

The Neuroscience Graduate Student's Guide to First Year

Welcome to The Ohio State University! This resource is meant to answer any questions you have about the Neuroscience Graduate Program. Please keep this for frequent reference during your transition and throughout your first year. For any additional questions, please reach out to your NewN Mentor.

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Names for Reference

Neuroscience Graduate Program Leadership

- Dr. Jonathan Godbout and Dr. John Oberdick- NGP program co-directors
- Keri Knowles- NGP program administrator

Neuroscience Student Representatives and Student Organization Leadership

- Nicki Pukos – Senior student representative
- Abby Zalenski – Junior student representative
- Kia Adams- President of the Neuroscience Graduate Student Organization.
- Rachel Gilfarb- NewN Chair

Neuroscience Department Administration (Department is separate from graduate program)

- Dr. Phillip Popovich- Chair of the Department of Neuroscience
- Melissa Stenger – Administrative Manager
- Kelsey Wheeler – Assistant to the Chair
- Phoebe Long – Neuroscience Seminar Series Coordinator

Graduate School Administration

- Dr. Alicia Bertone- Dean of Graduate school
- Laura Pearce - Manager, Fellowship Services
- Tim Watson - Director, Graduation Services
- Samuel Jordan - Director, Registration Services

Life Sciences Interdisciplinary Graduate Programs (IGP)

NGP along with three other graduate programs comprise the Life Sciences Interdisciplinary Graduate Programs within the Graduate School. The IGPs are separate programs that operate under their own policies but collaborate together organizing and participating in select events.

- **Biophysics**

- Ralf Bundschuh, Co-Director
- Jeff Kuret, Co-Director
- Kiley Morgan-Myrick, Program Administrator

- **Biochemistry (OSBP)**

- Jane Jackman, Director
- Franci Brink, Program Administrator

- **Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology (MCDB)**

- Tony Brown, Co-Director
- Dawn Chandler, Co-Director
- Lauren Pasquale, Program Administrator

Rotations and Choosing a Lab

In your first year, you will rotate through several labs to help you get some experience and choose a lab in which you will complete your dissertation research. As soon as you are accepted to The Ohio State University, you should think about which faculty members you are interested in rotating with. After identifying faculty members, contact them via phone or email as soon as possible to schedule a rotation for the fall (starting in August). **It is critical to contact faculty early**, as some faculty will have other commitments in any given semester (e.g., a large teaching load, current students, going on sabbatical, etc.).

Waiting may disrupt your rotation schedule. For rotations later in the year, **schedule them as early as you can**, as you will need to coordinate your schedule with the principal investigator (PI).



Keep in mind that spots in labs are limited and all first-year students in the IGPs are trying to find their labs. If you are comfortable in a lab, enjoy the research, and have discussed funding and projects with the PI, consider staying.

Rotations last for 7 weeks (half a semester). Be sure to work out with the PI how long you are planning to stay **before** you begin, along with reviewing the rotation agreement that lays out expectations for rotating students. Students typically complete between 2 and 4 rotations. There is some flexibility to do a fifth rotation, but this is not ideal. The program expects you to have chosen a permanent lab by the end of your first spring semester.

Things to think about and discuss with the PI during your rotation:

- *What is the funding situation?* Does the PI have funding available for both the research *and* your stipend? Are they still waiting to hear back about a grant? Starting the August after your first year, **your stipend comes out of your lab's grants and the program no longer covers you**. If you are rotating in a lab outside of the Neuroscience Department, **the PIs may not offer a stipend comparable to the NGP rate**. You may need to work as a Course Assistant to cover part or all of your stipend if the PI cannot support both you and the research.
- *Is there someone in the lab with the time to devote to training you so that you can eventually work on projects by yourself?* Sometimes this is the PI, and sometimes it is a postdoc or another grad student in the lab.
- *Does the mentorship style of the PI suit you?* Also, where is the PI in their career? A PI who is far along in their career may travel a lot and be less available for one-on-one meetings but will also be very established and well-connected in the field, have a good publishing record, and stable funding sources. On the other hand, a newer PI may spend more time at the bench and

be more available for hands-on instruction, but may also be focused on getting tenure and feel a strong pressure to publish.

