Westfield STATE UNIVERSITY

INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

Obtaining a J-1 visa

The International Programs Office (IPO) has prepared this information for individuals who have a Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status (Form DS-2019) for a program of study at Westfield State University. It describes the steps you need to take in order to pay the SEVIS fee, apply for a J-1 visa, if necessary, and enter the US as a student in J-1 immigration status.

Step 1: Read Form DS-2019

Your SEVIS Form DS-2019 indicates that we have created a record on your behalf in the U.S. government's Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). Your SEVIS ID number is found in the upper right-hand corner of page 1 of your SEVIS Form DS-2019. If any information on this form is incorrect, please immediately contact our office (or your "Program Sponsor" if your DS-2019 was issued by an organization other than Westfield State University). If all the information on the form is correct, sign your name in the appropriate space on the form. If you have dependents (husband or wife, children under the age of 21) who will be traveling to the U.S. with you, each of them will receive their own dependent SEVIS Form DS-2019 to assist them in applying for their J-2 visa. Please contact the IPO if you intend to bring your dependents to the U.S. with you and you have not received separate documentation for your dependent family members.

Note: The spelling of your name and your date of birth must be exactly as reflected in your passport. The same is true for dependents. If your name and/or date of birth on the SEVIS Form DS-2019 are not exactly the same as the information that appears in your passport, please forward a copy of your passport and request a corrected SEVIS Form DS-2019 from our office. Submitting an incorrect Form DS-2019 can result in delays or denial of the visa application.

Step 2: Make Sure Your Passport is Valid

In order to avoid possible problems applying for a visa or entering the U.S., it is recommended that your passport be valid for at least six (6) months beyond the date you intend to remain in the U.S.

Step 3: Pay the SEVIS Fee

The U.S. Department of State (DOS) and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) are now requiring proof of payment of the SEVIS fee before issuing a visa or approving any benefits of status. This fee must be paid by new J-1 students with SEVIS DS-2019 forms issued to "begin a new program" in the U.S. in J-1 status. While immigration regulations indicate that the fee should be paid a minimum of three business days prior to applying for your visa at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate, we suggest that students pay the fee as soon as they receive the Form DS-2019 to allow sufficient time for DHS to update the fee payment in your electronic SEVIS record. Please refer to the Student and Exchange Visitor website for more information: https://www.ice.gov/sevis

J-2 dependents are not required to pay the SEVIS fee. The SEVIS fee is NOT required from students currently in the U.S. in valid J-1 immigration status. Similarly, the fee is not required from students transferring from another J-1 program if they have already paid the fee. However, J-1 students sponsored by U.S. government agencies who are exempt from paying the fee will be required to pay the fee if they transfer to Westfield State University. J-1 students who have studied in the U.S. in J-1 status in the past, but have departed the U.S. or changed to another immigration status must pay a new SEVIS fee before commencing the new program regardless of whether the student will need a new J-1 visa. Finally, citizens of Canada are exempt from the requirement to possess a visa to enter the U.S. However, they are still required to pay the SEVIS fee. Proof of SEVIS fee payment for these individuals will be verified at the U.S. port of entry before they are admitted to the United States in J-1 status.

The fee can be paid to DHS either:

1. over the internet with an electronic application form (I-901) and a credit card
2. by mailing a paper application with a check or bank draft drawn in U.S. dollars to a processing center in the U.S., or
3. by making a payment at a participating Western Union in your area.

There is currently no mechanism to pay the fee at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate or at a U.S. port of entry. The fee can be paid by the student or by a third party inside or outside the U.S. However, the student must have proof of payment when applying for the visa and entering the U.S. We strongly recommend that students pay the fee online with a credit card whenever possible to secure an immediate receipt.

Please refer to the following Student and Exchange Visitor website for more information:
https://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901

All students who pay the SEVIS fee will receive a formal receipt that should be used as proof of fee payment. The receipt Form I-797 will be sent to the mailing address provided on Form I-901. This receipt notice will take time to process and to arrive in the mail. The Form I-901 instructions state that receipts will be sent via airmail at no additional cost. The payer can request expedited courier delivery by indicating this request on Form I-901 and by paying an extra fee at the time of initial payment. If the courier delivery option is selected, the student must include a contact telephone number and actual street address since the courier will not deliver to a P.O. Box. Although fee payments may be entered into the immigration (SEVIS) record, it is strongly recommended that students retain the fee receipt with other important immigration documents to use as needed.

