THE INTERNATIONAL APPLICANT'S GUIDE TO A PH.D.

APPLYING, FUNDING, LIVING ABROAD, AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN



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Thinking About Graduate Study in the United States? YOU'RE ON THE RIGHT TRACK



For the past several years, the United States has been the go-to destination for competitive, graduate degree-seeking international students. Especially in the STEM fields, large <u>numbers of international</u> <u>students</u> are choosing U.S. universities and colleges for their Ph.D. programs and research opportunities.

More people in the United States are earning their doctoral degree. <u>According to the National Center for</u> <u>Education Statistics</u>, the number of doctoral degrees conferred increased 53% from 2000 to 2018. There are many reasons people choose to pursue a doctoral degree, including:

- high quality academic programs,
- excellent career prospects,
- holding a reputation for being a leader in innovation and creativity,
- and being an interesting place to live and study.

Whatever your reason for considering international study for your Ph.D., you probably have some questions and maybe even a few concerns. In this resource, you will find information about choosing and applying to a Ph.D. program; financing your degree; navigating housing and living in the U.S.; and finding resources at SMU that can help you to do all these things successfully.

You will also learn from current and past international students at SMU, as they share their experiences and tips for success.



SMU INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS BY THE NUMBERS



In the Fall of 2020, Non-U.S Citizens made up:



Doctoral Admissions Doctoral Applicants First-time Doctoral Enrollments

*Statistics from the Fall of 2020

First Things First:



CHOOSE THE RIGHT PROGRAM FOR YOUR INTERESTS AND CAREER GOALS

So you have decided that you want to earn your Ph.D. abroad. With so many reputable graduate programs available in the United States, how do you choose which one is right for you?

The best way to narrow down your list is through a little advanced research that compares what you want in a program with what a program has to offer:

- First, compile a list of what is important to you in a graduate program.
- Include your interests, goals, desired areas of research, and the traits that are most important to you in a graduate degree environment.
- Compare this list to the programs you are considering, and see how they match up.

Aside from research focus and program specifics, you should also consider degree funding. If you are looking for someone to help you pay for your doctorate through a grant, scholarship, fellowship, trust, or gift of some other kind, where and how much funding you are offered can play a big role in which program you choose.

Another way to narrow down your choices is to consider the following question: do the program/school's graduates have careers that I would like to have?

Often, programs will disclose the jobs that their graduates accepted shortly after graduation as well as the careers they hold currently. This can be a good indicator of how well their degree and training prepared them to enter the field.

For more information on how to choose the Ph.D. program that is the best fit for you, check out our free resource — <u>a complete guide to Choosing</u>, <u>Applying for, and Thriving in a Ph.D. Program</u>.

DOWNLOAD THE GUIDE



Here's What a Strong Ph.D. Application Looks Like



Your application is a presentation of yourself on paper — your accomplishments, interests, research, and work experience. A strong Ph.D. applicant will meet all of the requirements for admission, and will demonstrate a unique determination to advance their chosen field of study.

Generally, international applications must submit an online application and application fee, transcripts, english proficiency test scores, GRE test scores and letters of recommendation.

INTERNATIONAL PH.D. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS AT SMU

- <u>Complete the online application</u> (Make sure you answer all questions correctly)
- A \$75 application fee (collected online)
- Copies of unofficial transcripts (Once you are admitted you will be required to submit official transcripts)
- Three letters of recommendation
- Proof of English language proficiency: <u>TOEFL</u> or <u>IELTS</u> scores (<u>Required</u> for students applying from countries that do not meet SMU's TOEFL exemption policy)
- Official scores for the Graduate Record Examination (GRE)
- Video essay (Required for certain Dedman College international applicants see below)

It is important to note the <u>application deadlines</u> so that all your materials are submitted in a timely manner.