- *What are the expectations for your time in the lab?* What are the expectations for time spent in lab? Is lab supposed to be treated like a 9-5, or more like a 8-6? What about weekends? What are the PI's policies on vacation time, mental health days, etc.? Talk to other graduate students to learn about lab expectations.
- *How often does the lab publish, and in what kinds of journals?* Make sure your publishing goals align with the lab. Do you want to publish a series of smaller papers? Do you want to only publish one or two high-impact papers? Either way, it is important that the lab is actively publishing and is not in an academic drought.
- *What kinds of conferences do lab members attend?* Conference attendance is key to your professional development. Also, consider what graduates of the lab do after graduate school.
- *Do you get along with the other people in the lab and does the working environment/culture suit you?* You will be spending the next several years of your life and shaping your career in this lab. If you do not get along with your lab-mates and do not feel comfortable in the lab, this will have a negative impact on your time as a grad student and possibly impact your career moving forward.
- *Do you like the research, and is there a project that excites you?* The lab you choose may not be perfect, but there are several aspects to consider. First, can you see yourself getting out of bed each day to perform your research? Second, do the techniques used in the lab interest you and add to your skillset? Third, will you be able to use your work in this lab to advance your academic career?

Answering these questions will help you decide if you want to stay in any particular lab. There are pros and cons to every single lab, but ultimately you want to find an environment that is the best fit for you because this is where you will be spending the majority of your time for the next several years.

At the end of each rotation, you will fill out an evaluation form. It is a good idea to have a meeting with the PI at the end of the rotation to establish an understanding about whether you will join the lab now, keep rotating, or do other rotations before returning to the lab. This can be an awkward conversation, but it is important to make sure that you and the PI are on the same page.

Remember:

The purpose of these rotations is to give you a taste of the lab, so do not stress out if you have not produced any data- most people don't.

Do not feel obligated to finish the rotation if you are not satisfied with the experience.

First Year Classes

During the first year, students do not need to worry about registering themselves for NGP core courses.

NEUROSC 7001 and 7002– Foundations of Neuroscience I and II (6 credits each)

- Foundations of Neuroscience I is offered in the Fall and Foundations of Neuroscience II is offered in the Spring of each year.
- Lectures are given by a variety of Neuroscience faculty.
- Comprised of four modules: Electrophysiology, Cell & Molecular Biology, Neurotransmitters & Glia, and Developmental Neuroscience
- You must receive a “B” or higher to pass the class. If a student receives a “B-“ they will have to remediate with the instructor before the next autumn semester, but not retake the class. If a student receives a “C” or lower, they will have to retake the class the following autumn semester.
- The class is mainly composed of first-year NGP students with a few students from other departments and programs.
- Foundations of Neuroscience II may be listed as “DENT 7012.03” for some students, though it is the same physical class.

NEUROSC 7100 – Current Topics in Neuroscience (1 credit)

- Current Topics in Neuroscience is offered in the Fall of your first year.
- This is a journal club-style class in which you will discuss primary literature from various disciplines within neuroscience.
- Discussions are led by various faculty members and generally correspond to the material being covered in Foundations of Neuroscience I at the time.

NEUROGS 7887 – Seminar in Neuroscience (1 credit)

- This is a weekly class required for all pre-candidacy NGP students.
- This class covers both the Fall and Spring semesters.
- All 2nd and 3rd year students present their research (~15 minutes) once each year, and all 1st-year students present a short talk on their lab rotation (~5 minutes) at the end of each semester.
- All student presentations are informally evaluated by your NGP peers in order to provide feedback for improving your presentation skills.
- Various faculty members lead discussions on technical and professional topics throughout the semester.

NEUROSC 7200.01 – Neuroscience Laboratory

- Neuroscience Laboratory is offered in the Spring of your first year.
- Neuroscience Laboratory may be listed as “DENT 7012.01” for some students.
- This class is a hands-on deep-dive into neuroanatomy where students will be able to handle human nervous tissue and gain experience with cadavers.
- Final grades are made up of participation and final exam.

