

Mobility of undergraduate students from FEUP to UMBC

November 2010

Before you apply, make sure that:

- you are comfortable with spending an extended period of time abroad, away from your friends, family, etc.;
- you have a decent grasp of the English language – for most daily situations you only need a basic level, but should be good enough with written English to properly understand research materials and to write your own thesis;
- you have at least 6000€, preferably 7000€ to spend (all expenses and flights included). Think of it as an investment in your education; You can talk with people at DCoop-FEUP to find out if you are eligible for some form of financial support;
- you are responsible enough to know when to study/work hard and when to have fun. It will not be a vacation, but you will have plenty of time to enjoy yourself and get to know more about the US.

Application

The application process is defined by FEUP but is subject to final candidate acceptance by UMBC.

During the application period, you are the sole responsible for three things:

- complying with all the eligibility requirements, both from FEUP and UMBC;
- finding a suitable project/mentor at UMBC (this can be done with the help of the coordinators from both sides/institutions or through the department coordinators for mobility programs);
- obtaining written confirmation from your Department Chair (or equivalent) that the project you selected/proposed is adequate to your academic path and that, upon successful evaluation of your work when you return, academic equivalence and credit will be given to you.

The most important step is to find the right project with the right person. To do so, you need to match your interests to the current research interests of the faculty at UMBC. These change periodically, but the general scientific areas tend to be rather stable and you can usually find them listed online, either in their personal sites or in the rosters of all faculty members within each department. You can also perform a search by research groups and then see which faculty members are actively involved.

A faculty member at UMBC will be more receptive to accept you if:

- you take proactive action and show interest and knowledge about their work – email them, tell them how you found them and why you would be the perfect student to work with them on the project that you would like to develop while at UMBC;
- you are flexible in your suggestions for projects and scientific areas. Select two or three professors that interest you and present to each of them two or three different projects. Also ask them if they have current projects you can fit into. Consider applying to other departments/areas. For example, if you are studying Electrical Eng., consider also Computer Eng. and Computer Science.
- be open and allow faculty to suggest projects to you. Getting a project that is in-line with a mentor's research will be more fruitful because other students in the lab will be able to help you.
- they know about this mobility program! – whenever you contact someone, make sure to explain all about it, just in case.
- when you email a perspective research mentor feel free copy Prof. Zupan (mzupan@umbc.edu) so that he can help coordinate and develop a strong research project for you from UMBC.
- once you have an advisor ask them to connect you with the other graduate students in their lab. These graduate students will be your new colleagues. They have been through a similar process to you. They will become your best resource to get questions answered when seeking help.

It may happen that some of them take a long time to reply or will not reply at all. It is still your responsibility to find a way out, but you are encouraged to ask for help!

The only thing you should not do is arrive in the US without knowing who to meet or what you will be working on.

Resources for finding research topics

- Chemical Eng.: <http://www.umbc.edu/cbe/>
- Mechanical Eng.: <http://www.umbc.edu/engineering/me/research.htm>
- Bioengineering: <http://www.umbc.edu/cbe/>
- Electrical Eng. / Computer Eng. / Computer Science: <http://www.cs.umbc.edu/CSEE/index.html>

While in Portugal

Assuming you already took care of all education related tasks during the application, you need to prepare all the required documentation to travel to the US under a J-1 student visa. This is usually a long, expensive, bureaucratic process that you should initiate as soon as possible to avoid delays and surprises. At the same time, you also need to book your plane ticket and find a place to live – more on that later.

