

J-1 Immigration Orientation

International Graduate Student Services

Graduate School, Virginia Tech

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Introduction

Welcome to Virginia Tech!

This is the online immigration orientation presentation for graduate students.

Through the course of this presentation, you will gain a better understanding of what it means to be an J-1 international student exchange visitor. You will learn about important terminology, benefits of being an J-1 student, and your responsibilities as students to maintain your immigration status.

If you have any questions after this presentation, please do not hesitate to contact us directly.

Important Terminology

By this time, you should have received your form DS-2019, paid the SEVIS fee, applied for and received the J-1 student exchange visitor visa and successfully entered the United States.

You may have come across the acronyms for DHS, SEVP, SEVIS, USCIS, and ARO, but you may not know what they stand for or what they do.

We will review these next.

DHS, SEVP

DHS stands for the Department of Homeland Security.

SEVP stands for the Student and Exchange Visitor Program.

On behalf of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) manages schools, and J-1 students and their J-2 dependents. Only SEVP approved schools can accept international students and issue the Form DS-2019 immigration document.

USCIS

USCIS, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, is an agency within the that authorizes approved J-1 student benefits.

These benefits include extending your stay, working, and even changing your immigration status. These changes are made through SEVIS.

SEVIS

SEVIS stands for Student and Exchange Visitor Information System.

It is a web-based system used by SEVP to maintain information on SEVP-approved schools and J-1 students and their dependents.

Your immigration Form DS-2019 is issued through SEVIS.

Any changes that happen to you or your program, for example your name, major, extension of stay, all happen through SEVIS. We will review these later on in this presentation.

Only an RO or ARO can issue, update, and sign a DS-2019.

ARO

An ARO is a Alternate Responsible Officer.

In the Graduate School at Virginia Tech, AROs are also referred to as Immigration Advisors. They are here to help you with immigration issues.

Only an Immigration Advisor can view your record in SEVIS and make changes to it. Only an Immigration Advisor can sign a DS-2019 immigration document.

An Immigration Advisor is there to help you maintain your J-1 student status and answer questions you may have about your student status.

J-2 Dependents

J-2 dependents will have a separate DS-2019 form, and will apply for a J-2 visa. All J-2 dependents must have health insurance.

J-2 dependents have the added benefit that they may apply for work authorization through USCIS and also may enroll in a full-time or part-time program of study.

Maintaining Status

While you are studying in the United States, you must maintain your legal immigration status at all times. For J-1 students this includes:

- Upon Arrival – checking in with IGSS after arriving in the U.S.
- Academics – during your entire period of enrollment at VT
- Work During Program – on or off-campus authorizations
- Program Completion – “grace period”
- Work After Program – post-completion employment authorization
- Health Insurance – during entire J-1 program

Upon Arrival

You can enter the United States no more than 30 days before the program start date listed on your DS-2019.

You must complete the immigration check-in with the Graduate School before the program start date. During check-in your arrival will be reported in SEVIS and your record will be activated.

Academics

- Attend all your classes and make satisfactory progress towards the degree program stated on your DS-2019 form.
- Enroll full-time, in 9-18 credits, in the fall and spring semesters. If you are on an assistantship, full-time enrollment is 12-18 credits.
- Take no more than 3 credits of online (virtual) coursework per semester counting towards full-time enrollment.
- Obtain prior authorization from an immigration advisor before dropping below full-time enrollment (in final term or for documented medical reasons).

Insurance

Health insurance is mandatory for all J-1 students and their J-2 dependents; minimum requirements for the insurance policy are specified by the Department of State:

- Major medical benefits per accident or illness: \$100,000 (formerly \$50,000)
- Medical evacuation: \$50,000 (formerly \$10,000)
- Repatriation of remains to home country: \$25,000 (formerly \$7,500)
- Deductible not to exceed \$500 per accident or illness
- Coinsurance not to exceed 25% of the covered benefits per accident or illness.

Work During Program

There are two types of work a J-1 student may do during their program of study:

- On-campus on an assistantship and/or student-wage position
- Off-campus in a position in your field of study. This is called Academic Training (AT). AT can also be done after the program of study.

Working without authorization can have severe consequences, including termination of J-1 status and having to immediately leave the United States, so never work without prior authorization from your Immigration Advisor!

Working During Program On-Campus

- You may work up to 20 hours a week when school is in session in the Fall and Spring semesters; you may work up to 40 hours a week during school breaks.
- If you are on a full assistantship, your contract is for 20 hours per week or 100% full-time graduate employment. In this case you can not work in any additional on-campus positions.
- If your assistantship is less than 20 hours per week, you can work additional hours per week in another assistantship or other on-campus wage position so long as your total hours worked do not exceed 20/week.

J-1 students with non-VT program sponsors must get a letter of permission to work from their program sponsor. This letter should be given to Payroll.

Working On-Campus During Program: Program Sponsor

Your program sponsor is the institution that issued your DS-2019.

If your DS-2019 was issued by Virginia Tech, then we are your program sponsors. If your DS-2019 was issued by another agency such as IIE, Fulbright, USAID or other, then they are your program sponsor.

You must obtain a letter of written approval from your program sponsor before beginning any type of employment. Employment authorization is employer specific. Each time there is a change in your employment (including hours per week), you must obtain a new letter.

