

Pre- and Post-Arrival Information Guide

Welcome to American University (AU)!

This packet contains pre-arrival information compiled by International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) office to assist you with your move to AU. Additional logistical and immigration information is available on our website at: <http://www.american.edu/ocl/iss/index.cfm>

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I. OVERVIEW

a) AU J-1 Exchange Visitor Categories

AU is authorized by the U.S. Department of State to bring J-1 Exchange Visitors in the following categories: Professor, Research Scholar, Short-term Scholar, Specialist, Students and Student Intern. The following rules governing these categories should be given consideration prior to participation:

Professor & Research Scholar: Minimum of BA/BS degree with appropriate experience in the field is required. The 12 month bar applies. Participants in the J-1 Research Scholar or Professor categories are subject to a 24 month bar on repeat participation in either category, regardless of the length of time spent in J-1 status. Minimum duration is 3 weeks, maximum is 5 years.

Short Term Scholar: A professor, research scholar or someone with similar education. Minimum duration is 1 day, maximum is 6 months.

Specialist: Except for professor, research scholar, short term scholar and physicians. Minimum duration is 3 weeks, maximum is 1 year.

Student: For full course of study at an accredited institution. Duration of stay is limited to the length of the program.

Student Intern: University/college students at foreign universities to intern with an AU faculty in residence.

b) Limitations of J-1 Visa Categories

1. 12-month bar on beginning new program as Professor or Research Scholar

An alien is not eligible to begin an exchange visitor program as a Professor or Research Scholar based on a DS-2019 issued to begin a new program if he or she was physically present in any J status, including J2 status, for all or part of the twelve month period immediately preceding the date of program commencement set forth on his or her Form DS-2019, except:

(A) J-1 Transfers: The 12-month bar is not applicable to those who will begin a program by transferring to a new program sponsor.

(B) Presence in J status of less than 6 months: An alien whose prior physical presence in J status was of less than six months duration is exempt from the 12-month bar.

(C) Presence in J status as a Short Term Scholar: No time spent as a Short Term Scholar under 22.C.F.R. 62.21 is counted as physical presence that triggers the bar.

2. 2-year bar on repeat participation as a Professor or Research Scholar

Exchange participants who have entered the United States under the Exchange Visitor Program as a professor or Research Scholar, or who have acquired such status while in the United States, and who have completed his or her program are not eligible for participation as a professor or research scholar for a period of two years following the end date of such program participation as identified in SEVIS.

3. Two-year Home Country Physical Presence Requirement

Individuals in J-1 and J-2 status will be subject to the two-year home residence requirement [also known as 212(e)] if any of the following apply:

- Participation in the exchange program is financed, directly or indirectly, by the U.S. government or a foreign government;
- The skills the Exchange Visitor is coming to develop or exercise are in a field, which the Exchange Visitor's home government requested be included on the State Department's skills list (skills in short supply in the home country); the list is available online at <http://exchanges.state.gov> .
- The Exchange Visitor comes to the United States to receive graduate medical education or training.

Those, who are subject to this, must return to the home country for two years before they are eligible for the more permanent visa categories (H-1B temporary worker, L-1 intra-company transfer, and Legal Permanent Resident status). It also prohibits subject individuals from requesting a change in immigration status from within the United States. At the time of the visa interview, the Consular Officer will indicate whether or not a prospective J-1 or J-2 is subject to this requirement, both on the DS-2019 Form and on the visa stamp.

More details on 212 (e) and application for waiver can be found at the link below:
<http://www.american.edu/ocl/iss/J-1-Two-Year-Home-Residency-Requirement.cfm>

II. PRE-ARRIVAL

After receiving the DS-2019 Form, you will need to pay a one-time fee required by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to fund the operation of the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). This fee is assessed in addition to the visa application fee. The SEVIS fee should be paid directly to DHS at least 3 business days prior to your visa interview. J-2 dependents are not subject to the SEVIS fee.

a) SEVIS FEE

To pay the SEVIS fee:

- (a) Visit www.fmjfee.com and complete Form I-901 (be sure to write your name exactly as it appears on your DS-2019 Form) and either:
- (b) Submit with your payment electronically via credit card (Visa, MasterCard or American Express)
OR
- (c) Mail the I-901 to the DHS address on the form along with the SEVIS fee paid by check, money order, or foreign draft drawn on a financial institution in the United States and payable in U.S. dollars.

