

*Pre-Arrival Information
and Travel Checklist*
Graduate Students

Spring 2017



INTERNATIONAL SERVICES
FOR STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS



Rensselaer

November 2016

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 life in the United States. This brochure provides important information regarding travel arrangements, immigration requirements and other helpful tips 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 October 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 legally REQUIRED to check in with our office upon arrival to campus during the specific check-in times. You are also legally REQUIRED to attend the International Student Orientation. Please see the enclosed orientation information pamphlet for more information, including dates and locations for check-in and orientation.

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

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Table of Contents

Pre-Arrival Checklist.....	4
SEVIS I-901 Fee.....	5
Applying for a Visa	6-7
Arriving at Immigration Checkpoint	8
Travel Arrangements	9
Checking In with ISSS Staff.....	10
Health Services Requirements	11
Housing and Accommodations	12
Financial Information	13
Helpful Hints/Phone Numbers.....	14

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 Center (see page 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 students and scholars 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.

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 United States. 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 (e.g. high school, 2 or 4 year college or university, etc...) in the United States please 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. If your SEVIS record is transferred, you will not have to pay another SEVIS fee.

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, please bring the following documents with you, along with any other documents your consulate or embassy requests:

- 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. If your visa is denied, please contact Rensselaer immediately.

IMPORTANT

- ◆ You must attend the school which issued you the 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.

If you are stopped at the border or denied entry, please contact the ISSS Office for assistance. If it is during normal business hours (Monday-Friday, 8:30am-5:00pm) we can be reached at **#518-276-6266**. During nights or weekends, please call **Rensselaer's Public Safety Office (#518-276-6656)** and they will help connect you to a representative from our office.

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 can be accessed online at:

<https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov>

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

Please be aware that you are responsible for making all of your travel arrangements. Please make these arrangements 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:

<http://www.expedia.com>

<http://www.travelocity.com>

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/>

There are a number of coach bus services from New York City and Boston to Albany, including **Greyhound**, **Megabus**, **Adirondack Trailways**, and **Peter Pan** bus lines.

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 approximately \$40. 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. You ***must*** check-in with the ISSS Office during one of the designated check-in times 10am to 12pm & 1pm to 3pm, between January 10, 11 and 12. 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.

When checking in, please bring your passport, visa, DS-2019, and a printed out copy of your I-94, which you can obtain here: <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov>

Orientation

You are required to attend a **mandatory** orientation for international students on **Friday, January 13th** from 8:30am -9:45a, in the **Darrin Communication Center (DCC) Room 232** . Please see the attached Orientation Information booklet for more information. This orientation will feature vital information about your time at RPI, specifically 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

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

Health Insurance

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:
 - a. Go to: <http://studenthealth.rpi.edu/>
 - 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

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://www.jumpoffcampus.com/>

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 for international student payments. You can find more information on their website:

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

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 study outside of the country.

If you do not have a bank account with a bank that is international it is important to inquire about fees for withdrawing money in the United States. 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 charges for using a credit card.

As a precaution, we recommend you have easy access to enough money to last a month upon arrival. 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, SEFCU (<http://www.sefcu.com>). International students are welcome to open bank accounts in the United States.

Please note that 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) 276-4966
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