

**TRAVEL NEWS AND INFORMATION**  
**Spring 2009 EDITION**  
**(Save For Future Reference)**

**EDITOR'S NOTE:**

ISSS acknowledges the hard work and dedication to serving international student of representatives of several universities in the compilation of this information. We would like to thank the ISSS staffs at Binghamton University, Syracuse University, University of California at Davis, University of Connecticut and Brandeis University for making this publication possible.

This information, and much more, is also available on the ISSS web-site. Just go to <http://albany.edu/iss> and click on "Travel."

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### 1. TRAVEL WITHIN THE UNITED STATES

If you are planning a trip within the United States by car, bus, train or airplane, to U.S. cities near or far, ***it is essential*** that you have your passport and visa documents with you. Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, there has been heightened security not only at all border crossings, but also at bus terminals, train terminals, and airports throughout the United States. Police from multiple agencies; federal, state and municipal, may be patrolling these areas. People may be stopped and questioned randomly. Therefore, you are urged to be sure to have your passport, visa documents (I-94 card and SEVIS I-20 or DS-2019), and SUNY student ID card with you for ***ALL*** distance travel, even travel within New York State. In addition, be sure that ***your current I-20 or DS-2019 has an authorizing signature for travel that will be less than one year old on the date you will return to Albany.***

If you are applying for a change of non-immigrant status, visa petition or EAD card, be sure to carry your application receipt notice as well, which proves that you have an application pending with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). NOTE: Students with a pending change of non-immigrant status application or immigrant visa petition **MUST** limit their travel to within the United States only, as travel outside the United States has the effect of abandoning the application.

## 2. TRAVEL TO CANADA OR MEXICO

For travel to Canada or Mexico, first check to see if a temporary resident visa (visitor's visa) will be required to enter either country.

You will need to have your passport, visa documents (I-94 card and I-20 or DS-2019), and SUNY student ID card with you when you travel, and be certain that ***your I-20 or DS-2019 has an authorizing signature for travel that will be less than one year old on the date you will return to Albany.*** If you will need a Canadian visa to visit Canada, you must also request a status letter from the ISSS. Please allow 5 business days for such letters to be prepared.

Those subject to SPECIAL REGISTRATION should note that if you were previously required to go through the NSEERS special registration process either at a U.S. port of entry or as part of a "call-in" registration at a district USCIS office, because you are male and/or from one of the 25 designated countries, or a citizen of either gender from Cuba, Iran, Sudan, or Syria, there is a special exit procedure that you must follow before you can depart the United States and enter Canada or Mexico. ***Failure to do so can result in your being permanently barred from entering the United States.*** If you are crossing at a land port by car or bus, be sure to stop on the U.S. side of the border at the Customs and Border Protection to take care of the exit procedure BEFORE crossing into Canada or Mexico. If you are traveling to Canada or Mexico by plane, you will need to go through the exit procedure at the airport in the United States. For more information, see Section 3.

International students and scholars may wish to use the "automatic revalidation of visa" benefit [22 CFR 41.112(d)] to re-enter the United States after a 30-day or less visit to a "contiguous territory" (Canada, Mexico, and, in the case of F and J non-immigrants, the "adjacent islands other than Cuba") without having to obtain a new visa prior to re-entry.

However, it is important to note that citizens of "state sponsors of terrorism" (as designated in the State Department's annual "Patterns of Global Terrorism" report) are not eligible for the automatic revalidation of visa benefit. The following countries are listed as state sponsors of terrorism by the State Department: Iran, Syria, Sudan, and Cuba. This means that a person who is a citizen of Iran, Syria, Sudan, or Cuba in the United States in any non-immigrant classification can only enter Canada and return to the United States ***IF*** he or she has an unexpired multiple-entry U.S. visa in the passport for his or her current status.

If you plan to apply for a new U.S. visa while in Canada or Mexico you will not be eligible for the "automatic revalidation" benefit during the course of that trip, but will have to wait until the visa is approved in order to re-enter the United States. If the U.S. visa application is denied, that individual will not be permitted to re-enter the United States, and will instead have to return to his or her home country. See Section 8 of this article, "Applying for a New U.S. Visa at a Consulate Abroad" for additional information on the visa application process.

However, non-immigrants traveling to Canada or Mexico for less than thirty days and returning to the United States (other than citizens of Iran, Syria, Sudan and Cuba) who do not intend to apply for a new U.S. visa can still make use of the automatic revalidation benefit, and re-enter on their expired U.S. visas, as long as they have a valid, unexpired passport, their I-94 card, and a valid and signed SEVIS I-20 or DS-2019.

U.S.-VISIT (United States Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology Program) entry procedures are now in effect at all land ports between the United States, Canada and Mexico. This means that when you return to the United States from your trip to Canada or Mexico, expect to have your fingerprints scanned and a digital photograph taken, as well as your passport and visa documents examined, before you will be allowed to proceed beyond the border check point. Only Canadian citizens are exempt from this procedure.

**SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT I-94 DEPARTURE CARDS:** F-1 and J-1 students with expired U.S. visas who are traveling to Canada, Mexico or adjacent islands for up to 30 days, who will not be applying for a new U.S. visa while there, AND who will be resuming their studies upon their return should NEVER surrender their I-94 card. Canadian or Mexican nationals returning to their home country should surrender their I-94 card as they enter their country, and obtain a new I-94 card the next time they enter the United States. Canadian nationals should be sure to carry with them their financial documentation that verifies the information on their I-20 when getting ready to return to the United States

### 3. TRAVEL ABROAD

#### SHOULD I TRAVEL ABROAD?

Whether or not to travel abroad is a personal decision. Barring an unforeseen catastrophe or circumstance, we do not anticipate any changes in the immediate future for student travel outside the United States. Hundreds of new and current students traveled abroad last summer and entered the United States in time to resume their studies at Albany without experiencing delays. But students who travel abroad should expect closer scrutiny of their documents upon their return to the United States. Students with valid U.S. visas should not anticipate too many difficulties in their travels. Students who will need to apply for new F-1 or J-1 visas should be sure to allow plenty of time for scheduling a visa appointment. In many cases, you can schedule your visa appointment before you leave the United States (see next paragraph). Any student who feels uncomfortable or concerned about their travel plans in a time of uncertainty may prefer to cancel those plans. No one is capable of predicting the future.

Students whose U.S. visas have expired and who will need to apply for new U.S. visas abroad should anticipate lengthy delays in some countries due to appointment backlogs. See Section 8 for detailed information. Doctoral level students who are majoring in the sciences, engineering, or computer science and who have not previously been subject to a security clearance review in the past three years or longer are likely to encounter additional delays of multiple weeks due to “administrative processing” (security clearance) issues. You are urged to check with the U.S. consulate or U.S. embassy where you will apply for the visa, or its internet link <http://usembassy.state.gov/> BEFORE leaving the United States to determine that particular post's policies and procedures, because much has changed in the past year. The same link will explain procedures for

scheduling a visa interview. For helpful information on waiting times for student visa appointments at embassies and consulates world wide, visit the following link:

[http://travel.state.gov/visa/tempvisitors\\_wait.php](http://travel.state.gov/visa/tempvisitors_wait.php)

You should start the visa process **at the earliest possible time** upon your arrival back in your home country.

#### 4. PRE-DEPARTURE DOCUMENT CHECK

##### PASSPORTS

When was the last time you checked the expiration date in your passport? In order to re-enter the United States, your passport MUST be valid at least six months into the future. Passports may be renewed at your country's embassy or consulate in the United States. If you have access to the world wide web, you can obtain up-to-date information on passport renewal. Point your web browser to:

<http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/dpl/32122.htm>

##### SEVIS I-20 OR DS-2019

You should be traveling using your most recently issued SEVIS I-20 or DS-2019. However, be sure to save all of your previous I-20s (or DS-2019s), as they represent your immigration "history" in the United States. If you will need to apply for a new visa, check the front of your most recent I-20 or DS-2019 carefully to be sure the field of study, level of study, and source of funds are still correct. If you will need a new I-20 or DS-2019, you must provide updated proof of financial support, unless current information is already on file. Allow at least five working days for the office of International Student and Scholar Services to prepare new visa documents for you.

##### SPECIAL REGISTRATION APPLICANTS

If you were required to go through the NSEERS special registration process either at a U.S. port of entry or as part of a "call-in" registration at a district USCIS office, because you are male and/or from one of the 25 designated countries, or a citizen of either gender from Cuba, Iran, Sudan, or Syria, there is a special exit procedure that you must follow before you can depart the United States. **Failure to do so can result in your being permanently barred from entering the United States.** Although certain aspects of special registration have been suspended, the exit procedure remains in effect. Generally, this exit procedure will take place at the airport where your overseas flight will depart. The exit procedure can add several hours to your departure schedule, so be certain to allow plenty of extra time so that you do not miss your flight! You should have been given information regarding the exit procedure when you went through your special registration inspection. For a list of designated exit ports and specific information on their locations and hours of operation, go to:

<http://www.ice.gov/doclib/pi/specialregistration/srindividuals.pdf>

##### I-94 ARRIVAL/DEPARTURE CARD

You will need to surrender your I-94 card upon your departure from the United States. You will be issued a new I-94 card with a new admission number upon your re-entry to the United States. However, your SEVIS ID number (printed at the top right of your SEVIS I-20 or DS-2019) will not change.

*SPECIAL NOTE:* F-1 and J-1 students with expired U.S. visas who are traveling to Canada, Mexico or adjacent islands for up to 30 days, who are not applying for a U.S. visa while there, AND who will be resuming their studies upon their return should NEVER surrender their I-94 card. Canadian or Mexican nationals returning to their home country should surrender their I-94 card as they enter their country, and obtain a new I-94 card the next time they enter the United States. Canadian nationals should be sure to carry with them their financial documentation that verifies the information on their I-20 when getting ready to return to the United States.

