to generate your Form I-20. All the items marked with (*) are required. Make sure all the information is complete and accurate to avoid an error on your I-20 and a delay in your visa application process.

New International Student I-20 Application: http://www.ufic.ufl.edu/is███████████

IMPORTANT: DO NOT distribute this link to anyone else; it is solely for your use. The International Center will email this link to a student ONLY when we know for certain that the student is ready to receive an I-20 from UF and all other pertinent information has been received by the center. Anyone that has not received this link directly from the staff at the International Center should NOT submit this application; it will be discarded.

Following are some important points to keep in mind while completing the form.

Name Format and Use of Special or Non-English Characters:
• Your name must be entered exactly as it appears on your passport. Clearly specify the surname and given name(s).
• SEVIS does not accept Non-Alphabetical characters in the name. Omit characters (such as hyphens, periods, or special characters from the name). If your name contains a hyphen, we recommend that you replace the hyphen with a space.
• SEVIS does not accept Non-English characters, such as non-english letters or punctuation marks. If non-english characters are used, the information will appear distorted or incorrect on the I-20.
• If you do not have a surname or if you do not have a given name, please attach and email a copy of your passport bio and photo page in JPG or PDF format when you submit your I-20 Application; be sure to write your UFID in the email. If you do not have a surname, it is required that we use your given name in the surname field.

Date Format and Addresses:
• All dates must be reported using the month/day/year (mm/dd/yyyy) format.
• The permanent foreign address is your address in your home country. Do not leave that section blank.
• The mailing address is the address where you want to receive your I-20 form. In order to send your I-20 to the right place, we need the physical address where the I-20 is to be delivered and a phone number where you can be reached if there are any problems delivering the package to you. Do not write PO Box addresses.

Dependents:
Only your spouse and/or children can be claimed as your dependents for I-20 purposes. Other family members are not eligible. If you want to obtain an I-20 for your dependents, complete the information as requested and make sure that it is accurate. If you are currently engaged to be married and want an I-20 for your fiancé, we will generate an I-20 for your fiancé but you must be married before applying for the dependent visa. The consulate will require proof of the marriage.

Understandably, I've redacted the link. You'll get it when you're done with the CFR, don't worry. There's hardly anything much after that. Anyway, I've included a screenshot of what comes through once you do follow the link:

Newly admitted international students at UF who have received a request by email from UFIC need to complete the process below. You will be directed to our UFIC Study Abroad Online system to complete an application that collects all the information required to issue your I-20.

Before completing this process, please gather the following documents and information:

- Your passport
- Passports for all dependents accompanying you to the U.S.

Instructions for completing the New International Student I–20 Application

- Click the "Start Now" button at the end of this page to initiate your application.
- Answer "Yes" to the question "Are you currently a registered user at UF with GatorLink login credentials?" and click the "Submit" button.
- Use your GatorLink username and password to authenticate yourself on our system.
  Note: If you do not have a GatorLink username and password, click "Create Account" to create your GatorLink credentials. You may have to wait 1 or 2 days to come back to this page and complete your I-20 application.
- Select the term for which you have been admitted to UF and click "Apply".
- Your New International Student I-20 Application page will open.

On the New International Student I-20 Application page, you should find a set of questionnaires you must complete to provide us with the required information to issue your I-20.

- Open each questionnaire and fill in everything that applies to you; leave blank what does not apply to you.
- If you do not have any dependents accompanying you to the U.S., open each dependent's questionnaire and answer "no" to the first question and then click the "Submit" button.
- Do not submit anything that contains non-English letters, accents, characters, or symbols.
- When a questionnaire is completed, click the "Submit" button. If you click the "Save" button, your answer will not be submitted. As you submit your questionnaires, they will be checked as "Received".

Once the UF International Center has received all the materials necessary for the I-20 (including but not limited to the Certificate of Financial Responsibility, the New International Student I-20 Application, and any additional documents requested), it will take about one week to process and mail the I-20. This is an estimate, the actual processing time may vary. UFIC will send the initial I-20 by DHL or FEDEX to the address the student specifies if the student is residing abroad. The estimated delivery time is about 3 to 5 days and the student will receive an email from DHL or FEDEX with the package tracking number. If the student is residing in the US, UFIC will send the I-20 by regular postal mail. The estimated delivery time is about one week. If the academic department contact requests to pick up the I-20 for the student, the contact person will be informed when the I-20 is ready. The contact person will communicate with the student to coordinate the package shipment. In case UFIC needs any further information, the student will be contacted by email.

Please do not call or send multiple emails to UFIC asking about your I-20.
Multiple emails and phone calls delay the I-20 process for all new international students.

Start Now

Now, like I previously mentioned, I have this problem with my name; the way it appears in my passport. So, I came across this issue where I couldn't leave the surname field blank. Just get to your advisor and he/she will tell you what to do. It's not a problem.

Once you get these things done, you'll be mailed your I-20 by DHL. They'll give you a tracking number which you can use. You'll be charge a certain amount for this, but you'll have to pay it only when you come to UFL. Here's a screenshot of the final I-20 related email that you'll get:

Once you get your I-20 form, you might notice how the employment section seems empty. Do not fill it out. Leave it just the way it is.

Immunization forms

You can begin working on the immunization form before you get your I-20 (Get it here). You'll need to email the form to them. I'll try to answer as many frequently asked questions as I can:

Is it okay to waive off the ones I can?

Yes, you can, it makes no difference to your enrolment. All this is just for record keeping. But, of course, the more sensible of you would try to get yourselves immunized. This is not a problem if you start early.

Do I have to take the Skin based TB test?

No, you do not. All you need to do is to get the QFT test done. If that turns out positive (there are a few reasons why this can happen. It doesn't necessarily mean you've got TB. Talk to a medical professional for this. I'm no doctor). You'll just have to get an X-Ray to show you haven't got T.B.

Why are there two or three slots for some of the vaccines?

They require two or three shots. You'll need all of them. The problem is some of them require a month's gap between each shot. So, start early.

Do I need some "big time" place to get my document signed?

No, I got mine from a small clinic.

Registering for Courses

You've got a window period where you can register for courses in advance. At the time of writing of this guide, I'm guessing it's already closed or too late to register for the more sought after courses. I'll try to answer some of the most frequently asked questions here.

Why can't I add courses?

This may be because of one of several reasons. It might be past the advanced registration period. It might be department controlled; you need to ask someone in charge to add you to the course manually. For CS, this is either Adrienne Cook or Kristina Sapp (Who you probably already know all too well). It might also be because the course you're trying to add isn't a graduate course. For CS, you can add courses only with course codes having prefixes 5 or 6 (5XXXX and 6XXXX).

What can I do if the course I want to take is fully taken?

There's nothing you can do. You'll just have to wait till the add/drop period where you can hope for people to drop the course.

What if I want to drop a course halfway through the semester?

You can, though I'd obviously suggest you not to do so for obvious reasons. The toll on your GPA isn't as great as you may think it would be, but it's still not worth it.

What's the Add/Drop period?

It's generally the first week of class where students are free to add or drop as many courses as they please. You can attend class and see whether you're comfortable with it. If you like it, you can keep it. If not, you're free to drop it. Watch out for courses that you may want during this time, some courses free up and you can enroll for them.

Health Insurance

All UF students are required to have health insurance (Except those of you who make TA/RA). The default health insurance that students are put under is considered expensive and also suffers from a lack of "features" as compared to what you can actually get. (Here's the link to the relevant page).

Here's your **definite guide to health insurance** (written by my good friend, Rahul Sengupta).

What if you do nothing before the deadline?

You will be auto-enrolled in the school sponsored Student Health Insurance Plan and a charge will be placed on your account.

How do I submit a waiver?

Here you go, here's the link. Once you do this, they'll take a few days to confirm your purchase of PSI platinum (or anything else) before they remove the default health insurance plan. Be warned, do this well in time before the last date of payment.

Section - II

I-20 received

Clearing Holds

You'll find a number of holds in your account, like having to make a GatorLink account, updating your address (don't take this too "rigidly". Some people don't have a clue as to where they'll be staying even a week after they reach the US). Anyway, just to make things centralized, I'll include stuff from the check list provided by UFIC (Link)

Set up gator link account:

Create your GatorLink account here or go to the Computer Help Desk at the HUB. Get your Gator1 card ($15) or photo ID and your UFID (Link). WF bankers sit outside where you get your ID card, so consider setting up your bank account here itself. (Reitz Union second floor – visit the link to know more about how to get your ID card) If you did not receive an email with the GatorLink account on submitting the application, you need to:

- Mail helpdesk@ufl.edu; OR
- Call the helpdesk using google hangouts app for android [Free calling to the USA]; OR
- Call the helpdesk using Skype; OR
- International call. On an average, you will require 10-15 min on the call. Might cost around Rs 8 per minute.

The first thing they ask for is your UFID. So, keep it ready. They will confirm your name, date of birth, email id etc. They will confirm/correct your phone number and you will be sent an email with a link and invitation code. The emails might go to spam, be sure to check all folders. Just follow the steps and use email instead of the phone number for OTP.

Emergency contact information:

This hold will appear on your record each semester. (Link)

Registration preparation:

This hold will appear on your record each semester. Complete 'Registration Acknowledgement' to clear the hold (Link)

Complete new/change of address:

You are required to report your U.S. address in the UF Directory and to USCIS within 10 days of arrival into the United States and each time there is a change in your address. The reported address cannot be a PO Box. (Link)

Booking an F1 Visa interview

Steps for booking a visa appointment date:

Things you must be ready with before you sit down:

- A decent internet connection for atleast 2 hours (You can fill it up taking break - saving your progress and then resuming later on).
- Your passport and I-20.
- Your present address, permanent address and address of your parents.
- Names, contact and addresses of two references other than your parents.
- A credit card to pay your SEVIS fee ($200).
- Official date of birth of your parents.
- Your high school/secondary education School name and address

STEP 1 – Paying the SEVIS FEE

This payment confirmation receipt is an important document to be shown on the date of your appointment.

- Go to http://www.fmjfee.com. Click on "Submit Dorm I-901 and Fee Payment"
- Select the I-20 option next to fill your I-901 form
- Fill the required details exactly as mentioned in your I-20. Enter the correct SEVIS identification number. It is present on the top right of your I-20 and starts with 'N' Proceed to fee payment and SAVE the confirmation page which is generated.
- Save this payment confirmation page.
- A print-out of this payment confirmation will be required along the other documents.

STEP 2 – Filling out your DS-160 Form

DS-160 is another important document which is required to book your Visa appointment. It's a lengthy document and will take up about 1.5 hours at a stretch. Follow the steps with caution since you cannot afford any mistakes here:

- Go to https://ceac.state.gov/genniv/. Select the location where you will be applying for the visa, and choose "Start an application".
- You will now be directed to a page where a unique application ID is generated for you. Make sure to save this page somewhere or note down the Application ID at a safe place. The ID will look something like "AA004UQ4TE". This ID will be used to retrieve your application.
- Answer the security question (note down the answer somewhere) and proceed..
- You'll have to fill 10 pages of information. Note that you can save your application after every page you fill. This is important in case your page expires.
- You should be able to fill out the DS-160 form without much difficulty. In any case, I've added some pictures which might help you potentially confusing places. (images taken from Edulix.com).
- Once you have completed all the required information, cross check everything in the Review section. Take a printout of the final form for future reference.
- Submit the final application, and save the confirmation page. A printout of this DS-160 confirmation along with your SEVIS payment confirmation are required for the visa appointment.
- Here's some information you might find important in the process:

DS-160 Form Guide:
TRAVEL

Purpose of your trip to the U.S.	ACADEMIC OR LANGUAGE STUDENT (F) STUDENT (F1)	You will have to choose from the drop down options: ACADEMIC OR LANGUAGE STUDENT (F) STUDENT (F1)
Have you made specific travel plans?	No	Answer 'Yes' or 'No' If you answer 'No', as per the visa regulation – a student, after the visa is approved, cannot enter the US 30 days before the college start date, therefore you can mention any date which is within the 30 days of your college start date. If your answer is 'Yes' then mention the, "Intended Date of Arrival" (Format: DD-MMM-YYYY) and
Intended Date Of Arrival	DD-MM-YYYY	Any date which is with in the **30 days** of your college start date (As per the visa regulation students cannot enter the US 30 days before the college start date)
Intended length of stay	Phd.- 5 years MS – 2 years UG- 4 years	Phd. 5 years – MS – 2 years UG- 4 years (Sometimes the I20 for MS program may have a 36 months duration still mention 24months or 2 years, if it's less then 24 months then mention the duration as per the I-20)
Address Where You Will Stay in the U.S:	Advisor/University campus address.	Write the address where you will stay in the United States, for students (F1 visa), this response might include your expected dormitory address or if this is not known, your International Advisor/University campus address. This should be the address where you can actually be contacted.
PERSON PAYING FOR YOUR TRIP	OTHER PERSON	Person/Entity Paying for Your Trip You can choose from the following options: SELF OTHER PERSON COMPANY/ORGANIZATION

DS-160 Form Guide:
U.S. Contact

CONATACT PERSON NAME IN THE U.S.		THE PERSON WHO SIGNED YOUR I-20 FORM
ORGANIZATION NAME IN THE U.S.		UNIVERSITY NAME
RELATIONSHIP TO YOU	School Official	Choose from the following choices: RELATIVE SPOUSE FRIEND BUSINESS ASSOCIATE EMPLOYER SCHOOL OFFICIAL OTHER You should choose "school official"
U.S. CONTACT ADDRES		Mention the name of the University
PHONE NUMBER		Mention the University contact number
EMAIL ADDRESS		Mention the University's email address (You can find the email address either on the letter received from your college or give a general address which can be found on the college website)

DS-160 Form Guide:
WORK/EDUCATION/TRAINING

YOUR PRIMARY OCCUPATION		Depending on your current situation – if you are studying mention **student** if working then – answer accordingly -If not working or not a student – mention "not employed" -the system will give you an option to explain your situation
PRESENT EMPLOYER OR SCHOOL NAME		Mention the name of your school or the name of your employer in India
ADDRESS (WITH STATE ZIP CODE AND PHONE NO.)		Complete address of your employer / school
MONTH SALARY IN LOCAL CURRENCY		Mention your salary (if employed) If you are a student – then click on (does not apply)
BRIEFLY DESCRIBE YOUR DUTIES		Mention accordingly and briefly about your duties.
WERE YOU PREVIOUSLY EMPLOYED		(IF YES, WRITE NAME OF EMPLOYER, ADDRESS, SUPERVISOR NAME, DATE OF EMPLOYMENT AND YOUR DUTIES).
LIST ALL YOUR EDUCATION INSTITUTION (INCLUDING COLLEGE NAME, ADDRESS, COURSE OF STUDY, AND DATE OF STARTING AND ENDING OF YOUR COURSE.)		Start with the most recent education and then go backwards E.g.: Graduation – then your class 12 If you do not remember the exact dates – you can mention any date – but the month and the year should be correct.
Current Location (write state and country's name)		New Delhi – India
SEVIS Number	N000*******	N000 ***** (This is the SEVIS number which is mentioned on your I20- you will find it on the right side of your I-20 – it starts with N000 1234567)
Course Name		
PLEASE ENTER THE NAMES, ADDRESSES AND CONTACT NO. OF 2 PEOPLE WHO CAN VOUCH FOR YOU. THEY CANNOT BE FAMILY MEMBERS	In India	You can provide the address of any friend neighbor or family friend (no relatives at all)
Language Known		Hindi, English and other language
Have you traveled to any country with the last 5 years		If you have traveled – mention the name of the countries.

