

# INTERNATIONAL STUDENT HANDBOOK



Office of Student Affairs  
(OSA)



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# International Student Handbook

In an effort to ensure the most successful and productive experience for incoming international students, a group of international alumnae created this Handbook with the Office of Student Affairs. The Handbook is intended to provide incoming international students with helpful information on a variety of topics related to graduate studies – academic, personal, cultural, and professional development.

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## The Role of the Office of Student Affairs

The Office of Student Affairs (OSA) is responsible for Orientation, Commencement, student organizations, community-wide programming (outings in New England, pub nights, Celebration of Cultures, Lunch & Learn, etc.), Diversity, Equity and Inclusion programming, Access and Disability Services, International student support and programming.

Our goal from before Orientation through Commencement is for students to be aware of and take advantage of the many programs, events, and services we provide to support students in their personal, academic and professional lives. We hope to get to know you!

At the center of our work is students, and providing an environment where students can thrive, succeed and find a sense of community. We believe that your experience outside of the classroom is just as important as your experience inside the classroom, and the two are interconnected and integral to your learning.

Another primary responsibility we have is student advocacy. We are here to support you through unexpected life circumstances. If you have a medical, health, or housing issue, need a referral to one of the many professional resources on campus, or assistance navigating the Harvard bureaucracy, we are here to help. OSA is your first point of contact for any issue, question, or concern.



## International Student Support & Programming



An integral part of the work of OSA is providing programs, services and support specific to the needs of our international students. Throughout the year, we offer a variety of social, educational, and professional development services and activities to allow international students to make the most of their HGSE experience. Examples of programming include the weekly International Student socials, Coffee with Andrea, Lunch and Learn sessions and outings in the Boston/Cambridge area.



Kevin Boehm, Associate Director of Student Affairs, and Andrea Le, International Student Program Coordinator, oversee all international programming from OSA. Andrea serves as the primary point of contact for international students. She can be reached at [andrea\\_le@gse.harvard.edu](mailto:andrea_le@gse.harvard.edu). If you have ideas or suggestions about programs, we welcome your thoughts and feedback. To schedule a one-on-one appointment with Andrea visit [calendly.com/andrea\\_le/one-on-one](https://calendly.com/andrea_le/one-on-one).



# Classes & Courses

## Course Preview



HGSE provides a wide array of courses that you can choose from. Through course preview period, students can attend mini classes, and gain insight into a faculty member's teaching style and experience before deciding to enroll. A course preview schedule will be available during orientation.

## Course Selection Advice

- 1. Stay organized:** Be mindful of class timings and days while making your choice of classes as some classes may overlap. Create a timetable/calendar and map out the classes you are keen on taking.
- 2. Manage your time:** Take into account the number of hours that you would have to commit towards the class including course work and readings each week. This information is available on the course site/evaluations. If not, you can contact the Teaching Fellow (TF) or faculty member.
- 3. Take note of section meetings:** Some classes require "section" meetings outside of classtime. Sections are smaller groups of students who meet with a TF.
- 4. Do your research:** Speak to alumni who have taken the course. They could provide valuable feedback.
- 5. Read course evaluations online:** HGSE does a great job at documenting feedback from the previous cohorts. Candid feedback could help you better understand the nature of the class.
- 6. Create variety:** Many students appreciate having a balance of large and small classes and teaching formats.
- 7. Be aware of enrollment limits:** Some classes at Harvard are limited enrollment or there may be a selection process that requires an application.

## Types of classes you find at HGSE

Many international students may be accustomed to a teacher-centered classroom with traditional exams. This is not the norm at HGSE, and listed below are examples of the types of class formats you may experience. Though there are some large lecture-based classes, in almost all cases, students are encouraged to participate and learn from each other.