### **U.S. VISA**

Check your U.S. visa stamp inside your passport. Has your visa stamp expired? If it is still valid, is it for multiple entry, or has the entry been used up? Finally, is the category for which the visa was issued the status you currently hold (for example, if your visa is F-2, are you currently in F-2 status or did that status change after you entered the United States)? If you are in F-1 or J-1 status and traveling to Canada, Mexico, or islands adjacent to North America, you do not need a valid U.S. visa as long as you have been maintaining your status, have a valid passport and I-20 or DS-2019 and are entering those countries for tourist purposes and your stay will be thirty days or less (you DO need a valid U.S. visa if you are a citizen of Iran, Syria, Sudan, or Cuba). However, travel to all other countries will require that you have a valid U.S. visa before you may re-enter the United States. This is especially true if you changed your non-immigrant status while in the United States (for example, changed from F-2 to F-1). This will mean applying for a new visa at the U.S. consulate in the country you will visit. Be sure to see section 8, "Applying for a New Visa at a U.S. Consulate Abroad."

### **SUNY ID CARD**

Carry your current SUNY ID card with you as supporting documentation.

### **STATUS LETTER**

This is a letter issued by the ISSS that verifies that you are a student at Albany and that you are maintaining valid status. It is required for a new visa application. This letter is also required if you will be applying for a Canadian visitor's visa. Any international student traveling outside the United States who will be applying for a new F-1 or J-1 visa should request such a letter from the ISSS at least ten days prior to travel.

### **LETTER FROM YOUR DEPARTMENT (DEPENDING UPON YOUR FIELD OF STUDY)**

If you will be applying for a new visa and you are a graduate student studying a subject or engaged in research that may fit the definition of a "sensitive area of study" such as computer science, engineering or the physical sciences, it is strongly recommended that you obtain a letter from your faculty advisor that explains the nature of your studies and/or your research. The letter should also include your faculty advisor's, e-mail and telephone number. The letter should be written using language that is easy to understand, and should not exceed the front side of one page. In addition, print a copy of your faculty advisor's official university webpage, containing information regarding his or her research, and attach the letter to it. This documentation will be useful if a visa officer

is considering whether or not to require a “administrative processing” (security clearance) before issuing the visa.

### **MAINTAINING STATUS**

Have you been maintaining the conditions of your non-immigrant status? If you are an F-1 or J-1 student, this means maintaining full time registration each semester at the school you are authorized to attend, reporting changes of address to the ISSS within ten days, refraining from unauthorized employment, not letting your I-20 or DS-2019 expire, and following the appropriate procedures for school transfer and extensions. J-1s are also required to have health and accident insurance for both themselves and their J-2 dependents, and the insurance must include a medical evacuation and repatriation benefit. If you think you may have violated the conditions of your status, be sure to speak to staff in the Office of International Student and Scholar Services BEFORE departing the United States, as you may risk being denied permission to return.

### **UAlbany TRANSCRIPT**

Have an official copy of your UAlbany transcript with you ONLY if you will be applying for a new student visa abroad, to show the consular official that you have been making satisfactory progress towards your degree. An increasing number of consulates have asked for transcripts when students come to renew their student visas. In addition to the transcript, also have with you a printed copy of your current semester’s course registration, stamped by the Registrar’s Office.

### **FOREIGN VISA**

If you are visiting a country other than your own, you may need a visitor’s visa to enter. The office of International Student and Scholar Services has copies of Canadian Tourist Visa applications available for your use, as well as a list of countries that are exempt from Canadian Tourist Visa requirements. Similar information is available for Mexican Tourist Visas. The office can also provide you with the telephone numbers for foreign consulates in the United States, so that you may obtain information on visa requirements for any country you might plan to visit. If you have access to the world wide web, you can also find out about entry requirements for other countries by pointing your web browser to

<http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/dpl/32122.htm>

If you are “transiting” into a country, meaning that your flight home requires an intermediate stop in a third country, find out if a transit visa is required, and if so, if it needs to be obtained in advance. This is most common for students with flights stopping in the United Kingdom. For information on the requirements for “Visitor in Transit” visas in the UK, visit the following web

link:<http://www.ukvisas.gov.uk/en/howtoapply/infs/inf20transit>

### **FINANCIAL DOCUMENTATION**

Documented proof of financial support that appears on your I-20 or DS-2019 is only required if you will be applying for a new student visa abroad, OR if you are a national of Canada or Mexico who is traveling home to Canada or Mexico for the summer. However it is recommended that you carry such information with you when returning from a trip abroad, even if your visa is not new.

## **STUDENTS ON OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING**

If you have completed your studies and have applied for Practical Training, you may travel outside the United States while the OPT application is pending, provided that you can present the USCIS Processing Center Receipt, proving that the OPT application has been filed. However, once the EAD card for OPT is issued to you, and you decide to travel abroad, you can only re-enter the United States to **resume employment**. Thus, you must carry with you written documentation from the employer verifying your employment or a job offer, as well as the EAD card. DHS has clarified that the F-1 student does not need to have already begun actual employment before leaving, as long as the student has a job offer to which to return.

