



# Immigration Basics for J-1 Students

International Student Services – Texas A&M University

**International Student Services:** 110 Pavilion Phone: 845-1824, Fax: 862-4633, Website: <http://iss.tamu.edu>, E-mail: [iss@tamu.edu](mailto:iss@tamu.edu). International Student Services (ISS) is an advocate for international students at Texas A&M University (TAMU). ISS advisors are available to answer your questions, especially questions involving immigration issues, while you are a student. However, it is your responsibility to maintain your legal status.

## Maintaining Your J-1 Status

Below are some of the most common J-1 regulations. Failure to follow J-1 regulations may result in the termination of your academic program. This handout is written for J-1 students on TAMU DS-2019s; however, the regulations also apply for students on DS-2019 issued by another institution or agency. If your DS-2019 was issued by TAMU, then please consult ISS for further information. If another institution or agency issued your DS-2019, please consult that institution or agency for further information.

### **A. Pursue your Objective**

You must pursue the objective listed on the DS-2019. Do not change your objective (major, degree level, etc) or category (e.g. student to researcher) prior to getting special authorization from your financial sponsor and from an ISS advisor.

### **B. Keep your documents up to date**

- DS-2019:** Do not let your DS-2019 expire. If you need an extension to the completion date on the DS-2019, please contact ISS. If your DS-2019 was issued from another institution or agency than TAMU, please consult them concerning your extension. Keep all of your DS-2019s for your records.
- Passport:** Do not let your passport expire. You should extend your passport six months prior to the expiration date at your country's Consulate in the United States or when you go back home. You cannot work with an expired passport.
- I-94 Card or I-797:** Keep your I-94 card. It must state "J-1" and "D/S" (Duration of Status). Your dependents I-94 must state "J-2" and "D/S". If you have an expiration date on your I-94 card, then you should speak to an ISS advisor immediately.
- Visa Stamp:** It is okay for your visa to expire while you are in the United States; however, you may need to renew it if you travel outside the United States. Pay attention to the number of entries into the United States you are allowed. It is acceptable for your visa to have another school's name on it. Please contact ISS for information concerning going to Mexico or Canada with an expired visa.
- Update both ISS and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) of any physical address changes while maintaining legal immigration status (Post Office Boxes are not acceptable for reporting purposes). Reporting changes of address in the Howdy Portal (<http://howdy.tamu.edu>) will fulfill this requirement, as the University will forward the updated address electronically to DHS. Failure to do so could result in losing legal immigration status and being required to leave the United States.
- Maintain a permanent address outside the United States to which you intend to return.
- Do not enter the United States on a tourist (B) visa, the visa waiver program, or on a border-crossing card. You will no longer be on a student visa and you will lose all student visa benefits such as work authorization.

### **C. Maintain Full-time Enrollment**

You must complete the following number of hours each semester.

Student	Credit Hours each Fall and Spring	Credit Hours Summer term
TAMU Graduates	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>
TAMU Undergraduates	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>
Full Time ELI students	<b>24</b>	<b>21</b>

If you need to fall below the required hours, please contact ISS before you Q-drop the classes. You may or may not be eligible to fall below hours legally. Please ask about a Reduce Course Load Waiver. In order to maintain legal immigration status, a Reduce Course Load Waiver must be approved prior to dropping below hours.

If summer is your first semester at TAMU, first semester in a new academic program, or last semester in your academic program, you must register full-time. Summer is considered vacation time if it is not your first or last semester and you are not required to take classes for immigration purposes. Please consult your department concerning university rules on summer registration.

**If you want to take classes at another school, including Texas A&M University English Language Institute, during the summer or in conjunction with your TAMU classes, then you need to complete a co-enrollment form. Co-enrollment must be authorized by ISS. During the Spring and Fall semesters, you should be taking at least half of your courses at TAMU.**

#### **D. Obtain Work Authorization**

Work authorization is dependent on your legal J-1 status and your enrollment at Texas A&M University.

##### *On-Campus Work*

As long as you are in legal J-1 status and meet TAMU requirements, you are eligible to work on campus for up to 20 hours per week during the Spring and Fall semesters. You are eligible to work full-time on campus during vacation periods and during the summer semester.

##### *Off-Campus Work*

You must get proper work authorization prior to working off-campus. **You will be out of status and eligible for deportation if you work without DHS authorization. Do not risk it.** Work is considered anything for which you are compensated, such as being given cash, food, or room/board.

Speak to ISS concerning Academic Training or economic hardship work authorization.

#### **E. Maintain Adequate Health Insurance**

**You are required to maintain adequate health, accident and repatriation insurance at all times for you and all of your dependents. You lose your J-1 status if you willfully do not maintain the required insurance. You must also maintain enough money for airfare home.**

#### **F. Traveling outside the United States while you are a student**

Your DS-2019 should be signed by an International Student Advisor at ISS (if your DS-2019 was issued by TAMU) before you leave the United States. The signature is valid for up to one year or until you graduate or your DS-2019 expires whichever comes first. Be sure that you enter the United States on your J-1 visa. Always make sure your I-94 card is marked "J-1" and "D/S". If you are given a 30-day entry, come to ISS immediately. Do not enter the United States on a tourist (B) visa, the visa waiver program, or on a border-crossing card. You will no longer be on a student visa and you will lose all student visa benefits such as work authorization.

#### **G. Dependents**

You may bring your dependents (spouse and/or unmarried children under age 21) to the United States. Please consult ISS about the procedure. There are no restrictions on a J-2 visa holder's ability to study. Eligible dependents on a J-2 visa may apply for work authorization from DHS. J-2 visa holders are also required to have health insurance coverage at all times while in status. Dependents must travel with the proper paperwork, such as their DS-2019 signed for travel.

#### **H. Two-Year Home Residency Requirement**

You and your dependents may be subject to the two-year home residency requirement. Please consult ISS for information on the ramifications of the residency requirement.

#### **I. SEVIS Fee**

The US government requires individuals applying for an F-1 or J-1 exchange visitor visa or F-1/J-1 status to pay the SEVIS fee in order to begin a program of study or exchange visitor program, change status, change exchange visitor category, or be reinstated to legal status after a substantive violation. For further information regarding the SEVIS fee, please visit <http://iss.tamu.edu/Prospective-Students/Applying-for-Visa/Immigration-Requirements>