- 1. Case Study Centered:** These classes are centered around theme/educational sector-policy, research, K-12 schools and leadership. In these classes you will see a lot of participation and dynamic conversations.
- 2. Didactic Learning:** These classes are guided by the faculty member and centered around the lecture and information transfer.
- 3. Project Based Learning:** These classes focus on students working on projects either through part or all of the semester, and where students are making active connections between their project work and theories presented in class. In these courses and others, students are required to work in groups and teams.
- 4. Practicum Based:** Classes at HGSE also see students consulting on real projects run by organizations in the Boston area. These classes are a great opportunity to add to your portfolio by giving you concrete skills and your professor's mentorship.
- 5. Seminar Style:** A few classes at HGSE are led in a seminar style, with a small class size and intimate conversations between the students and the faculty member. These classes are a great way of deepening one's understanding in a subject areas and forming close connections with student peers.

There are many other formats of classes at HGSE and it is helpful to know what to expect. Course content should be the primary consideration in selecting courses. You can find this information on the course preview site, but if you cannot find it, feel free to learn more about this from the faculty member or the Teaching Fellows in the class.

## Cross-registration

Thinking about venturing across the river? Cross-registration is a great opportunity to take courses from other schools at Harvard, MIT, and the Fletcher School at Tufts. While many students find this to be beneficial, here are a few things to keep in mind:



- 1. Logistics can be tricky.** The start and end dates are different for different schools and you will need to account for travel times, so start planning early. For example, spring term MIT courses cannot count towards graduating from Harvard because their spring term is longer. Also MIT is two Train (T)-stops away from Harvard, so you will need to keep 30 mins of transition time at least both to and from HGSE.
- 2. Not all schools have a formal “course preview” week.** However, it is perfectly acceptable to attend the first day of class. For example, HBS does not permit cross-registrants until the first week of classes are over. With this in mind, it is still a good idea to attend class while you wait to find out if you are enrolled. When in doubt, it is better to show up! A complete list of Harvard courses can be found at [courses.my.harvard.edu](https://courses.my.harvard.edu).
- 3. It is impossible to do it all.** There is always a lot happening at HGSE, across the other schools at Harvard, and in the Boston/Cambridge area. So remember to think about your admissions essay from time to time to remind you of your purpose for coming to HGSE, and let that serve as your guide.



### Academic Support

The Office for Master’s Studies works closely with the Office of Student Affairs (OSA) to monitor academic progress and support student success more generally at HGSE. The Office is comprised of eight Program Administrators (each program has a designated administrator), Associate Director, Mary Kiesling, and Associate Dean, Marc Johnson.

The OSA is considered the first point of contact for any support services for students, both academic and personal, and for any questions related to student life. The staff in OSA can provide referrals to the appropriate resources at HGSE and across Harvard, depending on an individual student’s need. We encourage students to seek support as early as possible in the semester to ensure academic success. Listed below are some key academic resources:

- 1. Gutman Library:** Students have access to books, articles, electronic databases and inter-library loans. Research librarians are also available for one-on-one appointments to assist you with your research. They also loan out video and still cameras for your use. You can also access computers, printers and scanners in the library. You will have to load money on your Crimson ID card to use some services.
- 2. HGSE Academic Writing Services:** Provides writing services to students by advanced doctoral students who serve as Teaching Fellows. Take advantage of the writing services to strengthen your writing. Appointments can be made on the library website. Workshops targeting specific writing skill areas will also be available throughout the year.

## Mentorship & Support from Faculty Members



One of the biggest resources for students are the dynamic group of faculty both at HGSE and across Harvard University. Given that there are many faculty members and the academic year is only nine months, you should connect with professors who align with your interests.

