Cell Phones

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Selecting a phone plan may require some research. Check with other students and colleagues, particularly those from your home country, for suggestions.

Some international students and scholars keep their current phone and insert a SIM card, which can be purchased from companies like U.S. Mobile [2]. Some students and scholars purchase an eSIM, which is a digital SIM. Not all phones support eSIMs, so it's important to check that your phone is compatible before you purchase this option.

Others choose to purchase a phone once here in the U.S. You can use the map below to find local cell phone stores in New Haven.

Get a U.S. Cell Phone

Find cell phone providers in New Haven [3]

Common Questions

Below are some suggested questions you can ask a cell phone company to help determine if their services are the best fit for your needs:

- Are pre-paid plans available? Is this a good option for the duration of my stay in the U.S.?
- What are the rates for calls, text messages (SMS), data transfers, and multimedia messages (MMS)?
  Cell phones in the U.S. may charge for both incoming and outgoing calls, texts, and data.
- Is a deposit required to sign a contract? Will it be returned in full at the end of the contract?
- If there is a contract, is there a penalty or loss of deposit if the plan is terminated early?
- Can I use a phone I already own?
  If you plan to use your own phone, be sure to obtain the code needed to "unlock" your phone for use abroad.
- Does the new plan require a new phone? Is there a fee or monthly charge for a new phone?
  Some plans in the U.S. offer phones for $0 USD down, but may charge a monthly fee for the duration of the plan.
- Will my phone be compatible with other international networks (GSM or CDMA [4])?

Terminology

Airtime: Actual time spent talking on the cellular telephone. Most carriers bill customers based on how many minutes of airtime they use each month. Airtime charges during peak periods of the day vary from about 20 cents to more than 40 cents per minute, depending on the service plan selected. Most carriers offer reduced rates for off-peak usage.

Bluetooth: A wireless method of communications between devices.

Call Waiting: If your line is busy, callers are asked to wait while you are alerted to their incoming call.

Calling Plan: A rate plan selected by subscribers when they start up cellular service, usually consisting of a base rate for system access and a per-minute rate for usage. Service plans are designed to provide the most cost-effective rates for different types and amounts of usage by the cellular subscriber.

Data: This allows you to access the internet when you are not connected to wifi.

Land Line: Traditional wired phone service. Voice, video and data transmission technology that relies on wires. Also called wireline.

Local Calling Area: The geographical area that a customer may call without incurring toll charges.

Off-Peak Periods: Times when carriers offer discounted airtime charges. Each carrier designates its own off-peak hours, usually after normal business hours during the week, and weekends.

Pay-As-You-Go: Essentially another term for pre-paid, meaning service that is paid in advance, as-needed, instead of billed at the end of each month (post-paid). Since service is paid for in advance, there is no generally no need for contracts or credit checks with pay-as-you-go. One difference from prepaid is that a PAYG plan can be set up to automatically deduct funds from a bank account when depleted, instead of the balance simply becoming zero, rendering the phone unusable until the account is manually replenished.

Peak: Highest-usage period of the business day when a cellular system carries the most calling traffic.

Roaming: The ability to use your cellular phone outside your usual service area – when traveling outside of the “home” service area defined by a service provider. Higher per-minute rates are usually charged for calls made or received while roaming. Long distance rates and a daily access fee may also apply.

Service Charge: The amount customers pay each month to receive wireless service. This amount is fixed, and to be paid monthly regardless of how much or how little customers use their wireless phones.

Service Plan: The rate plan you select when choosing a wireless phone service. A service plan typically consists of a monthly base rate for access to the system and a fixed amount of minutes per month. Service plans are designed to provide the most cost-effective rates for different types and amounts of usage by the cellular subscriber.

SIM card: A Subscriber Identity Module or a smart card that stores data for GSM cell phone users.

Storage: This is the space (gigabytes) that your device has available to keep files directly on it, such as photos and apps.

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