We recommend paying online and printing your receipt for inclusion with your visa application. Please note that another person may make the payment on your behalf. It is recommended that you carry the payment receipt with your DS-2019 Form to show to the immigration officials at the port of entry, as well.

Tips for Completing Form I-901: Your SEVIS Identification Number can be found at the top right corner of your DS-2019 Form. It starts with an “N,” which is followed by a 10 digit number. The Program Number can be found in Box 2 (P-1-00835).

b) VISA APPLICATION

Following payment of the SEVIS fee, you will need to schedule an appointment at the U.S. Consulate for a visa interview. You must provide the following documents to the U.S. Consulate: the DS-2019 Form (student interns must also bring the DS-7002), the SEVIS fee payment receipt, your passport, and any correspondence received from AU regarding your stay. If you will not be financially supported by AU **or** if AU is only providing a portion of your financial support, you must be prepared to show the Visa Officer at the U.S. Consulate proof of your financial support in the form of original documents. If your family members will be traveling with you, they should apply for their J-2 visas at the same time. If AU has not already issued separate DS-2019 Forms for them, please notify your contact in the AU Dean’s Office as soon as possible as your dependents must have their own DS-2019 Forms. Please contact the U.S. Consulate nearest to you for information regarding the application procedures and fees for that post (<http://usembassy.state.gov/>).

Intent to Return: You will not be given a J-1 visa unless you can demonstrate to the U.S. Consular Officer that you intend to return to your country of citizenship or legal permanent residence after you have completed your J-1 program. Any statements made during the visa interview with the American Consul,

which cast doubt on your intentions of returning home may result in the denial of the visa. Although some consulates permit applications from third party nationals, it may be difficult to prove your non-immigrant intent, if you do not apply for a visa in your home country.

c) TRAVEL TO THE UNITED STATES

You may enter the United States up to 30 days prior to the start date on your DS-2019 Form. At the U.S. port of entry, you will be asked to present your DS-2019 Form, passport, and visa to the U.S. Immigration Inspector. You will be given a small white card called an I-94 card, which will usually be stapled into your passport. Be sure to examine this card before leaving the Immigration Inspector's desk to verify that it has been marked "J-1" and "D/S." These markings indicate that you have entered in J-1 immigration status (or J-2 immigration status for your accompanying dependents) for the duration of your status. In addition to your immigration-related documents, we also advise that you may want to bring *certified copies* of the following documents:

- Birth certificates for yourself and each member of your family.
- Marriage certificate, if you are married.
- Copies of diplomas and/or professional licenses with English translations.
- Copies of vaccination records for yourself and your family, especially for any children who will attend school.
- Another form of identification other than the passport.

d) HEALTH INSURANCE REQUIREMENT:

As an exchange visitor on a J-1 visa, you (and your dependents) are required to have health insurance during the programs. Health insurance coverage must meet the State Department's J-1 visa requirements. Failure to maintain health insurance will prevent the issuance of any documents for travel, extensions or transfer of your J-1 status. Please visit ISSS web at the link below for a list of insurance companies: <http://www.american.edu/ocl/iss/J-1-Health-Insurance-Compliance.cfm>

e) BANKING & LIVING EXPENSES

Living Expenses: Washington, D.C. is one of the most expensive areas in the United States. Therefore, you are required to demonstrate monthly finances of at least \$1600 to support yourself PLUS an additional \$458 for your spouse AND \$350 for each additional dependent. Please note that these figures represent the bare minimum of funding needed to support yourself during your stay and do not allow for any luxuries.

If you do not yet have a U.S. bank account, you will need at least \$2,000 in traveler's checks and \$200 in cash upon arrival. This money will cover initial expenses such as taxi or bus fares, meals, overnight lodging, supplies, initial rent and security deposits and health insurance payments. Traveler's checks are immediately negotiable. International bank drafts are acceptable, but funds may take longer to become available. We strongly advise against carrying large amounts of cash. Foreign currency can be exchanged immediately at any of the airports in the Washington area and at most large banks. Banks in the area charge service fees for cashing foreign checks.