Immigration checklist:

1. Get a passport. You can apply for it at Governo Civil or Loja do Cidadão. It costs about 60€ and is usually ready in about two weeks;
2. Visit the website of the US embassy in Portugal (<http://portugal.usembassy.gov/>) and get familiar with the visa application process;
3. Receive the DS 2019 form by (traditional) mail, issued by UMBC. Make sure that everything in it is correct. That packet contains a lot of important information and you must read it carefully and completely;
4. Pay the SEVIS fee online with a credit card (about 180\$) (<https://www.fmjfee.com/i901fee/>);
5. Schedule your trip and book your plane ticket. Find a place to live in the US, if you have not done so already (more details below);
6. Pay at Millenium BCP the visa application fee (about 130\$);
7. Schedule the visa application appointment, to be conducted at the US Embassy in Lisbon – check their opening hours and typical wait times.
8. Go to Lisbon with all the necessary documentation (including proof that you have enough money to support yourself while abroad) and get interviewed. You will need to pay about 10€ to receive the visa by mail;

Air Travel

The closest airport to UMBC is **BWI** – Marshall Thurgood, also known as Baltimore-Washington International Airport. Other options are **IAD** – Dulles, also known as Washington Dulles International Airport, **PHL** – Philadelphia International Airport, and **DCA** – Reagan, also known as Washington National Airport.

However, none of these airports provides direct flights to Portugal, so here are some common itineraries:

OPO-EWR-BWI (about 6h + 2h layover + 1h + 10 min taxi) @ TAP

OPO-LIS-EWR-BWI (about 1h + 1h layover + 6h+2h layover + 1h + 10 min taxi) @ TAP, Continental

OPO-FRA-IAD (about 2h30min + 2h layover + 8h30m + 2h taxi/airport shuttle) @ Lufthansa

British Airways flies only from Lisbon and lately they have been offering the most affordable prices. For ex., the 2010 exchange students paid little more than 500€ for their flight. This is a great deal! You can easily get to Lisbon by bus for less than 20€.

LIS-LHR-BWI @ British Airways

Another alternative used, is to fly Ryanair OPO-STD then with a train ride you have access to both of the major London airports (LHR and GTW) to the United States. This often takes longer and you must coordinate between airports in London.

The prices usually vary between 500€ and 1000€ per person, depending on date, itinerary and carrier.

Accommodation

There are a few choices regarding accommodation near UMBC and it is up to you to decide which one you prefer:

- on campus residence halls, about 500\$/month, but you need to apply very early and unless UMBC creates some new provisions, are virtually impossible to get by a non-current UMBC student;
- on campus apartments (Walker Avenue Apts.), about 980\$/month, but again you need to apply very early and these too are virtually inaccessible to non-current UMBC students. However, if you are interested in this option and contact early in the Fall the International Education Services (IES) at UMBC, they are able to reserve some apartments for you for a 5 month lease. This was done in 2010. But keep in mind that you'd probably have to move to a different apartment in June as the school year at UMBC ends in May.
- off campus private houses / leased rooms, ranging from 500\$ to 900\$ per month. You can try your luck on online resources such as <http://baltimore.craigslist.org/>, but it may be difficult for the potential landlords to trust you as an international student. This becomes substantially easier if you want to change places after you arrive in the US. Unless you plan to buy a car, you should stick to houses on the UMBC Shuttle Bus lines (<http://www.umbc.edu/transit/>, <http://www.umbc.edu/ocss/offcampushousing/och.html>).
- off campus townhouses / apartments, ranging from 500\$ to 900\$ per month. See above notes.
- Contact the IES (<http://www.umbc.edu/ies/>) regarding your arrival and accommodation status. Drs. Arlene Wergin and Brian Souders are the two responsible people for your visa documentation and as a last resource can help you with housing arrangements.

Taking into account several issues (students have to perform a short term lease, the accommodation should have furniture, good facilities to get to UMBC – either by foot, in the free shuttle bus, etc.), the best option is to rent a townhouse/apartment at Westland Gardens. This complex is quite complete, and since 2003 FEUP's students have been staying there, thus the staff from this complex is already used to host Portuguese students. Keep in mind that the most affordable option is to rent a 3BR unit and split the cost three ways among three students.

You need to start the accommodation finding process while you are still in Porto. You should contact the tenant/realtor company 2-3 months before your arrival, start an application and send them whatever documentation they may need, usually by fax, email or even traditional mail.

The rental offices usually do not call you when they have a unit available. You will have to keep calling until they have a free unit for you. The application process only starts after that and after someone in Baltimore pays a \$25 application fee per person at the rental office.

