This is a First-days-in Guide for new Iranian students coming to Northeastern University in Fall and Spring 2011-2012. The Authors and Publishers of this information have made a volunteer effort to provide a high quality, informative guide for new Iranian students coming to Boston area and Northeastern University.
Notes to the readers
(Limits of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty)

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As always, the advice of a competent, legal, accounting or other professional should be sought.
Health Related Actions

Massachusetts state law requires that all full-time students, full and part-time international students and all health science students be immunized against a number of common transmissible diseases. You should probably receive a form from the university asking you for your health history. Here is the link to the from:
http://www.northeastern.edu/uhcs/pdfs/healthform11-12.pdf

The Massachusetts State Immunization Requirements are:

1. A booster of tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis (Tdap) within the last 10 years.
2. Two MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) shots or blood tests indicating immunity to these conditions. The first shot must be given AFTER 12 months of age.
3. Three doses of hepatitis B vaccine (or appropriately timed 2 dose series) or a blood test indicating immunity to hepatitis B.
4. One dose of meningitis vaccine for students who will be living on campus. Must be administered within the last 5 years.
5. A medical provider certified history of chicken pox or two doses of chicken pox vaccine given 4-8 weeks apart or a blood test indicating immunity to chicken pox.

The month and year of the immunization must be provided on the documentation. Such statements as “received as a child”, “records were lost” or “up to date” are not acceptable. All immunization records must be signed by a physician or designee or be copies of original immunization records.

Thus, it is highly recommended that you obtain a physical exam by your doctor before arriving in Boston. The vaccination is not covered by your health insurance and thus it is better to do it in Iran. The Pasteur Institute would be the best place where you can get your immunization. Also be sure that you bring any documentation about any health problem you have with you.

Also, it is the state law that all the students should have health insurance coverage through out the academic year. If you are holding an RA or TA position, the school will pay for your health insurance; otherwise you have to purchase your own health insurance coverage which will cost you around $2500 for the entire academic year.

Things you may need to bring with you

- Health related documentation including your vaccination card.
- International Driving license (It's valid for couple of months and it might be helpful to rent a car, plus it can be used as an ID).
- Copy of a letter (translated) from your car insurance company as a proof that you are a good driver (it can be used for getting a “good driver”’s discount if you are planning to get an auto insurance here)
- Diploma (B.S., M.S.) is not needed at the time of registration but you have to present your diploma sometime before your graduation. Also, you will need to have all your degrees (B.Sc. and higher) handy if you are planning to go on an internship. Most companies, unlike the university, require an official translation of your earned degrees for interns or co-op students.
• Medicine: We recommend you only bring any prescription medicine you are using on a regular basis and NOT to bring pain killers or antibiotics. You can buy pain killers or any regular medicine such as cold and flu medicine here without prescriptions.
• Money: Based on the US Law each person (or family group) is allowed to bring up to $10,000 with them. You can bring more if you want, BUT you have to mention the extra money you carry on the form you have to fill out before boarding on the plane to the US and at the destination airport you will be asked to show the money to the officer. Bringing money as much as you want is your right but you should make sure that you mention the exact amount of money (if more than $10,000) you have with you on the form.
• You can buy different kinds of towels here at cheap prices, BUT if you are used to the robes, they are a little expensive here ($50-100) and usually do not have hats. So, if it is really important for you to have a robe as your bath towel, bring one with you.
• Kettle and Teapots: there are different kinds of kettles and teapots here, BUT you might find a little difficulty finding kettle and teapot the way we had it in Iran. Here they have kettles separately and also electric ones, but if you are a tea lover and are very sensitive to how you make it, then we recommend you bring a light small kettle and teapot with you.
• Rice cooker: There are fairly good electric rice cookers here but if you insist on buying a Parskhazar, you can buy a special 110V Parskhazar rice cooker and bring it with you.
• Your musical instruments: We want you to know that there are several musical groups in Boston where you can join and satisfy your interest in music, so if you are an expert in any kind of musical instrument we recommend you not to hesitate to bring yours with you.
• Beloved items that bring back good memories.
• Handicrafts that having them makes you happy, e.g. tableware, small carpets, etc.
• Sandals for home: You might have difficulty finding a nice غیر لا انگشتی sandal; here most sandals are flip-flops.
• Saffron and زرشک which are very expensive here.
• If you have nice night dresses or accessories in Iran, bring them with you.
• In case you are a big reader, bring Farsi books you want to read. Finding good Persian reads is not that easy in the US especially in Boston (Los Angeles has a Persian bookstore or two, all very limited). You can share your books with Iranian bookworms in Boston too :) . Note that books are usually heavy so consider small ones and watch your luggage weight limit.