Bank Accounts: We recommend you open a bank account as soon as you arrive. Using an international bank will facilitate the wiring of money. Service charges and interest rates vary. Foreign checks may require 4-6 weeks before funds become available at a U.S. bank. Traveler's checks are the best way to make initial deposits. Two pieces of identification are generally required to open an account. There is a branch of Chevy Chase bank on AU campus and plenty of other banks within a walking distance to the university.

Wiring Money from Overseas: After opening a bank account in the United States, you may transfer funds to your U.S. bank account from foreign banking institutions. Wire transfers may take up to 48 hours and require a fee. Please speak with a bank representative for more detailed instructions on wiring money from overseas.

f) **HOUSING**

Temporary Housing: If you will need temporary housing upon your arrival, please see the links below.
<http://www1.american.edu/tour/visiting.html>

<http://www.american.edu/ocl/housing/upload/Eligibility-Rates-Payment-and-Registration.pdf>

Long-Term Housing: Due to space limitations, AU does not offer on-campus housing for scholars. We recommend that you DO NOT enter into a contract with any landlord for housing before arriving and viewing the property. However, it is helpful to begin to think about your budget and research properties before you arrive. The University maintains an Off-Campus Housing listing that may aid scholars in their search for housing. Please visit the link below for a listing of housing resources.
<http://www.american.edu/ocl/iss/Housing.cfm>

g) **TRANSPORTATION AND ARRIVAL**

We suggest that you plan to arrive in Washington during U.S. business hours, 9:00 am-5:00 pm, Monday through Friday, when most University offices and area businesses are open. Detailed information about Washington, D.C. transportation options and additional arrival information is available on our website:
<http://www.american.edu/ocl/iss/Transportation.cfm>

h) **RESOURCE GUIDE FOR FAMILIES**

There is a resource guide (in Quick Links to the right) on ISSS web site at the link below, which is compiled to help with your transition from your home country to the U.S. You are an important part of our community and we want you to feel as comfortable as possible here in the Washington, DC, area. If you have any questions or updates to this guide, please let us know as your input is invaluable. We hope to meet each one of you and encourage you to stop by our office for a cup of tea or coffee. We look forward to meeting you soon and wish you a safe journey!
<http://www.american.edu/ocl/iss/family-guide.cfm>

POST-ARRIVAL

a) HOST DEPARTMENT ORIENTATION

As a compliance requirement toward the US Department of State (DOS), please follow the steps below:

1. The J1 coordinator in the host department must bring the exchange visitor with the following documents to ISSS for clearance upon arrival in the US:
 - a. The processed DS- 2019 form with stamps.
 - b. Passport with J-1 visa
 - c. I-94 card
 - d. Proof of health insurance
 - e. Valid US address
 - f. AU portal log-in: User ID and password

Failure to do so may jeopardize the exchange visitor's immigration status.

2. The host department is required by the DOS to provide orientation to the Exchange Visitor in the following areas:
 - a. Library
 - b. Technology
 - c. Cultural adjustment
 - d. Other University Resources
3. The host department must submit program extension requests to ISSS **one month prior** to the current DS-2019 end date.
4. The host department must notify ISSS immediately if the exchange visitor or any of the dependents leave the US permanently before the program end date listed on the DS-2019.

b) ISSS ORIENTATION

1. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS FOR EXCHANGE VISITORS

ISSS must confirm your arrival with Immigration within 30 days of the start date of your DS-2019 in order for you to remain legally in the United States. If your J-1 program is shorter than 30 days, we must confirm your arrival immediately after you report to our office.

For the duration of your J-1 program at American University please keep in mind the following important information:

IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS:

You are required to provide ISSS with a copy of your renewed passport and visas. The same requirement also applies to the accompanying J2 dependents.

TRAVEL:

Before traveling outside the U.S. you will need a travel signature from ISSS on your DS-2019. Failure to do so may jeopardize your ability to re-enter the United States.

VISA RENEWAL:

If your J-1 visa expires you will be responsible for getting the appropriate documents to apply for a new visa to re-enter the U.S. the next time you travel overseas.

HEALTH INSURANCE REQUIREMENT:

As an exchange visitor on a J-1 visa, you (and your dependents) are required to have health insurance during your programs. Health insurance coverage must meet the US State Department's J-1 visa requirements.

