Welcome to Mercer University!

As a newcomer to the community, there are many things to learn about Mercer University, your department, the State of Georgia, and U.S. culture. As a J-1 exchange visitor, you are also responsible for knowing and complying with the J-1 immigration regulations administered by the U.S. Department of State (DOS). It is important for you to understand the immigration regulations especially because the DOS does not consider ignorance of the law a legitimate reason for failing to obey it. This handout is designed to assist you with your awareness of and compliance with the rules that regulate the immigration status of J-1 and J-2 visa holders. In addition to this document, you can also consult the Department of State’s website for J-1 visa holders for up-to-date information on regulations and rights at http://j1visa.state.gov/.

(I) Know your Program Contacts & Responsible Officer and Alternate Responsible Officer (ARO)

Each sponsoring agency of the J-visa program has a Responsible Officer (RO) and one or more Alternate Responsible Officer(s) (ARO). These officers are thoroughly familiar with the J-1 regulations and can therefore assist you with traveling outside the United States, employment authorizations, extension of stay, etc. At Mercer, your RO and AROs are located on the Mercer University campus in Atlanta and Macon.

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(478) 301-2582
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(II) Know your Immigration Documents

Passport
Exchange visitors must maintain the validity of their passports at all times. If your passport will expire before the end of the period of your stay, it is your responsibility to contact your Consulate or Embassy to have the passport extended or renewed.

You can find contact information for your nearest home country Consulate and/or Embassy in the U.S. at this address: http://travel.state.gov.

Visa
The visa is a document that grants you permission to apply for admission to the United States for a specific purpose and a specific period of time. Because the visa is only important for entry or re-entry to the U.S., the visa may expire while the exchange visitor is in the U.S. You must always have a valid visa in order to reenter the country.

Form I-94 (Arrival/Departure Record)
The I-94 Form is now an electronic form. To print your I-94 you will visit the following site: https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov. The I-94 website provides you with the most recent I-94 admission record and limited travel history. The most recent I-94 admission record can be printed and used as evidence of a lawful admission. The website will provide arrival and departure date information for a passport number for the past five years. Travel history will only be provided for the passport number entered for the search.

The form I-94 is the document that proves that you have been admitted to the U.S. legally. Your “Admission Number” is an eleven-digit number. The Department of Homeland Security uses this as an identifying number to track your arrival to and departure from the U.S. Your online record should show that you were admitted in J-1 status and for D/S (which stands for duration of status). This means that you are admitted for the length of your program of study plus a 30-day grace period for travel.
This is the certificate of eligibility for J-1 exchange visitors. The DS-2019 is examined and then returned to the scholar at the port of entry. Please refer to Item #3 of the DS-2019 for the end date of your program. If you plan on staying past this date, you are responsible for applying for an extension with the A/RO of your program. The DS-2019 provides pertinent information about the Exchange Visitor Program on the second page. The exchange visitor should read and adhere to that information. The Consular or Immigration officer will indicate on the front of the form (lower left) if you are subject to the two-year home residency requirement.

(III) Address Updates

You are required to update your address within ten days of moving. Please fill out a change of address form and fax it to your A/RO (478)301-5341 or email it as soon as possible.

- Your address must be a physical address (not a post office box); AND
- Your address must be a residence (not your office address)
- You may retrieve a change of address form from your A/RO

(IV) Time Limits for J-Categories

- **Professor and Research Scholar** has a maximum stay of 5 years
- **Short-term Scholar** has a maximum stay of six months
- **Non-degree student** has a maximum stay of two years

Two year bar on repeat participation. On November 17, 2006, a bar or repeat participation in the J Professor or Research Scholar category was implemented. The two-year bar goes into effect in these two circumstances:

- If the exchange visitor completes a full five years of program participation with one or more sponsors;
- OR
- If the exchange visitor completes a particular exchange visitor program, and the SEVIS record becomes “Inactive” before the full five-year period is over. In this case, the five-year window is “closed,” the individual is not eligible to access the remaining unused time, and the individual must wait for two years before beginning a new program in the same category as a J Professor or Research Scholar.

(V) Extension of Stay

An Exchange Visitor is eligible to apply for an extension of stay if:

- S/he is working toward the objective shown on the most recent Form DS-2019;
- S/he has and is maintaining status as a J-1 Exchange Visitor;
- S/he can demonstrate adequate funding for the period of the proposed extension
- She/he will purchase health insurance that meets U.S. Department of State standards; AND
- His/her extension will not carry him/her beyond **five years** in status as a J-1 Visiting Professor or Research Scholar.

**Procedures:** Approximately one month before your stay expires, contact your academic department about an extension. The department will request an extension of stay from the A/RO in the Office of International Programs.
(VI) Bringing Dependents

If the exchange visitor would like to bring his/her spouse or children (under the age of 21) to the United States, please ask your academic department to file a dependent request with the A/RO.

(VII) J-2 Employment Information

J-2 dependents may apply to the Department of Homeland Security for permission to accept employment, provided the income is not needed for the support of the J-1 scholar.

All the necessary forms to apply for work authorization are available in the Office of International Programs. Please contact the A/RO for further information.

