Visiting Scholar
Pre-Arrival
Information Booklet

International Services for Students and Scholars

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 will help to prepare you for your stay in the United States. This brochure provides important information regarding travel arrangements, immigration regulations and other personal matters.

Remember, you MUST email or call in advance to make an appointment to check-in with our office within 3 days after your arrival on campus. Please email ISSSOffice@rpi.edu 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) 276-6266
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 in your checked luggage!

- Valid passport with valid J 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 visiting scholars, (except Canadians see page 6), must obtain a passport and visa 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. This document was created in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). Please review your documents and make sure all the information is correct. If there is an error, please contact 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
- 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)

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 to apply for a J visa (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](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 Immigration’s 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 to the immigration inspector.

**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 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.

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. up to, but no more than, **30 days prior to the start date** as noted on your DS-2019.

If you do not believe that you will 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.

J-1 scholars may legally stay in the U.S. up to **30 days** after your DS-2019 expires. While travel within the U.S. is permitted in this 30 day time frame, if you leave the U.S. at any point you will not be readmitted in J-1 status.
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 will have to purchase it 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, and your J visa 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 this 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 “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 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 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.
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 the ISSS Office

Once you arrive on the Rensselaer campus, you must check in with the ISSS office. You must email or call in advance to make an appointment. Call (518) 276-6266 or email ISSSOffice@rpi.edu and set up an appointment.

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

Academy Hall is located on the corner of 15th Street and College Ave, across from the Fire Department.

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.

Your department will be able to help you with off-campus housing. RPI also has a website of off-campus listings:
   http://housing.union.rpi.edu/.

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 you book a hotel room early as these hotels get busy and may be sold out.

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**

- Bring a copy of your marriage certificate and birth certificates of children with you if your dependents’ family names are different on the passport so that they will be able to get the Rensselaer Identification Card.

- 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 country’s 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) 276-6266  
Rensselaer Public Safety (non-emergency)  (518) 276-6656  
*If you have issues with your arrival during non-business hours, please call the non-emergency number for public safety*  
Rensselaer Public Safety (emergency)  (518) 276-6611