Pre-Arrival Information and Travel Checklist
Graduate Students

2015-2016

INTERNATIONAL SERVICES FOR STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS
March 2015

Dear Graduate Student,

Welcome to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute! Fellow students, professors and staff at Rensselaer join in wishing you a pleasant and rewarding stay in the United States.

The International Services for Students and Scholars (ISSS) office is here to help prepare you for your trip and adjustment to the United States. This brochure provides important information regarding travel arrangements, immigration requirements and other personal information to ensure that you are prepared for your stay at RPI.

The dates and costs listed in this brochure are based on the best information available as of March 2015 and may change. For updated information, please take time to visit the International Services for Students and Scholars tab on the Dean of Students Office website, which may be found at this web address:

http://doso.rpi.edu

Remember, you are REQUIRED to check in with our office upon arrival to campus during the specific check-in times. You are also REQUIRED to attend the International Student Orientation. Please see the enclosed orientation information pamphlet for more information

We look forward to meeting you and wish you a safe and pleasant journey to Troy!

Sincerely,

Emily Anderson
Associate Dean
International Services for Students and Scholars
Dean of Students Office

International Services for Students and Scholars
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Pre-Arrival Checklist

You must complete each of the following prior to your arrival in the U.S. Be sure to allow yourself adequate time to complete each item:

☐ Pay your SEVIS I-901 fee (see page 5).

☐ Apply for your F-1 or J-1 Visa (see pages 6-7).

☐ Submit your immunization information to the Rensselaer Student Health Services office (see pages 11).

☐ Make arrangements for travel (see page 9).

☐ Arrange housing (see page 12).
SEVIS

The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System, or SEVIS, is a database used by the United States government to collect and monitor information about all international students and scholars who are admitted to the country on F, M or J visas. The ISSS Office at RPI deals exclusively with those students and scholars who are admitted on F and J visas.

All the information on your SEVIS account must be accurate and up to date in order for you to maintain your legal immigration status. SEVIS is the database on which your I-20 (F visa) or DS-2019 (J visa) is created and maintained. You will need your I-20 or DS-2019 for your visa appointment.

SEVIS I-901 Fee

Payment of the SEVIS I-901 fee is required. The fee is currently $200 for F-1 students and $180 for J-1 students. You must pay the SEVIS fee at least three business days before your appointment at the U.S. Consulate or Embassy. You must bring proof of payment of the SEVIS fee with you to your visa appointment or your application will not proceed.

Canadian citizens do not need a visa to enter the US but must pay the SEVIS fee and present proof of this payment to the immigration inspector upon entry into the US.

You may pay the SEVIS fee online:

http://www.fmjfee.com

More information on the SEVIS fee is available here:

http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/faq
Applying for a Visa

All foreign students must obtain a passport and visa to enter the United States. Student visas are issued in two categories at RPI: F-1 and J-1.

Apply for your visa at the U.S. Consulate or Embassy in your home country. For more information, please visit the website of your nearest U.S. Consulate or Embassy, which you can find at:

http://usembassy.state.gov/

If you have been accepted by more than one school, do not apply for a visa until you have decided which school you will attend.

Canadian citizens
Although a passport is required, a visa is not required for Canadian citizens to study in the U.S. Upon entry, Canadians need only present their form I-20 or DS-2019, evidence of financial support and proof of I-901 SEVIS fee payment.

Transfer students
If you are a foreign student transferring directly to Rensselaer from another educational institution in the U.S., consult your foreign student advisor at your current school for instructions on the transfer process. Transferring applies even if you are graduating from your current school and continuing your education at Rensselaer. Your SEVIS record will be transferred from your current school to RPI.

Applying for a visa

First, please review all of the information on your I-20 or DS-2019 to ensure that it is correct. The name on your I-20 or DS-2019 must match your name as it appears in your passport. If there is an error, please contact the ISSS Office at ISSSOffice@rpi.edu immediately.

For the visa interview you should bring the following documents with you:

1.) Form I-20 (F-1 students) or Form DS-2019 (J-1 students)
2.) Acceptance letter from Rensselaer
3.) Valid Passport
4.) Proof of payment for the SEVIS I-901 fee
5.) Proof of financial support for the entire course of study
If your visa application is denied

♦ You should request a written reason for the denial. You can re-apply if denied, but you should have new or updated evidence that convinces the officer that the first denial was wrong.

IMPORTANT

♦ You must attend the school whose form I-20 or DS-2019 you used to enter the U.S.