STEP 3 – Booking a VISA interview date on USATRAVELDOCS

This is the final step. You now have your SEVIS payment and DS-160 confirmation with you. You are all set to book an appointment date for your visa interview.

- Go to http://www.ustraveldocs.com/in/index.html
- Click "Yes" if this is your first time applying for a US VISA. You will be applying for an "F1" type visa which is essentially a non-immigrant visa.
- A number of instructions will show up. Overlook them, and go to the main HOME page.
- Create an account and note down your password somewhere for future references.
- A dashboard will appear. Go ahead and select the "Schedule Appointment" tab on left side follow all the instructions till the payment page.
- You'll be shown of options for paying $160 to schedule an appointment. This payment can be done only in Rupees.
- If you want to pay by cash, you can do so by selecting the AXIS bank option. A payment slip will be generated with the amount to be paid mentioned on the slip. Take the printout of the slip and deposit the required amount at a nearest AXIS bank. The transaction takes a maximum of 48 hours to go through (usually it is not more than 5-6 hours). If you want to pay by NEFT (electronic fund transfer) or Net Banking. Click the "Bank of America" option and follow the instructions carefully. The account number generated here is valid for a limited time. So, take care to complete the procedure the same day. Once the beneficiary is added, transfer the mentioned amount to the account. Wait for 4-5 hours for the transaction to go through.

- Save the payment confirmation page.
- Once the transaction goes through, login again at usatraveldocs, and enter the receipt number. You will be taken to the next page, and prompted to book a visa appointment date
- The visa appointment requires two days. On the first day, your fingerprints and photographs are taken. This is called "OFC". You'll have to book for the visa interview on another day.
- You will first be prompted to book your visa interview date (available only on weekdays. You'll have to select a date for the fingerprints and photographs (has to before the visa interview, and available on weekdays and Sunday). So, you've got to select two dates.
- A pickup location must be selected for you to pick up the VISA once it is processed. Once you have finalized all your dates, go ahead and submit your request.
- Save the form which is generated. A printout of this is required as a proof of visa appointment when you go there.
- You are now done with booking a visa date. All you must do now is to get your finances ready before you visa appointment.

Visa received

Getting to Gainesville

There are no direct flights to Gainesville since there're no international airport here. As with every place in the world, plan ahead and book early to save money. There's no general route that will save you money. People say that going through Miami tends to be cheaper, but I haven't exactly been able to observe that in consistency. In any case, you've got two choices, you can arrive at Gainesville by bus or by flight. There's probably nothing much to say about arriving here by flight. What I can tell you about is coming by bus (specifically, my experience of coming here via Orlando).

You've got a couple of bus carriers: Redcoach (the most expensive), MegaBus and Greyhound. My advice is to avoid MegaBus since I've heard that girls tend to avoid this (I'm not sure why or how far this is true, but I'm guessing because it tends to be unclean and/or unsafe). The problem with Greyhound is their timings. If you've got a late-night flight, you'll have no choice but to choose RedCoach. (By the way, Redcoach has student discounts). Greyhound buses aren't frequent enough at night and at sometimes during the day.

If possible, it's best for you to try to simply arrive at Gainesville by one connecting flight or the other. You needn't leave the airport area. It might cost you a little more, but having spent 20+ hours in-flight, you're bound to be tired. I was told that a number of people actually get lost trying to navigate the local bus system upon arrival (At Miami, Jacksonville, etc). Remember, you'll be pulling your luggage as well. Recall that most bus services don't have shuttle services to take you from the airport to their bus stands.

Do I need to pay extra for baggage in buses?
Yes, you need to pay for more than 1 check-in bag if you're choosing anything other than RedCoach and Greyhound (as of August 2015). So, if you're bringing more than a single bag, you might as just pay for RedCoach since they provide you shuttle service to their stand, and also allow 2 bags.

How many bags can I check-in in flights?
This varies from airliner to airliner. But, most airliners allow 3 bags for students (you'll need to contact them, send them your I-20 form for them to allow this).

Where do I board buses from the airport at Orlando?
I recall this being on one of the ground floors; go all the way down. Take the shuttle to the stand.

How do I get to my place from wherever I'm dropped off at Gainesville?
This is tricky. I was alone and didn't take the help of the Indian association that we have here. I just asked a stranger to call me cab. I got on it, and went on to the place where I wanted to go. For those of you who want to feel free of the anxiety of depending on a stranger (they're not bad, trust me), you can hook up with the Indian association. Most of my peers did that. For a fee, they pick you up from the airport and even drop you to where you want to be. (I've mentioned the link to their website further down the guidebook)

For those of you who're interested, the IGSA (Indian Graduate Student association) picks up for a small fee. Visit their site to know more.

Any other advice?

Redcoach has a free shuttle service to their stand somewhere in the city. I've heard that the shuttle servicemen try to rip off new arrivals by talking them into large tips; they claim that you need to tip them a minimum of $5. They tried this on me, I was able to find out what was going on and asked them why they had asked just me. Do the same, don't give up your money for those who try to cheat you. Award it instead to those who try to earn by honest means.

Prepare to get scam phone calls. You'll get phone calls claiming that your visa's been revoke, that your taxes are unpaid, or that you're wanted. They'll sound scary, intimidating and genuine. Their numbers might even show like they're from the UFIC (a friend of mine got called from numbers which TrueCaller displayed as being from the IRS and the UFIC). Do not fall for it. Do not give your social security number, birth date or anything. Always ask them to prove their authenticity. Always, always check with the UFIC before you yield to anything. Till date, I've heard a million scam calls from different people, with not a single one being a false negative. Do not worry.

Checklists and advise on what to buy/carry to the US ?

Since people asked for something like (sigh), I put together stuff which I observed most people bringing along with them (though, I personally didn't bring most of these):

Toiletries
Tooth Brushes
Tongue Cleaner
Shaving Razor
Shaving Foam
Trimmer
Facewash
Cold Cream
Combs
Perfume
Nail Cutter
Ear Buds
Sunscreen
Lip Balm

Clothing
T-Shirts
Denims
Polo
Formal Shirts
Formal Trousers
Undergarments
Formal Suit
Ties
Shorts
Track Pants/Pjyamas
Swimming Trunk
Traditional Wear
Personal
Towel
Hand Towels
Formal Leather Belts
Back Pack
Formal Leather Shoes
Sports Shoes
Sunglasses
Socks
Sweaters
Light Jacket
Muffler
Handkerchief
Slippers
Winter cap
Knight armour (with helmet and sword)

Medicine
Crocin
Crocin
Combiflam
Zinetac/Gelucil
Erythromycin
Avomine
Diclogem
Cyclopam
Lopomide
Vicks Vaporub
Diziron
Esgypyrin
Relispray

Food stuff (?)
Sweets and snakes (yes, reptiles)
All Powders (Chilli, Garam Masala, Rasam, Sambar, Pav Bhaji, etc)
All Dals
Sugar, Salt and Pepper
Tamarind
Ginger-Garlic Paste
Papad

Electronics
External HDD
Laptop
Power Bank
Ear Phones with Mic
Travel Adaptor
Scientific Calculator
Batteries

Misc
Umbrella
Doublebed sheets
Pillow Covers
Duvet + Quilt + Pillow
Wallet
Passport Wallet
Wrist Watch
Shoe Polish + Brush

Stationary
Pens
Notebooks
Pencils
Erasers
Sharpeners
Stapler
Stapler Pins
Glue Stick
Markers
Highlighters
Small Ruler

Documents
Passport
Visa
I-20
Air Tickets
All Marksheets
College transcripts
Immunization Forms
University Letters
SEVIS Receipt
GRE Score
TOEFL Score
Recommendations
All Certificates
National IDs

Utensils
Pressure Cooker
Serving Spoons
Knives
Vegetable Chopping Board
Gaskets for Cooker
Weights for Cooker
Roti Roller
Tea Strainer
Water Bottle
Plates
Bowls
Spoons
Forks

(partial source of list: gradly.us)

Housing, Banking and setting up base at Gainesville

Where do I temporarily stay in Gainesville?

I stayed in an AirBnb place. It cost me a lot, but gave me privacy and I didn't feel like I was imposing anyone's personal space. Many of my peers stayed at friends' places. The local Indian Association has this system where you can stay for free at a volunteer's place for 2 days and 2 nights. The Indian Graduate Student Association (IGAS) is helpful for newcomers and current students alike. Be sure to visit their website to see how you can most make sure of their services/help.

Which cell phone carrier do I use?

The three most used carriers are AT&T, T-Mobile and Verizon. There are two ways to going about with this. Most of my peers got together and enrolled for this "family plan" scheme. You'll have to enroll together (atleast 10 people or something, I don't recall the exact number). Doing so will enable you to get the standard plan (unlimited national calling + text + limited internet) for around $35 per month. Doing it alone with cost you precisely $45 (I did this with AT&T. You get 2GB 4G internet, too). They've also got this plan where you pay $5 per month for international calling (250 minutes).

Obviously, the problem with the former scheme is that you'll all have to do it together. This is highly unlikely to happen when you're actually coming from the airport. So, I chose to go at it alone. All you'll have to do is ask the cab driver to take you to a place where they sell SIM cards. Specifically, ask him to take you to BestBuy (it's an electronics store close to Stoneridge). You can purchase the SIM card at a very low rate (I don't recall how low it was. I think it was free or almost free). You don't need to submit any documents when purchasing it. However, you do need an internet connection to activate the SIM card. You'll need a computer to do this.

T-Mobile users do have a few advantages. Some airliners (atleast Delta airlines) offer free WiFi for T-Mobile users. Also, T-Mobile has this thing called T-Mobile Tuesday (or something similarly titled), in which users get movie tickets for $ 5 (instead of ~ $12).

Where do I set up a bank account?

Wells Fargo. The closest branch I'm aware of is close to Stoneridge. There's no advantage (atleast for students) in taking the trouble to set up an account with Bank of America or other banks. Oh, and there's also a branch at UF. (WF bankers also sit outside the place where you get your ID card from – the Reitz Union's second floor, around outside the bookstore)

What do I need to set up an account with Wells Fargo?

Absolutely nothing except your passport. I've noticed that different rumors tend to fly about each year concerning this. Back in my term, people said that you needed the UF ID card for this. This year (Fall 2016), people seem to claim that you need an SSN (for goodness sake, you get an SSN only if you work). Trust me on this, you need to do absolutely nothing. Just walk into the bank, you'll be approached by someone who'll ask you want you want. Tell them that you need an account opened. They'll sit you down and call you when ready. They'll put you through with an executive who will do everything for you. All you need to do is just electronically sign on a digital pad. You'll get two checking accounts by default. I don't recall the exact amount, but I think you'll have to put in $25 as an initial amount. You'll be advised to keep one of the accounts for storing large amounts (like tuition fees) and

the other for daily expenses. You'll also be given two immediately usable debit cards on the spot. These are temporary ones. You'll get the permanent ones at the address you provide them. You can give them the address of friend until you get a place to stay. Just make sure you get back to them when you do find a place to stay. It's all this simple.

How do I pay tuition fees?

You'll be given an account number and routing details. Get money wired to your account in this way. Use the online portal (one.ufl.edu) to pay your fees. It doesn't take more than a few clicks to link up your Wells Fargo account and your ISIS profile. Never pay by international direct transfer (or whatever it is called), you'll lose a ton of money during currency conversion (which is obviously a percentage of the amount you pay. Wire transfer, on the other hand, is just a flat charge of around $15, I think).

It's probably important for you to know that UF does not give their account details for a direct deposit from your loan account. International checks/ Demand draft is the most convenient way for students paying fees using a loan. It has to be physically handed in to the University Bursar Office at Criser Hall before the fees payment deadline. For details of payment options available, refer to the [Finance and Accounting website](#)

You can get an idea of the fees to be paid by taking the tuition per credit given to you, add the student fees per credit to that, multiply that by the number of credits you plan to take in the first semester (usually 9 credits for most students) and subtract any award amount from that.

How do I ride the bus?

You'll have to pay for the first few rides before you get your ID card. Once you do, everything is free. All you have to do is to flash your ID card to the bus driver when you get on the bus. Until then, however, you'll have to pay for your travel. Make sure you have bills in small amounts. When you enter the bus, inform the driver that it's your first time. Trust me, they're all really polite and will help you out. You'll have to put the bills into a machine (in the bus), it'll print out a magnetic card which you need to swipe whenever you get onto the bus.

Some general information here: Buses either have a yellow rope which you need to pull in order to signal a stop, or a button strip on the sides which you will have to push. If you're waiting for a bus and you're on the opposite side of the road, make sure you cross only after the bus stops. Trust me, just signal from where you are and they'll stop. If you cross the road even when the bus is up to even 20 seconds away, the bus driver will most likely yell at you and won't let you board the bus. He'll make you get the next one. Save yourself the embarrassment, okay? Yeah, it happened to me, but just once and he was polite. I've seen people getting burnt beyond recognition.

Where do I learn about bus routes?

You can find everything you need to know at their [website.](#) I'm not putting up a link to a schedule because the Fall 2016 schedule isn't up yet. Also, install an android application called "TransLoc". It helps you see the location of the buses in real time. You'll also be able to see how much time it takes for the next bus to arrive at the stand of your choice. Here's a screenshot of how it looks:
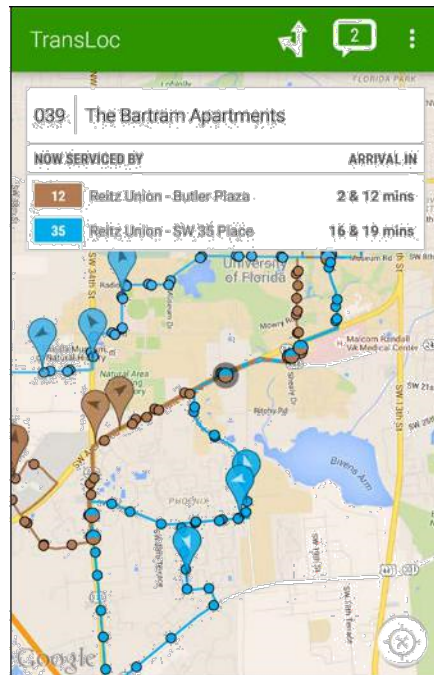
Could you tell me a few important bus routes?

Yeah. I will. But, not here. It's at the end of the guide, okay?

How do I know where my classes are?