You must have your USCIS Processing Center Receipt (if the OPT application is still pending) or your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) and written proof of employment with you, as well as your SEVIS I-20 endorsed for practical training, in order to re-enter the United States. The travel signature on Page 3 of the SEVIS OPT I-20 must be less than six months old on the date that you will return to the United States. If you are on Practical Training and will need to obtain a new F-1 visa before returning to the United States, you are advised that visa issuance for individuals on practical training can be highly problematic, since you may have a hard time proving that you do not intend to immigrate to the United States. Such students are urged to discuss their situation with staff in the Office of International Student and Scholar Services before they travel.

## **5. BAGGAGE INSPECTION REQUIREMENTS**

The federal Transportation and Security Administration has instituted screening procedures at domestic airports throughout the United States to improve security and passenger safety at airports and in planes. Similar screening procedures exist abroad for those flying to the United States. This can include the opening of locked check-through baggage without prior notice to the passenger, and limitations regarding the kinds of items that may be carried on board.

Should a bag be selected for inspection, an inspector is required to use whatever means necessary to gain access to the bag. This may include breaking locks to access the contents. If a bag is opened, the TSA official will place a note inside the bag to let the owner know.

If you plan to travel by airplane, we recommend that you familiarize yourself with the new procedures that may have been implemented since the last time you traveled. Detailed information on security, access requirements, checkpoints for passengers and baggage, permitted and prohibited items, and recommendations for travel preparation is available at

<http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm> and <http://www.tsa.gov/311/index.shtm>

Additional information on international travel may be found at:

[http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/assistant/duty\\_free\\_travel\\_alert.shtm](http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/assistant/duty_free_travel_alert.shtm) and <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/assistant/index.shtm>

## **6. WATCH YOUR WORDS!**

Several years ago, two international students from Syracuse University were escorted off an airplane at Hancock Airport in Syracuse and were closely questioned by legal authorities. Passengers became concerned and notified security officials when the students began to ask questions about the flight time, the engine, and other matters about the flight. It turned out that one of the students suffered from motion sickness and was worried about the possible turbulence in this type of aircraft, and how long it would be in the air relative to his medication for air sickness! They were both quite "innocent," and allowed to continue their trip. However, it caused a serious delay in the travel plans of all the passengers, and great anxiety, as you can imagine, for the students and all the passengers. These students were NOT part of any particular ethnic, cultural or religious group that would have 'targeted' them, so one cannot look at this situation as discrimination or "racial profiling." People around them who overheard their questions of the flight attendants were just frightened, and the airplane personnel had to respond.

This incident is a good example of why it is best to be cautious and discrete in your conversations while traveling.

## **7. U.S. IMMIGRATION REQUIREMENTS IF YOU ARE LEAVING ALBANY PERMANENTLY**

ISSS staff are often asked what the immigration requirements are if a student will no longer be continuing at Albany, either because the student is returning to his/her home country, or is beginning Practical Training, or because the student is going to begin study at a new school.

Regardless of your plans, retain your old I-20s or DS-2019s! These forms represent your immigration history in the United States and should be kept in a safe place as you would any important document. In addition, you must complete a departure form, available on the ISSS website at [www.albany.edu/iss](http://www.albany.edu/iss) or in the ISSS office.

If you were employed on or off campus during the current year, be sure to give your supervisor your forwarding address. This will allow tax documents, including W-2 forms, to be sent to you when they become available in January.

The U.S. federal regulatory process for transferring your F-1 status from Albany to a new U.S. school requires that you notify the ISSS of your intent to transfer. There is a SEVIS "release" process which must be followed, or else your new school cannot issue you an I-20. Also, it's important that you follow your new school's instructions for reporting to the International Student Office at the beginning of your semester there.

Students who will be ending their studies in May but have no plans to apply for practical training (F-1), academic training (J-1) or continue at a new school or in a new field or level of study, or seek a change of non-immigrant status, must depart the United States within sixty days of graduation or completion of their academic program if they are in F-1 status, or within thirty days if they are in J-1 status.

## **8. APPLYING FOR A NEW VISA AT A U.S. CONSULATE ABROAD**

If you need to apply for a new F-1 or J-1 visa during your trip abroad, first check the website of the U.S. embassy or consulate where you plan to apply to obtain the latest

information on non-immigrant visa processing and delays. Visit:

<http://usembassy.state.gov/>

You should do this while you are still in the United States! It is a very good idea to try and schedule your visa appointment before you leave the United States. Also check the special State Department website to determine the waiting times for student visa appointments at embassies and consulates worldwide:

[http://travel.state.gov/visa/tempvisitors\\_wait.php](http://travel.state.gov/visa/tempvisitors_wait.php)

If visa delays prevent you from returning to the United States in time to renew your studies in August, better to know this while you are still here so that you have time to cancel your trip!

