

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

Through the International Services for Students and Scholars (ISSS) Office, Rensselaer will help to prepare you for your trip and adjustment to the United States. This brochure provides important information regarding travel arrangements, immigration information, housing, family, health, and other personal matters.

Have a safe and pleasant journey to Troy.

***Remember, you MUST check in with our office as soon as possible after arriving on campus.*** We look forward to meeting you.

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*World Wide Web Homepage for Rensselaer:*

<http://www.rpi.edu>

*World Wide Web Homepage for ISSS Office:*

<http://www.rpi.edu/web/iss/>

*For on-line version of Welcome Brochure:*

[http://www.rpi.edu/dept/doso/iss/public\\_html/Forms/Scholar%20wel%20brochure.doc](http://www.rpi.edu/dept/doso/iss/public_html/Forms/Scholar%20wel%20brochure.doc)

## DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

Use the following checklist to be sure that you have the necessary paperwork with you for yourself and your dependents to enter the US.

- Valid passport with appropriate visa (except for Canadians). See page 3.
- Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status (Form DS-2019). See page 3.
- Evidence of adequate health insurance coverage in the US. See page 10.

Sufficient funds in US dollar amounts to cover settling-in costs.  
**(Note: Do NOT bring large amounts of cash).** See page 7.

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## **BEFORE YOU GET ON THE PLANE . . .**

Arrange for your passport and visa. All foreign scholars, except Canadians, must obtain a passport and visa stamp to enter the United States. Scholar visas are obtained in a J-1 category.

You have received a Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitors (DS-2019) to apply for a J-1 visa. These documents were 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 the ISSS Office at [havisj@rpi.edu](mailto:havisj@rpi.edu) immediately** so your document can be corrected and re-issued if needed.

To enter on a J-1, Exchange Visitor visa, you must be sponsored by an authorized Exchange Visitor program. J-1 holders from some countries, or those receiving government funds from the government of the United States or their home country, may be required to return home for two years at the end of their stay before being eligible to change their status to temporary worker status or permanent residence in the United States.

To obtain a J-1 visa you must present to a U.S. Consul a Form DS-2019 issued by your program sponsor, a valid passport, and proof of sufficient financial support and proof of payment for the SEVIS I-901 fee. See page 4.

Individuals in J status are **required** to carry health insurance while in the United States. See page 9 for specific insurance information.

Spouses and dependents of J-1 scholars need a J-2 visa to enter the country. Each dependent must have their own Form DS-2019 to obtain a visa stamp.

Under this visa, J-2 spouses may apply to work after arrival in the U.S. if they can prove to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) that such employment will support only the dependent(s) and not the J-1 visa holder. The ISSS Office can assist with the application.

Do not pack your Form DS-2019 or evidence of financial support in your baggage; you will have to present them when you enter the U.S.

Visa stamps are unnecessary for *Canadian citizens* coming directly from Canada to work in the U.S. Upon entry, they need only present to the immigration inspector their DS-2019 along with evidence of financial support and proof of payment for SEVIS I-901 fee (receipt).

## **SEVIS Fee**

**Payment of SEVIS Fee must be made before your appointment with the Consulate/Embassy to apply for a Visa stamp or for Canadians before you enter the U.S.**

All J-1 applicants must pay the SEVIS fee at least 3 Business days before the visa application appointment or for Canadians before entering the U.S.

For more information on this go to:

[http://www.rpi.edu/dept/doso/ISSS/public\\_html/Immigration/feesevisj1.html](http://www.rpi.edu/dept/doso/ISSS/public_html/Immigration/feesevisj1.html)

## **Applying for a Visa Stamp**

Visa stamp application is made at a U.S. Consulate or Embassy in your home country. To determine how much time this procedure will take you should look at the web site of the Consulate or Embassy:

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

## **Visa Denials/Security Clearance**

If you or your spouse's visa stamp application is denied, you should request a written reason for the denial. Denials are usually given because you the scholar or dependent cannot convince the visa officer you are going to return to your home country after finishing the job here.

You can re-apply if denied, but you should have new or update evidence that convinces the officer the first denial was wrong.

Applicants need to 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 perspective 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.

## **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 Immigration's transfer process.

Upon arrival at Rensselaer, bring your offer letter, passport and other immigration documents to the **International Office** (ISSS) so that we can ensure your legal status in the United States.

Scholars who have obtained the proper Form DS-2019 must attend the school named on the Certificate of Eligibility presented at the United States port of entry.

**IMPORTANT NOTE: J-1 scholars may enter the U.S. up to but no more than 30 day prior to the start date as noted on your DS-2019.**

## **Arrival in the U.S.**

Whether you enter the U.S. by plane or land you will be required to complete Form I-94 Arrival/Departure Record. It will be stapled in your passport and indicates the date of your arrival, port of entry and your nonimmigrant status. It should be marked with D/S. D/S means duration of status. This document is very important. **DO NOT LOSE IT!!!**

Your DS-2019 will also be marked with the above information.