♦ F-1 and J-1 students may enter the U.S. up to, but no more than, 30 days prior to the start date as noted on your form I-20 or DS-2019.

♦ Applicants should be aware that certain disciplines are considered “sensitive” by the State Department. If your area of study or research is considered “sensitive,” you may be subject to additional procedures during the visa application process.
Arrival at Immigration Checkpoint in U.S.

It is very important that you do not pack any of these items in your checked baggage:

- The Immigration Officer will check your passport, visa, I-20 or DS-2019, proof of financial support and proof of payment of the I-901 SEVIS fee
- The Immigration Officer will stamp your Form I-20 or DS-2019 with the date of your arrival, port of entry and your non-immigrant status
- Review your documents (I-20 or DS-2019, AND I-94) carefully at the Immigration inspection station to ensure that the correct information was marked. If there are any errors, ask them to be corrected there. This is your responsibility. Corrections might not be possible once you leave the immigration inspection station.

I-94

The I-94 is a form issued by the U.S. government which keeps track of your arrival and departure to the United States. The I-94 is an electronic form and your records can be obtained at the following website:

http://i94.cbp.dhs.gov

When you arrive in the U.S., this arrival will be documented on your I-94. It is important to make sure that the information of your arrival is correct. This includes your “Class of Admission” (F1 or J1), your “Admit Until Date” (D/S, or Duration of Status), and other identifying information (Name, Passport Number, Country of Issuance, Date of Entry).
Travel Arrangements

You are responsible for making your travel arrangements. You should make these travel arrangements well in advance to find the most affordable prices.

You may need to contact a travel agent or the travel company through which you are travelling. The following websites may also be helpful:


The nearest airport to RPI is the Albany International Airport (ALB), which is approximately 15 minutes from campus:

http://www.albanyairport.com/

If you are arriving at La Guardia Airport in New York City, Premiere Express Shuttle Service offers a shuttle service from La Guardia to Albany International Airport. Advance reservations are required:

http://www.premierelimo.com/transportation-services/airport-shuttle/

Megabus provides bus services from New York City to the Albany-Rensselaer Train Station. The Megabus departures are located at 10th Ave between 40th and 41st St. in New York City. Please be aware that Megabus has strict rules for baggage:

http://us.megabus.com

Amtrak is a national train service. The nearest station is the Albany-Rensselaer Train Station, which is approximately 15 minutes from campus. Please be sure to review baggage regulations before travelling:

http://www.amtrak.com

A taxi from the Albany International Airport or the Rensselaer Train Station to Rensselaer costs about $35. Carry a few extra dollars to tip the driver for your baggage. **Always verify the total cost of your taxi before you go anywhere. If traveling in a group, make sure that you are not being overcharged for each additional person.**
Checking In with ISSS Staff

Please review the Orientation Information booklet that was mailed to you. You **must** check-in with the ISSS Office during one of the designated check-in times. This is required in order for you to maintain legal immigration status. In addition, you will not be able to register for classes until you have checked in with our office.

Please bring your passport, visa, I-20 or DS-2019, and a printed out copy of your I-94, which you can obtain here: [http://i94.cbp.dhs.gov](http://i94.cbp.dhs.gov)

**Orientation**

You are required to attend a **mandatory** orientation for international students on **Friday, August 28th**. Please see the attached Orientation Information booklet for more information. This orientation will feature vital information about your time at RPI, specifically regarding your immigration status and your obligations as an international student in the United States.

All new international graduate students must also attend the graduate student orientation. Contact the Office of Graduate Education office for more information.
Health Services Requirements

Health Insurance

Students on a F-1 visa

All F-1 international students must purchase Rensselaer’s health insurance unless you can prove that comparable health insurance coverage from your home country matches Rensselaer’s insurance. If you have equivalent coverage, Rensselaer’s insurance fee may be waived, but you will be required to pay the health service fee.

Students on a J-1 visa

All J-1 students must purchase Rensselaer’s health insurance unless you can prove insurance coverage from your home country is comparable to Rensselaer’s insurance. Current U.S. regulations require all individuals in J status to carry health insurance meeting certain minimum levels. These include:

- Medical benefits: $100,000 per accident or illness
- Repatriation: $25,000
- Medical Evacuation: $50,000
- Deductibles: not to exceed $500 per accident or illness

FAILURE TO MAINTAIN ADEQUATE MEDICAL INSURANCE FOR YOURSELF OR YOUR DEPENDENTS WHILE IN THE U.S. WILL CAUSE YOUR PROGRAM TO BE IMMEDIATELY TERMINATED.