ADDRESS CHANGES:

Any change in US address must be reported to ISSS within 10 days through the my.american.edu International Student/Scholar Profile in order to maintain your J-1 status.

EXTENSION OF DS-2019:

You must have a valid DS-2019 while in J1 status at American University. Please contact your host department J1 coordinator with extension request at least 4 weeks prior to the DS2019 expiration date.

2. RESTRICTIONS/OBLIGATIONS OF J-1 STATUS

By entering the country in J-1 visa status, you accept the responsibility of meeting the terms and conditions stated on the DS-2019 Form. You will be admitted into the United States for the sole purpose stated in section 4 of the DS-2019. Please notify ISSS if any change of the following occurs:

- source of your funding
- nature of your work
- end date of your work
- sponsoring institution

Failure to notify ISSS of any of these changes may jeopardize your immigration status.

An alien is not eligible to begin an exchange visitor program as a Professor or Research Scholar based on a DS-2019 issued to begin a new program if he or she was physically present in any J status, including J-2 status, for all or part of the twelve month period immediately preceding the date of program commencement set forth on his or her Form DS-2019. Exception: A J-1 Exchange Visitor's presence was less than 6 months, or was short term scholar, in which case no time spent as a short term scholar is counted as physical presence that triggers the bar.

3. MANDATORY HEALTH INSURANCE

U.S. Federal regulations require Exchange Visitors to obtain health insurance for themselves and any J-2 dependents for the entire length of stay in the United States. AU requires all scholars to provide proof of insurance coverage upon arrival in the United States. Please be sure to include the costs of this insurance in all financial calculations. The requirements are:

- You and any dependents in J-2 status must have health insurance for the entire period of stay.
- The minimum requirement for coverage is at least \$50,000 per accident or illness.
- Insurance coverage for medical evacuation is required with a \$10,000 minimum. This is used in the unlikely event that you or a family member must return to your home country for medical treatment.
- Insurance coverage for repatriation of remains is required with a \$7,500 minimum. This is used in the event that you or a family member should die in the United States and the remains must be returned to your home country.
- The maximum deductible on the health insurance may not exceed \$500 per accident or illness.

An acceptable insurance policy may require a reasonable waiting period for pre-existing conditions. It may also include provisions for co-insurance payments of up to 25%. It may not unreasonably exclude coverage for perils inherent to the activities of the exchange program. Any insurance policy must be underwritten by an insurance corporation having an A. M. Best rating of "A-" or above, an Insurance Solvency International Ltd. rating of "A-1" or above, a Standard & Poor's Claims-Paying Ability Rating of "A-" or above, or a Weiss Research Inc. rating of "B+" or above. Insurance backed by the full faith and credit of the Exchange Visitor's home government, insurance that is part of a group health benefits program offered to employees or enrolled students by the University, and insurance that is underwritten by a federally qualified HMO or CMP do not require a rating.

You may use insurance coverage from your home country if it meets these criteria. If you use insurance from your home country:

- The insurance company must have a U.S. contact and telephone number.
- You should have written documentation in English for the dates of coverage and the benefits covered, including the amount covered per day for hospitalization as well as proof of coverage in U.S. dollars. This information may be especially important if you are hospitalized. Please make sure that any coverage you choose meets the requirements outlined above. You may also wish to verify that the insurance policy covers the birth of children in the United States. Note: If you will not be paid by AU and you or your spouse is pregnant, you are advised to purchase health insurance in your home country. Most insurance companies in the United States consider pregnancy a pre-existing condition and will not cover the related expenses if you or your spouse is pregnant upon arrival in the United States. If you choose to purchase insurance after your arrival at AU, information on insurance plans is available on ISSS web site and the purchase may be initiated when you report to ISSS upon arrival. Since insurance obtained in the United States after your arrival may not cover you right away, it is recommended that you obtain sufficient travel insurance to cover you during your first month at AU. Medical expenses in the United States can be extremely costly.

Please note: if you are paid by AU, you may be eligible to participate in one of the insurance plans offered by the University for its employees. Please discuss this option with your Dean's office during the process of obtaining a DS2019.