Review your documents carefully at the immigration inspection station to make sure the correct information was marked. If there are any errors ask for them to be corrected there.

Corrections might not be possible once you leave the immigration inspection station.

**Check government regulations for obtaining foreign exchange.** Also check your bank's procedures for transferring money to a U.S. bank. Keep in mind that in this area, personal and bank checks from abroad may require up to four weeks to clear in the bank. You will want to open an account at one of the several U.S. banks in Troy. There is a branch of HSBC on the Rensselaer campus (15th Street, Troy, New York 12180). All banks in Troy have procedures for handling funds from overseas.

**Ship** any belongings with care. If you must ship unaccompanied baggage, contract with an agent who has a corresponding agent in the U.S. who will check the baggage through customs and ship it to Troy. Scholars have had unpleasant and costly experiences with lost baggage in New York City and other ports because they contracted with shipping companies in their countries that had no forwarding agents or customs representation in the U.S. Insure all your shipments for 'all risk' coverage.

**International parcel** post will carry packages under 70 pounds (approximately 32 kilograms), usually less expensively than a shipping company. Consult your local parcel post regulations for details. The Troy Post Office will hold foreign ordinary parcels without charge up to 30 days if they are addressed to:

*(Your name)*  
c/o General Delivery  
Post Office  
400 Broadway  
Troy, New York 12180-9998  
USA

**Parcels mailed** within the U.S., however, will be held only 10 days. International mail within half ounce costs \$0.80 for most countries, while an aerogram costs \$0.70.

To ensure that your packages go through customs without unnecessary expense or delay, obtain a copy of *United States Customs Hints for Visitors* from a U.S. consular office. This pamphlet clearly explains customs regulations.

**Change your mailing address.** The International Office will accept your mail (letters only) until you establish a local address. Your mail should be addressed to:

*(Your name)*  
c/o International Services for Students & Scholars  
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute  
110 8<sup>th</sup> St.  
Troy, New York 12180-3590  
USA

Familiarize yourself with the **phone system** in the U.S. so that you can use it soon after your arrival. The format for phone numbers in U.S.:

(xxx) yyy-zzzz

xxx is the area code for a region and yyy-zzzz is an individual phone number. When dialing a long distance number (from one area code to another) you have to dial '1' before the area code and number. For example, to place a call from Troy, NY to Washington, DC the dialing sequence would be:

1-202-555-1212

When dialing a local number, you need only the individual phone number. For example: yyy-zzzz. Phone numbers with 800 or 888 in place of area code are toll free and cost nothing to the caller.

To dial an overseas number from anywhere in the U.S., the sequence is:

011- Country Code - City Code - Number

Country and city codes can be found in any local phone book or through an operator. Dial '0' for the operator.

## **FOR A SAFE & ENJOYABLE TRIP . . .**

***Keep this brochure with you and accessible throughout your trip. You can then refer to it or share it with anyone you approach for help should any problems arise. Do not hesitate to ask for help during your trip.***

- **Avoid carrying large amounts of cash.** We strongly recommend that you obtain traveler's checks in U.S. dollars to pay for most of your initial expenses. Traveler's checks will help you avoid delays and cash-flow problems and can be cashed in banks, airports, hotels, and restaurants. Personal and bank checks may require up to four weeks to clear in local banks.
- **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.
- **In a carry-on bag, you should include a few personal items**, extra clothing, and any valuables or important documents. **Always keep your passport, immigration documents and money on your person.**
- **NEVER leave your bags unattended!** This includes wallets and purses. Be extra careful in airports and getting out of taxis.

*In case of an emergency related to your arrival, you can contact your Hosting Department, the International Office at (518)276-6561 or, after office hours, the Rensselaer Public Safety at (518)276-6611.*

## **TO GET TO RENSSELAER'S DOORSTEP . . .**

### **To Albany**

It is easiest to fly into Albany Airport. Albany Airport (airport code - ALB) is the closest airport to Troy and is about 20 minutes from Rensselaer by car. Direct flights are available to Albany from New York City, Boston, Chicago, Atlanta, Detroit, and Washington, DC. Easy connecting flights are available from every other U.S. gateway airport. It is less expensive to book your flight to Albany along with your international flight rather than to buy a ticket to Albany after you reach the U.S. ***Be sure to reconfirm all flights and reservations before leaving your home country.***

If you are flying into New York City, there is a shuttle bus service from Kennedy and LaGuardia Airports to Albany. **“Express Shuttle”** service can be reached at the following numbers:

1-(800) 772-2172 (Free Call)

The free call can be made from any pay phone at the airport. Passengers are usually (differs from year to year) picked up at the terminal between 3:30pm - 6:30pm. One-way fare is approximately \$59.00. There is a luggage limit of two suitcases and a carry-on bag per person. There is an extra charge for more suitcases. The drop off location is in Albany, and you can take a taxi to the campus. They recommend making a reservation in advance. (You will need to be at Kennedy Airport by 5:00pm to catch the Shuttle)

### **To Campus**

**\* We have no formal service for airport pickup. \***

You can take a taxi from Albany Airport, to Rensselaer for a cost of about \$25. Have the taxi take you to the Visitor Information Center (VIC) on 15th Street. You may leave your luggage there while you check in with your department. If you arrive after office hours, it is advisable to have your taxi take you to any of the nearby hotels for the night (see page 9).

