

*Visiting Scholar
Pre-Arrival Information
Booklet*



*International Services for
Students and Scholars Office*



Rensselaer

Dear Visiting Scholar,

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 has put together this booklet to help you prepare for your stay in the United States. This booklet provides important information regarding travel arrangements, immigration regulations and other personal matters. Please review the enclosed information carefully before your visa appointment and before your entry into the United States.

Remember, you MUST email or call in advance to make an appointment to check-in with our office within 3 days of your arrival to campus. Please email ISSSOffice@rpi.edu or call 518-276-4966 to make the appointment. Please bring your DS-2019, passport, visa, a printed copy of you electronic I-94 and proof of health insurance for yourself and your dependent(s) when you check-in with our office.

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

Sincerely,

International Services for Students and Scholars

International Services for Students and Scholars
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Academy Hall Room 4226
110 8th Street
Troy, New York 12180-3590
Telephone: **(518) 276-4966**
Fax: (518) 276-4839
Email: **ISSSOffice@rpi.edu**

Homepage for Rensselaer: <http://www.rpi.edu>
ISSS website: <http://doso.rpi.edu/>
Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/RPI.International.Services>

Rensselaer admits qualified students and scholars without regard to sex, sexual preference, marital status, age, race, color, religion, nationality or ethnic origin, or disability.

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Departure Checklist

Please have the following forms with you while entering the U.S. **Do not pack these documents in your checked luggage!**

- Valid passport with valid J-1 visa
- Form DS-2019 – make sure that you sign the form at the bottom!
- Proof of payment of SEVIS I-901 fee
- Your RPI appointment letter from your host department

Visa Application & Immigration Requirements

All foreign exchange visitors must obtain a passport and J-1 visa (except Canadians, see page 6) to enter the United States.

Applying for a Visa

You should apply for a visa at the U.S. Consulate or Embassy in your home country. For more information on what your embassy or consulate requires, as well as current wait times, please visit:

<http://usembassy.state.gov/>

You have received a **DS-2019 form** to apply for a J-1 visa with this Welcome Brochure. This document was created in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). Please review your documents and make sure all of the information is correct. **If there is an error, please email ISSSOffice@rpi.edu immediately** so that your document can be corrected and re-issued if needed.

Please bring the following documents to your visa appointment:

- form DS-2019 issued by Rensselaer or your program sponsor and form DS-7002, if applying for the J-1 student intern category
- valid passport
- proof of sufficient financial support for the duration of your stay in the U.S.
- proof of payment for the SEVIS I-901 fee (see below)
- Other supporting documents, as needed. You can ask your Consulate/Embassy before the visa appointment what other documents are useful for the appointment.

Spouses and dependents of J-1 scholars need a J-2 visa to enter the country. Each dependent must have a Form DS-2019 to obtain a visa. ***Individuals in J status are required to carry health insurance while in the United States. See page 7 for specific insurance information.***

SEVIS I-901 Fee

Payment of SEVIS Fee *must* be made **at least 3 business days** before your appointment with the U.S. Consulate or Embassy (for Canadians, it must be paid before you enter the U.S.) You must bring proof of the SEVIS Fee payment with you to your visa appointment. The payment is currently \$180 for J-1 students. To pay the SEVIS fee online, please visit: <http://www.fmjfee.com>.

Two Year Residency Requirement [212(e)]

Please Note: According to the Immigration Nationality Act, Section 212(e), J-1 holders from certain countries, or those receiving government funds from the United States or their home country, may be subject to the 2 year home residency requirement. This will be covered further by our office upon your arrival to the U.S.

Transferring Scholars

If you are a foreign scholar transferring directly to Rensselaer from another educational institution in the U.S., consult your foreign student/scholar advisor at your current school for instructions on the SEVIS transfer process.

Canadian Citizens

Canadian citizens do not need a visa in order to enter the U.S. Upon entry, you are required to present your form DS-2019, evidence of financial support, and proof of the SEVIS I-901 fee.

Visa Denials & Security Clearance

If you or your spouse's 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.

Please be aware that certain disciplines are considered "sensitive" by the State Department. The Technology Alert List (TAL) describes critical fields, which are considered sensitive, and outlines procedures consuls must follow when they issue visas to prospective scholars whose areas of study or research coincide with fields on the list. Individuals planning to undergo research in these fields should be prepared for longer wait times.