1. Every student is assigned a Faculty Academic Advisor. We encourage you to be thought partners with your advisor on course selection. Program Administrators are also a great source of knowledge.
2. Use the Faculty Directory (<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/faculty-directory>) to learn more about the work of a faculty member. You may also send them an email introducing yourself, and requesting time to meet during their office hours. Most faculty members on campus are very friendly and willing to give their time to engage with students, however, the initiative is on the students.
3. Speak to alumni who have taken classes/worked with the faculty member to better understand their experience and analyze whether it might fit with your aspirations and goals. Facebook groups are a great way to connect with alums, or ask your Program Administrator to direct you to a few alums.
4. Student-Alumni Meeting Initiative (SAMI) pairs current students and HGSE alumni for personal and professional development, as well as career and network building. Applications to be part of the initiative are required. More details can be found on this webpage - <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/alumni/get-involved/sami>

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## Office Hours



Faculty members have blocks of time available for students to meet with them individually, either regarding course work or to speak with them about their academic interests. One or two questions are generally sufficient to guide a 20 minute enriching conversation. Be prepared to come with questions. Most office hours are appointment based and must be made in advance.

Teaching Fellows (TFs) also have office hours available. You could meet with them too with course related queries.

\*TF's are generally easier to schedule appointments with, but it is encouraged to meet with faculty members in person. Be prepared to share what questions you have with the faculty assistant as this is often the "password" to getting an office hour block with a faculty member.

# Career Development



In the U.S., the job search differs in many ways from other countries. It is important to be as mindful of your career as your academic studies. There are ways to combine academic success with your job search. You may be starting to apply for positions as early as September depending on your sector of interest. Below are some key steps that you can take to be successful.

## 1. Visit the Career Services Office (CSO)

You can book 20 minute one-on-one appointments with staff at the CSO for support with resume and cover letter writing, LinkedIn profile, job interview skills and negotiating compensation. Appointments can be made online through the Career Services HUB ([hgse.me/HUB](http://hgse.me/HUB)).

## 2. Make a profile on the HUB

Complete your HUB profile to receive important notifications and job postings in the sectors that interest you. HGSE events and workshops are also posted here throughout the year. Lastly, under the “Student Success” tab you will find the “International Student Resource Center” that contains information about the cross-cultural job search, taxes and social security, as well as the GoinGlobal platform that lists job postings and career guides for cities all over the world.

## 3. Complete the Career Success Workshop

Have an understanding of the different sectors and the role(s) within education that you would like to see yourself in at the end of your time at HGSE. If you don’t have the chance to participate, you can learn about the sectors and roles on the career resource center website [cso.gse.harvard.edu](http://cso.gse.harvard.edu).

## 4. Update your Resume

Each sector has different requirements for resumes. Some sectors require a one-page resume while others will accept two-page resumes.

- Get feedback your resume from the CSO staff or alumni at Resumania which is an event on campus where alumni offer advice on resumes
- Update your resume to include your coursework - don’t just write the name of the courses you’re taking, write at least one line to describe the key take-away from that course OR market a project/paper you completed
- If you are going to an career or internship expo, bring several copies of your resume

5. *Complete your LinkedIn Profile (if you don't have one, make one!)*

- Add a Summary Statement
- Add the courses you are taking at HGSE and market the projects from your coursework
- Add the people you meet at networking events/conferences/expos
- The Career Service Office holds workshops in how to best present your skills on LinkedIn

6. *Attend and consider presenting at relevant conferences and sign up for their newsletter for updates*

- You can apply for the HGSE's Student Conference Fund (up to \$500) to cover the costs of attending external academic conferences. The application form can be found at [osa.gse.harvard.edu/student-conference-fund](http://osa.gse.harvard.edu/student-conference-fund)
- Sign up for the Student Research Conference at HGSE - it is free for students. Put in a conference proposal; to practice your presentation skills, make connections and get feedback on your work
- Sign up to volunteer or present at the Alumni of Color Conference held in the Spring semester.

7. *Participate in the Spring Career Treks!*

- CSO organizes various career treks during the Spring Break. In the past, the treks were to D.C. and New York. This is a great opportunity to visit organizations and get a feel for them.
- HIVE Study Trek which occurs during Spring break is organized by the Harvard Innovation and Ventures in Education organization – an organization at HGSE dedicated to educational entrepreneurship. In the past, HGSE students have visited a number of Silicon Valley startups and giants (e.g. Google, Facebook) and had a chance to interact with senior leadership in education. This is a fantastic opportunity for networking!