Health Forms

1. You must submit your medical forms to the Student Health Center by registering for the Student Health Center Portal. Please follow the steps outlined below:

   
   b. Click on the “Student Health Center Portal” link in the main menu.
   
   c. Register for the portal. After you register, you will be emailed a password to log into the portal directly.
Housing and Accommodations

**Off-campus housing**

If you intend to live off-campus you should arrive by early August. You should be prepared to pay a deposit and perhaps buy or rent furniture and household items. We strongly urge you not to sign any lease or contract for off-campus housing unless you fully understand the terms of the lease. Leases or contracts cannot be broken without financial loss to you.

The Student Union maintains listings of many current opportunities for off-campus accommodations. It is available online here:

http://housing.union.rpi.edu/

**City Station**

Family housing is available off-campus for married students or guardians of children:

http://www.mycollegesuites.com/city-station-south/

Applications for City Station South should be sent to this address:

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute  
Office of Graduate Education Attn: Dennis Gornic  
1516 Peoples Avenue  
Troy, NY 12180

**Temporary Accommodations**

Students who do not have housing arrangements prior to their arrival can choose to stay in a local hotel while they look for permanent housing. The following hotels are the closest to the Rensselaer campus. Be sure to ask for the RPI discount.

Franklin Square Inn  
1 4th Street  
Troy, NY 12180  
Phone: (518) 274-8800  
Fax: (518) 274-0427  
http://www.franklinsquareinn.com/

Hilton Garden Inn  
235 Hoosick Street  
Troy, NY 12180  
Phone: (518) 272-1700  
Fax: (518) 272-1701  
http://www.troyhgi.com
Financial Information

Paying Bills
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute has partnered with peerTransfer to save you money on your international student payments. To get started with this program go to:

https://www.peertransfer.com/school/rpi

The benefits of paying through peerTransfer
- Eliminate hidden bank fees – ensure Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute receives the correct amount.
- Save on exchange rates – in most cases you can make a payment in your home currency.
- Peace of mind – payment tracking and 24x7 multilingual customer support.

International Finance
Banks and credit card companies may deactivate your cards when they see suspicious charges. Make sure to inform them that you are planning to travel outside of the country and the length of your travel.

If you do not have a bank account with a bank that is international, it is important to inquire as to what the fees are for withdrawing money in the United States. Also, be sure to find out what conversion fees, if any, are involved. Many credit card companies often charge “Foreign Transaction Fees” or “International Transaction Fees.” It is important to inquire about these fees prior to leaving to avoid large charges for using a credit card.

As a precaution, we recommend you have easy access to enough money to last about a month. If you are being financed by your home country or another source that is not personal funds, the deposit time can be lengthy.

Upon arrival, you will need to use cash for a variety of important things such as taxi transportation. It is important that you have US currency available for these transactions. Money is often given in large units, such as $20 bills. When exchanging money, be sure to ask for some smaller bills, such as $5 and $10 bills.

Banking
Rensselaer has a bank on campus. This bank is called SEFCU (www.sefcu.com). International students are welcome to open bank accounts in the United States. Please note, SEFCU, as well as many other banks, charge fees for the transfer of funds. They are often based on how much money you are transferring and are usually charged each time you transfer money.
Helpful Hints

Do...

♦ Ensure that you have access to at least one month’s worth of money for initial expenses. You should also bring some smaller US currency for food and taxi services upon arrival.
♦ Check in with the ISSS Office upon arrival.
♦ Mark all your bags with your name and Rensselaer’s address.

Do not...

♦ Bring electrical appliances. U.S. domestic voltage levels and outlets may not be compatible with those at home.
♦ Bring food. Most foreign foods are available in specialty stores in this area or in New York City. Some foods cannot be brought into the U.S. legally.
♦ Bring household items or bed linens, which are easily and inexpensively available in the U.S.

Important Phone Numbers

International Services for Students and Scholars (518) 276-6266

Undergraduate Admissions (518) 276-6216

First Year Experience (518) 276-6864

Residential Life Office & Dining (518) 276-6284

Bursar’s Office (518) 276-6610

Student Health Services (518) 276-6287

Rensselaer Public Safety (non-emergency) (518) 276-6656
Rensselaer Public Safety (emergency) (518) 276-6611