Most of the following information was obtained from the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) website: http://dmv.ny.gov/driver-license/looking-license-permit-id-card-information.

New York honors all valid foreign licenses. By law, New York will honor a valid driver license issued by any other nation to a resident of that nation. The DMV recommends that you not apply for a New York State license unless you become a resident of New York.

If you drive using your valid home country license and your license is not in English, you must also carry a certified English translation of your license. To locate a translator on campus, for your language see http://isso.cornell.edu/sites/isso.cornell.edu/files/isso/documents/translations.pdf.

If possible, we suggest that you obtain a current International Driving Permit, only available in your home country, because it informs authorities, in several languages, that you have a valid foreign driver’s license. An International Driving Permit by itself is not valid for driving in New York State. New York honors the underlying license, not the permit alone.

Should I Apply for a New York State License?

Although there is nothing in the Vehicle and Traffic Law which prohibits a non-U.S.-resident from applying for and receiving a New York State license, the DMV recommends against this because it is not necessary; New York will honor your foreign license, as long as you have certified English translation of your license. Many non-U.S. residents, however, find it difficult to register a personal vehicle and find that automobile insurance companies either charge higher rates or will not insure those without a U.S. driver’s license. If you decide to apply for a NY State driver’s license, keep the following in mind:

- If you have a license from any nation other than Canada or Puerto Rico, you must pass a written test, complete a 5-hour pre-licensing course and pass a road test to qualify for a New York license. Your foreign license is valid for driving, but not for waiving the tests and course for new drivers. If you have a valid license from Canada or Puerto Rico, you do not need to take a driving course or a road test.

- You must be able to show proof of identity and date of birth. You must also show your Social Security card, or provide a letter from the U.S. Social Security Administration (SSA) stating that you are not eligible for a Social Security Number (SSN). In order to get this ineligibility letter from the SSA, you will first need to get a letter from the International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO) confirming that you are not working—just come in to “walk in” advising hours at the ISSO to get that letter. The SSA letter must have been issued within the last 30 days. (Note: If you do not have a SSN, your application may be delayed an additional 1-4 weeks while the DMV Headquarters in Albany conducts additional background checks. You will be notified by the DMV when this process is finished and you may return to the local office to complete your application.) You MUST also present your passport and I-94 departure/arrival record, with supporting documentation of visa status, such as an I-20 or DS-2019. Some visa types cannot apply at the DMV in Ithaca or need additional documentation. For more information, please see the handout “Proofs of Identity”, available at the ISSO or on the DMV website: http://dmv.ny.gov/driver-license/prove-identity-age-permitlicense.

- When you receive your New York license, you will be asked to surrender your foreign license. Your foreign license will be stored at the local DMV office and destroyed after 60 days. If you will need your foreign license in the future, ask that your foreign license be filed. You may then request the license back by going to the office where it is filed and surrendering your NYS license.

Please see the other side of this page for directions to the DMV and the basic procedure for applying for a New York State Driver’s license. For more information, contact the Department of Motor Vehicles at: 273-7187 or visit at 301 3rd St. in downtown Ithaca.

Please Drive Safely!
How to Apply for a New York State Driver's License


- Bring the following documents with you to the DMV: your passport (with port of entry and visa stamp), I-94 departure/arrival record (download the electronic copy from [www.cbp.gov/i94](http://www.cbp.gov/i94)), I-20 or DS-2019, social security card or an ineligibility letter from Social Security office (which also requires a letter from ISSO confirming that you are not working), and any additional “Proofs of Identity” to satisfy the requirement of 6 points. Visit: [http://dmv.ny.gov/driver-license/prove-identity-age-permitlicense](http://dmv.ny.gov/driver-license/prove-identity-age-permitlicense).

- Before getting in line at the DMV, fill out the application for a Learner’s Permit. When you reach the counter, you will pay a fee (around $75) and take an eye test. You can then take a written test on New York State driving rules; if you pass, you will receive a learner’s permit.

- Next, you must take a 5-hour pre-licensing course, offered at area high schools, or commercial driving schools, listed on the web under "Driving Instruction".

- With confirmation that you have taken the 5-hour course, you can schedule a road test by phone or on line at [http://dmv.ny.gov/schedule-road-test](http://dmv.ny.gov/schedule-road-test). Until you take the road test, you can drive with the permit, but only if accompanied by a licensed driver.

- Once you have passed the road test, you will be issued a temporary license, and receive your photo driver’s license in the mail.


City of Ithaca

Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), 301 3rd Street 607-273-7187