8. *Last, but definitely, not least, explore and take advantage of the Harvard Innovation Lab (ilab)*

- Located at Batten Hall, 125 Western Avenue
- Yes, it is open to all Harvard Students, just remember to take your ID
- It is a great place to work on an idea, find team members or join a team!
- Utilize the office hours to bounce your ideas with Entrepreneurs in Residence for feedback, mentorship and networking

## Connecting & Getting Involved: Co-Curricular Life



### Things to Do

#### On campus

- Visit Harvard Gazette's event calendar or download the Harvard University Mobile App "Thrive" which includes events that are happening around the campus and dining options, shuttle tracker, news, among others.

#### Off Campus

- Check out the Outings and Innings website for student discounts on local attractions - <https://outingsandinings.harvard.edu/> Their office is located at 44R Brattle Street.

#### Cambridge

- Kayaking/Sailing on the Charles River
- Harvard Campus Tour
- Harvard Museums
- Mt. Auburn Cemetery
- MIT tour
- Walden Pond

#### Boston

- The Freedom Trail
- Museum of Fine Arts
- Apple picking in the Fall
- Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum
- Museum of Science
- Boston Public Library
- New England Aquarium
- Samuel Adams Brewery
- Fenway Park (go Red Sox!)

### Transportation

#### 1. Riding a bicycle

- One of the fastest and healthiest ways to travel around Cambridge is by riding a bike. Many Cambridge streets have easily identified bike lanes. To get a second-hand bike, check out different Facebook market groups or Craigslist.
- The cities of Cambridge and Boston offer "Blue Bikes" a program where you can purchase a membership, and rent their bikes at any time for an hour or longer. Their bike racks are located at multiple locations in Cambridge and Boston.

#### 2. Harvard Shuttle service

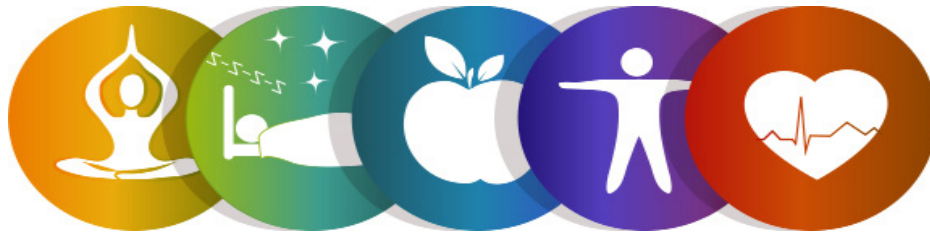
- There are free shuttle services for Harvard students that offer 10 different routes and connect the Harvard campuses in Cambridge and Longwood (the Medical School area). The list of shuttles with their routes and schedules are available on the app "Thrive".
- To utilize the Harvard shuttles, you do not need to show a Harvard ID. To use the M1, you will need to show your Harvard ID and you can bring a guest.

#### 3. Harvard evening van service

- At night, there is a free shuttle that runs from 7:00 p.m. to 3:00 a.m. everyday. This is a great service that helps students and faculty members get around campus safely in the evening. You can request the van using two options: 1) by downloading and using the Rider App or 2) by calling 617-495-0400