## **TO FIND A PLACE TO LIVE . . .**

We urge you **NOT** to sign any lease or contract for off-campus housing, which 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. Rensselaer does have a web site of off-campus listings:

<http://offcampus.union.rpi.edu/>

There are two local hotels that you can stay at while you look for housing.

1. The Best Western Rensselaer Inn on 1800 6th Ave. in Troy [tel. (518) 274-3210; fax: (518) 274-3294] charges \$70.00 a night for a single and \$75.00 per night for a double.
2. The Franklin Square Inn & Suites on One 4th St. in Troy [tel. (518) 274-8800; fax (518) 274-0427] charges range between \$86 – 129.00 per night for single or double rooms. Discounts given when you mention RPI.

## **INSURANCE REQUIREMENTS. . .**

### **Health Insurance**

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

- Medical benefits - \$50,000 per accident or illness
- Repatriation - \$7,500
- Medical Evacuation - \$10,000
- 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 in the U.S.

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

## **TO HELP YOU ADJUST TO LIFE AT RENSSELAER**

The International Services for Student and Scholars hold an orientation program every fall. International Scholars are eligible to attend at a cost of \$35.00. Talk to the staff in the International Office about this when you check-in.

A personal car is often unnecessary since many shopping areas and services are within walking distance of the campus. A free shuttle bus, which operates during the entire year (limited service during summer), can take you to the campus. Public buses serve the entire metropolitan area, but are inconvenient for reaching outlying areas.

If you do purchase a car, it will cost a minimum of \$13,000 new or \$3,000 used. You will also need \$40-\$80 for licensing and \$500-\$1100 annually for adequate insurance. Additional funds are required for operating costs & repairs.

To park on campus, you must purchase a parking permit from the Rensselaer Office of Transportation located in the Visitor Information Center (VIC). **You are responsible for knowing and observing all traffic regulations.**

### **Weather**

The weather in Troy varies greatly from season to season. Temperature ranges from 60° to 85° Fahrenheit (18° to 29° Celsius) in the summer to 0° to 38° F (-17° to 3° C) in the winter.

Troy generally receives a large amount of snow in the winter, which provides excellent skiing close to campus. During the rest of the year, rain showers can occur unexpectedly, and the humidity level can be uncomfortably high, especially in the summer. Weather conditions are more moderate during the spring and fall.

### **Clothing**

Scholars wear very casual clothing at Rensselaer. Jeans and sport shirts are most common for men; jackets and ties are rarely worn except on special occasions. Women often prefer slacks for everyday school wear, and dresses for more formal wear. Warm coats, sweaters, hats, gloves, and snow boots are necessary items for the cold winters. Cotton clothing is appropriate for the summer. Shorts are popular wear for both men and women in the summer, but not in the office.

New and used clothes are available relatively inexpensively in the area. We do not advise scholars to purchase extensive wardrobes before coming; fashions may be different in your country. Most locally available clothes are 'wash and wear'. Tailors and seamstresses are very expensive and hard to find in this area, so we urge you not to bring fabric for clothes, unless you can sew everything yourself.

## **MORE HELPFUL HINTS . . .**

### **DO**

- Seek advice from others who have visited very recently in the U.S. or contact international students currently studying at Rensselaer, many of whom express their desire to help you as much as possible.
- Bring a number of small crafts or trinkets from home. These are ideal gifts for future friends.
- Bring some pictures or slides of your home and family, a great conversation starter with U.S. scholars or families.
- Bring academic documents for your spouse if she/he may be considering pursuing some course work in the U.S.
- Bring music from home and your traditional dress/costume for special events.
- Remember to bring most of your money for initial expenses in the form of traveler's checks.
- **Check in with the International Services for Students & Scholars Office (ISSS) upon arrival.**

### **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 New York City, and some foods cannot be brought into the United States legally.
- Bring household items and bed linens, which are easily and inexpensively available in the U.S.

**IMPORTANT TELEPHONE AND FAX NUMBERS**

	<b><u>Phone</u></b>	<b><u>Fax</u></b>
International Services	(518) 276-6561	(518) 276-4839
Rensselaer Public Safety	(518) 276-6611	
RPI (Switchboard)	(518) 276-6000	
Best Western Rensselaer Inn	(518) 274-3210	(518) 274-3294
Franklin Square Inn & Suites	(518) 274-8800	(518) 274-0427

Notes

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