

# CELL PHONES IN THE UNITED STATES

## Plan or Pre-Paid?

Most providers in the United States require either a Social Security Number (SSN) or a high security deposit for setting up a contract for your cell phone service. These contracts usually last for one or two years in which you are required to stay with that provider or pay a fee to cancel the contract.

Recently, some providers have started to make their services more easily accessible for international students and do not require Social Security Numbers or high deposits for contracts (plans) anymore.

In addition, all providers offer pre-paid options, in which you pay your monthly bill in advance. These do not require a Social Security Number or high deposits and do not require you to stay with the provider for a fixed time period, but may have higher monthly fees.

Almost all providers offer additional options to their plans or pre-paid options for international texting (SMS & MMS) and calls. Please note that placing international phone calls can be very expensive.

## Contracts

- ❖ Most cell phone companies charge for all calls, outgoing AND incoming, though many have free calling within their network.
- ❖ Some plans give you a set number of minutes per month. Overage minutes are charged at a much higher rate. Check your plan to see if weekend and nighttime minutes are free.
- ❖ If you don't have a US Social Security Number, expect to pay a deposit (the deposit should be returned at the end of the contract). Some providers have become more friendly toward international customers recently. T-Mobile, for example, allows F-1
- ❖ Text messaging (SMS) typically carries an additional charge if not included in a plan. Ask about adding texting to your plan.
- ❖ For most companies, you must have a compatible phone. Ask specifically if you want to use one you currently have.

*Please note:* Once a contract is signed, you will be obligated to pay for the entire contract period. Expect to pay a high fee if you break a contract. Contracts generally last 1-2 years.

## Prepaid

- ❖ If you intend to make calls to your home country, ensure this is possible with your specific plan.
- ❖ May be month-to-month subscriptions or “add minutes as you go.”
- ❖ No deposit required.
- ❖ Cheaper phones— generally basic features such as SMS and calling.
- ❖ Cost ranges from minimal to comparable to contract services.

## Major Providers

*Please note:* When subscribing, ask the representative about their student discount program as well as international calling plans.

### Verizon Wireless

Fashion Centre Mall  
1100 S Hayes St  
Arlington, VA 22202  
703-415-1101  
[www.verizonwireless.com](http://www.verizonwireless.com)

### AT&T

3307 M Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20007  
202-333-3373  
[www.att.com](http://www.att.com)

### Virgin Mobile:

1208 18th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
202-496-9400  
[www.virginmobileusa.com](http://www.virginmobileusa.com)

### Sprint

1208 18th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
202-496-9400  
[www.sprint.com](http://www.sprint.com)

### T-Mobile

1330 Connecticut Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
202-429-0715  
[www.t-mobile.com](http://www.t-mobile.com)

## Prepaid Providers

- ❖ Straight talk: [www.straighttalk.com](http://www.straighttalk.com) TracFone: [www.tracfone.com](http://www.tracfone.com)

## Prepaid Calling Card Locations

- ❖ Vital Vittles (Leavey Center) / Georgetown University Bookstore (Leavey Center)
- ❖ Wisemiller's Deli (Wisey's - 1236 ½ 36<sup>th</sup> St. NW)
- ❖ Key Bridge Exxon (3607 M Street NW)