Well, you can find them online. But, you'll find this official UF application quite useful. It's called "University of Florida". You can see all your classes, timings, locations and a lot more!
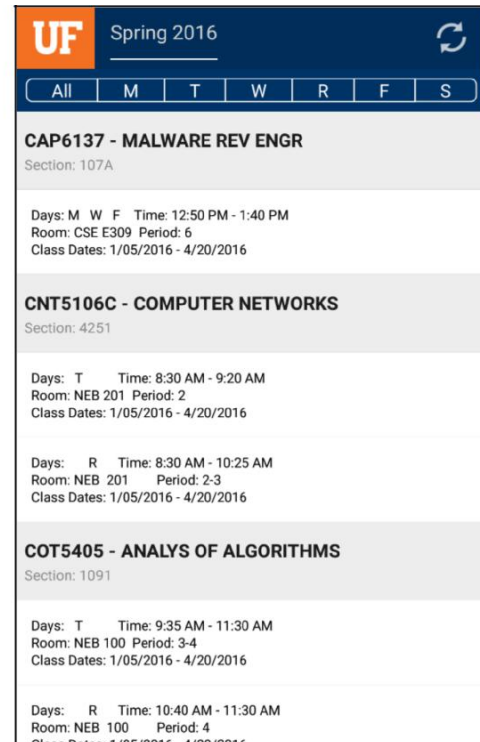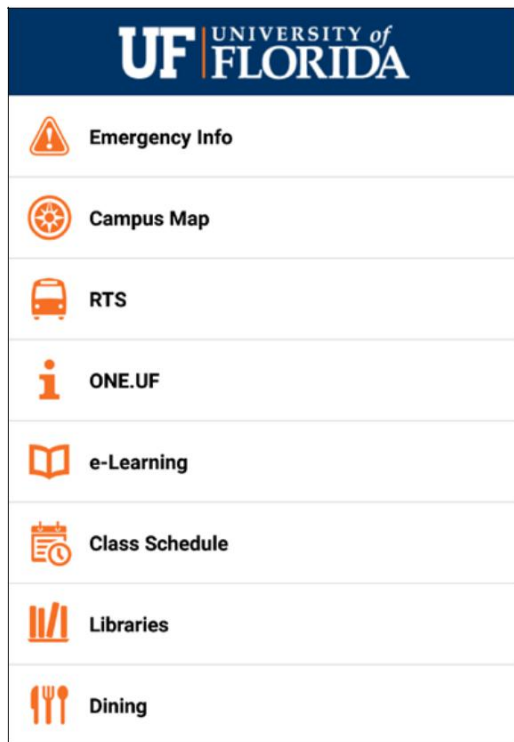
What's the best place to stay?

Stoneridge is where most of the Indians stay. If not here, they stay at The Niche, Greenwich, Ridgemar Commons and others places which are minutes from here. Staying anywhere away from this place has the following problems:

- It is quite likely that in time, you'll get bored of staying in a small(er) place like Commons since there'll be lesser people you can hang out with. At Stoneridge, there's this culture of people walking into your house, making food for you and stuff. And obviously, you can do the same.

- Distance from shops: Everything is 3 minutes by walk from Stoneridge: Publix (food, vegetables and stuff), India Bazaar, Butler Plaza etc

Every other place requires you to take a bus and go all the way there and back to your house. You will end up having to plan just for shopping, and in the almost inevitable moment of running of out something (which you can't or would rather not borrow from someone), you'd have to either sit through it or take a bus there.

This is something I wrote about Stoneridge to a friend (it's pretty informal, but you can glean important points from it anyway):

At Stoneridge, you get to have single rooms + attached bathrooms for $330 per month. (No furniture, though). Trust me on this: Socialization. Staying elsewhere would almost certainly give you lesser exposure to people at the start. Most of the groups/social bonding happens in the first 2 months. The place is good. I used to look up these apartment rating sites and stuff. I did everything I could NOT to move into here because of these reviews. But, thank God... all these failed. Because... I kid you not, I've got NO problems staying at Stoneridge. The rooms are spacious and nice. I understand that this largely depends on the roommates you get. If you're able to lease a new apartment all by yourself (which means you'll have to find 2 other people)... Then, that'd probably be the best since having

roommates who're all from your batch is what tends to works the best. Trust me on this... Ending up taking a room in a house which has 2 people who're senior to you (or just unknown to you) is a gamble since... they could be untidy, strange, unwilling to help/spend money/share common expenses... or simply pushy. So, the point is.... try your best to lease an entire apartment yourself. This is also much better than getting a sub -leased room because... the previous room occupant would have left his room the way it was; in a nasty state. The bathrooms wouldn't be clean and the room might be untidy. The only advantage is that he'd most likely leave you his bed and/or table. According to me, it's better to have a fully clean and vacuumed house and start out yourself rather than having a house which might already have essentials like a vacuum cleaner, furniture, beds, a functioning grocery purchase cycle and stuff.

Lastly, come to Stoneridge, I stay here. We can have fun ;). In case you can't, just try to make it one of these places close by, it'll surely help you in the long run.

Where do I buy furniture from?

Well, there's this Facebook group called "Free and for sale". You'll have to be manually added to it, though. Ask a senior to add you to it, and get yourself added to it. People sell things here at low rates all the time. It's almost completely unnecessary for you to buy anything first hand (except for perhaps a bed and bed stead). If not from here, you can buy second hand furniture from this place called "Goodwill Thrift shop" and bring it to where you stay (on foot). The real problem here is not the question of being able to find cheap furniture, it's about being able to move them to your place. Like I mentioned, if you're staying at a place close to Stoneridge, you can move the furniture on foot. But, this will require half your life. I still recall the sweat and blood I spilt moving my table from Goodwill Thrift shop to my place at Stoneridge. I could have more easily swum back to India.

There are church groups which give out free furniture (mostly during the Fall semester) . I've heard that they even deliver them to homes. Now, I've also heard that certain (Indian) people go and get furniture just to sell them, and earn from it. Clearly, we'd like for this not to happen.

Where do I buy groceries from?

There's Walmart close to Stoneridge (you'll have to take the bus, though). For those of you who don't know, they're the largest retailer in the world (though, this particular outlet isn't one of their large ones). You can get pretty much anything you need to set up your place here. There's a Publix closely too. That one's walkable from Stoneridge.

Where do I buy electronics from?

BestBuy. It's also close to Stoneridge. (All the places I've mentioned aren't more than a few minutes away from each other). I got my Surface Book and my SIM card from here, and I've had no problems with anything.

Where do I get "outside food"?

Once you get here, you'll miss the small road side shops you see in India, with all your heart. The cheapest "food" you can get is a sub ($4 - $7). Trust me, it's everyone's staple food for the first few weeks. You'll grow tired of it. Panda express (Chinese food) is a decent place. You can get nice food for around $5. I prefer "Asian wok and grill", though. Their "spicy chicken" is most similar to anything that's even remotely spicy (something we Indians crave for). There's also a dominoes outlet, a pizza hut outlet and a McDonald's outlet close by. There're many eateries near Stoneridge (each place I've mentioned here is not more than 5 minutes from Stoneridge). There's Costa Vida (You get nice

Mexican food here). Don't forget this place called "Indian Cuisine" right next to India Bazaar. They're real good. I recall having chicken biriyani, almost in tears, following 2 weeks of subway sandwiches. Kabab House (~University Avenue, walkable from Library west) is excellent, too.

Krishnalunch is a good option for weekday (healthy and cheap) lunches. The KrishnaHouse (ISKCON) of Gainesville puts up stalls in the Plaza of the Americas (the lawn in front of Library West) at around noon. You get rice, salad, and two more vegetarian entrees + unlimited juice + refills! So, people eat there, and pack their food as well. Some people complain that the food isn't great. I'm not a picky eater (when it comes to vegetarian food), but I must say that I think it's pretty good (although, I confess, I didn't think *this* great of the food back when I was there, it's probably because I've stopped cooking since UF, and homecooked food has since been a rare sight; (**TL;DR)** Krishna lunch is excellent for its price, and it tastes like homecooked food).

YummyCity (a short walk from Library West) is an authentic Chinese place. The hot pot is excellent. (The spicy boiled chicken slices ("extra spicy") literally made my mouth right now, I mean, please… someone, please send me some =/.) I love this so much that I never missed going there each of the 4 times I've been to UF since I graduated. There's Indian Street food right next to India Bazaar. There's also Tikka Express (which has an excellent buffet). I'm sure there're many good ones I'm missing – I'm just covering the essentials, have fun exploring! You guys are lucky - so many have opened since I left!

How do I split bills among my roommates?
Everyone here uses this application called "Splitwise". Go ahead and download it. People make common purchases and simply record the bill using this program. The bills get equally distributed among your roommates and shows you how much you're owed. It also takes into account what they owe you. This is pretty much what each and everyone uses here.

Where do I get Indian groceries?
India Bazaar. Again, it's close to Stoneridge. You can get all things Indian here. In fact, there're things here which I haven't even seen in India. I don't know if it's because I haven't spent more than 4 years in India or if it's because they're that varied, but anyway, you get the picture. You even get instant dal, sambar and other instant food. Expensive? Yes, but convenient? Yes. People generally stock themselves with instant food when they first come here, and also during exams.

You get everything from instant chapatis, dosa batter, idli batter, spices, rice, dal, vegetables, and curry leaf (at the rate of $2 per bag. Crazy, right?) to instant biriyani and chicken gravy.

You won't be able to get Indian vessels here (as far as I know), so you'll have to bring this by yourself.
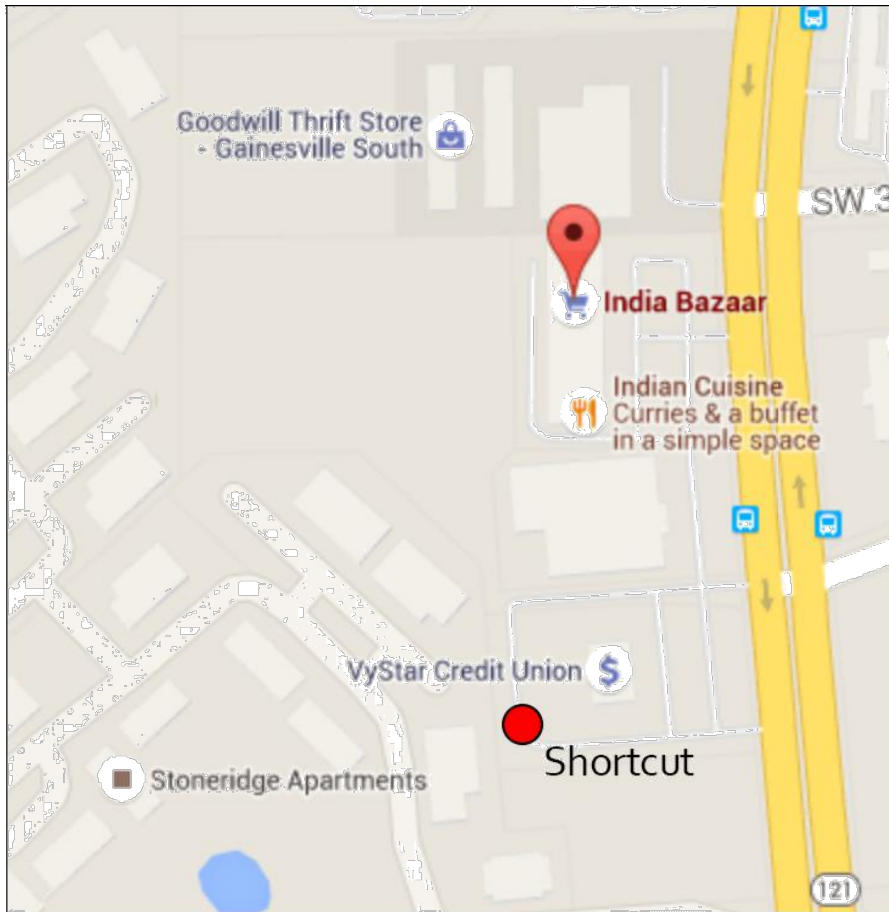
How close are these places from each other?

Have a look for yourself (note that Stoneridge and other places are just below and beside this screenshot):
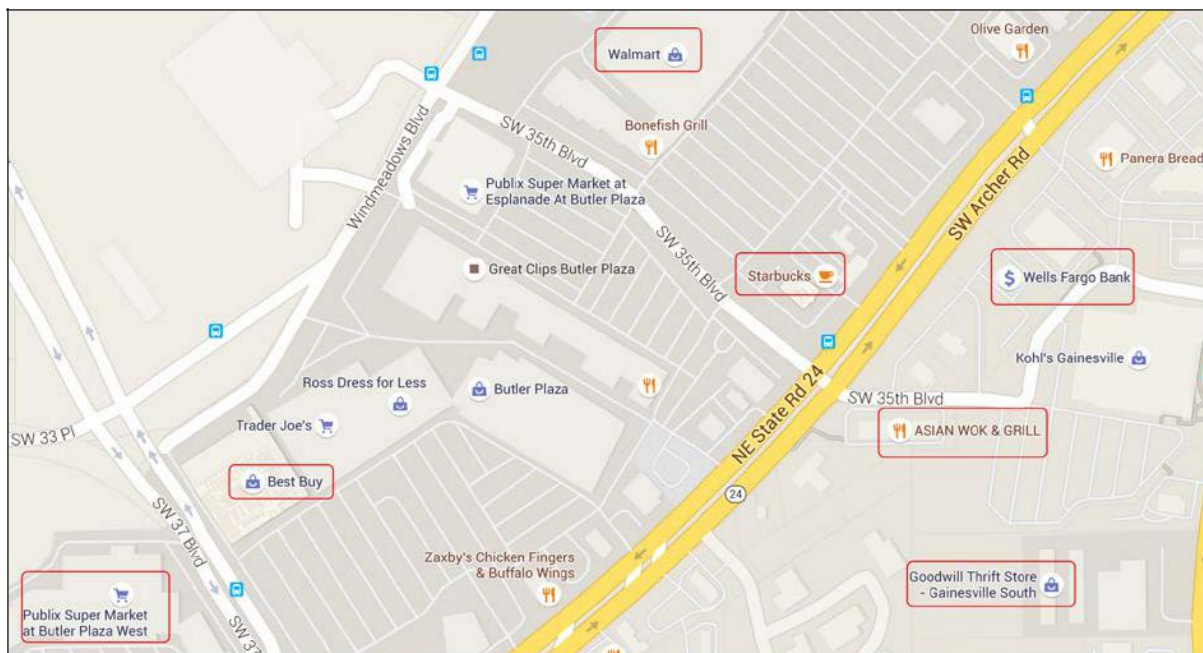
Again, all these places are just minutes of each other. (20/11/2016: Walmart has moved to a location around 10 minutes away from this. You'll have to take a 12-bus there now)

Can I jay walk and be an idiot?

No, you cannot. Unfortunately, I've seen a lot of Indians who tend to want to take their chances and jay walk. The excuses they make (apart from apparently saving time) is that others (Americans or others) do the same. This simply doesn't work for us. We're here in their country. It appears much "worse" when *we* break *their* rules (unsurprisingly). Trust me, if something goes wrong when you're jaywalking, you'll have to pay with your visa, job, left leg and probably your girlfriend/boyfriend getting married to someone else (lol).