Timeline

At the end of each year, **you will complete an annual review with two NGP committee members to talk about program expectations.** This is a way for the program to check on your progress and make sure you are meeting all of the important checkpoints. You will need to fill out a form sent out by Keri and send in an updated version of your CV. In your first year, this meeting is focused on checking that you have passed all core classes and have chosen a permanent lab.

Year 1

- Complete required coursework.
- Conduct 1-2 lab rotations per semester and select a thesis lab.
- Attend the “Seminar in Neuroscience” weekly and present your rotation research once each semester.
- Attend the Neuroscience Seminar Series.
- Attend the Interdisciplinary Graduate Programs (IGP) Symposium.
- Volunteer at N.E.U.R.O.’s Brain Awareness Week at COSI.
- Get involved in the program! Join various organizations such as NGSO or N.E.U.R.O.



Year 2

- Settle into your new lab.
- Begin thinking about your candidacy exam and form a thesis committee.
- Attend the “Seminar in Neuroscience” weekly and present your research once each academic year.
- Attend the Neuroscience Seminar Series.
- Attend the IGP Symposium.
- Complete “Responsible Conduct in Biomedical Research” during the May term.*
- Complete statistics course requirement.
- Volunteer at N.E.U.R.O.’s Brain Awareness Week at COSI.
- Start thinking about candidacy and put together a committee. **You have until December of your third year to complete candidacy.** If you need to postpone for any reason, you need to submit a petition to do so.

Your PI may ask you to take another class.

* “Responsible Conduct in Biomedical Research” is offered every odd year (*i.e.*, 2019, 2021, 2023, *etc.*). NGP students will enroll in this course during their 2nd or 3rd year. **You will be taking this class during Summer 2023.**

Resources

Graduate school can be physically, emotionally, and mentally challenging. Take advantage of OSU's resources to avoid burning out and proactively take care of yourself.

Brain-breaks:

- OSU has [hundreds of student clubs](#) and activities, most of which are open to graduate students. If you have hobbies and interests, there is a good chance a relevant club already exists.
- The Ohio Union Activities Board ([OUAB](#)) hosts FREE events throughout the year for graduate and professional students, including cooking classes, trivia nights, speed dating, craft workshops, and movie screenings.

Physical Fitness:

- OSU has 8 [fitness facilities](#) across campus, with many offering group fitness classes and state of the art of equipment. Access to these facilities are free with your BuckID!

Mental Health:

- If you need a mental health specialist, OSU's [Counseling and Consultation Services](#) are available through the Psychology Department.
- Yoga classes are offered through the Recreation and Physical Activity Center (RPAC) [group fitness classes](#).
- NGP participates each autumn in a program called RUOK? Buckeyes, a mental health assessment that gauges students mental health and helps connect you to resources.

Family Services:

- If you have children under 5 years old, there are [four childcare options](#) associated with OSU.
- A list of schools by district is available [here](#).
- Access for families, significant others, etc. to the RPAC is [free certain times of the week and weekend](#) or can be [purchased](#).
- [Lactation rooms](#) are located around campus and are available for use.
- Further questions regarding Paternal Care at OSU can be answered [here](#).

Organization:

- [The Student Wellness Center](#) offers discounted birth control, STI testing, nutrition coaching, financial coaching, relationship education and violence prevention services, as well as alcohol and other drug prevention services.
- If you have a disability or need accommodations for testing, check out the [Student Life Disability Services \(SLDS\)](#) website. Services offered include exam accommodations, note-taking assistance, disability parking, etc.

Getting Involved

Neuroscience Graduate Student Organization (NGSO)

The (NGSO) was officially created in 2017 to enhance the experience of graduate students as they move through the NGP program. Our goal is to ensure that each person has a positive and rewarding experience in the program, both in and out of the lab. Our organization hosts monthly happy hours and social events with the NGP faculty. We program and advocate for student wellness and work closely with the student reps to actively participate in the consistent improvement of the graduate program. We also have established professional and career development resources to help students prepare for life after graduation. We partner with NEURO to host outreach opportunities in the greater Columbus community as well as events aimed at educating high school and undergraduate students about careers in science. We are committed to building a relationship and planning collaborative events with the other IGP programs. All NGP students are welcome to attend our monthly meetings and join committees at any time! Committees include: Social, Fundraising, Professional Development, NewN



Neuroscience Education: Rural and Urban Outreach (N.E.U.R.O.)