Things you don’t need to bring with you

• Here is a list of all items that are legally prohibited according to the CBP website::
• You can buy things like blankets, tableware, cookware, towels, etc here on a price similar or even cheaper than Iran. So, we recommend you not to bring these things with you. You can check amazon.com or walmart.com to get a sense of the items you need and their prices.
• Electrical devices: Here they use 110V and not 220V based electrical devices. 220V devices either do not work here, or they work at a weak power, so they are not recommended at all. So you can simply check your electric devises adaptor to see the voltages they support. Most laptops are well designed to work in a wide range of supply voltages in Europe and the US, so do not worry about bringing your laptop. Although, if
you are planning to purchase a new laptop, we recommend you to purchase it here; both because of good prices and the warranty.

- **Food (at the airport they may throw away تخمه and dates).** You can bring any raw material for your cooking such as dried vegetables، زرشک, etc but you have to keep in mind that when you are boarding the plane to the US, you have to fill out a form about the things you are carrying with you. There you are specifically asked about the fruits, vegetables and food items you are carrying with you. The dates and تخمه are strongly prohibited but other items seem fine. You can buy good nuts، تخمه، dates, etc. at a reasonable price (usually lower than what we have in Iran) here.

- **Clothes:** You might have heard a lot about winters in Boston and be worried about what you should bring with you. Yes, the winter in Boston is tough. You will definitely need warm outwear and a pair of boots which are water resistant. You can buy these items here at reasonable prices. So we recommend you not to bring a lot of clothes with you unless you have good boots and outwear and do not want to pay again. Also, it might take a few weeks to settle down and you should have the essential items especially if you are arriving in January to survive before you find the appropriate time to go shopping. For clothing, there are several shopping centers at downtown Boston, with reasonable prices and other stores with relatively higher prices in other areas such as Newberry street, Back Bay, Prudential center, etc. which once they go on a sale or clearance the prices drop a lot.

- **Do not buy anything from Iran to bring here, especially if you have financial support from the university.** Bring clothes, shoes, personal items, etc. that you already have and are almost new.

- **Do not bring too much dried herbs (خشک سبزی and Iranian spices) with you.** You can easily find them with reasonable prices in Iranian stores (such as Super Hero’s، Arax Market or Tabrizi Bakery at Watertown).

- **Do not buy laptops in Iran.** They are much cheaper here and you have way more options to choose from, decent costumer service, and legitimate warranties.

## Public Transportation

MBTA is the public transportation in Massachusetts which is one of the best in the US. You do not need to worry about having your own car. To get more information check mtba.com or maps.google.com where you can find directions via public transportation to any address.

- **Bus**
  It’s usually slow and it takes longer (especially during winter, however it also depends on the bus number). You cannot count on buses on the days with heavy rain or snow.

- **Subway (it’s called T in Boston)**
  It’s fast and it takes less time. The Green line is slower than the other ones, especially Green line B which has too many stops.
  - Orange line
  - Green line (B, C, D, E)
  - Red line
  - Blue line
  - Silver line

- **Commuter Rail**
It’s more like a transportation between towns and cities. There are several lines between Boston and neighbor towns which could be a good way of transportation if you want to visit somewhere nearby during weekend. They mostly have free wi-fi (Internet access) on them.

- **Tickets:**
  - Cash: $2 for subway, $1.5 for bus (one way)
  - Prepaid Charlie Card: $1.75 for subway, $1.25 for bus (one way)
  - Weekly/Monthly Pass: $15/$59 (unlimited use of bus/train)
    - Note: you can get monthly pass from school for $52.5 if you get them for a full semester (4 months).
  - Commuter Rail tickets are mostly more expensive, (e.g. from $4.75 above) depending on the zone and can be bought either on the train or from main station.