Work Off-Campus During Program: Academic Training

J-1 students can apply for Academic Training (AT) to work in unpaid or paid position, either pre-completion or post-completion. AT can only be authorized by your program sponsor.

Students can apply for AT if they have maintained good academic standing and maintained J-1 status and meet the following requirements:

- Have a job offer in field of study
- Apply before current DS-2019 expires or program ends, whichever comes first
- The position begins within 30 days of program completion and is approved before employment begins.

AT may be approved for a maximum 18 months, or the length of time studied, if less than 18 months. An 18-month extension is available for postdoc positions.

Students may not apply for AT if they do not have a job offer, their current DS-2019 has expired or their program has ended, or if they have requested a waiver of the 2-year home residency requirement (where applicable).

Program Completion

J-1 students and their dependents have a 30 day grace period to depart the United States after the completion of their program, or the completion of their Academic Training.

Immigration Documents

As an international student, you have several different immigration documents that you must make sure are valid at all times, unless otherwise noted.

You need to have the following documents:

- Passport
- Form DS-2019
- J-1 Student Exchange Visitor Visa
- Form I-94

Passport

Your passport must be valid at all times. This means that it cannot be expired while you are in the United States. If it is close to being expired, you must renew your passport within 6 months of the expiration date.

Form DS-2019

Review your DS-2019 and make sure that all details stated on it are correct.

Your DS-2019 should always reflect your current academic status. If your degree level or major, or anything changes, you must request an update to your DS2019. Keep in mind that there is no reverse matriculation for degree levels – you can only request a change from MS to PhD.

Your DS-2019 must be valid at all times. If your DS-2019 is about to expire and you are not finished with your program, you will need to request an extension 30-60 days before your DS-2019 expires.

Keep all original copies of your DS-2019s.

J-1 Student Exchange Visitor Visa

Your J-1 student visa is used for your entry to the United States while you are a student exchange visitor. It is a stamp in your passport that clearly states the type of visa, expiration date, and number of entries (one, two, or multiple) it allows. It will also show whether you are subject to the two-year home residency requirement or “212e”.

Your visa may expire while you are in the United States, and you do not have to renew it until/unless you wish to travel outside the U.S. and reenter in F-1 status again.

Visas may only be renewed at U.S. embassies and consulates outside of the United States.

Form I-94

The Form I-94 is your electronic Arrival and Departure Record. It is evidence of a nonimmigrant's term of admission and documentation of legal status, including the length of time you may stay and your expected departure date.

For J-1 students, the time you may stay is usually written as "D/S," or Duration of Status.

This will also be written on your entry stamp in your passport, along with the date and place of entry.

You can access your electronic I-94 on the CBP website at <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94>. Let us know if you find any errors in your I-94 record, and we will help you get it corrected as needed.

Two-Year Home Residency Requirement

The Two-Year Home Residency Requirement is determined by the embassy and is usually notated on the DS-2019 and/or the visa.

If you are subject to the home residency requirement, you must return to your home country for a cumulative period of at least two years upon completion of the program. Dependents are also subject to this requirement.

If you are subject to this requirement, you are not eligible for the following:

- Change of category within the J status (e.g. from student to scholar)
- A change of status while in the United States from J to another nonimmigrant visa status
- Adjustment of status while in United States to permanent resident
- An H work visa, L intracompany transferee visa, or immigration visa

You must keep track of all dates in which you are in your home country. In some cases, a waiver may be granted. Please visit: <http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/study-exchange/student/residency-waiver.html> for more information.

Traveling Outside the U.S.

International students may leave the U.S. for a short time period (5 months or less) and reenter to continue their program if they hold the appropriate travel documents:

- Unexpired DS-2019 signed for travel; a travel signature must be less than a year old at the time of re-entry to the U.S.
- Valid passport
- Valid J-1 visa

Learn more about travel at <http://graduateschool.vt.edu/student-life/immigration-services/travel.html>.

When To See An Immigration Advisor

The following are examples of situations where you should seek immigration advising, but feel free to contact us if you have any other concerns:

- Working in the United States
- Applying for a Social Security number if employed by the University
- Transferring to another school
- Changing campus (Blacksburg to NCR)
- Taking a leave of absence or break from school
- Traveling outside the United States
- Moving to a new address
- Changing your name
- Requesting a program extension or shortening program
- Adding dependents
- Needing to drop below full-time in final semester or for medical reasons

Reporting Requirements

J-1 students are required to report the following information to an immigration advisor within 10 days of the date of change so it can be updated in the student's SEVIS record:

- Change in name
- Updating address
- Change in program or degree level
- New address in home country
- Change in student status (ie. withdrawal, suspension)
- Change in immigration status

Forms and Requests

All forms and requests can be found on our website at

<http://graduateschool.vt.edu/student-life/immigration-services/forms.html> :

- Change of Address Form
- DS-2019 Request (ie. extension, etc)
- Dependent DS-2019 Request
- Transfer Out Form
- AT Application

Contact Information

There are 3 immigration advisors in the Graduate School:

- Ms. Monika Gibson: Director of Graduate Student Services, Alternate Responsible Officer, PDSO
- Ms. Christina Lapel: SEVIS Compliance Coordinator, Immigration Specialist, ARO, DSO
- Mr. Matt Grice, ARO, DSO

igss@vt.edu; 540-231-8486; walk-ins in 120 GLC: MWF 1-5, TTh 9-12

We look forward to meeting you and welcome you to Tech!