This student-led group partners with after-school programs and local libraries to engage kids in learning about the brain. This group sets up interactive brain games and trivia and display real human and animal brain specimens. This group also facilitates some events for adults at places like COSI. Major events each year include Brain Awareness Week and the Explorations in Neuroscience summer camp for high school students. NEURO runs a variety of after school activities for elementary and middle school students at Columbus Metro Libraries and local schools. Additional programs NEURO participates in include:

- Columbus Metro Library programs
- College Mentor for Kids
- Breakfast of Science Champions
- STEM career days
- Brain Awareness Week
- COSI After Dark (adult only event)
- COSI Big Science Day
- Brain Bee
- Brain Injury 5k

A Neuroscience Competition for Teenagers



Council of Graduate Students (CGS)

The Council of Graduate Students is the governing body whose mission is to effectively advocate and program to ensure that the Ohio State University graduate student experience is the best it can be. CGS communicates and regularly works directly with the university administration to guarantee that graduate student voices are heard on important issues. CGS also appoints representatives to serve on both University and Senate committees. Delegates from each program/department are elected to represent their peers, to participate in monthly meetings of the council, and to serve on committees that carry out the work of the organization. All CGS committees are open to any interested graduate student!

CGS Internal Committees include: Academic Affairs; Arts & Culture; Career Development Grant; Equity, Inclusion, & Diversity; External Affairs; Hayes Forum; Global Gateway Grant; Government Affairs; Graduate Caucus; Graduate Student Affairs; Health, Wellness, & Safety; Housing & Family Affairs; Internal Affairs; International Student Affairs; Organization & Elections; Ray Travel Award; Strategic Communications; Sustainability & Environmental Responsibility

Frontiers in Neuroscience Committee

This committee convenes once a year in the fall to discuss and vote on which preeminent neuroscience researchers we would like to invite to speak the following year. Announcements will be made for opportunities to get involved with this committee.

Stipends and Fellowships

In your first year, you are going to be on either a fellowship from the graduate school or given a stipend from the NGP. Following your first year, your stipend will be covered by your lab's funds, **which is why it is so important to talk to your PI about the security of funding for your time in the lab.**

Managing your stipend may be difficult for some. [Financial Coaching Services](#) through the Student Wellness center can help you create a budget and figure out how to start saving for retirement.

If you are not on a fellowship, you will be asked to make a decision upon arrival whether or not to enroll in the Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS). For more information on OPERS, visit <https://hr.osu.edu/benefits/retirement/opers/>. **You have to make this decision in the first month of employment. To opt out, you have to submit a form to the HR office.** For those on a fellowship, you will not be eligible for OPERS until you are no longer supported by a fellowship.

Taxes

For those students who are on a fellowship, taxes can be a little tricky because you are not issued a W2. Be advised, although taxes are not deducted from your paycheck, your income is still taxable and you will be required to pay the appropriate taxes to the IRS and Ohio state government. You will receive

an email in the early spring detailing the exact amount that you have earned for the previous year and this is the number that you will use when preparing your taxes. If you find you are having trouble, contact Keri and she can put you in touch with a student who has previous experience with this same problem.

Automatic Paycheck Deductions

- If you are paying for parking or student health insurance, you can opt to get it docked from pay or pay in a lump sum.
- Activity fee
- COTA (Columbus Bus Service)
- Recreation Facility fee
- Taxes, and happen

Make sure to check your paycheck every month to ensure proper totals. Reach out to Keri if you have any issues.

**If you have any additional questions, please ask your NewN mentor or the NewN Chair!
Again, welcome and Go Buckeyes!**

NewN Checklist

There are quite a few things that you need to get in order before you move to Columbus and start graduate school. This checklist will help you get organized and assist in a smooth transition. For more information on any of these steps, head over to “The Neuroscience Graduate Student’s Real Guide to Surviving the First Year of Grad School.” Go Buckeyes!