Note that Northeastern University offers - semester T-pass package to students by 11% off. Fall semester T passes (4-months Sept. - Dec.) can be purchased in July, and spring semester T passes (4-months Jan. - April) can be purchased in November. You should pay the whole fee at the purchase; for example for the linkpass (4months of monthly pass) you are supposed to pay $210 at the time of purchase.

### Housing

Here is a link to a handout on off-campus housing provided by the university:  
[http://www.northeastern.edu/offcampus/pdfs/77856_PR_StudentHand.pdf](http://www.northeastern.edu/offcampus/pdfs/77856_PR_StudentHand.pdf)

Here is another link which is provided by NU off-campus housing  
[http://www.northeastern.edu/offcampus/aptsearchpost/index.html](http://www.northeastern.edu/offcampus/aptsearchpost/index.html)

You can search through a list of apartments/rooms. You can also find roommates through this site from a bunch of NU students.

### Location & pricing

- **Near school (10-20 min walking distance)**
  - Boston, Back bay
  - Fenway
  - Mission Hill
    - Close to Huntington Ave. and Brookline
    - Far from Huntington (not recommended because of safety)
  - Dorchester, Roxbury (not recommended because of safety)

- **Other places (15-50 min with public transportation)**
  - Malden (Orange line: Malden Center and Oak Grove stations)
  - Somerville
  - Brookline
  - Cambridge
Brighton, Allston

The following table has some general information about each area listed above. Note that different parts in the same area might still be very different from each other. For more information about different parts of some of the listed areas (i.e. Cambridge, Somerville, Brookline), read the more detailed information following the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Avg. Rent(^1)</th>
<th>Transportation(^2)</th>
<th>Nightlife</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boston Back bay</td>
<td>$1300</td>
<td>Walk</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fenway</td>
<td>$1200</td>
<td>Walk</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission Hill(^3)</td>
<td>$900</td>
<td>Walk</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malden</td>
<td>$800</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerville</td>
<td>$800</td>
<td>Bus/Orange/Red</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brookline</td>
<td>$1100</td>
<td>Bus/Green</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge</td>
<td>$1100</td>
<td>Bus/Red</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brighton Allston</td>
<td>$1000</td>
<td>Bus/Green</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Avoid Roxbury, Dorchester, Chelsea, and East Boston by all means. These neighborhoods are usually very cheap but NOT safe.

**Cambridge:**

A vibrant city with a very good social atmosphere north of Boston. **Young academic crowd.** It is accessible to NU via Bus (No. 1) and T (Red and change to Green E at Park St). It is a very nice place to live around its squares. Rents tend to be high around squares (below 5 min walk) but tail off as you get farther, **Rents usually do not include heat and hot water.**

\(^1\) All rents are for a studio. If you consider to live in a room (i.e. having roommate(s)), the rent per person will be cheaper by $100 to $200.
\(^2\) Transportation to school
\(^3\) The information is for the part that is close to Huntington Ave. and Brookline.
- Harvard square area: Probably the **nicest** square of Cambridge. Has perfect **hang out** places. Has its own T station (red). It is an **expensive** area to live though. Safety: Good.
- Central square area: Very **accessible**, has its own T station (Red), Lots of bus routes. Awesome **nightlife**, good **restaurants**. The rent is **not cheap** close to the square. Safety: OK.
- Kendal square area: It is not as busy as Central but has its own vibe. T station (red). Rents are cheaper than Harvard and Central. Safety: OK/Good.
- Inman square area: Very nice neighborhood. Lots of **cheap restaurants** and bars. **Cheap rents**. Not very **accessible**! (No T or direct bus to NU, **15 min walks** to major commute means), Safety: Good.
- Porter square area: The border of Somerville and Cambridge. Not as elegant as Harvard, quite live though. Plenty of **cheap restaurants and bars** (hangout places). Rents are **moderately cheap**. Safety: Good.
- East Cambridge (Lechmere station) area: **Cheap rents**, small houses, **direct commute to NU (Green line E)**. Not as busy or nice as squares, close to Kendal. Safety: OK.