Once you arrive in Baltimore, you will need to supply them with additional information, namely the I-94 form that will be filled out in the airplane. This means that it will take some time, usually two to three days, to validate and complete your application, and during this time you must have an alternative temporary accommodation in the US, such as a friend's house or a hotel. Once everything clears, you will be given access to your new place.

One more important note: your house will be equipped with basic furniture and appliances. You'll need to buy all the kitchen and cleaning utensils as well as bed and bath items (pots and pans, dishes, blankets, sheets, etc).

Dr. Arlene Wergin (International Education Services, IES) and Prof. Zupan (Mechanical Engineering) hold a collection of house items that she and the previous PhD and exchange students donated to be passed along from year to year to the new exchange students. You should see them when you arrive (more on that below).

Insurance

Regardless of whether you are taking courses at UMBC or only doing a research project with a professor, U.S. federal law requires anyone on a J-1 Exchange Visitor visa to have adequate health insurance coverage while you are in the U.S. The most comprehensive and cost effective insurance is the one you can purchase from UMBC's University Health Center once you arrive. The cost can be prorated for however long you stay, at a cost of \$27 a week. This gives you a much greater coverage than other policies which may be slightly cheaper. You will also have access to the University Health Center for routine visits or minor illnesses.

Failure to hold valid health insurance can result in loss of visa status and deportation.

Arrival at UMBC

Please be advised that the first week at UMBC will be hectic as you are moving to a new country- this is normal. No matter how much you plan and try to sort things from Porto many items will not be handled until you arrive at UMBC. More importantly-be flexible because even with the best planning from Porto mistakes will be made and problems will arise that need to be solved. Just as an example, in 2010 the FEUP-UMBC integrated masters students arrived during the worst snow storm for the last 100+ years in Maryland history. No person can plan for 1+ meters of snow and the University being closed for a week, but all of the students now have great stories of the event.

The UMBC community is around to support you- Ask and you will get help.

Once you get to UMBC, the first thing you want to do (even before taking care of your accommodation) is to visit the International Education Services (located at the administration building, 2nd floor) and let them know you arrived. They will adjust your records with the immigration services and point you in the right direction. Preferably, see Dr. Arlene Wergin for both regularization of the immigration status and to pick up the house items she is holding for you. She will lend you blankets, bedding, kitchen items like pots and pans and eating utensils. It is possible that you may need to purchase a few items after you arrive, but much of what you'll need can be leant to you.

Then you should obtain a UMBC ID card and create an email account.

To get a UMBC ID card and email you will need to contact Prof. Zupan (mzupan@umbc.edu) before you depart Porto. Before leaving Porto he will provide you with a letter stating that you are part of the FEUP-UMBC integrated masters program. He will also start the process of getting your email set-up so that it goes more smoothly upon arrival. Your email will become the primary means for the university to contact you, so check it regularly. With your ID card and UMBC email you are now officially part of UMBC!

- set up an appointment with your mentor preferably before you depart (send them an email stating that you have arrived and ask him to suggest a date/time for you two to meet);
- open a bank account and deposit/wire some money. Capital One Bank (formerly Chevy Chase Bank) has a branch on campus and several ATMs;
- go take care of your accommodation (you will probably need your UMBC ID and a check drawn on a US bank to pay for the deposit and the first month's rent);
- become familiar with the campus and try to meet all the key people, such as professors (including FEUP-UMBC mobility coordinators) and graduate students in your department as they will be the best resource for help, IT staff, lab mates, other Portuguese students, etc.
- become familiar with the areas surrounding your house, namely grocery stores and bus stops, etc.

Helpful contacts list at Baltimore (2011):

Dr Antonio Moreira (Program Coordinator/ CBE)

Dr Mark Zupan (UMBC IDs/ ENME)

Dr Arlene Wergin (IES)

Dr. Brian Souders_ (IES)

Andreia Ribeiro (PhD Student, CBE)

Jorge Teixeira (PhD Student, CSEE)_

Nuno Pinto (PhD Student, CBE)

Ricardo Pinto (PhD Student, ENME)

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