Failure to maintain health insurance will prevent the issuance of any documents for travel, extensions, or transfer of your J-1 status. Please visit ISSS web at the link below for a list of insurance companies:

<http://www.american.edu/ocl/iss/J-1-Health-Insurance-Compliance.cfm>

4. WORK REGULATIONS

All scholars in J-1 visa status sponsored by AU must understand and abide by the laws governing this particular nonimmigrant status. Please call (202) 885-3350 to make an appointment to speak with an ISSS Advisor or submit your query via email to iss@american.edu any time employment opportunities arise. In order to maintain your legal status in the United States, it is important to consult an expert on all matters of payment, reimbursement, and employment. The information listed below is only a general guide.

Non-immigrants holding a DS-2019 Form that was issued by AU may teach or do research only in the field or area listed in box 4 of the DS-2019 and only for AU. Any payment received from AU that is in an unrelated field would be considered unauthorized employment. Any payment received from an outside entity (even if the work is performed on the AU campus) is unauthorized employment unless you are granted specific, written permission from an ISSS Advisor (see below). It is the responsibility of all non-immigrants in the United States to know and follow immigration regulations related to employment. The responsibility of accepting any type of employment that does not meet regulatory requirements, even if offered by an AU department or faculty member, will fall solely on the J-1 visiting scholar.

According to the regulations governing the J-1 visa status, Professors and Research Scholars may participate in occasional lectures and short term consultations outside of AU if allowed by the Responsible Officer of the J-1 program at AU. More details on this type of authorization may be found at:

<http://www.american.edu/ocl/iss/J1scholars/employment>

5. TAXES

U.S. tax laws require that approximately 30% of the U.S.-based income of a foreign national be withheld in the form of taxes. You may, however, reduce this tax burden by taking advantage of certain tax benefits to which your J-1 status may entitle you.

Tax Treaties: The United States has negotiated income tax treaties with some countries which may exempt you from paying U.S. income tax altogether. Your eligibility for tax treaty benefits will depend upon the following factors:

1. The existence of a tax treaty with your country;
2. Your activity in the United States;
3. The length of time you may have already been in the United States, if any.

Social Security Taxes: Generally, J-1 status holders are exempt from paying U.S. Social Security taxes for two calendar years. Please be sure to note that these are calendar years, not years counted from the date of arrival. For example, a scholar who arrived on December 30, 2010 was exempt from Social Security taxes in 2010 and 2011, even though s/he was only in the United States for two days in 2010.

All J-1 scholars will be required to complete at least one tax form by April of the next year, whether or not they have received U.S. source income. Visit ISSS website in mid February for details and access to free tax software.

6. SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBERS

In order to work in the United States, you must apply for a Social Security Number (SSN). All individuals in J-1 status are eligible to apply for a Social Security Number even if they are not currently employed in the United States. This number serves as your unique taxpayer identification number. Please wait until 10 days have passed since your arrival in the United States to apply for a Social Security Number to ensure timely processing of your application. To obtain a Social Security Number, you must:

1. Submit an application to the Social Security Administration (SSA) in person. Copies of the related application form (SS-5) are available at the Social Security Administration and online (<http://www.ssa.gov/online/ss-5.pdf>). In Question 3 (“Citizenship”), please mark that you are a “Legal Alien Allowed to Work.”

2. Bring your passport, I-94 card, DS-2019 Form and job offer letter (if applicable).

Please note: The Social Security Administration will not issue a Social Security Number if the passport is less than one year old. If you have a new passport, you must also bring a second source of identification (identification card issued in your home country, old passport, etc).

Processing Time: The Social Security Administration may take two weeks to three months to process the application. The Social Security card will be sent to the address written on your application form. After accepting your application, the Social Security Administration should give you a receipt notice.

Social Security Numbers for Family Members: J-2 dependents are eligible for employment in the United States. A J-2 dependent who intends to seek employment in the United States must first apply for work permission from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). After receiving the work permit, s/he can then apply for a Social Security Number. The J-2 dependent is not eligible for a Social Security Number until s/he has received the work permit.

SSA Office Locations: The Social Security Administration office closest to AU is located at: 2100 M St. NW, Washington, D.C. and is open 9:00 am – 4:00 pm. While the M Street office is the closest to AU, there are other Social Security Administration offices that may be more convenient for you. More local Social Security Administration office addresses are available on the Social Security Administration website: www.socialsecurity.gov.