### **GENERAL INFORMATION**

Any student who is traveling outside the United States whose U.S. visa has expired will need to renew it at a U.S. visa issuing post abroad before the student can return to the United States. In most cases, the visa application will be filed in your home country.

Students who will need a new F-1 or J-1 visa should take note of the following matters:

- More and more visa applicants are being subject to administrative processing, regardless of gender, field of study or country of nationality
- If you are a graduate student, faculty member or research scholar and the State Department decides to require a administrative processing based on field of study, it could take as long as eight weeks. If you have previously had a similar administrative processing, that earlier clearance is valid for your period of stay on the I-20 or DS-2019, or up to four years (whichever is shorter) if annotated on your visa stamp.
- If the State Department decides to require a security clearance based on your name being similar to or the same as an individual with a criminal record, or if you have an arrest record that will require a clearance, it could take eight weeks or longer
- Appointments are now required for virtually all non-immigrant visa applications
- Many U.S. embassies and consulates may temporarily close or alter their hours if there are any threats of terrorist attacks or protests
- Holiday and vacation periods can be very busy times at U.S. embassies and consulates
- Males and females from Cuba, Iran, Sudan and Syria, and males older than sixteen from certain countries continue to be subject to security checks. The current list of affected countries include: Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Egypt, Eritrea, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, North Korea, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

***Allow plenty of time for the visa application process, and begin the process as soon as possible after you arrive home.***

The State Department has also prepared two information sheets about student visas on its web site which may be useful to you as an international student. They may be obtained at

[http://travel.state.gov/visa/tempvisitors\\_types\\_students2.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/tempvisitors_types_students2.html) for F-1  
[http://travel.state.gov/visa/tempvisitors\\_types\\_scholars.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/tempvisitors_types_scholars.html) for J-1

### **SECURITY CHECKS AND SPECIAL REGISTRATION**

Individuals from Cuba, Iran, Sudan and Syria, both male and female, will not be eligible to obtain a new non-immigrant visa unless it can be determined that the individual does not pose a security threat. Such individuals will undergo a security check that will lengthen the processing time for their visa applications.

Males between the ages of 16 and 45 from Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Morocco, North Korea, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen who will need to renew their U.S. visas while abroad may be required to undergo security checks that will lengthen the processing time for their visa applications.

These same individuals may be subject to “special registration” upon their return to the United States. Individuals subject to “special registration” are fingerprinted, photographed and questioned under oath upon entry into the United States and must go through a special exit procedure prior to any departure from the United States. This list of countries can be expanded at anytime with the publication of additional countries in the Federal Register.

### **BACKGROUND CHECKS:**

Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, there has been an increase in the number of criminal background checks done for all visa applicants. State Department consular posts use a computer program called the Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS) to check names and visa eligibility of all visa and passport applicants.

If you have ever been arrested, or if you have a name that is the same as or similar to someone who has been arrested, the record will need to be cleared before a visa can be issued. This process can take as long as six to eight weeks.

### **TECHNOLOGY ALERT LIST AND SENSITIVE AREAS OF STUDY**

Students who are considered to be majoring in “sensitive areas of study” as determined by the U.S. government may also be required to undergo administrative processing before a visa can be issued.

There is a document called the “Technology Alert List” that visa officers consult for this purpose.

China, India, Israel, Pakistan and Russia have received special mention by the U.S. State Department in the context of this list because these countries are considered to possess nuclear capability that is of concern to U.S. national security.

But even if you are not a citizen of one of the countries listed above, your field of study (especially if you are a doctoral student majoring in the sciences, technology, computer science or engineering) might require your visa application to undergo a administrative processing REGARDLESS of the country you are from. The State Department has announced that these clearances generally take as long as eight weeks for review. Once

granted, the clearance will be valid for the duration of the student's study, to a maximum of four years, unless the field of study changes.

It is strongly recommended that if your field of study is "sensitive," you should obtain a letter from your faculty advisor that explains the nature of your studies and/or your research. The letter should also include your faculty advisor's address, e-mail and telephone number. The letter should be written using language that is easy to understand, and should not exceed the front side of one page. In addition, print a copy of your faculty advisor's official university webpage, containing information regarding his or her research, and attach the letter to it.

If you find that your visa application is delayed due a need for the consulate or embassy to send your file for administrative processing based on your field of study, please notify the ISSS by e-mail, fax or telephone of the situation.

### **SEVIS REQUIREMENTS**

Visa officials are required to verify your record in the SEVIS system before a visa can be approved. This is also true for any dependents. If the visa official is unable to access your record in SEVIS and you have a SEVIS I-20 or DS-2019, please contact the ISSS by e-mail, phone or fax to alert us to the problem.

### **SEVIS FEE**

Please note that continuing F-1 and J-1 students are not required to pay the Federal SEVIS fee, although some embassies and consulates have incorrectly requested proof of SEVIS fee payment from continuing students when applying for a new visa. In the rare event that you are asked to show proof of SEVIS fee payment and you are a continuing student, contact the ISSS by e-mail, fax or telephone. We will want to know the date and location of your visa interview. We will verify your records and then provide you with information to present to the visa official, showing that the SEVIS fee is not required.