**Brookline:**

A neat and nice city west of Boston. Famous for its rich, **grown up** crowds. Most of the population is Jewish/ Russian. It is considered an **expensive area** to live. **Rents normally include heat/hot water. Mostly apartments.** It is accessible via Green (C and D) line or 66 buss. You have to change line to E at Arlington stop to go to NU. Alternatively, you can get off at **Hynes** stop and walk 10 min to NU campus. If you have a car, you will have a weird problem in Brookline. There is no street parking after 2:00 AM even for residents! You will need to rent a parking spot for 150-250 per month. Some rents include a parking spot or two, but most don’t.

Main areas are:
- Coolidge corner: The downtown of Brookline. Very nice neighborhood. Lots of shops and restaurants. Pretty live during the day but quite at nights. Rents are very high. Safety: High.
- Brookline village: Accessible via Green line D. Nice quite neighborhood. Mostly families and young professionals going to Harvard medical school. Rents are high close to Longwood area, but are cheaper if you go farther west. Safety: High.
- Cleveland circle: The border of Brighton and Brookline. Lots of shops and restaurants. A bit busier than other parts of Brookline. It is at the end of the C line but can be accessed with D line (much faster), and B line (insanely slow!). It is quite far from the campus, you will have a long commute. Safety: Good.
- Washington sq: between Coolidge corner and Cleveland circle. Probably the best nightlife in Brookline. Rents are high around the square. Safety: High.

**Somerville:**

A town north of Cambridge with young crowd. Rents do not include heat and hot water.
- **Davis Square area**: Very nice and live neighborhood. Lots of hang out places, hip young crowd. Rents are moderate but can be high very close to the square. Has its own T station (Red). Long commute to NU (45-50 minutes). Safety: Good.
Teele sq: Quiet neighborhood. Nice houses. Big space, cheaper rent. 10-15 minutes walk to the T (Red, Davis sq). Good if you have a car. Very Long commute to NU. Safety: high.
Sullivan sq: Not a very nice neighborhood. Rents are very cheap. Direct commute to NU (orange line). Safety: OK/bad.

Malden:
A nice and quiet city north of Boston. It is on Orange line (Malden Center station and Oak Grove station) which is very accessible for Northeastern students. If you don’t want to share the apartment with any one and want to rent a studio or a 1 bedroom apartment, Malden may be the best choice since you can find good, large and cheap apartments there. You can also find a 2/3 bedroom apartment here and share it with your friends, which would be even cheaper. Plenty of Iranian students (singles/families) live in Malden. Most apartments include heat/hot water; however you should check it with the landlord. Malden is a quiet city and you should not expect nightlife. Like everywhere in Boston, rents are higher for the apartments close to the T and tails off if you go further. Safety: OK/good.

On-Campus Housing:
On-campus housing is another option for full-time students at Northeastern University. Northeastern campus is located in a good neighborhood in downtown Boston, so school offers very limited and pricy apartments to graduate students. Candidates should apply for on-campus housing ahead of time (about 2-3 months before the start of semester). After the application deadline, housing applications will be randomly selected through a computer-generated program. Students will either receive an offer for housing or be placed on a wait list for housing. Students who receive an offer for housing will be required to submit non-refundable $200 deposit for the terms they requested. All the utilities are included (except internet and TV-cable). For more information you should check: http://www.northeastern.edu/reslife/index.html

Things you have to consider before finding a place
- Safety
- Distance to university, i.e. how close to public transportation
- Proximity to grocery stores (such as Shaws, Stop & Shop, Trader Joes, Market Basket, Whole Foods and Haymarket)
- Laundry in building or close to building
- To see what kind of utilities are included in the rent (heat/hot water, electricity, Internet, TV (cable), parking lot, etc.)

Warnings
- When signing a lease, you usually need to pay
  - the rent for the first month + the rent for the last month;
○ security deposit for the apartment;
○ and sometimes the half/or complete broker fee,
This is approximately equal to the rent of three to four months. e.g., if you rent a place for $1000, you must have $3000-$4000 in your pocket for signing a lease. So, regardless of your funding status, consider bringing this fee for renting an apartment with you. Note that you get your first stipend which is almost about $900 around September 15th.