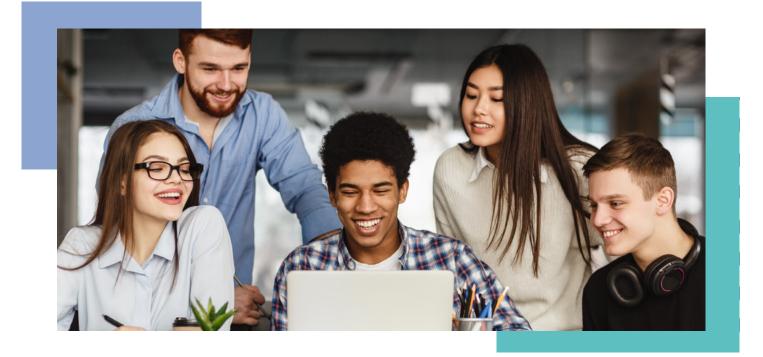
CO Read: <u>I Successfully Navigated the Application Process</u> — Here's How

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY EXAMS (TOEFL/IELTS)

The <u>Test of English as a Foreign Language, or TOEFL</u>, and the <u>International English Language Testing</u> <u>System (IELTS)</u> evaluate students' proficiency in four areas of English language skills — reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

A TOEFL/IELTS score is required of all international applicants from countries where English is not the native language. Your test scores must be within the past two years of the application deadline; otherwise, you must retake the test. For more information on the guidelines surrounding testing, including minimum score requirements for admission at SMU, please visit the <u>international applicant</u> page of the Moody School of Graduate and Advanced Studies SMU.

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TIPS FOR ACING THE IELTS/TOEFL

Here are six helpful tips for the IELTS/TOEFL

- 1. Know the test format Having a good grasp of the number of questions, sections, the length of the test, and the types of questions that will be asked will help you to feel more prepared going into the test. The fewer surprises the better, so spend some time learning about what will be on the test.
- 2. Create a study plan Name specific strategies for learning to speak, read, write, and listen in English. You can find many english proficiency test exercises online that will help you outline what and how to study.
- **3.** Take as many practice tests as you possibly can Practice tests, especially ones published by the testing companies themselves, will help you familiarize yourself with the material.
- 4. Set a goal score Setting a goal will keep you motivated, focused, and will help you measure your progress throughout your time taking practice tests.
- 5. Enlist support Ask family, friends, tutors, and anyone else to help you practice your English language skills.
- 6. Retake the test Trying again is an option if you leave enough time to retake the test.

PRO-TIP: Here is an in-depth look at how the IELTS and TOEFL exams are structured and scored.



Many graduate programs in the United States require students to submit official scores from the <u>Graduate Record Examination (GRE)</u>. The GRE is a test that measures a student's proficiency and skills in several areas, necessary for graduate education. The test focuses on three areas of competency: verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, and analytical writing. To succeed in taking the GRE, students should <u>study the structure</u> and <u>scoring methodology of the test</u>.

Students have the option to take the test on paper or online, and should choose the arrangement that works best for them. The test is offered in more than 160 countries, and is administered at 700 test centers around the world. Results can be sent electronically to the program of your choice (SMU's code is 6660). Most graduate programs require applicants to take the GRE within five years of application.

VIDEO ESSAY - DEDMAN COLLEGE APPLICANTS ONLY

A video essay is required for certain Dedman College Ph.D. applicants. You are required to submit a video essay if:

- You submitted a TOEFL/IELTS speaking score below 23 (TOEFL) or 6.5 (IELTS).
- You are applying to the Statistics or Biostatistics program.

If you receive a higher score than those listed above, the video essay is optional.

Students should not be nervous about the <u>video essay portion of the application</u>. This is an opportunity for you to speak directly to your admissions committee via a recorded response about your passions and strengths. The best thing students can do to prepare for the video essay is to practice a lot, and to think about it like a job interview.

CO Read More: <u>De-mystifying the video essay portion of the Dedman College application</u>

How does the video essay work?

Students will be asked to record their answer to just one question. Students can practice as many times as they want, but they are only allowed two chances to record their final answers. Students will be asked one randomized question from one of the following three categories:

- Interest in SMU and/or their desired degree program
- Personal characteristics, leadership skills, and activities
- Academic and research experience



Unofficial transcripts are accepted during the application phase. Upon admission to SMU, you will need to send official transcripts, certified and translated if from a foreign institution, directly from each school of higher education you attended.

Applicants must also provide a copy of their diploma in the original language and in English. The translation of these documents should effectively and accurately explain the title of the course from its native language, so the faculty can understand what it is.

Meadows School of the Arts and Simmons School of Education and Human Development require transcript evaluations for international applicants. All foreign transcripts must be accompanied by a professional evaluation and an official transcript, including an English translation if it is not in English, and course descriptions or syllabi.