After you commit, but before you move: subheadings for housing, paperwork, healthcare, etc.

- Read over “The Neuroscience Graduate Student’s Real Guide to Surviving the First Year of Grad School.” Keep this handy!
- Look for [housing](#) and find a roommate.
- Decide on your main method of transportation and associated [parking](#).
- Reach out to faculty members to set up rotations for the Fall and Spring semesters. Think about a budget for your stipend.
- Activate your [BuckeyePass](#) and [student email](#) account.
- Reach out to your NewN Mentor to introduce yourself and to ask specific questions about moving/rotations/stipend/Columbus/OSU.
- Submit official transcripts to the [Graduate and Professional Admissions](#) office.
- Sign up for [Student Health Insurance](#).
- Complete the Financial Responsibility Statement
 - Go to [Buckeye Link](#) → Student Center
 - Under HOLDS, click DETAILS
 - Click REGISTRATION LOCK and follow the instructions

After you move, but before you start:

- Confirm rotations with faculty members and find out more information about current projects.
- Explore Columbus! To start, check out the [Guide to Columbus](#) and this [link](#) on the NGP website.
- Locate the places where you intend to frequent (i.e. the grocery store, gym, classrooms, labs, libraries, etc.)
- Check in with your NewN mentor.
- If you are so inclined, gather information about volunteering with [N.E.U.R.O.](#) or participating in the [NGSO](#).
- Institute wellness activities/habits. You’ll thank yourself later!
- Put all the dates for the [Neuroscience Seminar Series](#) and the Frontiers in Neuroscience Seminar in your calendar (attendance is mandatory).
- Decide on [parking](#).
- Complete your Employment Checklist referenced in Keri’s email.

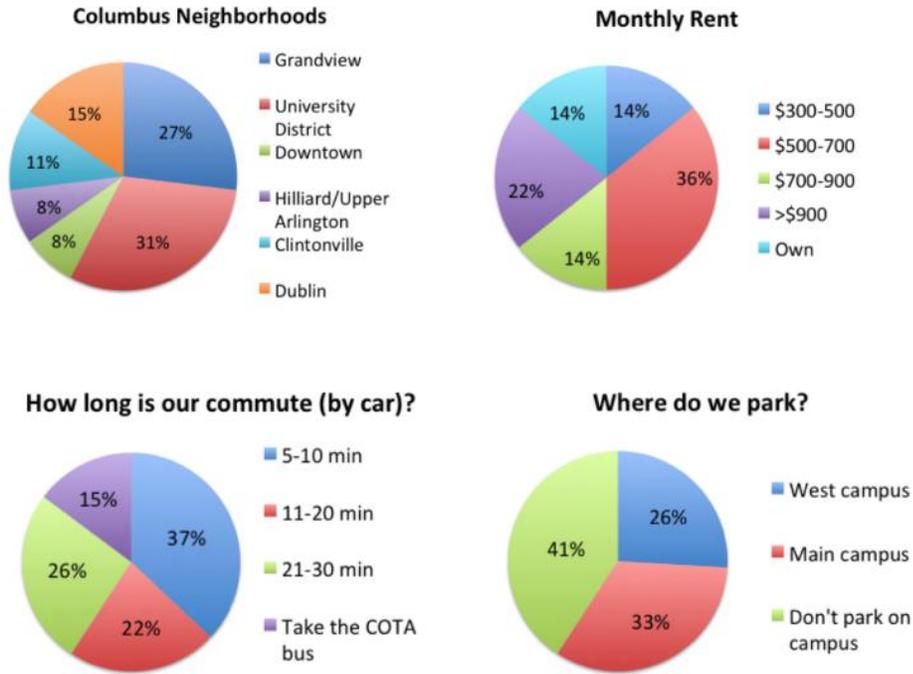
After you start, but before you finish your first year:

- Find a lab where you would like to stay for the remainder of graduate school.
- Talk with the PI of the lab in which you want to stay about funding and projects. This is imperative!
- Check in with your NewN mentor.
- Make sure to explore your new city!