### **VISA APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS**

To apply for a new visa, you will need to complete application form DS-156 "Non-Immigrant Visa Application" and DS-158 "Contact Information and Work History for Non-Immigrant Visa Applicant." If you are male, you must also complete the DS-157, the "Supplemental Non-Immigrant Visa Application." Note that consular officers reserve the right to require a DS-157 from any applicant for any visa classification. You may download form DS-156 at: <http://evisaforms.state.gov/> Many US visa posts are now requiring that the DS-156 be completed on-line prior to the visa interview. Please note that some visa posts have moved to a completely electronic visa application known as DS-160. You will be informed at the time you schedule you visa appointment if the DS-160 form is required. Over time, all U.S. visa posts will be switching to this electronic application.

Your passport must be valid for at least six months after the date on which you plan to return to the United States. You will also need one photograph 1 and 1/2 inches square, showing full face, without head covering, against a light background. You will need to have sufficient currency to pay the required visa fees, or a receipt showing that you have paid the visa fees. You will need your SEVIS I-20 or DS-2019 form. You will want to have a letter of certification from the ISSS, verifying your enrollment as well as the fact that you have been maintaining valid (F-1 or J-1) status. If you have previously paid the

federal SEVIS fee due to having an initial entry I-20 or DS-2019 with a start date on or after September 2004, or a reinstatement I-20, have the SEVIS fee receipt with you.

You will also need to show proof of financial support, and evidence of binding ties to your home country which you have no intentions of abandoning, so that you plan to return to your home country upon the conclusion of your studies. Some U.S. consulates will ask you how you plan to use your U.S. education in your home country. Many consulates will ask you to present copies of your academic transcripts to prove that you have been maintaining student status in the United States, and that you have been making satisfactory progress in your program. Plan to have copies with you, but do not present it to a consular officer unless specifically asked to do so. If you are on optional practical training, you will need to present your EAD card and have a letter from your employer, verifying that you are currently employed, your job title and description of duties, and that you are returning to the United States to resume employment.

U.S. visa posts abroad have implemented biometric requirements for visa issuance. You should expect to have your fingers scanned and a digital photograph taken as part of the visa process.

### **VISA APPLICATIONS IN CANADA OR MEXICO**

In 2002, the U.S. State Department announced new rules that any non-immigrant who chooses to apply for a new visa while in Canada or Mexico (but is not a citizen of either of those two countries) and whose visa application is subsequently denied will not be permitted to re-enter the United States. So, international students should consider this matter carefully when applying for a U.S. visa in Canada or Mexico. See Section 2 for further details.

## **9. STRATEGIES FOR A SUCCESSFUL RE-ENTRY INTO THE UNITED STATES**

Procedures at the U.S. ports of entry now accommodate SEVIS requirements as well as US-VISIT requirements. The Bureau of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security manages immigration and customs at ports of entry. You will see CBP officers at all U.S. ports of entry. You may also be required to go through a pre-inspection procedure at certain airports abroad.

ISSS encourages students to have their current SUNY ID card with them as back up identification. However, when you give your documents to the CBP inspector at your U.S. port of entry or pre-boarding checkpoint, you should initially present **only** your passport, I-94 card (which was distributed on the airplane), SEVIS fee receipt (due to having an initial entry I-20 or DS-2019 with a start date on or after September 2004, or a reinstatement I-20 where you paid the fee at the time of reinstatement) and signed SEVIS I-20 or DS-2019. Your SUNY ID card and other materials are meant to be used only for “supporting documentation” purposes, if you are asked additional questions or asked to produce additional documentation.

A CBP official who is presented with more documents than is customarily required might become suspicious, so you are well advised to show only your passport, I-94 and I-20 or

DS-2019. Then you have the comfort of knowing that you have additional supporting documentation with you if needed.

Expect close scrutiny of your documents. Answer all questions politely and **briefly**. Do not offer any information that goes beyond the scope of the question asked you.

### **SEVIS**

CBP officials are required to record your arrival data into SEVIS at the time you enter, and return your SEVIS I-20 or DS-2019 to you, after they have stamped it. However, not all CBP officials will have access to SEVIS at their booths in the “primary lanes.” Depending upon the port of entry, some students may be directed to a secondary inspection area or “student lanes” so that their data can be entered into SEVIS. CBP is advising that processing at land, sea, and air ports may take more time, so travel and connecting flight plans should take this into account.

### **SPECIAL REGISTRATION**

Individuals subject to “special registration” (see section 8 for a list of countries) will be directed to a separate area following their initial immigration inspection where they will be fingerprinted, photographed and questioned under oath. This may add significant delays to the amount of time spent at the airport. If traveling on a connecting flight, allow plenty of time.