(VIII) Incidental Employment for J-1 Visiting Professors and Research Scholars

To work for any employer other than the school named on your Form DS-2019, you must first obtain approval in writing from your J-1 (Alternate) Responsible Officer. The A/RO must evaluate the proposed employment in terms of your program objectives and your individual circumstances, and then decide whether it would be appropriate employment in terms of your original program objectives.

Conditions

The proposed employment:
- Must be directly related to the objectives of your Exchange Visitor program;
- Must be incidental to your primary program activities; AND
- Must not delay the completion of your Exchange Visitor program

Procedures

To obtain A/RO approval for incidental employment, present the following to the A/RO:
- A letter of offer from the prospective employer describing the terms and conditions of the proposed employment, including:
  o the duration,
  o the number of hours,
  o the field or subject,
  o the amount of compensation, and
  o a description of the activity for which you are being hired.
- A letter from your department head or supervisor which MUST
  o Refer to the letter from the prospective employer
  o Confirm that the employment is directly related to your principal activity, is indeed incidental, and will not interfere with or delay the completion of your current program
  o Explain how the proposed activity would enhance your Exchange Visitor program
  o Recommend approval of the employment

If your J-1 (Alternate) Responsible Officer approves, he or she will authorize the employment in writing.
(IX) Health Insurance Requirement for Exchange Visitors

Basic Requirements
Here are the following requirements determined by the Department of State for the type and amounts of coverage you must carry if you hold J-1 or J-2 status:
- Medical benefits of at least $100,000 per accident or illness;
- Repatriation of remains in the amount of $25,000
- Expenses associated with the medical evacuation of the exchange visitor to his/her home country in the amount of $50,000; AND
- A deductible not to exceed $500 per accident or illness

The insurance policy must be underwritten by an insurance corporation having:
- An A.M. Best rating of “A-“ or above;
- An Insurance Solvency International, Ltd. (ISI) rating “A-“ or above;
- A Standard & Poor’s Claims-Paying Ability of “A-“ or above;
- A Weiss Research, Inc. rating of “B+” or above;
- Or such other rating services as the Department of State may from time to time specify

Insurance coverage backed by the full faith and credit of the government of the exchange visitor’s home country shall be deemed to meet this requirement.

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR SECURING HEALTH INSURANCE FOR YOU AND YOUR J-2 DEPENDENTS.

(X) Traveling Outside of the United States

An exchange visitor traveling outside of the United States should be certain to have all necessary documents for entry into all countries he or she intends to visit and for re-entry into the United States.

For re-entry into the U.S., the exchange visitor needs:
- A valid passport
- A valid J-1 visa
- A DS-2019 that has been validated for travel by the A/RO. This requires a special signature from the A/RO and is good for one year from the date of the signature.

If a new visa is required to re-enter, the exchange visitor should have a valid passport, endorsed DS-2019, and evidence of financial support to present to the United States Consulate or Embassy.

What is automatic revalidation of visas?

An exchange visitor (except those nationals from Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Sudan and Syria) can re-enter the United States with an expired J-1 visa when the exchange visitor:
- Travels to Canada, Mexico, or the adjacent islands other than Cuba for less than 30 days; AND
- Has maintained and intends to resume J-1 status and the previously authorized stay is valid at the time of re-entry.

In such a case, the exchange visitor will need only a valid passport, with an affixed visa, an endorsed DS-2019, and a current I-94 Form. **The exchange visitor should not surrender the I-94 when leaving the U.S. to travel to contiguous territory.** Please consult with the A/RO for more information.
(XI) Two-Year Home Country Physical Presence Requirement

Intent of the Requirement
The intent of the requirement is to have the home country benefit from the exchange visitor’s experience in the United States. Exchange visitors come to this country for a specific objective such as a program of study or a research project. The requirement is intended to prevent the subject participant from staying longer than necessary for the objective, and to ensure that he or she will spend at least two years in the home country before coming back to the United States for a long-term stay.

An exchange visitor is subject to the requirement if any of the following conditions apply:

- If the exchange visitor’s participation in an exchange program was financed, directly or indirectly, by the United States government or a foreign government for purpose of exchange;
- If 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 skills list;
- The exchange visitor comes to the United States to receive “graduate medical education or training.”

The exchange visitor can tell if he/she is subject by looking at the J visa page in the passport. The subject visitor would find “212e does apply” on the visa page. The visitor can also check the bottom left box of the DS-2019 for subject information.

If the exchange visitor is subject to the requirement, s/he can only change to A or G status within the United States.

An exchange visitor subject to the requirement can change visa status outside of the United States at the discretion of the consular official, but is NOT eligible for an H (temporary worker), L (intra-company transferee), or immigrant status until the two year home residency requirement has been completed or a waiver is granted.

Waiver of the Requirement

For further information regarding a waiver, please see: https://j1visawaiverrecommendation.state.gov/

Please note that the waiver application is the exchange visitor’s responsibility. Also, please note that once the scholar has been recommended for a waiver by the DOS the A/RO can no longer extend the program or transfer the record.

If you have any questions about these regulations, please contact your A/RO.

Please also visit the Department of State’s website for J-1 visa holders at http://j1visa.state.gov/