It is the student's responsibility to procure this evaluation and to assume financial responsibility for it. Because of the importance of this information, SMU only accepts evaluations from the following agencies of proven reliability:

World Education Services, Inc. PO Box 745 Old Chelsea Station New York, NY 10113-0745 Telephone: 212-966-6311 TOLL FREE: 1-800-937-3895 E-mail: info@wes.org

International Academic Credential Evaluators, Inc. PO Box 2585 Denton, TX 76202-2585 Telephone: 940-383-7498 www.iacei.net Josef Silny & Associates, Inc. 7101 SW 102 Avenue Miami, FL 33173 Telephone: 305-273-1616 Fax: 305-273-1338 E-mail: info@jsilny.com

The above services' evaluations should include an explanation that the institution is recognized by the ministry of education in the home country and is generally considered to offer at least the equivalent of U.S. higher education credit. In addition, it should include an explanation of the credits, the grading system and course levels, as well as a course-by-course evaluation.

The expertise and reliability of a professional evaluation report is recognized worldwide and is likely to be accepted by other academic institutions, employers and state licensing boards. However, the report is not binding to SMU and it will be considered a recommendation for SMU's independent decision of the credit to be given. Information and applications from the agencies are available online.



LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

As part of your application, you will need to <u>submit three letters of recommendation</u>. When choosing the three individuals who will write your letters of recommendation, you should choose people who know you well and can speak specifically to your accomplishments. Unless you have specific and extensive work experience in your chosen field, the best recommendations for Ph.D. applicants are from academic references.

Be sure to provide them with all the materials they need to craft your letter, and plenty of time to submit it before the deadline.

PRO-TIP: Easy Steps to Get the Best Letters of Recommendation for Grad School



ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Depending on the school or college to which you apply, you may be asked to submit additional documents to support your application, such as a resume, personal statement, audition video or portfolio.



Understanding Fees, Funding, Taxes, and Visas



FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS



Once admitted, international students must provide a Certification of Finance Form or Letter of Financial Backing as evidence of financial support. A Letter of Financial Backing may be signed by a parent or sponsor, but must be certified by a bank. These documents must be notarized and on file with the university to begin the process to obtain an I-20, as well as a visa and passport.

The cost to obtain a Ph.D. in the U.S. will vary depending on your school, program and whether or not you qualify for funding, like scholarships, grants and fellowships.

FUNDING YOUR PH.D.

There are several different options for <u>funding your Ph.D. degree</u> as an international student in the U.S., the most common of which include:

- fellowships
- teaching and research assistantships
- grants and scholarships
- loans

This section will briefly describe the differences between each, which funding sources are available for international students at SMU, and resources to help you find and apply for each type of funding.

FELLOWSHIPS IN THE U.S. FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Fellowships are gifts of money, offered by either the university or external benefactors, that are commonly given to students as a merit-based award. Fellowship funding can last anywhere from one year, to the whole duration of a student's Ph.D. program. Fellowships are frequently used to sponsor a student and <u>fund proposed research</u> that will advance their specific area of study.

At SMU, tuition fellowships are available from the university, and are awarded on a competitive basis for both merit and need. If a program offers departmental funding, students are considered at time of application and do not need to fill out an additional fellowship application. Sometimes additional documentation is required, in which case the department will contact the student directly.

You can also research additional external fellowships through websites such as ProFellow and GoGrad.

\checkmark TEACHING AND RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIPS

Teaching and research assistantships are available from the departments.

Teaching assistantships are positions in which students support department faculty members in their various courses. Some of these positions will involve work helping the professor prepare materials for the class, and in some cases graduate assistants you may be asked to teach the class yourself.

Research assistantships are similar, in that you will support a department faculty member in their lab and research while receiving compensation, but you will not be involved in classroom interactions.

Similarly to fellowships, they are awarded on a competitive basis for both merit and need, and students are considered for these opportunities at the time of their application. Assistantships cover a student's tuition and fees and can, in addition, pay stipends for designated work in the departments.



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Grants and scholarships are both gifts of free money from both private and public institutions that will not need to be paid back after you finish your Ph.D. These types of funds are usually earmarked for students from specific ethnicities, countries, or with particular skills or other qualifications. The best way to take advantage of grants and scholarships is to begin your research early and apply for as many as possible.