Additionally, the CBP has the discretion to requiring any foreign national, regardless of nationality, to undergo special registration if they are considered a national security risk. The discretionary factors relating to national security risk may include dual citizenship with one of the designated countries, a foreign national's unexplained trips to certain designated countries, other instances of unexplained travel, previous visa violations, people who by their "behavior, demeanor, or answers" demonstrate that they should be monitored while in the United States, and characteristics determined by intelligence profiles.

### **US-VISIT**

U.S. Visitor and Immigration Status Indicator Technology, is the name for the entry/exit record keeping system for all non-immigrants traveling to and from the United States at airports and some seaports. It came into use in early January 2004.

In addition to the usual inspection procedure conducted by CBP officers, each non-immigrant will have their fingerprints taken by placing their fingers on an inkless fingerprint scanner. A digital photograph will also be taken. This procedure takes less than a minute to accomplish. There are also US-VISIT Entry systems at land borders (Canada and Mexico). In New York, this includes the border crossings at Niagara Falls, Buffalo, Champlain, Roosevelttown, Alexandria Bay and Thousand Islands.

### **CARRYING U.S. OR FOREIGN CURRENCY**

Sometimes, a student carries a large amount of money into or out of the United States. Please remember that it is a federal law that anyone carrying more than \$10,000 in a monetary instrument of any form must declare that money, or risk having it seized by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials. Here is the explanation of the law:

"There is no limit on the total amount of monetary instruments that may be brought into or taken out of the United States, nor is it illegal to do so. However, if you transport or cause to be transported (including by mail or other means) more than \$10,000 in negotiable monetary instruments on any occasion into or out of the United States or if you receive more than \$10,000, you must file a Report of International Transportation of International Currency or Monetary Instruments (FinCen105) with U.S. Customs and Border Protection denoted in the Currency and Foreign Transactions Reporting Act, 31 U.S.C. 1101, et. seq. Failure to comply can result in civil and criminal penalties, including seizure of the currency or monetary instruments. Monetary instruments include U.S. or foreign coin, currency, travelers' checks, money orders, and negotiable instruments or investment securities in bearer form."

In past years, there have been students carrying large sums of money whose funds have been seized for failure to declare. Do not let this happen to you.

### **SEARCHES OF LAPTOP COMPUTERS AND OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICES AT PORTS OF ENTRY**

Many individuals, both US citizens and foreign nationals, enter the United States with laptop computers and other electronic devices. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has recently updated its website with information on their search policy for such items. U.S. courts have determined that CBP officials have the legal right to examine laptops and other devices without necessarily suspecting that the individual may be carrying unlawful information. Part of this policy is based on CBP's concern that such searches are essential to prevent terrorists from transporting information over the border. CBP has stated that such searches are limited in scope, and that out of 400 million travelers passing through U.S. borders annually, only a tiny percentage are referred to secondary baggage inspection and of those, only a fraction have electronic devices that may be checked.

Despite the limited number of electronic devices that are checked, travelers need to be aware of what is on their computers and remove any problematic content. If the computer is used by others, check the browser history and make sure that the contents will not cause problems if searched.

For more information, read the July 16, 2008 US Customs and Border Protection Policy regarding Border Search of Information  
[http://www.cbp.gov/linkhandler/cgov/travel/admissability/search\\_authority.ctt/search\\_authority.pdf](http://www.cbp.gov/linkhandler/cgov/travel/admissability/search_authority.ctt/search_authority.pdf)

### **DOCUMENT PROBLEMS**

In certain cases, if there is some problem with your documents, you may be issued a 30-day entry on your I-94 card and issued a form I-515, usually with instructions to see your international student advisor. Examine your I-94 card carefully as you leave the immigration booth. F-1 students and J-1 students should have their I-94s marked "D/S" which means Duration of Status, along with a colored stamp indicating the date you entered the United States. If an expiration date is written on the I-94 instead of "D/S," and you are in F or J status, come to the office of International Student and Scholar Services as soon as possible.

Anyone who is denied admission at a U.S. port of entry should be very cautious about arguing with the immigration official. You may risk being issued "expedited removal," which now entails a five-year bar on admission to the U.S. If you are denied admission, first try to contact the office of International Student and Scholar Services for assistance, but also make it known to the Immigration Official that you are willing to withdraw your application for admission to the country rather than be subject to expedited removal.

## **10. STAYING INFORMED WHILE YOU TRAVEL**

Much has been reported in the national and international media regarding travel delays and security concerns. The ISSS Announcements will continue publishing its weekly issues during the summer. If you are able to check your e-mail while in your home country, you can stay up-to-date with your immigration news by reading your weekly issues.

## **11. KEEPING YOUR VALUABLES SAFE WHEN YOU TRAVEL**

The following information on laptop computer security is also applicable for other items of value such as briefcases and carry-on bags while you are in domestic or international travel status:

Items left unattended for even a very brief period have become a premium target for theft. Every traveler should remain on constant alert as they traverse through all airports. Here are some common examples of methods used by thieves to separate you from your belongings.