Guide to Columbus

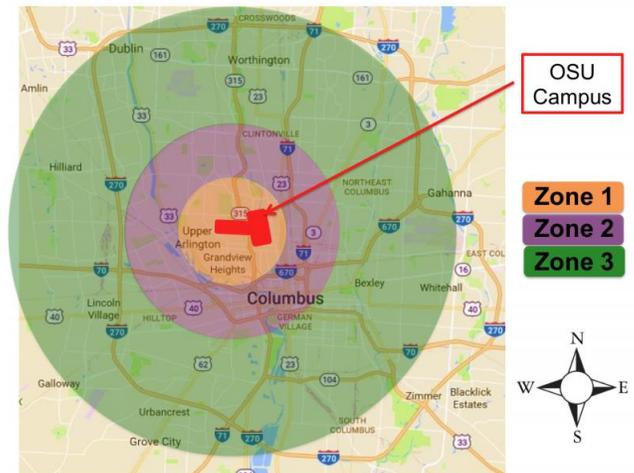
Housing

NGP students live all across Columbus and have varying lengths of commute. Here is a snapshot of NGP housing and transportation demographics:



Housing can be separated into 3 Zones based on distance to OSU:

- **Zone 1:** University District, Necko, Grandview (5-10 mins)
- **Zone 2:** Downtown, Upper Arlington, Clintonville, Harrison Park (10-15 mins)
- **Zone 3:** Dublin, Hilliard, Galloway (20+ mins)



Parking

Find out more about parking on campus from CampusParc.



Gateway Plaza
1560 N. High St.
Columbus, OH,
43201 614-688-000

Need a place to park on campus? Find out where from the CampusParc map.

Visitor and Guest Parking: Visitors and guests can pay for parking in either the many garages located around the Academic Core and the Wexner Medical Center, or by paying for surface lot parking typically located in less dense areas of campus.

You may be eligible for an upgrade to a B (staff) parking permit through CampusParc. Contact CampusPark for more information.

Getting Around

- Campus Area Bus Service (CABS), a free transit service provided by OSU. Use real-time tracking to see where your bus is either online or on the OSU mobile app! Schedules and maps can be found here.
- Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA), [COTA](#) goes all around Columbus! You can find all the routes on your phone too! See “Useful Apps”
- If you have a bike, don’t worry! Bikes can be secured to the front of the bus. For more info, head on over to their website. Part of your student fees goes toward COTA, so make sure to carry your BuckID with you to catch a free ride!
- CoGo Bike Share: Located around Columbus, rent a bike and explore! Find a [bike station](#).
- And there’s always those scooters...



Things to do

Arts and Culture

Columbus has a thriving dance and theater scene. Tickets for these and other shows in the Columbus area can be purchased online and also can sometimes be obtained at a discount through the D-Tix program at Ohio State. Tickets are allocated through a lottery system. More information can be found [here](#). Check out these links to learn more:

- [Ballet Met](#)
- [Opera Columbus](#)
- [Columbus Jazz Orchestra](#)
- [Columbus Symphony Orchestra](#)

Museums and Centers

- [The Columbus Museum of Art](#)
- [The Ohio History Center](#)
- [The Center of Science and Industry](#)
- [The Columbus Zoo & Aquarium](#)

National, State, and Metro Parks

- [Cuyahoga Valley](#) National Park
- List of [State Parks](#)
- List of [Metro Parks](#)

Music Venues

- [The Newport Music Hall](#)
- [The A&R Music Bar](#)
- [Skully's Music Bar](#)
- [Ohio Theatre](#)
- [Shadowbox Live](#)



Food/Nightlife

- Known as the art and soul of Columbus, the culturally rich [Short North Arts District](#) is a pioneer in the urban revitalization of Central Ohio. Explore its vibrant neighborhood known for its wide variety of amazing art, dining, nightlife, fashion, home décor, and unique gift.
- The [Arena District](#) is one of downtown Columbus's most popular neighborhoods featuring sports, entertainment, food and drink.
- The [German Village Business Community](#) is a collection of independent businesses sharing resources and working together to promote the historic business community of German Village.
- Columbus also has a ton of great breweries, so if you're a beer lover, be sure to check those out! You can find a pretty comprehensive list [here](#).

