Week 2: Visas and Immigration

Sooner Global Newsletter

Issue 2/20

**Issue 2: Visas and Immigration**

This week SGN will focus on F-1 and J-1 visa/immigration requirements.

All international visitors must have a current US visa in their passport to be admitted into the US. People come to the US for many different reasons. As an international student at OU, you will apply for an F-1 or J-1 student visa. Canadian citizens are not required to apply for a visa to enter the US but must still pay the SEVIS fee and present the Certificate of Eligibility (I-20 or DS-2019) at the US port of entry. Landed Immigrants of Canada must obtain a US visa.

How do I obtain a visa?

**Week 2**

- 4 Steps to your student visa
- F-1/J-1 status
- When to arrive
To obtain a US visa and enter the US, you must:

1. Pay the SEVIS fee online at www.fmjfee.com.
2. Receive your DS-2019 or I-20 and make a visa appointment at a US consulate abroad.
3. Apply for your student visa at the consular interview. Make your visa interview appointment as early as possible and bring your SEVIS fee receipt to the interview.
4. Present the required documentation to apply for entry to the US upon arrival.

For more information visit: http://www.ou.edu/iss select 'New Students,' then select 'Applying for a Visa.'
What is the difference between my visa and my immigration status?

Your immigration status (F-1 or J-1) is determined when you enter the US by a customs official and is indicated on your I-94 card. You may have many visa stamps in your passport, but upon entry into the US, you may be admitted in only one immigration status. Verify that the correct status is indicated on your I-94 card. Unlike your visa, it may be possible to change your immigration status in the US. The US Department of State provides further information on visas and visa status.

I-94 Card

I-94 Card - This small white card documents your legal entry into the US, and indicates your immigration status. You complete it while in flight or at a US border crossing. It is completed at a US port of entry. An immigration official stamps it, and places it into your passport. The I-94 card notes your name, date of birth, country of citizenship, and the date and port of your arrival in the US. It indicates how long you can stay in the US. The notation D/S signifies "duration of status" and refers to the completion date on the I-20 or DS2019. Each time you leave the US, you must surrender your I-94. The I-94 is an important form. Copy the card and keep it in a safe place. If you lose your I-94, alert the OU ISS office.

Form I-20

Form I-20 (Certificate of Visa Eligibility) - Students who (1) are fully admitted, (2) need a student visa to enter the US to study at OU (except Canadian citizens), and (3) have documented their ability to finance their education will receive a Certificate of Visa Eligibility, Form I-20, from OU. This document certifies your eligibility for an F-1 visa. You must apply for the F-1 visa at a US consulate abroad, and must show Form I-20 to the immigration official when you enter the US. The I-20 is processed and issued through SEVIS (the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System).

The initial I-20 that you used when you entered the US and which the Department of Homeland Security stamped is an important immigration document. Copy all pages, and keep them with your records. If you lose your I-20, alert OU ISS office.
Entry Into the US

Tips on:
- When to arrive
- What documentation to bring
- When/where orientation takes place

When to arrive

International students cannot enter the US more than 30 days prior to the program start date that is indicated on the Form I-20 or DS2019. We recommend that new students arrive at least two weeks before the start of the semester. You will receive information about several different orientations, including the orientation program organized by your school and/or department. It is important that you attend these programs. The OU ISS office is required to give all new international students an orientation program; this orientation is mandatory for all new and transferring international students. Students who are transferring from another US school to OU and who have a "Transfer Pending" I-20 or DS-2019 are not subject to the 30-day arrival limit. Transfer students may travel and re-enter the US any time between school programs. However, transfer students must re-enter with their OU I-20 or DS-2019, and not the I-20 from the previous school.

I-94 Card

At customs, you will receive an I-94 Card to complete along with customs declarations. Use the white I-94 Card; the green I-94 Card is for tourists only. Write your name and other information as they appear on your I-20 or DS-2019 and passport. Inconsistency in your name and information will cause problems and delays after your arrival to the US.

Orientation

All new and transfer international students MUST attend New International Student Orientation. Failure to do so will negatively impact your US immigration status. You can register for orientation at: http://www.ou.edu/content/iss/home/audience_navigation/new_international/new_international.html.

Student Perspectives

The visa process was very quick and straightforward. Coming with an open mind to a country like the United States, I felt really enthusiastic to be more independent and responsible, experience life on my own, meet new people and study in a different academic system than the one in my country. Coming from the busy city of Bangalore in India, life in Norman turned out to be comparatively low-key and took a little while to get used to. Nevertheless, my experience over the past one-year has been absolutely fantastic.

-Neil from India
MA in Electrical & Computer Engineering