One method involved the use of security x-ray machines. The first thief precedes the traveler through the security check point and then loiters around the area where the carry-on luggage had already been examined. When the traveler places his laptop computer or bag onto the conveyor belt of the x-ray machine, the second thief steps in front of the traveler and sets off the metal detector.

While the traveler is being delayed, the first thief removes the traveler's laptop computer or bag from the conveyor belt just after it has gone through the x-ray machine and quickly disappears.

Another method of theft can occur while the traveler is walking through a crowd of people in the airport terminal. The traveler, who may have a laptop computer or small bag on top of his or her roll bag, is preceded by the first thief. Just as the traveler gets around the crowd of people, the first thief stops abruptly, causing the traveler to stop abruptly. When they stop momentarily, a second thief, who had been following just behind them, quickly removes the traveler's laptop computer or small bag from the roll bag and disappears into the crowd.

All travelers, both international and domestic, are urged to be alert to the above methods used in stealing valuable items and always be mindful of any abrupt diversions during your travels. Report any losses immediately to the authorities. Keep serial numbers, make, and model information of your laptop computers, or of any items of value, separate from the item so you can give precise information to authorities if the items are stolen.

## **12. VISITING NEW YORK CITY?**

International House in New York City has traditional student dormitory-style single rooms, apartment shares, and studio and one bedroom apartments. Facilities include a dining room, fitness center, music practice rooms, study rooms, and gymnasium. Accommodations are available for a few days or a few months. University students, scholars, faculty, international trainees, and interns are eligible to stay there.

For more information, contact:

Admissions, International House, 500 Riverside Drive, NYC, NY 10027-3916,

Tel: (212) 316-8434, FAX: (212) 316-1827,

E-Mail: [admissions@ihouse-nyc.org](mailto:admissions@ihouse-nyc.org). or WWW: <http://www.ihouse-nyc.org/>

Another option is Educational Housing, a not-for-profit corporation that provides affordable housing for long or short term stays in New York City.

Tel: (800) 297-4694 ext 313

E-Mail: [reservations@studenthousing.org](mailto:reservations@studenthousing.org) or WWW: <http://www.studenthousing.org>

## **13. SALES TAX REFUNDS?**

Students sometimes ask if it is possible for them to receive a refund of the sales tax they paid for goods and services in the United States upon their departure. In the U.S., sales tax on goods and services is set by each of the fifty states, and state entities (such as cities and counties), not by the U.S. government. Each state and state entity determines what the sales tax will be (always a percent of the purchase price) and what items will and will not be assessed a sales tax.

Therefore, it is not possible for an overseas visitor to obtain a refund of the sales tax for a purchase made in the U.S. upon their departure. The best "official" explanation comes from U.S. Customs and Border Protection, reprinted below:

"Foreign visitors to the United States frequently confuse the state sales tax with the value-added tax (VAT). The state sales tax is a small tax on purchases or services, calculated at the time of purchase, which individual states assess and which the U.S. federal government neither determines nor receives. The VAT, on the other hand, is a national tax commonly applied in foreign countries that is included in the actual sales price rather than at the time of purchase. The United States does not have a VAT, and the federal government cannot refund state sales taxes.

State taxes are generally not charged to diplomats or employees of some international organizations who have been issued a tax-exemption card. This card must be presented at the time of purchase in order for sales taxes to be waived.

Also, many states do not charge tax on items shipped out of state. Ask about state sales-tax policies in the state where you make your purchases."

## **14. SHIPPING BOOKS AND OTHER ITEMS OVERSEAS**

A very inexpensive way to send large quantities of books overseas is to use the U.S. Postal Service's M-bags (large, canvas duffel bags) for "bound, printed matter." For more information, visit the Postal Service's website at:

<http://www.usps.com/international/mbags.htm>

and scroll down to "M-Bags." The rates are sometimes about half the usual parcel post rate. Each bag needs to weigh no more than 66 pounds with all boxes addressed to the same recipient. Books are packaged by the sender in small boxes, with the destination address clearly written inside and outside each package. Take the boxes to any major post office and ask for an "M-Bag". Your boxes of books are then placed in the huge canvas sack (a.k.a. the "M-Bag"), the bag is closed and addressed to your destination, and the postage is affixed to the bag tag. The bag can be shipped via air or boat (economy), and the books should go from the point of mailing to the destination post office without even being taken out of the bag. This tends to increase the likelihood of their safe and intact arrival. Even if one of the packages breaks open in handling, the contents stay in the M-bag

## **15. SHIPPING COMPANIES**

If you choose not to use the U.S. Postal Service's M-Bags, or if you are shipping items other than books, you may want to use the services of the following companies to ship large items overseas. Call or write to them for information:

International Sea and Air Shipping Corp.  
8 Connerty Court  
East Brunswick, NJ 08816  
(732) 390-0322  
<http://www.internationalmoving.com/>

Directory of International Shipping Companies  
<http://united-states.shipping-international.com/>

Federal Express International  
(800) 463-3339  
<http://www.fedex.com>

United Parcel Service  
(800) 742-5877  
<http://www.ups.com>

rev 05/2009