Where can I buy liquor?

Yeah, well... I'm not sure if I should include this in a fresher's guide to UF. Actually, yeah. I shouldn't. It's not like I'm forbidding you (I drink occasionally myself), it's just that it's probably not best to want to have liquor the very day/week you're here. Anyway, those of you who really want to, will figure this out yourself. When you do, don't forget to take your passports; they check if you're underage. It doesn't matter if you look like a dad.

IGSA Questions and Answers

The following questions and answers were taken from an IGSA article. I thought it might be useful to have this incorporated in my guidebook as well.

Note: I haven't updated IGSA information because, well, they haven't updated their site. ¯_(ツ)_/¯

What're my best choices to stay at Gainesville?

Stoneridge Apartments:

Options – 1BHK 1 bath (only phase 1), 2 BHK 2 bath, 3 BHK 2.5 or 3 bath or4 BHK 4 bath (only phase 2); rates on their website.

Phase 1: Only kitchen is furnished. No washer-dryer in unit. Common laundry room.

Phase 2: Kitchen is furnished and washer-dryer in unit.

For booking an apartment you can email them asking to book an apartment for you. Stoneridge does not help in finding roommates. Also you will be leasing the entire apartment so you will have to find your roommates on your own. You will have to pay the deposit and an application fee to book the apartment. Deposit is usually around $200 per bed room i.e. it will be $600 for a 3bhk apartment and so on. Application fee is around 35$ per head. Online transfer is not allowed. Hence you will have to make an international DD or money order. Or you can even ask any of your friends in Gainesville to pay for you. The lease document will be sent to you via email. You will have to check and reply to them if there any changes to be made Prime location. Near all the important stores and university. Most of the Indians graduate students live in the area. Pretty cheap. Lots of facilities like gym, pool, clubhouse etc. Dealing with management can be hard. You will have to work hard to get back your deposit money. If you want to furnish the apartment, then you will have to do that on your own. Need to get own internet connection (example from Cox) and a Wi-Fi router, electricity and water/sewage connection from Gainesville Regional Utilities (GRU) after you arrive here. Update: You need to get utilities before your lease begin date, otherwise you will be fined.

Website: http://www.stoneridgegainesville.com/

Address: 3800 SW 34th Street, Gainesville, FL-32608

Phone: +1(352) 375-1121

Bus routes: 1, 12, 35, 36, Later Gator B and F

The Nook:

Options: 3 bed 3 bath (starting at $529) and 4 bed 2 bath (starting at $447) per apartment. Application fees: $30. Security deposit: $1000 or provide a guarantor (Prices change frequently and sometimes they also have special offers, so call or email leasing office to confirm).

The Nook has a 3 bed-3 bath or a 4 bed-2 bath unit option to choose from offering individual lease which means even if you are unable to find roommates, you will pay only the rent that you are responsible for and not for the other unoccupied rooms from the apartment. Both 3 BHK and 4 BHK

apartments are furnished and have a fully equipped kitchen. The furniture includes a box bed with mattress, study table and a chair, a bedside table and a chest of drawers in the rooms. Furniture in the hall includes two tables and a sofa set. Kitchen is equipped with a fridge, dishwasher, microwave, an oven and in-sink garbage disposal. Each apartment unit also has its own washer and dryer units installed. You could also choose to rent an unfurnished apartment or an apartment having hardwood floors. The rent includes cable with HBO, water, sewer, internet and an electricity cap of $30 per room. If the electricity consumption of the apartment exceeds the electricity cap you will get the overhead notice and will be charged the exceeded amount. Maintenance requests are usually taken care of within couple of days.

Prime location. Right next to Stoneridge apartments. Individual rooms and leases. No need to worry about utilities and internet bills. Lots of facilities like swimming pool, club house, basketball court, business center, on-site maintenance, volleyball court, TV lounge, game room, fitness center, and tanning beds. For booking please contact leasing office.

Website: http://www.thegatewayatglades.com/

Address: 3415 SW 39th Blvd, Gainesville, FL-32608

Phone: +1(352) 782-9755

Bus routes: 12, 35, 63, Later gator B and F

The Niche:

Options: 3 bed, 2bath (starting at $559) and 4 bed, 3 bath (starting at $519) per room.

Similar to The Nook, they provide fully furnished apartments with everything included. They have individual leases and provide roommate matching if needed. Please enquire with the leasing office via phone or email for rent, security deposit, application fees, any current special offers and how to apply. You can also use the contact us section on their website.

Good location, but has less bus routes (bus no. 12 is more than sufficient though). No need to worry about utilities and internet bills (cap on utilities usage though). Lots of facilities like swimming pool, club house, basketball court, business center, on-site maintenance, volleyball court, TV lounge, game room, fitness center, and tanning beds.

Website: https://campusclubtcc.com/

Address: 4000, SW 37th Blvd, Gainesville, FL-32608

Phone: +1(866) 782-9753

Bus routes: 12 (first community on the route) and Later Gator F

University Commons

Options: 2 bed, 1 bath (starting at $545) and 4 bed, 2 bath (starting at $445) per room.

Located at the intersection of Archer road and 23rd terrace, they have fully furnished units with roommate matching if needed. Rent includes cable, electricity, heat, internet, trash, water /sewer. Complex also has a gym, club house, swimming pool etc. Complex is very close to the university. Please contact leasing office for enquiries using email, phone, or contact us section on their website.

Newly renovated. Single room leases. Everything included in rent with a cap on utilities. Very close to university and to SW rec center (gym). A bit farther away from Butler plaza. Lot of bus options to go to campus and to Butler plaza.

Website: http://universitycommonsuf.com/

Address: 2601 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL-32608

Phone: +1(352) 397-2063

Bus routes: 1, 12, 9, 35, 36, 38, Later Gator B and F

Brandywine Apartments:

Options: 1 bed/1 bath (from $680), 2 bed/1 bath (from $700), 2 bed/2 bath (from $790)

Located on Archer road, they offer semi furnished units (only kitchen furnished) like Stoneridge. There are no individual leases, you have to lease an entire apartment and find your own roommates, who will all be responsible for paying the rent. The rent includes high speed Gatornet internet (still need to buy your own Wi-Fi router) and water/sewage, you only need to pay for electricity to GRU after getting your own connection. Very close to the university. In addition to all the bus routes, Student Nighttime Auxiliary Patrol (SNAP) offers free rides to surge area right across the road till 4 am in the morning from campus. Also walkable distance to the SW Rec Center (gym) of the university. A bit farther away from the Butler Plaza area. The complex also has a swimming pool and a club house with common laundry facility (no washer/dryer in the unit). The units here are older than most other places. But the maintenance is pretty good and management responds promptly to any issues without any fuss. The application fees and security deposit is pretty low compared to other places. Please contact the leasing office via email, phone or through their website to get an exact quote.

Website: http://www.universitymgt.com/brandy.html

Address: 2811 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL-32608

Phone: +1(352) 375-1111

Bus routes: 1, 12, 38, Later Gator F

Oxford Manor Apartments:

Options: 1 bed/1 bath (from $809), 2 bed/2 bath (from $ 534), 3 bed/3 bath (from $460) per bedroom Located between University Commons and Brandywine on Archer road, they offer furnished/ semi-furnished apartments with or without washer - dryer in unit. They do offer individual leases. Located close to the university and right across the road from surge area with SNAP access along with all the buses. They have lots of facilities like swimming pool, tennis, basketball, volleyball courts, gym, cable,

internet, a business center etc. The 24-maintenance is pretty good. Please check website for more information and any special offers.

Website: https://oxfordmanor.org/

Address: 2777 S.W. Archer Road, Gainesville, FL - 32608

Phone: +1(352) 377-2777

Bus routes: 1, 12, 38, Later Gator F

University Terrace Apartments:

Provides option of individual lease with lesser rent than other apartment complexes. No corporate leasing office, but individuals can lease apartments through various leasing agents and landlords. Hence, rent, deposits amenities etc. can differ widely. Located at the intersection of 34th street and 39th Blvd. next to The Nook and close to India Bazaar and Butler Plaza.

Address: 3921 SW 34th street Gainesville, FLorida-32608

Bus route: 12, 35, 36, later gator B &F

What's the best date for me to arrive on?

The best time to arrive would be about 3-4 days before orientation so you can comfortably take care of things like apartment leasing, utilities, internet, any shopping you might need to do, check-in at UFIC, get your Gator1 card, removal of immunization hold at SHCC(if not done already), getting a cellular connection etc. It's better to arrive during the week so that all the post arrival work can be completed. You should also consider the date your apartment will be available to move in and ideally arrive after the lease has started. IGSA tries to provide free temporary accommodation to incoming students for the first 1-2 nights before they can move into their apartments based on volunteer availability. But owing to the high number of students coming in fall, it can become difficult to provide temporary accommodation for more than 2 nights. So please plan accordingly.

Advise on travelling to Gainesville:

Book tickets soon to get the best rates. Please do check multiple sources to get the best deal. Try and book a direct flight to Gainesville, even if you have to take a local airline it is better and safer than say Greyhound (local bus service in USA), which usually has its stops in the shadiest areas. A direct flight is also more convenient than taking a shuttle or cab for say Tampa, Jacksonville, Miami or Orlando because you will be tired after more than 20 hours of flying. Buy a single ticket all the way through; add-ons are very expensive. Avoid change of airline. A direct flight is the best. If change of airline can't be avoided, leave at least 3-5 hours gap between the scheduled arrival of one flight and the scheduled departure of the connecting flight, especially at the port of entry. Baggage is usually safe with a single airline - change of airline sometimes leads to misplaced luggage. Some airlines don't take care of baggage transfer - you may have to personally carry it (check this while booking) and cross check everything you are promised by the travel agent with the original airlines even if you have a confirmed ticket in your hand. And remember to ask for student concessions. Generally all the airlines will come up with one or the other discount offer for students so check all this out before you pay the money.

Many students have a lot of confusion about what needs to be done at the port of entry (the first airport you land in the US). Here you have to first go through immigration, show your I20, passport, visa and such to the immigration officer and answer whatever general questions he might have. After that, you have to claim all your check-in baggage and personally carry it across customs along with your carry-ons!!! Airlines will do this for you only if your luggage has been misplaced and has not arrived; you have to lodge a complaint about any missing luggage with the airline. At the port of entry you will also have to submit a form given to you on the flight declaring the stuff that you are bringing in and its value. Any fresh fruits, seeds, meats etc. cannot be brought in. It will be confiscated if you have it. All of this takes considerable amount of time. So please make sure that you have sufficient amount of time at the port of entry, or you will miss your connecting flight. Larger airports like Miami are especially notorious for long lines at immigration during peak hours.

You do not have to usually carry your check-in luggage at a transit airport (usually somewhere in Europe or Middle East); the airline usually takes care of it unless it explicitly specifies otherwise. The exception is when you have to change airports in the same city. In that case you will have to claim baggage and also have a transit visa because you will be entering the respective country. This can happen for example if you book a ticket via London and the flight from India lands at Heathrow, but the next departing flight is from Gatwick. Similar change in airport can also happen if you book via New York (JFK airport and Newark, New Jersey) only in this case you will not need a transit visa. Please be mindful of this when booking tickets. As much as possible, you do not want to change airports in transit or even at the port of entry.

There are many guides on what to pack or not pack in your luggage. You can look at the on the IGSA website http://igsauf.weebly.com/first- travel-to-us.html. We do stress that you have the right stuff in your carry-on bag/bags. You should on your person or in carry-on bags, all your original documents (the ones you decide to carry), sufficient amount of money, laptop, clothes and other supplies to last you at least a week, in case you lose your check-in bags or they are delayed (which is surprisingly common, especially on the smaller domestic flights to Gainesville). Please make sure you have sturdy bags which can undergo lot of rough handling. If your luggage does not arrive or is damaged, it has to be reported to the airline and they will deliver it to you address in a couple of days or give you compensation. IGSA volunteers will help you with this at the Gainesville airport. It is a good idea to get some kind of travel insurance just in case (they are not very expensive).

Many airports have free Wi-Fi at least for some duration. Please take note of where on your route you might have such facilities. For example, Gainesville and Charlotte airports have free Wi-Fi. You can stay in contact with your family and in many cases with IGSA if they are coming to pick you up via WhatsApp. You can get a local cellphone connection within hours at Butler plaza. Cricket Wireless, T-Mobile, ATnT, Verizon etc. are good options and have stores nearby. People mostly prefer group connections (5 in a group). You can visit their stores for the current offers.

What're my transport options from Gainesville airport?

There are five options:

1) RTS Gainesville buses: Regional Transit System is the City of Gainesville's public transportation system. As a new international student, you can ride the bus number 25 A or B from the airport to campus by presenting your letter of admission or initial I-20 and then bus number 12, 1 or 35 buying a single ride ($1.5) to the above mentioned apartments. Refer to the following

website for bus schedule: http://go-rts.com/ and
http://www.ufic.ufl.edu/ISS/newstudentsArriving.html for more information.

2) Taxi: Taxis are available for hire at the airport. The cabs typically charge around $30-40 per person excluding tips (15-20%) and baggage charges for one way ride from Gainesville Airport to Stoneridge Apartments.

3) Uber: It is a ridesharing service that uses a smartphone application to connect passengers with drivers of vehicles for hire. A typical ride using Uber can cost around $15-20 per person. An Uber cab can typically seat one passenger with two large bags and one carry-on. The cost is calculated for a one way trip from Gainesville Airport to Stoneridge Apartments. Refer to the following website for further details: https://www.uber.com/.

4) Have an acquaintance pick you up.

5) IGSA pickup: Every Fall and Spring semester, IGSA provides an airport pickup service to receive incoming Indian students at the Gainesville airport. Gainesville airport is situated at a distance of approx. 7 miles from the University and approx. 11 miles from Stoneridge Apartments (a preferred housing option by Indian students). This service was initiated in an effort to help the new students who may not be familiar with the transportation services in Gainesville. With most of the flights from India arriving at Gainesville airport late at night, IGSA makes sure that incoming students who register for the service will be received at the airport and dropped at their place of accommodation irrespective of the time of arrival of their flight. The people who mainly receive new students at the airport are members of the current IGSA board and/or other student volunteers studying at UF. IGSA also helps incoming students to solve issues arising due to missing luggage, delay of flights etc. Following are the tentative details of pickups for Fall 2016:
    1)   Dates: 1st August to 21st August
    2)   Charges: Rs 1000 (May change)
    3)   The link for registration and exact details of payment method will be put up on Facebook and on our website in the last week of June

Dates: 1st August to 21st August

Charges: Rs 1000 (May change)

What about temporary accommodation?

In addition to the pickups, IGSA arranges for free temporary accommodation for new incoming students. Current students act as volunteers and host the new students for a duration of 1-2 nights before they take possession of their apartment. These hosts also try to guide new students in their first few days in Gainesville. Due to a large number of students coming in, we request you to plan travel such that you will need temporary accommodation for minimum duration.