International students are not eligible for U.S. Government grants, but there are plenty of opportunities from private institutions — some even offer fully-funded scholarships or grants for international graduate students. You can find grants and scholarships specifically for international students on websites such as <u>GreatCollegeDeals</u> and <u>CollegeScholarships.org</u>.



Discover world-changing research, competitive funding, & professional and community engagement at SMU.

GET TO KNOW THE MOODY SCHOOL

🚱 LOANS

Private <u>loans are offered to international students</u> through a variety of different institutions. Students can borrow up to the total amount of the cost of their education and education related expenses, after financial aid is applied, to be paid back to the institution with interest upon completion of your degree.

You will need to apply for these loans, which will include providing the lender with some financial information. International students applying for loans will often be <u>required to have a creditworthy</u> <u>cosigner</u> on the loan who is a U.S. citizen or a non-citizen permanent resident.

Websites such as <u>International Student Loan</u> and <u>IEFA</u> can help you find and compare loans, interest rates, and repayment plans.



Every international student is required to file a tax return if they were in the US during the previous calendar year. These need to be submitted by April 15th of each year. You must file a tax return (or in some circumstances Form 8843) to comply with a F-1 visa, even if you didn't earn any money in the U.S..

If you received income in the US in the last calendar year, you will need to file both <u>Form 8843</u> and most likely <u>Form 1040NR-EZ</u>. There are several options for completing your tax paperwork:

- File online, by purchasing a tax code for an online program facilitated by the International Student and Scholar Services Office (ISSS)
- Fill out hard copies and mail them directly to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS)
- Pay a professional to file them for you

For more information and resources regarding filing taxes, purchasing access codes, and obtaining the correct paperwork, contact the <u>Office of International Student and Scholar Services</u>.

IMMIGRATION LAWS AND OBTAINING A VISA

International students will need to acquire several documents to legally study in the United States. At SMU, our Office of <u>International Student and Scholar Services</u> works with students directly to process their visa paperwork. The office will contact students directly through email, to help get paperwork in order and remind students if anything is still missing.

After being accepted by SMU, a <u>Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) certified school</u>, international students will begin the process of filling out your paperwork to study in the U.S.. Follow this easy step-by-step list will help ensure international students complete each necessary component.



How to Apply For A Student Visa to Study in the United States:

- 1. Your designated school official (DSO) will send you an <u>I-20 to complete</u>
- 2. Pay Your <u>I-901 SEVIS Fee</u> (make sure to keep your receipt you will need it!)
- 3. Apply for a U.S. Visa (F-1 student visa status)
- 4. Arrive at U.S. Port of Entry (schedule arrival within 30 days of official program start date listed on your I-20)
- **5.** Once international students arrive in the US, they will be met by a U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) officer. Be prepared to present the following:
 - Form I-20
 - Valid visa
 - Passport
 - Acceptance letter from your SEVP-certified school
 - Evidence of financial support
 - Name and telephone number of your DSO
- Once international students have been admitted, they will receive a <u>form I-94</u>, "Arrival and Departure Record"
- 7. International students <u>must maintain their status</u> as a fulltime student, until they have completed their chosen degree program

After one full year of study, international students are eligible to take an annual vacation. Students who wish to find part time employment must speak with their DSO first to ensure that they meet all the necessary requirements.

F-1 students should <u>speak with their DSO</u> if they are planning to do any of the following:

- Change their major, program, or degree level.
- Change their education level.
- Transfer to a new school or take a leave of absence.
- Take a break from school.
- Travel outside the United States.
- Move to a new address.
- Request a program extension.

Additional Resources For International Students:

<u>U.S. Department of State's EducationUSA</u> <u>EducationUSA Find Financial Aid</u> <u>U.S. Department of Homeland Security Most FAQs</u>

Healthcare, Housing, and Travel: PRACTICAL THINGS TO CONSIDER FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDY AT SMU



Southern Methodist University offers several resources to international graduate students, designed to make their time here safer, more comfortable and more enjoyable. We understand that being thousands of miles away from home can be difficult, and we want to make your experience at SMU as fulfilling as possible. From a place to live, to a place to go when you get sick — you will find the resources you need to make Dallas feel like a home to you while you earn your Ph.D.