● Mouse: Don’t be shocked if you see a mouse in your apartment. Call the landlord; it’s their responsibility to fix the problem.
● Usually, AC is not included in apartments.
● Heating system: check if the heating system works with electricity or gas and what’s the monthly cost. Usually gas is cheaper and should not go above $100-150/person.
● Try not to sign a contract more than 6 months if you can. This way you have time to decide if you like the place or not. Sometimes, landlord doesn’t agree to make a contract with you just for 6 months (less than a year). So you should ask ahead about the following options:
  ○ What’s the policy if you want to move out before the end of your lease.
  ○ What’s the policy if you want to sub-lease your apartment/room.
Make sure to know how much the landlord is going to charge you in each case.
● Ask the landlord about maintenance, most often they are responsible for that. But you should make sure who is the responsible.

Bank Account
One of the things you should consider doing in the first days of your arrival is opening a student bank account. We recommend you to open an account with Bank of America, because:

● It has a branch close to school,
● It has several ATMs on campus,
● It has numerous branches in every city in the US,
● and the university will pay you directly to your bank account, “Direct deposit”.
For the check book, you don’t have to order it right away. You can wait a week or two to find an apartment first and then order the check book with your known address.

Note that any transaction with Iranian banks is prohibited because of Iranian embargo. Like all the American banks, Bank of America is pretty sensitive to this issue.

Telephone
One of the first things that you should consider doing in the first days is getting a cellphone. There are plenty of service providers, such as:

● T-Mobile
You can get a prepaid t-mobile or simple mobile sim card on your arrival, then you have enough time to decide what vendor you would like to choose.

Prepaid T-mobile: $50/month unlimited talk and text
Prepaid simple mobile: $40/month unlimited talk and text

- **AT&T**
  - pros:
    - Good customer service
    - Rollover minutes which lets you keep your unused phone minutes for next month.
  - cons:
    - Relatively bad coverage
    - Limited data plan.

- **Verizon**
  - pros:
    - Best coverage in East coast
  - cons:
    - Less minutes/promotions compare to other providers

- **Sprint**
  - pros:
    - Relatively cheaper, OK customer service. Maybe the best option for those who mainly want to use cell phone to make calls.
  - cons:
    - Poor coverage in suburbs (small cities like Marlboro which is 45min West of Boston and located in “Woods”)

- **MetroPCS**
  - pros:
    - No contract, no minute limit, unlimited text message, unlimited web, no pre-deposit required.
  - cons:
    - Relatively bad coverage in smaller towns.

If you want to start a two-year contract with any of these companies (except MetroPCS), you should put a deposit of $500; otherwise you can get a prepaid plan.

Some service providers may not have good antenna coverage at some parts of the city. Make sure that the provider you are selecting has good coverage at your apartment.

When deciding about the service provider, you might want to consider the service providers of your friends, because calling a cellphone from the same service provider is free.

## Purchasing Furniture

If you want to have an idea of how much you will spend on the furniture, check [Ikea](https://www.ikea.com).
Other possibilities are Walmart, Target, local stores and second handed (http://boston.craigslist.org/). You should note that bedbugs are very common in the US and they can cause a serious issue at your apartment which may only be managed by pesticides applied by professional pest control companies. Second hand furniture may be infested with bed bugs and bringing them to your apartment, may infest other furniture.

**Forms you need to fill out upon your arrival**

There are some forms that you will be requested to fill out while you are in the plane to the US:

1. **U.S. Customs and Border Protection Declaration Form 6059B:**
   Each individual arriving into the United States must complete the CBP Declaration Form 6059B. If you are traveling with other immediate family members, complete one form per family unit. A sample of this form can be found here:
   It is recommended that you fill out the form honestly.

2. **Form I-94: Arrival-Departure Record, for Non-immigrant Visitors with a Visa for the U.S.**
   For nonimmigrant visitors entering the United States with a visa, there is a requirement to fill a CBP Form I-94 (white form). This form has two specific perforated sections to it. The visitor or the carrier representative must complete both sections of CBP Form I-94 upon arrival in the United States. The bottom section of CBP Form I-94 is a departure record and must be returned to U.S. officials upon exiting the United States.
   Find a sample form here:
   After the successful completion of processing the applicant, a CBP officer stamps the applicant’s CBP Form I-94, Arrival and Departure Records, and the passport. The CBP Declaration, used at air and sea ports of entry, may also be stamped by the CBP officer. The CBP officer retains the arrival portion of the CBP Form I-94 and returns the departure portion of the CBP Form I-94 and passport to the applicant.