Step 4: Obtain a valid J-1 Visa

Citizens of all countries, except Canada, are required to be in possession of J-1 visas to enter the U.S. as exchange visitors. You must initiate the visa application process with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. It is strongly recommended that you review the web site (https://www.usembassy.gov/) of that consular post to learn about their specific visa application procedures, documentary requirements and deadlines. Most consular posts will process an application 120 days prior to the start date of the academic program listed on your SEVIS Form DS-2019. Please refer to the following U.S. Department of State (DOS) website for more information: https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study/exchange.html

To apply for a J-1 visa, you will need to submit the following documents to the U.S. Embassy or Consulate:

1. Completed Online **Form DS-160,** online application is available at https://ceac.state.gov/genniv/ and print the confirmation page (to bring to the interview). For more information about Form DS-160, please visit this link: https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/forms/ds-160-online-nonimmigrant-visa-application.html
2. **Fee receipt showing payment of the $185 visa application fee** (check with the consulate for the fee amount and how it must be paid or visit the following DOS website at: https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/fees/fees-visa-services.html
3. **One 2x2 photograph** (2 inches square [51 x 51mm], showing full face, without head covering, against a light background) as explained on the following DOS website: https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/photos.html
4. **Passport**
5. ***Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status*** (SEVIS Form DS-2019)
6. Form I-797 receipt or online proof of SEVIS fee payment
7. Acceptance letter from Westfield State University
8. Original documents proving the availability of sufficient funds as stated on your SEVIS Form DS-2019
9. Documents that demonstrate that you intend to return home after the completion of your studies in the U.S.

Always protect yourself by keeping a copy of everything that you fill out and send off. Remember to bring the original aforementioned documents with you when you go for your J-1 visa interview to the U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

All visa applicants are required to schedule a personal appointment for an interview. Once you finish paying the SEVIS fee and completing the nonimmigrant visa application (Form DS-160), you can contact your local U.S. Embassy or consulate to schedule an interview.

Please keep in mind that it may take a few weeks to schedule an appointment so you should initiate your visa application as early as possible. Before your interview, practice answering questions in English about your application, your plans in the U.S., and your plans after you return home. If your spouse and children will remain in your home country, be prepared to explain how they will support themselves without you sending them money from the U.S. Be positive and respond to questions with clear, concise answers during your interview.

You may not need to do anything special to prove that you intend to return home. It may be sufficient for you to explain that you plan to return to your country to work, to continue your studies, or to do whatever you plan to do when you return home. However, you may need to prove that you have such strong ties to your home country that you will return there. If you believe it is likely that you will need to prove your intention to return home after you complete your studies, please carefully read the enclosed handout entitled Proving "Nonimmigrant Intent" for U.S. Visa Application Purposes and refer to the information on the following DOS website: https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/tourism-visit/visitor.html

The consular official may decide to process your application through a special "security clearance" before granting the visa. Security clearances may take as long as a few months, so it is very important that you apply for your J-1 visa as early as possible. Most consular officials request a security clearance based on the country of national origin of the applicant or on a determined level of sensitivity of your prospective field of teaching or research. Once the application has been sent for security clearance, the applicant must simply wait until the consulate approves the visa.

If your visa application is denied, it is difficult to get the Consulate to change its decision. For this reason, it is important that you arrive at your appointment with the best and most complete supporting information. If your visa is denied, we suggest that you ask for the reason for the denial and request a reason in writing if possible. Please visit the following DOS website at: https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/visa-denials.html

Step 5: Travel to the U.S.

Once you have obtained your J-1 visa, you are ready to travel to the U.S. Immigration regulations allow you to enter the U.S. no earlier than 30 days prior to the start date of your program indicated in Section 3 of your SEVIS Form DS-2019.

Step 6: Apply for "Admission" to the U.S.

When you arrive in the U.S., you will apply for "admission" and an immigration official will examine your documents. You will need to present the following documents:

- USCIS Form I-94
- Passport with valid J-1 visa
- SEVIS Form DS-2019
- Proof of SEVIS Fee payment

You should have the following documents ready to present if the immigration official asks for them:

- Original financial documents
- Acceptance letter from Westfield State University

The immigration official may ask you one or more questions. If you are asked about your source of funding, answer the question, and offer to show the Inspector your financial documents. If you are asked about your "intentions," answer the question and offer to show supporting documents.

If you have the required documents and there are no more questions, the Immigration Inspector will "admit" you to the U.S. by stamping your passport, your SEVIS Form DS-2019, and your USCIS Form I-94. When you leave the inspection

area, make certain that you have the following documents in your possession:

1. Passport
2. *Departure Record* (part of USCIS Form I-94)
3. SEVIS Form DS-2019
4. All supporting documents

The Two-Year Home Country Physical Presence Requirement

After you finish your J-1 program in the U.S., you may be required to spend two years in your home country, or country of last legal residence, before you will be allowed to return to the U.S. in certain types of immigration classifications. You may be subject to this requirement if:

- Either the U.S. government or your home government directly funds your activities in the U.S.
- Your prospective field of research, teaching or expertise appears on a document called the "Skills List," or
- You will receive graduate medical education or training.

Caution

It is important that you do not enter on a B-1 or B-2 visitor visa, or in WT or WB status through the "Visa Waiver" program. It is unlawful for individuals in these classifications to work in the U.S., and it is difficult and sometimes impossible to change status to J-1 once in the country.

Additional Information

The staff of the IPO is pleased to provide you with information, advice, and assistance on any visa or immigration matter that relates to your activities at Westfield State University. For more information on U.S. Embassies and Consulates, on the visa application process, and on the "exchange visitor" program, you may visit the U.S. Department of State website at: https://travel.state.gov/content/travel.html