Example Timeline for New International Students

Before Arriving in Richmond

1. Get accepted to VCU **(~ February)**
    1. VCU only needs unofficial transcripts for initial evaluation to determine eligibility for VCU.
    2. Application fee may be waived for developing country (~75$), which will be in the form of a promo-code
2. For graduate students specifically: Ask VCU to start an I-20 form (has SEVIS number)
    1. International validation of academic transcripts
    2. WES (World Education Service, Canadian or US type (US preferred)) - service to validate academic transcript
        1. 250-300$ fee for evaluation
        2. Send results to VCU's global education office
        3. Ask for official TOEFL score report
        4. WES also requires institutional communication, ie. universities need to send them directly to WES, not through the individual.
    3. Postdoctoral trainees will send graduate degree (e.g., PhD) diploma
3. Receive eID and VCU email, after receiving I-20
    1. You may then register for courses for your semester.
    2. Even if you don't have your visa, you need to register for courses. If you need to defer your semester (ex. Visa arrives late), you need to contact the department's course director for more assistance.
    3. Some programs in the US do not allow students to defer their semesters. Check with your VCU contact
4. Apply for visa (ex. F1) **(go to embassy in March)**
    1. Visit government website to pay SEVIS fee (350$ for F VISA applicants and $220 for J VISA applicants)
    2. Complete DS160 form, which requires a SEVIS number.
    3. Go to the US embassy in your home country's website to schedule an appointment to apply for your visa.
        1. You need your DS160 number to get the appointment to apply for your visa.
        2. On Day of your visa interview, you need SEVIS fee receipt and DS160 form, passport, military service ID card, I-20, CV, SoP, research/study plan.
        3. After your interview, you start the administrative process (AP) which includes a background check(starts the day of your interview). Some applicants get a visa immediately after the interview without AP.
    4. Note: May take 3 months (or even longer) for the background check to finish and receive the visa.
        1. If your visa takes too long, you may need to defer your starting date/semester. **(get visa before starting semester)**

5. Secure Housing ~ very difficult if you're coming from a country outside of North America. Some options listed below, and note that we have additional information in the housing section of this document:
   1. One option: There is a facebook community group for VCU students.
      1. Stay in an Air-BnB or hotel temporarily, or friends' relatives.
      2. Current graduate students may volunteer to host new international students temporarily.
      3. Identify people looking for room-mates and meet virtually but this has risks to it.
6. ***Strongly consider getting temporary/travelers' health insurance until VCU's official insurance starts
   1. Confirm when insurance starts.
   2. Health Insurance may start on August 15th.
7. Book Flight
   1. Richmond Airport does not receive international flights. Typically, international students will arrive in the US at an airport in Washington DC.
   2. Luggage - international students may need to pay an extra fee for their luggage to fly from DC to Richmond. Alternatively, some students may have a friend/family pick them up.

Immediately After Arriving in Richmond

8. Get a cellphone + plan; this must be the first thing you do because everything else will require a phone number.
9. Create a bank account next, before SSN. Make an appointment online, **do not go in-person initially.** Wells Fargo and Chase do not require an SSN and they open an account conditionally. You must provide your SSN later. They will also ask you for your student ID account, which can be provided afterwards. Virginia Credit Union may also have options for VCU students
   1. Without a student ID, you will have an annual account fee. Once you provide your ID, those fees will be waived.
   2. Start with Discover credit card (independent of wells fargo), because it doesn't require a credit score. For Discover Credit Card, you need two proof of address, so you will need to secure housing first if this is important for you (I provided bank statements and the SSN mail card).
10. Get Social Security Number (necessary for receiving payment from VCU as well).
    1. You need a letter from your employer (VCU) (https://global.vcu.edu/students/immigration/social_security_number/)
11. Secure housing if not done before arriving:
    1. Find housing. Some landlords may not require SSN, initially. It just depends.
    2. You may need a reference check or co-signers, but it depends on the apartment type or landlords.
       1. Instead of co-signers, may ask for higher deposit.
    3. Student/faculty resources (people who live in certain neighborhoods)
12. Get payment setup from VCU - they need SSN.

1. Contact Ruth McIntosh-Brandt, and make an appointment - in-person to give documents (I-20, passport, bank account numbers, SSN if you have it, you may send by email later).
2. You should receive pay-check September 16th (or around then).

13. Setup VCU Registration with Police (do this in the first month). VCU will contact you through email to schedule this if this is needed.

*Starting at VCU/VIPBG (*May depend on your program; ILS vs. Human Genetics)

14. Go to orientation (Human Genetics or ILS)
    1. Get student ID card
15. Start rotations (for Human Genetics); meet with advisor (for ILS).
16. Get keys to the VIPBG building/office from the VIPBG Administrative Team
17. Acquire Health Insurance - first weeks of school, you will receive an email from VCU.
18. Acquire National ID card - like Driver's license (optional)
    1. Not convenient to bring passport everywhere.
    2. You need SSN and I-20, passport, and letter with home address (ex. phone or internet bill).
19. Sign-up for buddy system - from GEO or VIPBG?

Other/As needed

Please see the existing resources for a range of other areas including: US Taxes, transportation/parking, child-care, groceries.