🧀 HEALTHCARE

SMU provides funding to cover the cost of premiums for the Student Health Insurance plan for all full-time enrolled Ph.D. students who meet the <u>eligibility requirements</u>.

Coverage is provided for up to five years, with the goal of improving the quality of life for students and removing a significant financial burden so students can focus on their doctoral studies.

Students who elect to accept the university's health insurance plan have access to the Dr. Bob Smith Health Center, located on SMU's campus. Your insurance covers all services offered, including comprehensive quality medical services, dental services, counseling services, and health promotion.

Annual health maintenance such as flu shots are free to students, and the Health Center hosts a pharmacy for students to easily access medications and prescriptions.





At SMU, there are both on- and off-campus housing options for graduate students.

The on-campus <u>housing option for graduate students</u> also houses seniors and non-traditional age students. To <u>apply for on-campus housing</u>, contact the Office of Residence Life and Student Housing (<u>housing@smu.edu</u>).

Whether you are an international student looking to live off-campus in a larger space that is more accommodating to your family, or you just want the privacy of living on your own, there are several options for graduate students. Check out this list of nearby apartment complexes, or search websites like <u>Very</u> <u>Apt, Zillow, Trulia</u>, or <u>Redfin</u> to find homes or apartments for rent near campus:

- <u>Cedar Lodge Apartments</u>
- <u>Cambridge Court Apartment Living</u>
- <u>The Caruth Townhome Apartments</u>
- <u>The Village Dallas</u>

- The Avery on Southwestern
- <u>Grand Reserve Townhomes</u>
- The Standard
- Mockingbird Flats

LIVING IN DALLAS

SMU is centrally located in the heart of Dallas Texas, just miles from the city center. Dallas is a cosmopolitan city, and home to large groups of individuals from several different nationalities and backgrounds. In our experience, international students have no problem feeling right at home in this cultured city, with grocery stores, restaurants, and cultural centers that offer a little taste of their home country. Once you get to Dallas, be sure to take some time to explore the area, find places where you can buy your favorite food or experience familiar music and art.

Read More: <u>3 Reasons Dallas is a Graduate Student's Dream City</u>

To learn more about why Dallas is an excellent place to be a grad student, check out our Graduate Student's Guide to Living in Dallas. We're bringing the city to you to experience from the comfort of your home!



Dallas is a large, popular, and easily accessed city, which makes it easy to get to and from SMU.

- There are two major airports in the Dallas area: Love Field and Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport.
- <u>DART is the transportation system</u> that gets you around Dallas and 12 surrounding cities. SMU participates in a <u>DART Higher Education Pass Program</u>. All enrolled students are eligible to receive a FREE annual DART transit pass.
- The <u>SMU Express and Museum Express</u> shuttles are free to all students and do not require a DART Transit Pass to ride.

To learn more about why Dallas is an excellent place to be a grad student, <u>check out our Graduate Student's</u> <u>Guide to Living in Dallas</u>. We're bringing the city to you to experience from the comfort of your home!

DOWNLOAD THE GUIDE



Advice from Current International Students

Aditi Malu

PH.D. IN MOLECULAR & CELLULAR BIOLOGY, INDIA

Tell us a little about where you are from and your educational background.

I am from India. I completed my BS in Biotechnology and MS in Biomedical Genetics in India. After my master's degree, I worked for four years in India detecting genetic abnormalities in cancer and infertility patients. I also taught genetics to medical professionals, including nursing and medical students.



What was your primary motivation for applying to an international graduate school?

After working for four years in the medical industry and education sector, I felt that my career progression had come to a stand-still, and in order to achieve higher goals I would need a doctoral degree from the United States. I chose the US because of better available laboratory infrastructure, state of the art scientific equipment, and a higher quality of research when compared to other countries.

What made you choose SMU over other schools?

I was interested in the Molecular Virology and Cancer Research carried out by Dr. Harrod's laboratory at SMU. I also found other labs in the Dedman College interesting, and the small department size indicated more personal attention to students and their research projects.

Was there anything you found challenging about applying to an international school?

Since I had a long gap in between completing my master's degree and applying for a Ph.D., I found it challenging to convince international schools of my motivation and keen interest in further studies. Choosing the right fit in terms of a school, department, and most importantly, the laboratory that I would spend at least 5 years in was a very crucial decision to make.