First things to do when you get here:
1. Get your Gator1 card which is your student ID (it will also let you ride the bus)
2. Check-in with your international student advisor at UFIC in the HUB. (UFIC opens at 12 P.M on graduate orientation days)
3. Check-in with your department
4. Open a bank account (Wells Fargo and Bank of America are popular options)
5. Get a cellular connection
6. Take possession of your apartment (get utilities and internet if needed)

Gainesville Reached

Libraries, labs and places to study

Where can I print?

Once you get your ID cards, you can print at your respective departments at UF. Compute Science Graduate students are given 300 pages per month (black and white). You can print them from here (I prefer the Dungeon (lab in the ground floor)). You can print color pages at Marston Library and Library West. You'll be charged $ 0.75 per print out. Students get 250 pages per semester from UF, too. You'll have to get them printed at the computer centre at the Reitz Union.

What can I do at Marston Library?

Marston library is open till 1 A.M. There's also a Starbucks there. They're open throughout the day in weekends, too. The ground floor has facilities for scanning and printing (though you'll have to pay for prints from here).

Charges will be added to you your account which you'll have to pay later. It's also right opposite to the CS department where you'll find a lab (nicknamed the "dungeon") on the ground floor, which is open 24 hours throughout the year. CS students can use this lab to print out whatever they want from here. You'll need your ID card to access it at times, though.

What can I do at Library West?

Oh, trust me, it's beautiful. It's also open 24/5. We graduate students get to have our own private floor on the top. Only graduate students get to access this floor by swiping their ID cards in the elevator. A red light turns green and you get to hit the button for floor 6 which isn't accessible without a graduate student's ID card (this is probably the closest any of us will get to feel like being a secret agent). You'll first have to register at the front desk before you can access the graduate study floor. They'll take a single day to enroll your ID card. They'll manually let you onto the floor for that waiting day alone.

Here, you get super-fast internet (173 Mbps both ways), beautiful study rooms with giant screens, white boards and sound systems (you'll have to reserve one before you can use them, though). The general section is not usually full. Right now, it's completely empty (Yeah, I'm here right now). You'll be here in a few months' times, I guess, hopefully not making it too full for me.

Anyway, some pictures for eye candy:

What can I do at Newell Hall?

It's this new place UF opened in Summer'17. It's a study hall, and is usually crowded. There're comfortable study capsules, tables and rooms. It's open 24 hours. There's an Au Bon Pain (Something like Starbucks. The food is more expensive there, and the coffee isn't as great). Here're some pictures for you:
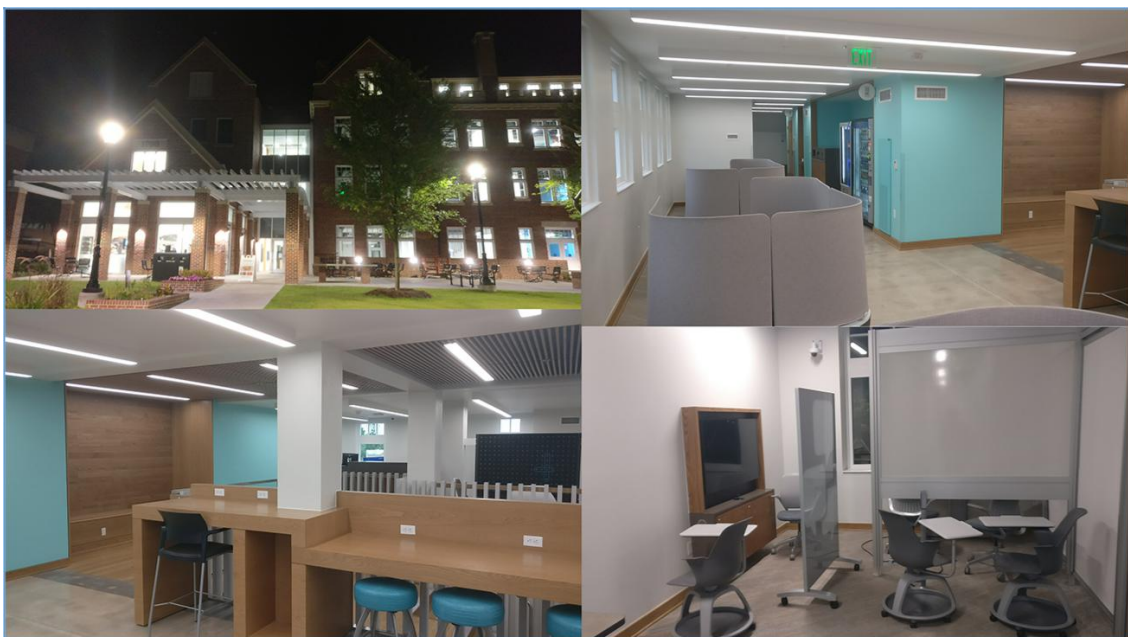
What can I do at the Health Science Library?

It's a lovely quiet place where you can study. They've also got single study rooms which you can reserve for 4 hours (and then renew). I don't have pictures of the rooms, but they're small, cute, has a white board, can accommodate at least 2 people, and is very cold.

Wait, if I stay here so late, how do I get back?

The last bus (12) is sometime around 2:30 A.M. So, yeah, you've got plenty of time for a late-night study session instead of an all-night one, too.

Where do I go for group study?

Use this link to book study rooms in either Marston, Library West, Library West's graduate section, or Education Library. You can book them in 2-hour slots. You can also head over to the health science library and ask for group study rooms (there are rooms for 2,4 and 6 people).

What else can I do with my ID card?

What some people do is to accept Wells Fargo's offer of turning their ID cards into debit cards. This really works well with things since you'll just have to carry your ID card around for everything from transportation and payment to graduate only access areas.

What else can I borrow in libraries?

You can borrow white board markers, iPads, all kinds of movies, documentaries and shows (at Library West).

Where do I go for church?

I've gone to GCL (Gator Christian Life) during my 2 years here. They hold Sunday services at Carlton auditorium, at 10 A.M each week. I've been happy here. They're not imposing, they're supportive, helpful and are wonderful people.

Miscellaneous

Where can I buy textbooks?

Yeah, this is tricky. Textbooks here in the US are really, really expensive. So, you'll have to bring them from India or simply use e-books (and lose half your mind trying to do so).

Where can I buy notebooks from?

Walmart or the department store at the Reitz Union. You can find all kinds of UF merchandise at the Reitz Union library (apart from stationary, textbooks and clothes).

Tell me something interesting, Dev.

I like it when you talk to me like that. Do that again, I like it. (͡° ͜ʖ ͡°)

No, I'm serious, tell me something interesting

Oh, okay. There's this thing Gators' night every Friday. You get free food and get to play different games every Friday night. Each Gator's night is differently themed, too. I've seen stuff like dance-offs, ride-the-mechanical-bull, stand-ups, live bands, rope-gliding and more. Yeah, I'm not kidding. It's all free. They screen a movie, too. There are 2 shows each night. They've got this theatre in the Reitz Union (where the rest happens, too). Anyway, I'll leave the rest for you to come and discover for yourselves. It's fun, trust me.

Can I book for a place to stay before I get to Gainesville?

Yeah, at most places, I guess you can. Unfortunately, you can't do this at Stoneridge. You can sign the papers and send them over email, but you'll have to pay by money order (which can't be done unless you're there). You'll have to make someone pay for you.

How do I view my grades?

Everything's on Canvas. Here's where you'll get to see your course lectures as well. There are these EDGE courses which are for off-campus students as well. The entire class is recorded and put online here. You can view these recordings later on. Many graduate students take advantage of this and don't show up for class. You'll find them waking up at 4 P.M, stumbling over to the computer with a groggy face, and watching these lectures (and scoring As in these subjects).

What else does being at UF get me?

Well, you get free genuine copies of Windows, Office and a bunch of other software (For those who're into graphics, like me, you can actually get 3Ds max, man!). You're also given full access to Lynda video tutorials. CS students are given access to a wider variety of programs. I'm not sure which ones are CS exclusive, but here's the list off the top of mind: VMware workstation, every version of Windows from 7 to 10, Visual Studio, and… I'm sorry, can't remember any more right now. Also, you get discounted Adobe CS rates (which I'm currently enrolled to. I can confirm that it's economical, though not compared to being a pirate, which I don't dare to be here in the US)

My card isn't getting me into graduate only areas!

Use the side with the thinner magnetic strip. The bigger one is for using it as a debit card.

This guy/girl wants to stay over at my place! Does he/she like me?

Sorry to break your bubble, but this happens a lot, and I mean a lot. It's common here. People walk into other people's houses. You find people asleep on your bed and on your couch (Talking about the opposite sex here). If you aren't used to seeing the opposite sex around a lot, you'll have to make sure you don't get wrong signs. I'm letting you know this because I've had to "counsel" certain guys I know. It's quite sad to break down people's lovely but wrong perception of things, you know?

Wait, are you sure?

Yes. But, then again, look into things with an unbiased mind.

What do I do on my first day?

Attend the general orientation and make sure you check-in with the UFIC. That's about it. Your department will have their own orientation events, too. Make sure to attend them.

Should I get my Indian Driving license here?

Yes, it'll help. Despite everyone here saying that you can drive with your Indian Driving License for 6 months, I've personally found no verifiable source that says this. I tend to dismiss things I cannot verify, especially when the stakes are high (Chances of getting arrested). So, why bring the license here? When you apply for a driver's license here, you can avoid this "Drug course and test" by showing them your driver license. It's just a mandatory online course where you have to read and click to pass, but it costs. Avoid it by getting your license here.

Bus routes?

12	Goes all the way from Rawlings Hall and Reitz Union to Walmart. This bus is taken by most people since it services the most common places of residence (including Stoneridge).
35	This can get to you to Stoneridge and surrounding places, too.
1	Gets you to Walmart and goes past Butler Plaza (you can walk to Stoneridge from here)
20	Goes to the airport. There's one of the big Walmarts on the way to the airport.
37	Goes from Stoneridge to Rawlings Hall via the Health Sciences Library route.

This is almost enough for most people to know which bus to take (this guide is targeted for most people and not necessarily all people, you know). Rawlings Hall is where almost all people get down and walk. Use google maps to get an idea of the campus. Look up the walking routes of your departments to Rawlings and the Reitz Union. These two places are the most common bus stands that you're going to use.

Which button do I press while crossing at signals?

Look at the name mentioned in the street sign that's exactly opposite to where you're standing (look in direction you want to get to). That's the button you need to press.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Yes, I've noticed that people tend to get ruthless in competitive places. I've seen people deliberately misguide other people to have a so-called "edge" over others. Look, we're in a place where life itself constantly tries to set fire to (some of) us. I doubt we're lacking hell of any sort.

If you don't want to help others, that's fine, it truly is. Just don't try to cripple others. If you do, it may never come back to you (what goes around doesn't necessarily come around), but don't do it for the sake of an already ever-scarce peace of heart in us. Regardless, some of them are some of you.

Where do I buy musical instruments? I left mine at home.

For those of you who play musical instruments, there's "Guitar Centre" just beside Publix. I got my acoustic guitar, electric guitar and lap steel guitar from here. I got the models I wanted, at a price could afford. You get everything from acoustic guitars to 8 string electric guitars. You can get FX pedals here, too. But, I'd suggest you to get it second hand from reverb.com. I got my BOSS ME-80 and BeatBuddy from there at almost 60% of the price. Oh, and if you ever want to have a jam session, you're welcome at my place. (If you're want a *good* violin, I'd suggest you to get it from Gainesville Violins instead of guitar center).

Can I get a discount for Uber.

Yes, you can. Starting this Summer, UF has partnered with the University of Florida Student Government to help students ride with ease during late nights around campus. Eligible students can request discounted rides from 9pm-3am Wednesday through Sunday nights for trips within the UF campus area. Get your promo codes here.

Do I use Amazon to shop online?

Yes, you can get pretty much anything you want from there. Don't forget to use your @efl.edu email account to get free student Amazon prime status for 6 months.

What can I do for my birthday?

Get an App with: Starbucks, Firehouse Subs, Dunkin Donuts, Which-Wich. You'll get free treats on your birthday. Simply walk to Larry's Giant Subs, Chik-Fil-A, Lolicup with your passport and get free food. (I've heard there are more, but this is what I've personally done and can confirm)

I can't carry my passport everywhere, what do I do for ID?

Get a driver's license (information mentioned elsewhere in this guidebook). If you don't want to get a driver's license, get a state ID: You need to have your Passport, I94-form, Gator-1 card, Latest I20, Two address proof (example: lease agreement, GRU bill, bank statement, Amazon invoice etc). Go to the tax collector's office located at:

Alachua County Tax Collector Southwest Branch
3837 Windmeadows Blvd, Gainesville, FL 32608
(352) 374-5236
(https://maps.app.goo.gl/X7NTMAqfhTr1oqd9A)

The receptionist will guide you through the rest. You don't need an SSN for this since you're on an F1 visa. They take a photo at the counter, verify documents, ask your height in (feet and inches). The entire process takes 15-20 minutes, and they issue the card right after. They'll charge you $35. The card will have a title stating that it's 'temporary' since you're a temporary resident anyway. Its validity is 2 years.