Libraries

- Columbus has a great city library system that can be accessed [here](#).
- A list of multiple libraries on campus that are open to students that can be accessed [here](#) under “Locations & Hours.”

Sporting Events

- Nationwide Arena: Home of the [Columbus Blue Jackets](#) hockey team, Nationwide Arena is located in the arena district. The arena hosts plenty of non-hockey events throughout the year as well. Click [here](#) for more info.
- Columbus Clippers Stadium: This is the home stadium for the [Columbus Clippers](#), Columbus’s minor league baseball team.

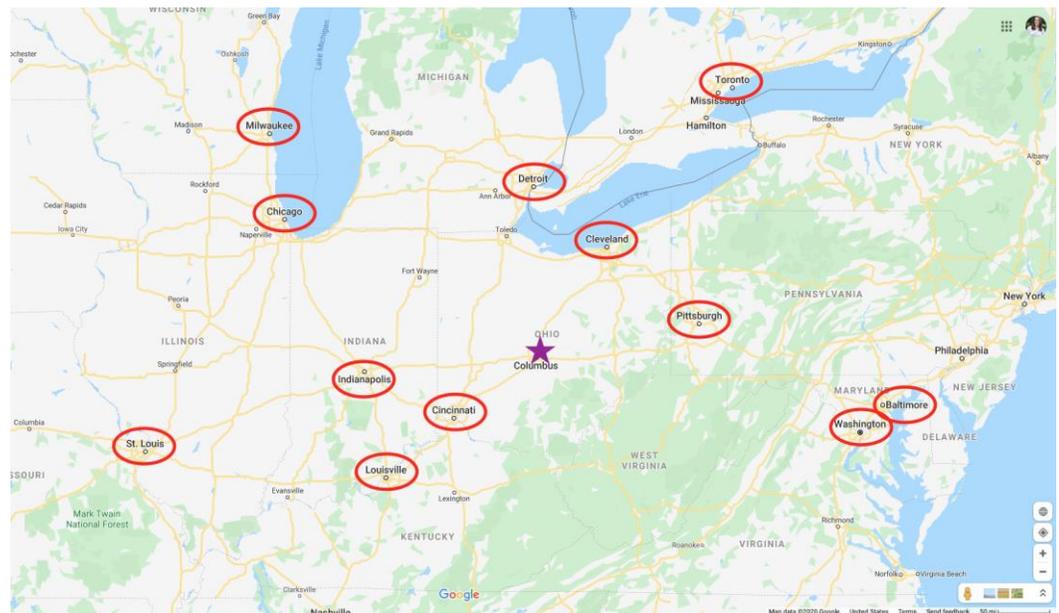


- MAPFRE Stadium: This is the home stadium for the [Columbus Crew](#), Columbus’s professional soccer team. In addition to soccer matches, the stadium frequently hosts other events throughout the year. Click [here](#) for more info.

- Tickets for these and other events in the Columbus area can be purchased online and also can sometimes be obtained at a discount through the D-Tix program at Ohio State. Tickets are allocated through a lottery system. More information can be found [here](#).

Proximity to other cities

- 2 hours to Cincinnati, OH
- 2.5 hours to Cleveland, OH
- 3 hours to Pittsburgh, PA
- 3 hours to Indianapolis, IN
- 3.5 hours to Detroit, MI
- 3.5 hours to Louisville, KY
- 5.5 hours to Chicago, IL
- 6.5 hours to St. Louis, MO
- 7 hours to Washington, D.C.
- 7 hours to Baltimore, MD
- 7 hours to Milwaukee, WI
- 7 hours to Toronto, Ontario



Helpful Apps

There are a number of apps to help your transition to Ohio State.

- Ohio State has put out a list of apps associated with Ohio State that is available [here](#). The Ohio State app has information about Ohio State bus (CABS) lines, stops, and wait times.
- For people using the bus, the [Transit](#) app has real-time tracking for any COTA line in town (available for either iPhone or Android phones).