Is there any advice you would give an international student applying to SMU?

I found everyone at SMU very approachable and friendly. The department and the Graduate Studies Office always supported me in everything I needed, and I am greatly indebted to them. Most of the time, you only need to go and talk to someone. Once you do that, they are always there to help.

What has been your favorite part of attending an international school?

It was great to make friends with students from across the world and be a part of a new culture. I learned a lot from living in another country, and got some very valuable exposure that has definitely added to my personal and professional skills, and my personality as a whole. My circle of best friends includes individuals from Ukraine, Iran, Turkey, and Sri Lanka. How cool is that!

Is there anything you have found difficult about attending an international school?

Sometimes it's hard to explain your point of view, since you are from another country that is very different. But with patience and a little hard work you can overcome these issues. You will have to constantly put effort into learning new things in a new place, but it's all a part of the international exposure that will help you achieve so much in life.

What is one thing you would recommend doing in Dallas, to all international students attending SMU for the first time?

I loved Dallas. It's the easiest city to live in. Don't miss out on amazing Tex-Mex food while here!

Is there any advice or wisdom you would pass along to prospective international graduate students?

Never underestimate yourself or your country, and don't allow anyone else to do it either! Be proud of where you come from and how far you've come. At the end of the day, it's those roots that made you the person you are today, the rest of it is what you acquired on this journey of life!

TO Read More International Student Experiences:

- The Diary of a Biology Ph.D. Student: Lacin Yapindi
- Why I Chose a Ph.D. in Civil Engineering: An International Student's Story
- Why I Chose to Study in the USA: Xinyi Ding's Story

A Look at SMU Resources THAT SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS



There are several offices at SMU that are designed to meet the academic, professional, and personal needs of international students while they pursue their Ph.D.. Check out these helpful resources, and don't hesitate to contact these offices if you have any questions before or during your graduate education.

MOODY SCHOOL OF GRADUATE AND ADVANCED STUDIES

- General admissions questions for all Ph.D. and Dedman College Master's applicants
- University Ph.D. Fellowships
- McNair Scholar tuition waivers
- Graduate student travel grants
- Graduate student life initiatives
- Changes in academic status, dropping/adding courses, and other forms
- Dissertation submission and graduation requirements
- Assistance with applications for external funding opportunities.
- Workshops focused on furthering education and professional development
- Access to the Graduate Writing Center and consultation on all academic writing

OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT AND SCHOLAR SERVICES (ISSS)

- Immigration services for those on F or J visas
- Coordination of pre-arrival information, current compliance issues, data management, and programming

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- Handling of necessary reporting to the U.S. Federal Government
- Immigration orientations
- Creation of cultural and educational programming opportunities for students

HEGI FAMILY CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER

- Helps to match SMU graduates with employers
- Encourages students to develop the skills necessary for lifelong career management
- Offers opportunities for employers to recruit students through campus events and online resources
- Assists with the transition to postdoctoral work or research
- Guides international students in forming partnerships that will lead to their professional success

SMU LIBRARIES

SMU has seven libraries — six on-campus and one off-campus — that offer students a wealth of opportunity for study, research, and scholarly pursuit. The library system at SMU also offers an <u>online</u> <u>scholarly database</u> with peer-reviewed articles and research that is accessible to all SMU students.

One particularly useful resource for graduate students, is the <u>graduate student lounge</u> located in Fondren Library Red Room 320.



Want to Learn More?



Earning your Ph.D. in the United States is a life-changing experience. It can open doors to cutting edge research opportunities and connect you with the leading academic experts in your field.

We hope this resource has provided you with the information and answers you need as you pursue a Ph.D. at Southern Methodist University.



FOR QUESTIONS REGARDING THE I-20 OR VISA PROCESS, PLEASE CONTACT OUR OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT AND SCHOLAR SERVICES:

Telephone: 214-768-4475 Email: isss@smu.edu

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT OUR PROGRAMS OR ASSISTANCE WITH THE APPLICATION PROCESS, PLEASE CONTACT:

Stevie Otto Director of Recruitment and Admissions Moody School of Graduate and Advanced Studies Southern Methodist University Telephone: 214-768-4345 Email: <u>smugrad@smu.edu</u> Graduate application: <u>smu.edu/gradapp</u>