Core credits			
Non-Thesis (College of liberal Arts and Sciences)	9	Minimum of 9 credits from CISE graduate-level courses.	Up to 1 credit of CIS 6935 (Graduate Seminar) allowed.
			Up to 3 credits of CIS 6905 (Individual Study) allowed.
			EXCLUDES CIS 6910, CIS 6940.
		Minimum 9 credits must be taken outside the department	At least 3 credits must be offered by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (taken from the approved list of courses).
			Up to 3 credits of EGN 5949 (internship) allowed.
Thesis (College of liberal Arts and Sciences)	9 + 6 Master thesis research credits (CIS 6971)	Minimum of 6 credits MUST be taken from CISE graduate-level courses.	Up to 1 credit of CIS 6935 (Graduate Seminar) allowed.
			Up to 3 credits of CIS 6905 (Individual Study) allowed.
			EXCLUDES CIS 6910, CIS 6940.
		Minimum 6 credits must be taken outside the department	At least 3 credits must be offered by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (taken from the approved list of courses).
			Up to 3 credits of EGN 5949 (Internship) allowed.
Non-Thesis (College of Engineering)	12	Minimum of 12 credits must be taken from CISE graduate-level courses.	Up to 1 credit of CIS 6935 (Graduate Seminar) allowed.
			Up to 3 credits of CIS 6905 (Individual Study) allowed.
			EXCLUDES CIS 6910, CIS 6940.
		Maximum 6 credits must be taken outside the department	Up to 3 credits of EGN 5949 (internship) allowed.
Thesis (College of Engineering)	12+ 6 Master thesis research credits (CIS 6971)	Minimum of 6 credits MUST be taken from CISE graduate-level courses	Up to 1 credit of CIS 6935 (Graduate Seminar) allowed.
			Up to 3 credits of CIS 6905 (Individual Study) allowed.
			EXCLUDES CIS 6910, CIS 6940.
		Maximum 6 credits MUST be taken outside the department	Up to 3 credits of EGN 5949 (internship) allowed.
Total	-	-	30

(terrible image quality because of how I lost the original Word document with the actual table)

Graduation plans

There're essentially 2 durations of graduation: 3 semesters or 4 semesters. I've seen people do both durations in both intakes (Spring/Fall), with and without internships, and still ending with jobs. So, anything is "possible". Anyway, just to illustrate a few of your choices:

#	Batch	Sem. Dur.	Semester Breakup	Credits breakdown
1	Fall	3	Semester 1 (Aug-Dec)	3 courses (9 credits)
			Semester 2 (Jan-May)	3 courses (9 credits)
			Summer Break	Internship (2 credits)
			Semester 3 (Aug-Dec)	4 courses (10 credits)
2	Spring	3	Semester 1 (Jan-May)	3 courses (9 credits)
			Summer Break	1 courses (3 credits)
			Semester 2 (Aug-Dec)	3 courses (9 credits)
			Semester 3 (Jan-May)	3 courses (9 credits)
3	Spring	3	Semester 1 (Jan-May)	3 courses (9 credits)
			Summer Break	2 courses (6 credits)
			Semester 2 (Aug-Dec)	3 courses (9 credits)
			Semester 3 (Jan-May)	2 courses (6 credits)
4	Fall	4	Semester 1 (Aug-Dec)	3 courses (9 credits)
			Semester 2 (Jan-May)	3 courses (9 credits)
			Summer Break	Internship (2 credits)
			Semester 3 (Aug-Dec)	3 courses (9 credits)
			Semester 4 (Jan-May)	1 course (1 credit)
5	Spring	4	Semester 1 (Jan - May)	3 courses (9 credits)
			Semester 2 (Aug - Dec)	3 courses (9 credits)
			Semester 3 (Jan - May)	3 courses (9 credits)
			Semester 4 (Aug-Dec)	1 course (3 credits)
6	Spring	4	Semester 1 (Jan - May)	3 courses (9 credits)
			Semester 2 (Aug - Dec)	3 courses (9 credits)
			Semester 3 (Jan - May)	3 courses (9 credits)
			Summer Break	Internship (2 credits)
			Semester 4 (Aug - Dec)	1 course (3 credits)

"1 course" refers to CIS 6935: Graduate Seminar.

There're many variations possible. I've seen people convert their internships into co-ops (a semester-long internship). So, they start interning in the summer and keep interning till December. They then take up courses aiming to graduate in Summer. You've got a choice to do an internship for 3 or 2 credits. People tend to safely do it for 2 credits. In case their internships fail to convert to a full time, they can safely graduate a semester later with a single credit course (CIS 6935: Graduate Seminar). Remember, you'll have to hunt for jobs, so make sure that you plan things right. Trust me, you'll have to sit down and think this through. I've even seen someone get a 4/4 GPA, graduate in 3 semesters, intern at VMWare and get a job there (Vivek, my housemate (hey, man!)). I obviously advise against attempting something like that, unless you're sure of your management skills. This table is just for you to get an idea of the number of ways you can go about doing things. There're also other (expensive) variations in which people take up a course just to have them dropped at the end of their third semester, earning them time to look for jobs a semester in advance. Obviously, this isn't very advisable.

Select set of Course Reviews

I'm going to candidly talk about some of the courses that I took. These are my views, and my opinions are from the time I took these courses (Spring 2016 – Fall 2017).

CAP6137/CIS4930: Malware Reverse Engineering	Joseph Wilson	My most favorite course (and professor) from UF. I'd suggest you take this only if you're interested (and have some experience) in low level programming, and have knowledge about computer architecture fundamentals, and more-than-decent knowledge of computer security. You'll be exclusively working with x86 assembly, and your assignments will feature increasingly obfuscated assembly/programs. This is a highly practical-oriented. You'll be given malware to analyze and write reports on. He takes quizzes every class. They count towards your grade. There are 4 practicals and an open book exam (open books exams generally imply that the books you carry are almost always useless). The professor is extremely humorous and seriously fun. You'll have to email the professor for this course. You'll have to do it really early, since he maintains a small class. I never missed a single class in the entire semester. Graded absolutely.
CDA5636/CDA4630: Embedded Systems	Prabhat Mishra	The professor has a clear-cut plan for the entire semester. It's more theoretical than practical. I loved this course since it gave me good insight into how embedded systems are (without going in too deep for discomfort). There were 2 programming assignments, 2 exams and 3 assignments. He allows a single "Cheat sheet". You're allowed to write anything you want on one side for the first exam. You can write on the other in the second exam. The exams are cumulative. The professor is extremely helpful, and is very serious about marks (you cannot fish for them). He is humorlour, polite and clear on his expectations. Graded absolutely.
CIS4204/CIS6930: Penetration Testing	Joseph Wilson	This course seemed to require "less specialization" than Malware Reverse Engineering. As in, you can learn most of what you need to learn (if you don't already know them) in the course itself. Strong security and network fundamentals will make sure you have nothing but fun in this course. Each assignment (around 12, if I recall correctly), involves a setup of a virtual network with virtual machines involving varying scenarios. Graded absolutely. You'll have to achieve the objective in each assignment, and write a report. There's a bonus clue in each assignment. If you collect and follow each clue in each virtual network, you'll eventually find clues to clues hidden in REAL LIFE locations, which contains keywords, which when mentioned in your final exam, give you bonus points! I had to go into dingy places to get my final clue. Trust me, it was a treasure

		hunt like I never played before. Clues that transitioned from being hidden within HTTP banners on hidden virtual machines in virtual networks, to finding out QR codes hidden in dimly lit places on campus. This course made me re-live my childhood; D
CNT5106C: Computer Networks	Ye Xia	A professor who loves to see students come to class. Everyone ends up watching online videos after a point. If you come to class, he'll eventually ask students (when the numbers drop to literally 4 or 6) to sign a paper and will offer bonus points/grade to those who attend. The course is mostly theoretical, with one relatively large programming assignment, and 2 non-cumulative exams. Graded on a curve.
COP5536: Advanced Data Structures, Summer	Sartaj Sahni	Considered an "Easy A grade course" by many, this course is both interesting and easy. He teaches the more practical aspects of ADS, with 1 programming assignment, and 2 non-cumulative exams. I'd suggest you to take the course just to have the honour of being taught by a legend as him. Graded absolutely.
COP5725: Database Mgmt. Sys	Markus Schneider	The professor presents a course plan in the first class, which has a day to day plan for each and every class for the rest of the semester. The way he organized the course was something I had never seen before. He's got 2 exams, and 1 large programming assignment. If you're like me, and do not like web-based front-end development, you'll have to find team members who're good at this. The project must be both practically useful and innovative. Overall, a fun course. Graded absolutely.
COT5405: Analysis of Algorithms	Sanjay Ranka	I've been told that Professor Sanjay Ranka will not take the course anymore. So, I'm not sure if my opinion matters. But, in case he does come back, he's got a clear and relatively easy-to-follow teaching structure of the course. There were 3 exams, some assignments and no programming assignments. Graded on a curve
EEL6761: Cloud Computing and Storage	Andy Li	In short: this is a strictly no BS course. To the best of my knowledge, no one gets away from even a stolen idea, let alone stolen or manipulated code. There's so much focus on the project, that you could semi-literally lose out marks on the assignments, fall below the class average, and still get an A. I noticed that all he wanted was an innovative, publish-worthy project. In the end, my assignment score was around 14 points below the class average. Yet, I was one of the 10 or so A grades given in the entire class (atleast that's what I was told), since he liked my original project and drive. Focus on the project, do well, be sincere, report often, and you'll get an A. (This professor is one of the most enthusiastic professors I've met). You'll need to work regularly, since there're assignments due every Sunday night, with 4 projects check points, and a project demo day.

Section - V

Job Hunt Begins (if you're looking for one)

Does UF have a good "Placement Scene"?

Let me first tell you that people get jobs and internships through many different ways. If one were to try and find how many students got jobs exclusively through career fairs, to estimate how well UF is in the "Placement scene", I think this would be a largely incoherent conclusion (whatever it may be).

People get jobs applying online on company portals, LinkedIn, through referrals, open fairs (that don't happen in campus, Florida or even on the East Coast), and through job fairs themselves. In this section, I'll tell you my stance on how to efficiently look for jobs. Note that "on-site" refers to the company's office, and "on-campus" refers to UF's campus.

I don't have experience. Is this going to be a problem?

No, it's not going to be a "problem". You're obviously going to be at a competitive loss when compared to people who do have experience, but trust me, you can gain an edge over them with your own skill set, projects, accomplishments, and so on. Experienced people tend to have tougher interviews (notice the word tend). Sadly, there is this unfortunate tie-breaker scenario, where you'd be at certain loss, if you tied in performance with other candidates who have experience. They'd mostly tie-break on factors which you apparently "lack". In cases like this, you'd probably lose an offer to someone who does have experience, but trust me, this isn't very likely as you think, since your accomplishments, skill or specialization could strongly lure their will to invest towards you instead.

What's a good way to prepare to "Look for jobs"?

Okay, first off, you need to be good at programing aptitude. By this, I mean the questions you'd come across on websites like GeekforGeeks, Leetcode, hackerrank, and books like Cracking the Coding interview. It doesn't matter how many patents you may hold, or publications you might have, you must prove your coding and algorithmic versatility. There is, ofcourse, this view -point that pre-learning methods to play around with linked-lists, numbers, trees, array and so on, do not actually accurately imply one's measure of coding/design strengths. While this may be true in several cases, in a company's point of view, it'd be a greater risk to solely bank on your accomplishments than your "demonstrated coding ability".

Does my undergrad GPA matter?

If it's low, it's never going to be a problem. Just don't mention your UG GPA on your resume like how many don't. If it's good, mention it, it'll probably work some good. I can testify to how failing to mention your UG GPA does not stifle your job hunt.

Does a "low" Master's GPA matter?

This is very subjective. When I mean low, I'd say that anything below 3.5 is low. So, given this, I'd say no, it doesn't (except for Bloomberg). Of course, the higher the GPA, the more credibility you automatically earn. Also, I'm sure than something like 3.1 or 3.2 is going to throw some serious doubt on your profile. Say that you've got some pretty serious accomplishments like winning national/international hackathons, best paper awards, popular projects (all won/received/made in the same period of time as your study at UF), you'd quite easily ward off any doubts about capacity. But, if not, I'd say that your profile might take a hit.

Ideally: Be like this roommate of mine. (take note, Fall Students) Get a 4.0 GPA in your first semester. Aim for easy subjects (if possible), and aim for perfect scores. You can quite simply march up to any

company you'd like, and say "Well, I've got 4 points". They're almost bound to give you a shot (ofcourse, they won't if you under-sell yourself, or act "strangely"), regardless of your profile. If you're like him (with important first semester courses, a strong profile and a 4.0 GPA) getting an internship should be quite easy. Anyway, land an internship, and ease out of academic pressure in the next semester, and begin to focus on preparing for interviews, in case your internship does not convert to a full time. Right about this time, it shouldn't matter even if you just barely get through your subjects (Although, I doubt anyone getting a 4.0 would slide that far).

What're my objectives, here?

Have a resume that's good enough in terms of:

1) Aesthetic appeal. Don't be hip with excessive colours, diagrams, stylization etc.
    a. Display of solid achievements that grab the attention of recruiters.
    b. Showcase of projects that aren't typically all-academic, all-personal or all-professional, and that are not common course projects that your peers also worked on.
    c. Lucid enumeration of your programming and technical skill. Make sure you include seemingly trivial key words like "algorithms and data structures" just so automated resume parsers pick your resume.
2) Be prepared for programming aptitude examination, in varying levels of difficulty. Start early.
3) Be aware of company specific tendencies (explained in later sections).
4) Be proactive, and look for jobs on all fronts (online, referrals, job fairs etc.)
5) Adapt your resume to highlight the requirements that companies have (note that I said adapt and not fake)

So, by the time you start looking for internships in late August, you'd have to be good (enough) in programming aptitude. This is what's common for any kind of a software engineering position, both specialized or general.

If you're interested in research, work on papers (either by yourself, or with fellow-students or professors). Take part in programming competitions, do your best to place a decent rank there. Take part in national/international Capture-the-Flag competitions that take place.

If you're aware of papers that has cited your papers, show how many actually have. Contribute (sensibly) to open source, and mention it pertinently. Work on projects for fun, and put it up on GitHub. Look around, and see what kind of desktop/mobile/web app might benefit people in general. Things like this are what make you stand out.

What do I need to know before I begin to job hunt?

1) Do not wait for career fairs (unless you're in your first semester). Start applying online well before it. So, start applying by late July or early August, when you plan to attend the CRC in September.
2) Never, never say something like "I'll prepare till the month of August, and I'll then apply". You do not know how long or soon it'll be before you get called. Most importantly, a thousand people would have already applied before you do, which almost completely kills the chances of your profile being reviewed or being given a chance (reviewed: processed, given a chance: resume accepted, placed in a queue waiting to be given an interview). This is something I've seen many people doing (including myself, during my internship search).
3) Start working on your resume the moment you arrive at UF. You'll have to go through many drafts before you arrive at a usable base resume (see next section for resume tips).

4) Do not wait till the very end to ask your contact in companies for referrals. Inform them months in advance, and keep in touch with them. They'll probably be busy, make sure you keep reminding them as well.

5) Do not bank on your referrals. Referrals work, at most, to give you a chance at being interviewed. Do not assume that being referred gives you a "marginal advantage" over others who're being interviewed the "regular way". Also, several companies do not (always) take referral programs very seriously. Referrals also depend on vacancies. If there're too few vacancies, referrals almost always fail to result in an interview call. I personally know people with high-up referrals (and strong profiles) who had referrals from Bloomberg, Goldman Sachs and Amazon, but still missed out getting called.

6) This last one is at most, a gentle suggestion: Start a simple website that fully explains all your projects, documents your accomplishments, explains your research, and enumerates all citations to your papers (and more). Make sure it's got a good CMS to work with (and not a raw, manually designed collection of static HTML pages that you'd have spend valuable time on, just to add/update/remove content). It'll probably cost you, but it'll probably be worth it.

How do I go about designing a good resume?

I don't know about you, but when I did my undergrad, we a had a standard 2/3-page resume. Here, the universal standard is a single sided Letter sized page (with expanded margins, if necessary). Points to keep in mind, off the top of my mind:

1) You'll also have to keep updating each resume as you work on projects, gain skills and publish papers. Make sure you version control your resumes, just in case you need to revert back (Click here to see my resume repository).

2) Maintain separate folders for each company that you apply to. This is for two reasons: one, the cover letter, and two, company specific highlighting of skill sets. If you don't maintain separate folders for this, there quite a chance that you'll mix things up, and send the wrong cover letter/resume to the company you're applying for. (Click here to see my resume-company repository).