- What area does the van cover? The van can go as far as Porter Square on the north, Central Square on the east, Harvard iLab on the south, and Fayerweather St. on the west.
  - For more information and a route map, visit [www.transportation.harvard.edu/shuttle-van-services/evening-van-service](http://www.transportation.harvard.edu/shuttle-van-services/evening-van-service)
  - Please note: ride requests must be received by 2:30 a.m.
4. Public transportation (MBTA)
- The MBTA (Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority) provides great public transportation in the Greater Boston area and that includes the bus, commuter rail, and subway (simply called the “T”). The transportation card is called a Charlie Card which you can get at a subway station.
  - The Office of Student Affairs offers a discounted MBTA pass program, available for both the fall and spring semesters. The pass must be purchased for the entire semester, so be sure that you will be using public transportation on a daily/consistent basis to make it financially intelligent to purchase the pass. If you are using public transportation less frequently, just be sure to pick up a Charlie Card (see below for more information).
  - Cost: One-time ticket is \$2.90 vs paying with the Charlie card: \$2.40. Even if you do not anticipate using the public transportation frequently, you should definitely get a Charlie card because it is cheaper than paying with cash and it includes a free transfer to a local bus within a 2-hour time-limit.
  - For a complete list of maps, costs, and services, visit [www.mbta.com](http://www.mbta.com).
5. Taxis and Ridesharing
- Taxis are always an option in Cambridge/ Boston, but they can be more expensive than Uber and Lyft. These apps are very common transportation methods for students and locals in Boston. The services are generally reliable and there is no shortage of cars in the Cambridge and Boston area.
  - Tip: Download both apps and compare both prices before requesting a car. Oftentimes you will be surprised at the difference in cost of these two apps.
7. Zipcar
- You might want to rent a car for a weekend getaway, but the public transportation in the Boston area is so well done that there is usually a way to get to a place without renting a car. Plus, driving in and out of Boston causes a headache because of its narrow roads, aggressive drivers, and costly parking spots. Students often rent cars for a day/weekend through Zipcar (which has cars available in different parking lots and you can rent it out for a few hours or days).
  - Make sure to get your foreign driver’s license approved in advance.
  - More traditional car rental services such as Budget, Enterprise, and Avis are also available around Cambridge. Check out their ratings and customer reviews before renting from them.

## University Resources: Mental Health, Emotional, Physical, Spiritual Well-being



### Counseling and Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

- Counseling and Mental Health Services is a part of University Health Services (HUHS), which is provided for all students. You can reach out with concerns such as anxiety, depression, stress, grief, eating, sexual or relationship concerns. Do not be afraid or ashamed to reach out for help. It is actually a sign of strength!
- In contacting CAMHS for an appointment, you will be asked to do a 20-minute phone consultation to match you with the most appropriate clinician. They may even be able to match you with a clinician who speaks your native language, and we know how comforting that is!
- Location: Smith Campus Center, 4th Floor
- Visit [huhs.harvard.edu/services/counseling-and-mental-health](https://huhs.harvard.edu/services/counseling-and-mental-health) or call (617) 495-2042 for more information.

### Harvard Chaplains

- The Harvard Chaplains are a professional community of more than thirty chaplains who represent many of the world's religious, spiritual, and ethical traditions, and share a collective commitment to serving the spiritual needs of the students, faculty, and staff of Harvard University. If you would like to meet with a spiritual leader, you may visit [chaplains.harvard.edu](https://chaplains.harvard.edu) for a list of the Chaplains and their contact information.

### Harvard University Health Services (HUHS)

- The Harvard University Health Services provides a full range of medical services from primary care to counseling, and referrals for special services. For a full list of services, visit [here](https://huhs.harvard.edu).
- If you elect to have the HUHS Student Insurance plan, make sure you know what is included in your health insurance and take advantage of the free check-ups and physical exams that your insurance covers. The full plan of services for the Student Insurance can be found at [huhs.harvard.edu](https://huhs.harvard.edu)
- There is 24/7 – 365 days a year Urgent Care that is a part of HUHS.

## Wellness Center

- The Center for Wellness and Health Promotion offers a large variety of workshops, services, and classes available to all Harvard community members. Their mission is to cultivate individual and collective well being through holistic educational experiences. Massage and acupuncture appointments are available through the Center for Wellness. Students on the Harvard University Student Health Plan (HUSHP) receive a discounted rate. Classes in yoga, meditation, pilates and more are also available. Visit [wellness.huhs.harvard.edu](http://wellness.huhs.harvard.edu) for more information or to book an appointment.

