

Mobile Phones

A mobile (cell) phone can be a good alternative to having a phone at your home, for example, if you spend most of your time outside your home and want to be reached anywhere anytime, and/or paying for both home and cell phone is expensive for you.

Most cellular companies require a social security number in case if you wish to get a cell phone, or they charge a big fee. This is required if you want to sign, say, a 12 or 24 month contract with the company. If you don't have a Social Security Number, the best option to obtain a cell phone as an international student is probably to get a pre-paid plan.

Several scholars last year bought a cell phone and service through Radio Shack's Cingular "Pay As You Go" or "Pick Your Plan" plans. Through these plans you pay for minutes which you can buy online at a base rate of 10 cents a minute, and the more minutes you buy the less you pay.

There is a Radio Shack at the Corner of Wisconsin and River Road, by the Tenleytown metro stop, at 4531 Wisconsin Avenue, NW. You can find information provided by Radio Shack online at <http://www.radioshack.com>, and there is also useful information below about cell phone service from the following website:

http://www.radioshack.com/uc/index.jsp?page=researchLibraryArticle&articleUrl=.%2Fgraphics%2Fuc%2Frsk%2FResearchLibrary%2FBuyersGuides%2Fresearch%2Fwireless_phones.html

Text messaging

Text messaging is a service that allows mobile phone users to type in short messages on the keypad of their phone and send them to other users. These types of messages are perfect for communicating short bits of information when it's otherwise not viable to make a phone call. Crowded restaurants or bars often make text messaging a necessity. Most wireless providers offer text messaging capability for a few cents a message, as well as special packages that include a certain number of messages a month for a flat fee. Speak with your wireless salesperson to determine if text messaging is a feature that's right for you.

Providers & pricing

Most wireless pricing plans offer a certain number of wireless "minutes" each month for a flat rate. Any minutes used beyond that amount are usually charged on your bill on a per-minute basis, with unused minutes expiring at the end of the month. Long distance calls typically count against your monthly allotment of minutes for no extra charge. Sprint PCS and Cingular Wireless, both RadioShack partner companies, are two carriers that offer wireless plans customized for your personal needs.

To get a better understanding of your wireless options and to select a plan and provider that is ideal for you, meet with a certified associate at one of [RadioShack's neighborhood stores](#). You will also be able to get the same money-saving rebates and rate plans that

these carriers offer at their individual stores.

Night & weekend vs. "anytime" minutes

Today, most wireless plans include a certain number of "anytime" minutes. These are the minutes used when making calls during the day, as well as night-time minutes, which are minutes used for calls placed after a certain hour in the evening or during the weekend. Some wireless plans include free night and weekend minutes, meaning that the value of your wireless plan can dramatically increase if you place frequent calls in the evening or over the weekends. The hour at which your night-time minutes kick in differs from carrier to carrier, so check with your provider to avoid additional charges.

Who pays for incoming calls?

Generally, a customer's monthly minutes are impacted regardless of whether they made or received the call. Some carriers, including Sprint and Cingular, offer free calls between members of their networks. So, if a customer has several friends or family members who are part of a particular provider, it might behoove that customer to determine whether the provider offers free calls to in-network members since it can dramatically reduce the number of paid for minutes that customer needs.

Pre-Paid Plans:

Pre-paid plans are offered by several carriers, and to get started with a pre-paid plan, you buy a phone and a set amount of service, either a certain number of minutes, or a certain amount on a calling card. You simply buy the number of minutes each month that best suits you life style and the necessity. When you use up your minutes or your calling card, your phone stops working, and you must buy more. Usually you can do this via the carrier's website, or you can buy extra minutes or hone cards in local retailer shops like BestBuy or Radioshack. Before you pick a plan you might want to compare different carriers – how much you have to pay per minute; how often you have to refill your phone, if there is a daily access fee, how much the initial setup of the phone costs, how much the phone costs, and what kind of phones are offered. Below you can find a list comparing the most common carriers.

Cingular GoPhone <http://www.cingular.com>

- Pros:* Some plans offer reduced-rate or unlimited nights and weekends plus unlimited mobile-to-mobile calling with other Cingular subscribers;
- Cons:* Incoming text messages cost 10 cents each; access fees for some plans
- Plans:* Several options available, including a 10-cents-per-minute prepaid plan with access fees for days on which you use your phone, a 25-cents-per-minute plan with no access fees, and a monthly plan with rollover minutes, unlimited night and weekend minutes and unlimited calling to other Cingular phones for the pricier plans. Prices range from 10 to 25 cents per minute.

Messaging: 10 cents to send and receive text messages; 25 cents to send picture messages

Int'l calling: Yes (variable rates plus airtime)

Phones: Prices range from \$30 to \$200

T-Mobile ToGo <http://www.t-mobile.com>

Pros: Free incoming text and picture messaging

Cons: Smallest network coverage among the big U.S. carriers

Plans: Offers packages of minutes that expire anywhere from 30 days to a year after purchase; Prices range from 10 cents to 33 cents per minute.

Messaging: 10 cents to send text messages, free to receive; 25 cents to send picture messages, free to receive.

Int'l calling: Yes (variable rates plus airtime)

Phones: Prices range from \$50 to \$280

Verizon Wireless Inpulse <http://www.verizonwireless.com>

Pros: Unlimited night calling and calling to another Verizon phone

Cons: Roaming fees; daily access fees for 10 cents per minute with the InPulse plan

Plans: *InPulse:* 10 cents per minute, with a 99-cent daily access fee, whether or not you use the phone; minutes expire on a sliding scale of days, depending on the size of the packet (the number of minutes you purchase)
EasyPay: monthly plans (\$50 for 350 minutes, \$70 for 700 minutes) with no access fees, unlimited nights and weekends and unlimited mobile-to-mobile calling.

Messaging: 10 cents to send and receive text messages; 25 cents per minute to send and receive picture messages.

Int'l calling: Yes (variable rates plus airtime)

Phones: Prices range from \$60 to \$350

For information on additional carriers, information about and reviews of a large number of cell phones, and for a more comprehensive guide to prepaid phones, visit C-Net at <http://reviews.cnet.com> .