3) Have 2 sub-versions for each version of your resume: one for online submissions, and the other for print. The online version could have links on each project mention, and on each claim of accomplishment. You could have a tiny footer that says, "Click on entries for source code/documentation" (or something similar). You could also link entries to sections in your website where you could document and fully explain your project. Also, if you're using colours in your resume, having a different, darker shade for print would work better. Speaking of colours, this brings me to my next point:

4) You can use colours to very, very minimally highlight your best and most acclaimed accomplishments. Avoid colouring headings, section titles etc.

5) Have clearly grouped sections for projects (for example, professional projects, personal projects and academic projects).

6) If you have publications, make sure you include number of citations earned for each paper. Don't just rely on Google Scholars to find your citations. Do manual searches as well.

7) Clearly mention when you're graduating, the role you're looking for, and when you're willing to start working.

Here's how I laid out my resume:

Separate section for Research papers,
Personal projects and academic projects

Accolades highlighted with a gentle attention grabbing colour

References for acclaimed accomplishments, such as best paper awards,
critical citations or technical awards/prizes.
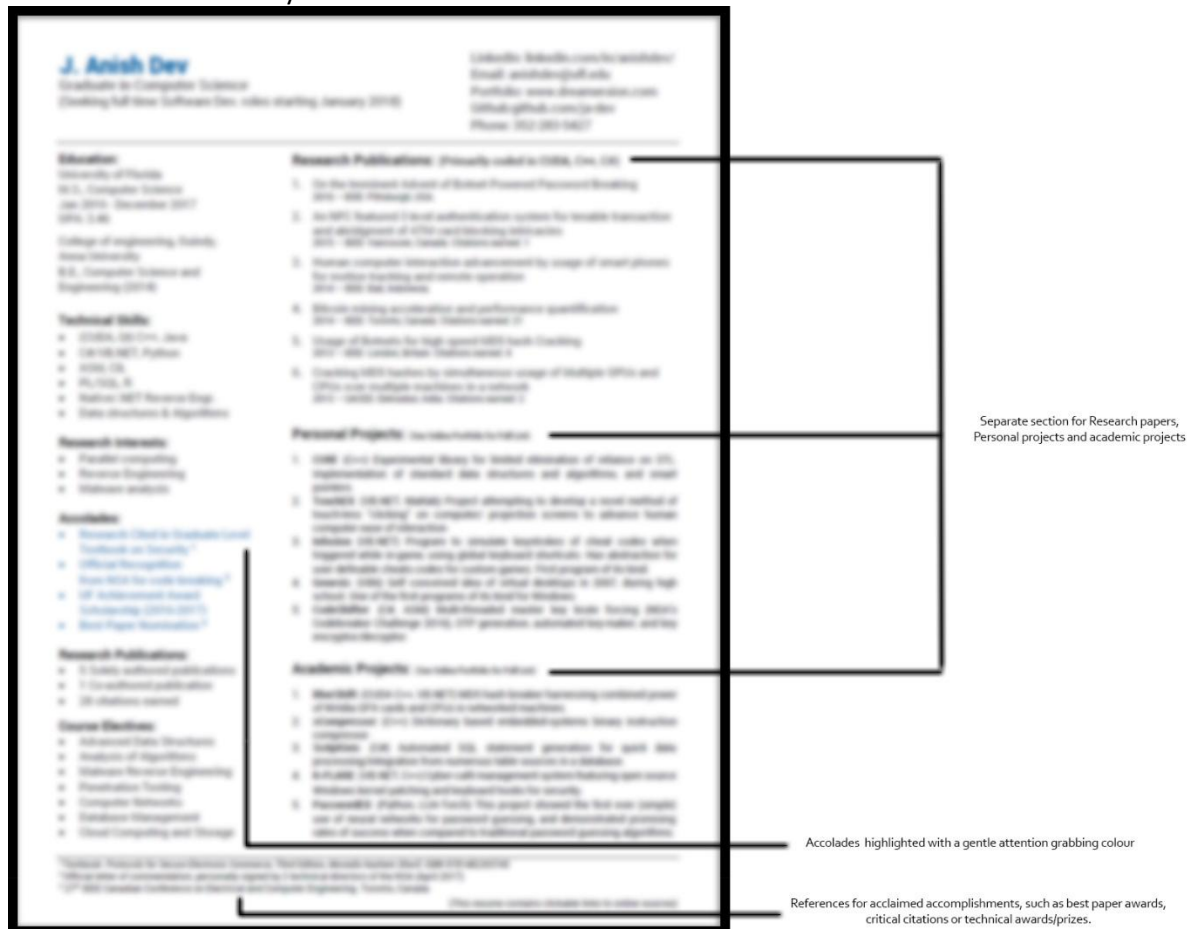
What do I do in career fairs?

There're 2 fairs: The CDW (Career Development Workshop), and the CRC (Career Resource Centre Job Fair). CDW is a CISE only event, while CRC is much larger, and has companies attending from all departments. The CDW happens first, with the CRC happening around a day or 2 later. They take place in both semesters, with the Spring edition happening towards the end of January, and the Fall edition around September. Spring intake students unfortunately, cannot make much use of their first job fair since they can't work until a stay of 9 months in the US has passed (Although, I have personally noticed atleast one person who had worked in Microsoft India, get an interview for an extremely early prospective internship interview, despite being a Spring student attending the first CDW). This should be treated as an exception, so do not get your hopes dashed if you're not given a chance.

Attend the CDW/CRC, and get a feel of how things are. Here're somethings that might help:

1) Make a list of companies that you plan to visit before attending the job fair. There is far from enough time to attend all companies.
2) You'll need to stand for literally 4-6 hours at a stretch. Make sure you get enough rest, food, sleep, and bring water/granola bars to the fair.
3) Stand in line for companies for which you have referrals for. Referrals do not imply a guaranteed chance. I know people who get called through career fairs instead of their own high-up referrals.

4) If you're printing your resumes at the campus, make sure you don't get them done in the last 2 or 3 days before the fair. Understandably, a lot of people would be doing just this. You wouldn't want to waste your time waiting, or risk waiting on a malfunctioning printer.

5) Do not get excited if recruiters seem excited to meet you. Understand that people-skills are part of their job profile, and that's what they're best at doing. (I'm not saying they're "fake"/ "bad", I'm just letting you know not to get excited before you actually get interview calls).

6) Prepare what's called an "elevator speech" of not more than 30 – 45 seconds of explaining your profile. This generally consists of what you're doing now, your experience, and what you're specialized in. Remember to end it with your best accomplishments, scholarships, publications etc.

7) Dress formally with a blazer. Get this from India if you need to avoid buying expensive formal wear from here.

8) Do not believe that failing to get calls from job fairs imply total loss of opportunity to get jobs. You'll realize that most/many (not sure about the proportion), get jobs outside of the job fair.

9) Things might get tense as job fairs come and go. Do not give up, do not get depressed, do not stop applying. Many people (including myself) stop applying (for varying periods of time) when they face job offer/interview rejection. You waste valuable time in doing so. Do not thin your chances further. This is probably similar to many situations in life where you "need energy to do things to get energy, but don't have energy in the first place". You'll have to sit through and do it.

10) Not all companies sponsor visas. Use this as a mean to filter out companies that you'd need to avoid. I've heard that these companies do not take interns either, since they hire interns with hopes of eventually having them as full time converts.

11) Keep things professional. Even if you get to interview with your dream company, X after dreaming about it since the 7th grade, when asked "Why X?" do not go "I've been dreaming about this since I was a kid! Everything I've worked towards until now, has been this!" etc. Given the right context, you probably could say that, but it may not work well if that's the first thing they hear. I guess it's probably because it sounds contrived. Answer questions very, very impersonally (unless, of course the context is right).

Can I get a job without interning? What if I have zero experience?

Yes, you still can. Exhibit A: Myself. I had no prior professional experience whatsoever. I interviewed with Microsoft for an internship in early February. Despite it going fine to the best of my knowledge, I was still denied the internship. That killed my spirits, and I didn't apply anywhere after that. Every company that I spoke to during my job hunt, asked whether I had any experience of any sort, and why I didn't. But, by God's Grace, I had then held 2 job offers, one from Citrix and the other from Microsoft.

What do I need to know before applying online?

1) (Many) Companies use automated resume parsers to scan your resume for key words. Make sure you include them in your resume.

2) Make sure that your resume is text process-able. If you design your resume using Adobe InDesign or Photoshop, it's very likely for the text to be inaccurately tokenized. To see an example of this, click on this link to see an example of earlier versions of my resume (quite professionally) designed in Adobe InDesign, and later ones made simply in Microsoft Word. You'll notice that many keywords are split up and "un-readable".

3) Do no waste time applying to companies that do not sponsor visas. Some of them openly state that they do not sponsor visas. Save time by overlooking them.

4) Some companies do not sponsor visas, but do not explicitly state that they do not do so. Rejects come in either immediately or a few days from then. Do not be disheartened.

5) This one is very, very subjective. Take this as just my (personally justified) opinion. I've seen people with 2 stances on applying online when the requirements mentioned clearly do not match with your own, in terms of either required skills or experience. When I say required skills, I don't mean a simple absence of a scripting language or a nuance of your technical capacity. I mean applying to front-end role when you've got no front-end experience or knowledge at all.

    a. **Popular opinion: Apply anyway**
       Support for this is mainly fishing for that "fortunate possibility" that happens to a fortunate few. They say that the skill-set requirements are not meant in its entirety, and that companies are more than willing to interview people who are willing to "adapt and learn" as well. Experience, according to them, is also negligible when required from 1 to 2 years.

    b. **My (extremely unpopular) opinion: Do not waste your time**
       I believe that you'd lose your place when there's even someone with a single skill that's required, or with half the experience of what's been mentioned. You'd end up hoping that you'd somehow hear back from them; there's this tiny, tiny chance that you'd be called. I've seen a lot of people do this, and then seem let down that they did not get called (when they themselves claim that they never expected anything in the first place). You'll learn that each application takes atleast 5 minutes. I think it's not worth the let-down nor the time. I personally haven't heard of anyone getting calls this way. The choice is up to you.

6) Always keep checking for vacancies that may come up at any time of the month. I know this be repetitive and trying, but being the first ones to apply for positions give you an advantage.

7) For goodness sake, this isn't Mad Max, share things with your friends. I've been fortunate enough to be have had a lovely 2 years (with people who's names I've mentioned in the last page). Everyone shared everything with everyone; when one notices Amazon opening up positions, they inform the others right there. I've heard of people who literally keep things secret, who apply to places but almost outright deny that they did. There's only one thing I feel about this stuff.

8) Linked-In is a really nice place where you can quite easily find jobs/internships. This also means that you'll have to tidy-up your LinkedIn profile. Put in time for this.

(My personal) Company Specific observations

Before I begin writing, let me first say that these observations are purely my own, and do not necessarily mean that this will always hold true for all time to come. I will not be mentioning any specific questions I've been asked, since that would violate NDA agreements I'm under. Lastly, for purposes of "legal safety", let me state that I do not intend to "smear" any company mentioned here, in any way whatsoever. I am simply stating opinion based on what I have experienced. I do not support nor oppose any employment practices of any company. I am not responsible for any outcome that might come through based on your dependence on what you read here.

Microsoft:

According to me, getting called by Microsoft is the larger challenge than facing interviews themselves. They call a very small select set of people they personally meet through career fairs. To the best of my knowledge, referrals do not seem to be effective, since every call I've heard of, including my own, has been explicitly through university job fairs. This might be exclusively the case for Microsoft-UF referrals, since University of Florida is listed as an "official university recruitment site" (or something along those words) on their website, and they probably deem referrals from UF as redundant.

The resume you first submit to them, is used throughout the interview process, till the very last interview you'll face on-site. So, don't even think of using a temporarily fake and flashy resume "just to get an interview process going". They prize achievements which are notable, technical, personal and voluntarily accomplished. That's what gets their attention: a deterministic measure of technical passion and devotion; volubly and emptily using words like "passion", "innovative" etc. without actual project backing, documented recognition, or verifiability may not get you through.

Interviews themselves are obviously very technical. They test your programming and algorithmic skill. Questions are often ones that interviewers themselves come up with, (I said often, not mostly or always) which means you're expected to think for yourself, and not "recall from memory" for similar questions you've previously dealt with.

There'll be one on-campus interview (if you get called from the career fair). If you get through, you'll be called for 4-5 rounds of interview on-site (Seattle, Sunnyvale, San Francisco etc.). I can testify that internship interviews tend to be easier than full-time interviews. System design questions are common. You're expected to ask questions to maximize clarity. Questions are often asked vaguely to test your capacity to spot ambiguity in problem statements. Describe what you're going to do before you do it. Test your understanding of the problem with a few test cases, and confirm whether it is what the interviewer is actually asking for.

You'll generally hear back within 2 weeks, at most. If you've got any pending job offers deadlines, you'll have to let them know both before and on the day of the interview (you'll be given a digital form to fill out before the day of the interview. You'll also be asked to fill a form on the day of the interview). They'll give you the results before your deadline, unless it's an impossible early date. For example, my offer deadline from Citrix was a Monday, when I was interviewing with Microsoft on the Thursday just before it. My interviews ended at 6 P.M, so all they had was 1 business day to work on results. They politely mentioned that I could not expect to hear back on Friday, and suggested for me to get a deadline extension from Citrix. They did, however, promptly get back to me on Tuesday with a phone call, extending an offer to me. They email if there's no deadline.

Amazon:

Amazon has been known to be unpredictable with a large number of candidates. When I say unpredictable, I mean situations in which the candidate displays interesting skill sets which other companies appreciate, but for some reason, never, ever gets called by Amazon.

In my 2 years at UF, I have never seen anyone being called by Amazon from career fairs. Stand in line in their stalls, and you'll notice that they simply ask you to apply online. Yes, they take your resumes, but once you go through your first career fair, you'll notice that some companies simply ask people to "apply online", while taking your resume. Referrals in Amazon do tend to work for most people. Simply applying online works as well. Just make sure you apply to everything as soon as you notice a vacancy.

Now, if you're like me, one of the very, very few who, for some reason, have never, ever gotten called, despite being referred, and applying online each and every semester, trust me when I say this, it's not your fault. I think Amazon has this method of "pruning" the applicant pool, to make applicant numbers smaller and more practical. I very personally know of 4 more people who have had this exact same "problem". At the same time, I'm aware of someone who got an internship (which later converted to Full-Time) without even having a phone interview. He was given an online HackerRank test (which he passed) and eventually got an internship confirmation email. I've also heard of people who went through 2 rounds of phone interview after the online test. I've heard of people who got called on-site (for Full-Time roles), where they had just a single round, in which they were asked how they solved their online coding round. As you can see, it's pretty varied.

Citrix:

A brilliant company that's been around since the late 80s. Their stall queues are usually the longest in career fairs. The advantage? They tend to give an on-campus round the very next or the next to next day. If you're selected, they'll call (within an hour or two of meeting them at the stall) and let you know the time and venue where you'll be interview on -campus. Clear that, and you get called on-site. You'll be engaged the whole day. But, you'll hear back quick. I went on-site on a Thursday, and was told that I was being extended a job offer the very next day.