## Gym Membership

- Signing up for the Harvard University gym membership means you receive access to pools, indoor tracks, gyms, and athletic centers (for a complete list of gyms, visit [recreation.gocrimson.com/recreation/facilities/overview](http://recreation.gocrimson.com/recreation/facilities/overview)).
- Make sure you take full advantage of the programs offered at the gym. They have classes such as barre, zumba, yoga, hip hop and others and you can take as many classes as often as you want without any extra cost! For membership prices and a full list of classes please visit [recreation.gocrimson.com](http://recreation.gocrimson.com).

# How to Enrich Your Social Life at HGSE: 10 Suggestions



## **1. Be Open-Minded when considering the cultures around you.**

Remember that relationships are a two-way street. You cannot expect people to reach out to you without reaching out to them first, even if this is not the case in your culture. During your time at HGSE, make the effort to understand the culture of the other people around you, and where they are coming from.

## **2. Get involved in a student organization.**

Why join a student organization? You might be interested in joining an organization because you would like to contribute your professional experience in a region, build a skill set that you are lacking and can add to your resume, or contribute to a cause. Most importantly, however, it enriches your relationship with colleagues because you develop friendships with people who are as passionate as you, which is the beauty of the HGSE student body. There is vast array of topics and causes of organizations that might interest you. For a complete list of currently recognized organizations, see [here](#). You also have the option of starting a new student organization of any kind!

## **3. You Can't Know Everything.**

As an international student at HGSE, you might constantly find yourself wondering what to say when it comes to talking about issues related to the U.S. such as politics, education policy, historical events, or customs. Remember that it's okay to ask your American colleagues for clarification or explanation. It might also enrich the conversation if you share about similar political/historical/social issues that your country faces or has faced with your American colleagues.

## **4. Be Open to Ideas, Learning, and Being Challenged.**

That's how you will learn! It is okay to disagree with faculty members and colleagues. It is not a good idea to disagree for the sake of disagreeing, but rather with the intent to understand their position and find value in their argument.

## **5. Accept Invitations and Make the Effort to Show Up.**

As you will soon find out, there are always lots of events, activities, gatherings and happening throughout the year, both on and off campus. Regardless of whether you're a person who prefers a quiet night with a cup of tea and a good book in hand or an outgoing person who likes to hike mountains and play sports, be brave and say yes to invitations even when they seem like they are a bit outside your comfort zone. More often than not, you'll be surprised at how you end up having meaningful conversations. You'll be glad you went.

## **6. Balance your Priorities and Time.**

That said (see #5), don't forget to keep a healthy balance between your priorities and strive to pursue the goals you had in mind before coming to HGSE. Don't feel pressured to do what others are doing or be afraid of missing out. What matters is that you stay happy, fulfilled, and healthy throughout your time in school.

## **7. Venture out of your comfort zone.**

When you are in a new environment, it is tempting to stick close to people who are from your country or region. While there's nothing wrong with enjoying that food you've been craving since you landed with people from your country or speaking in your own native language to people who understand your language, make the effort to venture out of your comfort zone. One year in a foreign country is a great opportunity to meet people from other cultures and learn their culture, games, songs, and food, while also sharing the amazing culture you have brought with yourself.

## **8. Ask for Help.**

Despite having excelled as a student and professional in your country, you may find yourself intimidated and less confident in a new environment. Coupled with language and cultural barriers, academic pressure and job search, everything might feel overwhelming and stressful. Breathe deeply and remember that there are a lot of student services ready to support you. So many resources are available to you--don't be afraid to use them.

## **9. Remember that Everyone Comes from a Different Place and Culture.**

Sometimes, as international students who come from many different countries, we tend to see non-international students simply as Americans and we forget that even American colleagues have very different backgrounds. Many of them are coming from different US states and are also navigating a new environment away from home. The diversity of the HGSE population is immense and each of their stories makes the fabric of the HGSE student body colorful. Before placing people into boxes, try to listen to each individual story and share yours as well.

## **10. Keep in mind that You are Harvard and You belong here.**

There is much to learn from Harvard, and equally as much for you to contribute. Sharing your experiences and questions in class, in team projects, as a speaker at an event and so much more, truly enrich every students' experience at Harvard.