Applicants from **Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Sudan and Syria** are required to undergo security clearances. Security clearances can cause long delays.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

J-1 scholars may enter the U.S. **30 days prior to the start date** as noted on your DS-2019, and are required to **check into the ISSS office within 30 days after your program start date.**

If you will not be able to arrive to the U.S. by the start date listed on your DS-2019, you ***must*** contact your host department ***as soon as possible*** to ask for a change to the dates in your offer letter. If your host department approves the new dates they must notify the ISSS Office so that we can update your new start date in SEVIS.

Insurance Requirements

Current U.S. regulations require all individuals in **J** status (J-1 or J-2) to carry health insurance meeting certain minimum levels, listed below:

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

If you do not have health insurance that meets these requirements from your home country you must purchase adequate insurance immediately upon your arrival to the U.S. Your health insurance must be purchased for the entire duration of your stay in the U.S.

Failure to do so could result in your termination at Rensselaer.

Arriving to the United States

Arrival

Immigration officials will ask you to present your DS-2019, a valid passport, valid J-1 visa, and appointment letter from the department when you arrive at the port of entry. You may also be asked to present proof of financial support and payment of the SEVIS I-901 fee. **It is very important that you do not pack any of these items in your checked luggage.**

The immigration officer will stamp your passport with your date of arrival, your port of entry, and your non-immigrant status. Please make sure that your status is marked as “J-1” and your admissibility as “D/S” (“Duration of Status;” i.e. the duration of your program as indicated on your DS-2019).

Please review your documents carefully at the immigration inspection station to ensure that all information was marked correctly. If there is an error, please ask for it to be corrected there. Corrections may not be possible once you leave the inspection station.

I-94

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

<https://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 checking your class of admission (J1) and admit until date (D/S, for duration of status) as well as all other identifying and entrance information.

Getting to Rensselaer

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.

The following websites may 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 \$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 the ISSS Office

You **must** check in with the ISSS office upon arrival to Rensselaer. Please email the office at ISSSOffice@rpi.edu or call us at 518-276-6266 to arrange an appointment for check-in.

Office Location: International Services for Students and Scholars
Academy Hall, 4th Floor, Suite 4226

Please bring your: *passport with valid visa, DS-2019, a printed copy of your electronic I-94, and proof of your health insurance.*

Housing & Accommodations

We urge you **NOT** to sign any lease or contract for off-campus housing that you do not fully understand. **Leases or contracts cannot be broken without financial loss.**

Temporary Accommodations

Scholars 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. We recommend that you book a hotel room early as these hotels can get busy and may be sold out.

www.airbnb.com

Troy, NY or Albany, NY area

<https://www.corporatehousing.com/find/ny/metro-albany/troy>

Temporary short term rentals

<http://www.apartmenthomeliving.com/troy-ny/apartments-for-rent/furnished-short-term-lease&page=8>

Additional short term rentals

Franklin Square Inn/Best Western

1 4th Street

Troy, NY 12180

Phone: (518) 274-8800

Fax: (518) 274-0427

<http://www.franklinsquareinn.com/>

Avg. rate in August:

\$125+ per night

Hilton Garden Inn

235 Hoosick Street

Troy, NY 12180

Phone: (518) 272-1700

Fax: (518) 272-1701

<http://www.troyhgi.com>

Avg. rate in August: \$134.00+per night.

Ask for RPI friends & family rate.

Helpful Hints

DO's

- Write your name clearly on the outside of each bag that accompanies you on the airplane. Be sure each bag is tagged to your final airport destination and immediately report any lost or damaged baggage to an airline official.
- Remember to convert some money into US currency before arriving in the US. This will be very important if you are arriving at campus by taxi (which may only take cash) and for other expenses in your first couple of days.
- Call your bank/credit card companies to let them know you are traveling and living outside of your country for a period of time. This is very important so that they do not block your cards. You will also want to ask about international transaction fees and ATM fees.
- Bring an adaptor for US plugs, as US plugs will be different from your home countries plugs.
- Check in with the ISSS Office upon arrival

DON'Ts

- Bring electrical appliances. U.S. domestic voltage levels and outlets may not be compatible with those at home.
- Carry large amounts of cash. Carrying cash is ok, but large amounts of cash may not be able to be brought through customs. Again, check with your bank/credit cards about traveling and living abroad.
- Leave your bags unattended! This includes wallets and purses. Be extra careful in airports and getting out of taxis.

Important Phone Numbers

International Services for Students and Scholars	(518) 276-4966
Rensselaer Public Safety (non-emergency)	(518) 276-6656
<i>*If you have issues with your arrival during non-business hours, please call the non-emergency number for public safety</i>	
Rensselaer Public Safety (emergency)	(518) 276-6611