The interviews themselves consisted of atleast 5 rounds. One of them involved a 3-member interview team. (I've heard that someone actually had a 4-member team). They were all very friendly throughout the day. You'll be interviewed by people who might eventually be your colleagues. You'll be taken out for lunch by the same team. Trust me, they are very, very courteous.

The interviews I've had with Citrix have easily been the most "colourful" one I've ever had. I was asked everything from Compiler fundamentals to standard specific C++ questions, from assembly level views of concurrency facilitation, to high level language features of concurrency, from network fundamentals, to industrial scaling of web applications and services, from language specific features, to object oriented principles in general, from broad Design pattern approaches, to language specific implementation specifics of design patterns, from highly profile specific questions (questions concerning my research) in context of their products, to general questions concerning improving their products, from general security to .net/native reverse engineering. Note that I'm not sure how many of what I mentioned were asked because of my interest in low level programming, reverse engineering, (and research in) security, applications of cryptography, and parallel computing.

Magic Leap:

Interviews here are highly job vacancy dependent. Most (if not all) the technical roles I've seen there are C++ roles. They look for "truly solid C++, algorithmic skills and projects". Magic Leap has an NDA that you need to sign before the interview, so I don't want to cross any lines by going beyond what I've already (generically) described.

Bloomberg:

This is only company (that I know of) that has a hard-lined GPA requirement of 3.50 and above. Apply online with anything lower that this, and you'll get a reject literally within the hour. Stand in line in career fairs, convince them that you're worth it (with projects, accomplishments etc.), and you'll still have to face highly direct questions targeting your "failure in your GPA". Trust me, I barely fall short of the 3.50 line, and I was asked questions that made me feel like I failed in life; "Why is you GPA so low? What happened? How do you explain that? Wait, tell me your actual grades in the subjects where you lost your grade". He actually proceeded to note down the courses and respective grades I mentioned.

The good thing about Bloomberg, is that they'll give you short programming questions on the spot, right there by their stall in the career fair. Have an impressive profile and/or GPA, and solve their questions, and you'll be given a chance to interview with them at a hotel or on-campus a day or two from then (it's almost always the next day). You'll face a 2-person interview panel, who'll probably ask you a question each in under an hour. Get through this, and you'll have 2 or 3 more rounds on-campus. Get through these, and you'll be told of your results before staff leave the campus. You'll then be taken on-campus for a tour of their office.

Goldman Sachs

People typically apply online (I do not know of anyone who got referred into GS). Everyone I know (who applied) got online HackerRank coding rounds. Here's the tricky part. Whether you hear back after that seems to be almost arbitrary. My roommate applied online and directly got called to an on-site interview in NYC (something they called a "Superday", during which around 50 people have interviews as well). I've heard of people who get technical phone interviews, and get invited to on-site interviews. I've heard of people (like myself) who give a single (first) technical phone round, and never, ever hear back. I mean, no number of emails to your HR point of contact seem to work. If your round actually went bad, you could rest in the fact that you simply failed to pass. But, when things go well, it's only natural to be frustrated and left hanging, especially when you have no other offers in hand. My advice: try emailing them, call them if you have their phone numbers, but do not wait on them.

I've been called on-site, now what?
1) Look up reviews on glassdoor to get a feel of what to expect. Look up people who're going to interview you (you don't always get to know this, though).
2) Ask friends who've interviewed with the company recently.
3) Decide whether you're going to go business casual or business formal.
4) Print a (sanely) superfluous number of copies of your resume. Interviewers in some companies keep your resume at the end of your round. I'd suggest you to buy and use resume paper.

5) Most importantly: Choose the earliest date you can – always. Never try to postpone a date, even if it's close to exams. Do not try to postpone to a later date. I lost my chance to interview with Microsoft's Office team during my internship hunt, this way. I had to leave right after my exams, so, I requested them to postpone by just 3 days. They got back to me a week later saying that all positions were full. I eventually had to interview with a small team.

6) Remember, a hundred people are waiting to try in your place. Companies do not have to wait on you. Don't ever tempt them to pass on you.

Section - VI

Job secured

I've been given an offer, now what? (Negotiation, acceptance)

If you receive the news by phone call, remain professional, do not go "Oh wow! Thank you! Thank you so much! Oh, wow, it's been my dream! I can't believe this!" etc. (this is an overdone example). My point is, remain as composed as possible. A simple "Thank you, I'm glad to hear that", in a brightly toned voice (as opposed to a childlike voice, or a clearly faked robotic voice) is more than enough. The reason for this? Leverage.

If the recruiter comes to know that you're more than satisfied, or perfectly happy with the fact that you got the job, you've almost certainly sealed your capacity to negotiate for more. Remain composed when they specify your compensation package. They might (sneakily) ask you something like "So, where are you leaning towards?" (if you've got other job offers), tell them flatly that you need time to think about it, even if there's no way in the world that this might be the case. There's no loss in doing this, and there're only possibilities of working this to your advantage. Say that you get a job offer that might be close, equal to, or greater than your current offer, you can press for an increase in the package. Learning how "hard to press" is probably a psychological course on its own. I know people who've flatly lied that they had heavier offers from other companies, and in doing so, got their offers raised. Being someone who is both unwilling to and unable to (successfully) lie, trying this would be professional suicide. I would never, ever recommend this to anyone, for reasons faithful (in the sight of God), ethical (in the sight of the company that trusts your statements), and personal (your moral stance). I chose to be entirely honest during my negotiation (I can't mention the details, but it worked to my advantage), and I advise nothing less to those who may want to negotiate, too.

I've accepted an offer, but I need to renege, can I?

Shortly: Yes, you can. But, if you're doing it, do it as soon as possible. I've been told that companies can "go after you". The only way I've heard them doing so, is letting the university know of what you did, blacklisting you, and blacklisting the university from further recruitment drives. As far as I know,

this is only what I've heard, and I haven't seen this happen. Clearly, none of us want to be that first one, and none of us want to put UF at risk for any reason selfish or otherwise.

So, make sure you renege as gracefully as possible, with a carefully drafted email. Cite your reasons, thank them for their courtesy, state your interest in a firmer and larger offer from the other company than made you lean that way, and close in professional gratitude. Some companies actually write back to you, asking for details of the competing offer, just to see if they can compete with it. If you do not have plans of actually joining the company if they did match the other offer, do not take advantage of them, do not do things "just to see how far they're willing to go". You already signed the offer. They're already doing a lot by letting you go. This would be perfectly alright if you hadn't signed it.

I've signed an offer, and am done. What next?
Choose an OPT start date. Go to the UFIC, book an appointment for this. They'll ask you to take a list of documents with you. Take them with you. You're ready.

Can I go back home to India before I join?
Yes, you can. Once you apply for the OPT start date, you'll get what's called an EAD card (it'll take you 2 – 3 months to get this). You can either (A) Go to India, and ask a friend to mail the card to your address in India, or (B) stay here, get the EAD card, and leave with it. You cannot return to the US without the card. Personally, (A) sounds too risky for me (if for some reason, the card doesn't arrive). Quite a few people decide to play it fully safe, and work for a year first before going back.

What do I do once I join the company?
Make sure you report your SEVIS status to UFIC every 6 months. Work hard, make your parents happy, make your siblings happy, make your friends happy, and reach out to those who need help. Have ice cream, loads and loads of ice cream (you should see my freezer, I've got a mini ice cream bar going).

Microsoft Referral

I'm willing to look through resumes of people who seem to have **profiles that deserve a shot at Microsoft, but do not seem to have the "aesthetic/potential advantage" of profiles that generally do get chances**. What do I mean by this? I mean:

1) A GPA not higher than 3.5 (3.6 at most).
2) A resume with lots of personal (non-trivial, interesting) projects.
3) Little or no (pertinent) professional experience or internships.
4) Gap years (due to death in close family or personal tragedies).
5) (Possibly a) Terrible undergrad GPA.
6) At least 1 first authored IEEE publication presented at a reputable conference.
7) At least 2 or more second authored IEEE publications presented at reputable conferences.

If you do fit the criteria above, email me with your resume. If you truly feel that your profile, despite being partially dissimilar to what I've mentioned above, might fail to get noticed by recruiters, email me. Please, please do not email me if you've already got a "clearly strong profile which will be picked up by recruiters". Also, if all goes well, I'll continue to attend UF's career fair on behalf of Microsoft for recruiting. Hope to see you all there.

A final word:

Cherish those you love with everything you have. You've got no idea how suddenly or slowly death comes upon people. More importantly, you've got no idea how messed up you'd be without them. You can never love anyone enough while they're alive, to feel that you couldn't have loved them more once they're gone. Celebrate *living* your life with them while they're *alive* in your life.

If someone you love shows signs of suicide, talk to them and be their saving angel. Even if they successfully trick you to look past your fears, pester them and keep them alive. Cherish those around you. No matter who they are. Starting from your parents, to those you love, to those who love you.

This is going to be a wonderful 2 years for you. You're getting a new chance at life; new friends, new people, a chance to subtract yourself of personality issues that people in your older life cannot look past, a chance to be the person you've wanted to be, a chance to work on your dreams, a chance to probably meet someone you could come to like, and so on. God bless you all. I hope you find nothing but joy, happiness, in every person you meet, every meal you have together, every birthday you celebrate together, every up and down that life throws at you.

Study, share, live, love and realize that simply sitting together with friends, talking your mind out, sipping coffee around a table on a random Sunday evening, could easily end up being one of the happiest times in your life.

Lastly, and I cannot stress on how important I believe this is: There are 7.5 billion people on this planet. Most people want to live life focused on their families *only* and themselves – this is a blessing by itself which a lot of people do not get to have, and I pray that everyone gets to do so. However, I implore you to realize how fleeting our lives are, and to do everything you can, in every thing you do, with every talent you've got, with every person you love, with ever one who loves you, with every minute you have, to help make the world a better place *in a way that would last*, since that's the only thing that will truly make a difference (minus our otherwise contextually meaningless existences, each of which eventually are also rendered trivial with the passing of the final bearers of our memories). Time, according to me, is the single most-wasted resource – you'd be surprised by the number of things you can accomplish if you simply pay attention to what you *actually* do with your time.

About this Guide, and Contact

I thought I'd help about by making a simple guide for people who're new to UF. I noticed how questions were repetitively being asked each year. Hopefully, this should put most of them away. I'm sure that there's much more that can be added to this guide. Please feel free to make suggestions or corrections, I'd be more than willing to incorporate them. <u>More importantly, I'd love to know if you found this guide even remotely helpful. A single lined comment would be more than kind of you.</u>

This is the <u>8th</u> version of the guide. Expect typos, grammatical errors and missing information.

Also, **I'd love to hear from you** if you've got similar research interests, or questions/comments about my publications. You can reach me through the following ways:

Email	anishdev@ufl.edu j.anishdev@gmail.com (preferred)
LinkedIn	https://www.linkedin.com/in/anishdev
Website; Publications, artwork, poems, projects, and free fried chicken	http://www.dreamersion.com
Publications:	Google Scholars Page http://dreamersion.com/research-papers/
Get the newest version of the guidebook	http://dreamersion.com/ufl-guidebook-for-freshers

If email's a hassle, you can leave a quick (if required, anonymous) comment: https://anishdev.sarahah.com/. Like I said, I'd love to know if this has, in the least, been useful.

Remember, share the link to the guidebook, and not the PDF file itself, so others can have the newest versions as I complete them.

People who've contributed to corrections, suggestions and additions:
Sharanya Sini – for immunization related clarification, and "beta testing".
Sneha Mohanan – for suggesting (and answering) multiple questions to be included.
Deepthi Narkuti – for misc. suggestions and "beta testing".

Dedications

This might be the last version of the guidebook I'm writing, so pardon my verbosity here.

My parents, uncle and brother. As a family, I grew up with us, literally just us, in a tiny town in the Middle East. I've got no other blood relation I could really call family, for all intents and purposes – these people I mention, shaped me.

People I've come to know, deeply love, and call family plus the ones mentioned above, at UF:

Roommates#1: Abhishek, Shubham, Dharsan – The Dude, the Party Animal and the Shooter!
Roommates#2: Avinash, Vivek, Vineeth (+nominal roommate: Rakshit) – it was really something, wasn't it? I mean…. how *many* people ended up meeting, caring and loving for each other at our then-home; Stoneridge - R159?!

The rest of us: Naveen, Rahul, Ramona, Rochelle, Gunjan, Jeni, Jennifer, Kalyani, Monisha, and Natasha.

I've made some of my best and purest life stories and memories with you all, and I hope we never stop making more. Isn't it lovely how most of us still live close to each to each, almost like back in Stoneridge, in Seattle, too? In fact, would we have thought that three of us (Vineeth, Natasha and I) would start as roommates and classmates, and end up as teammates in the same team at Microsoft?

Undergraduate friends:
Leslie, Prithvi, Vignesh, Subhash – you guys helped me back to my feet when one of my reasons to live, passed away.

In memory of Arun Kumar, a good fried to many; we had fun in our own small ways. In deep longing and loving memory of Iffat - an angel who left us too soon, I wish you knew what you are to us.

Finally, in desperate and undying memory of someone who was (and still is) the most important person in my life, not a day goes by without me wishing that we had traded places, and you lived instead of me. I don't know how I'd go on in a world where you are gone neither do I know whether I consciously choose to do so. Everything I learnt with you and from you, during the billion hours we spent together – is what gives me the strength to give everything in me to finish what we started together so many years ago. It's been 5 years since you've left this world, honestly…

… I still don't know how I'd go on in a world where you are gone. Working towards what we started is the only thing keeping me alive, going, and is what I'll do until we meet again in another world.
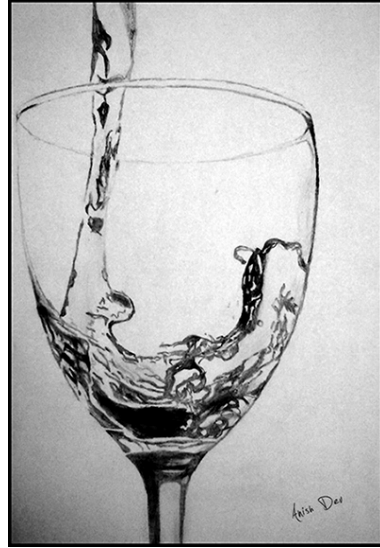
"In every work and every move,
in each day, he tries to prove,
a heartfelt gift in every act,
thankful feel for not having lacked,
a pinch of joy when right beside,
or a ton of fun in every chide.
Yet in times or all, it seems seen past,
in cause of how it all seems off classed:
blending in with persona as if normal,
losing sight as if formal.

all this seems in line to just a glass of water,
when filled, causes nothing for one to perceive,
as something beautiful, unique or that can heart-heave.

but when time's frozen still,
the all but simple pour of water,
seems but an intrinsic display of running art in glory,

this when seen… does it make you wonder?
that if you froze someone's actions and did some ponder?
would it yield a completely different view somewhere yonder?
or would you rather choose to see through and squander…

The value of gifts in people's actions"