

American Cell/Mobile Phone Service Providers Guide



The Providers

[T-Mobile \(GSM\)](#)

[AT&T Wireless \(GSM\)](#)

[Metro PCS](#)

[Verizon](#)

[Sprint PCS](#)

Important Note on American cell/mobile phones:

When a provider speaks of minutes available when you purchase a plan or a pre-paid card, they mean INCOMING AND OUTGOING calls combined! Therefore, you will need to factor in how much time you spend on the phone overall when you are considering the minutes allowed on a plan.

Service Options:

There are essentially 3 options you have when choosing a mobile phone provider. They are categorized below:

- **Month to Month Services (No Contract)**
- **2 year Contract Plans**
- **Pre-Paid Cards**

1) Month-to-Month Services (Metro PCS, T-Mobile, AT&T)

Overview: Month- to-month plans are an excellent option for all students who plan on staying in the US for a semester or longer. No contracts are required and you pay your bill on a monthly basis. They require the purchase of a phone at regular price, or you can use a phone from overseas if it is GSM, tri or quad-band, and unlocked (only with T-Mobile or AT&T). A major credit card is usually required for these plans. The best month to month plans are listed below:

[Metro PCS](#)

Benefits: NO contract, unlimited talk time for a flat monthly rate (between \$40 to \$60 depending on features), unlimited international calling plans available, no activation fee

Drawbacks: No GSM available, must purchase a Metro PCS device (starting at \$30)

[T-Mobile](#)

Benefits: NO contract, GSM phone compatible, unlimited talk plans available at a flat monthly rate (starting at \$50), optional discounted international calling for \$5 extra

Drawbacks: \$35 activation fee

[AT&T GoPhone Pick You Plan](#)

Benefits: NO contract, GSM phone compatible, rollover minutes (unused minutes carry over), no activation fee, phones are cheap and many models offered, unlimited talk plans start at \$50.

Drawbacks: \$36 activation fee, \$18 service upgrade fee

2) Contract Plans (AT&T, Verizon, T-Mobile, Sprint PCS)

Overview: This option is only recommended for students planning on staying in the US for at least two years.

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Benefits: Get a phone for free or at a discounted price, low up-front cost, good service coverage area, smart phones available (e.g. iphones), more features offered-e.g. internet, video messaging, etc.

Drawbacks: 2 year contract required, must pay monthly fee for the entire term of the contract, or pay a fee (usually \$150 or more) to quite the contract early, high overage charges if you go over allotted minutes with certain providers.

3)Pre-Paid Card Service(AT&T GoPhone, T-Mobile Prepaid, Verizon Prepaid, Boost Mobile)

Overview: This option is not recommended since the rates per minute are extremely high. If you want to use your GSM phone from home while in the US, remember you can just as easily go with the month-to-month or contract plans from AT&T or T-Mobile. Students often buy a pre-paid number immediately upon their arrival since they are easy to purchase. However, they almost always end up switching to a month-to-month or contract plan.

Benefits: NO Contract, easy to purchase. Good option for someone who rarely uses their cell phone.

Drawbacks: Very expensive per minute rates, no incoming or outgoing calls when minutes run out, limited features.

How to Choose?

International students often start out by purchasing pre-paid cards because they can use their international GSM phone. However, they soon discover that they could still use their GSM phone with the month-to-month or contract plans from AT&T or T-Mobile. Recharging cards becomes quite expensive if you spend a normal amount of time on the phone. Avoid pre-paid card plans if you plan to use your phone for more than a few hours per month.

For most students, Month-to-Month plans are the best option. Because they require no contract, they are easy to get the day you arrive, usually only requiring a credit card. Two-year contracts are also a good option for F1 students who may want to purchase a smart phone.

If you will be using a smart phone (iphone, android, blackberry, etc.) you will also need to purchase a data plan in addition to your regular plan. Be mindful of the extra costs involved when using a smartphone.

Regarding which provider to choose, we recommend that you do your own research. T-Mobile and Metro PCS are cheap, but their network coverage is a little weaker. Verizon, Metro PCS and Sprint don't offer GSM. AT&T and T-Mobile offer GSM but AT&T is a little more expensive. Some require activation fees, some don't. Some offer cheaper phones than others and this will be important when determining the cost of your plan. Mobile phone vendors will also be present at the first day of the orientation if you have more questions.