

Brazilian Students Pre-Arrival Information and Travel Checklist

2014-2015

INTERNATIONAL SERVICES
FOR STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS



Rensselaer

March 2014

Dear Brazilian 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.

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

The dates and costs listed in this brochure are based on the best information available as of March 2014 and may change. For updated information, please take time to visit the New Students section of the ISSS website, which may be found at this web address:

<http://doso.rpi.edu/update.do?catcenterkey=11>

Remember, you MUST check in with our office upon arrival on campus during the specific check-in times. Everyone should check in by Thursday, August 21, 2014.

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

Sincerely,

International Services for Students and Scholars
ISSSOffice@rpi.edu

International Services for Students and Scholars
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Academy Hall Suite 4226
110 8th Street
Troy, NY 12180-3590

Telephone: (518) 276-6266
Fax: (518) 276-4839
Email: ISSSOffice@rpi.edu



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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 J-1 Visa (see page 6).
- Submit your immunization information to the Rensselaer Student Health Services office (see pages 8-9).
- Apply for student housing (see page 10).
- Make arrangements for travel (see page 11).
- Submit your Arrival Itinerary Form (attached).
- Complete Orientation reservation form.

The following items are optional. You do not have to complete these prior to your arrival at Rensselaer, although you may wish to do so:

- If Necessary, arrange to have your items shipped to the U.S. (see page 11).
- If you are arriving at Rensselaer a day or more before Arrival and Orientation, it is strongly recommended that you contact the Office of Residence Life to make arrangements about arriving early (see page 11).
- If you are unable to make arrangements for arriving early, you may want to make hotel arrangements (see page 10)



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 scholars and students who are admitted to the country on F, M or J visas. The information collected by SEVIS is an important part of your visa application.

A fee will be charged in order for your SEVIS information to be processed once you have provided all the information required.

You must pay the SEVIS fee **at least three business days before your appointment at the U.S. Consulate or Embassy**. (Business days are Monday to Friday inclusive.) You must bring proof of payment of the SEVIS fee with you to your appointment or your application will not proceed.

More information is available on the ISSS website, which may be found at this web address:

<http://doso.rpi.edu/update.do?catcenterkey=11>

You may pay the SEVIS fee online:

<http://www.fmjfee.com>



APPLYING FOR A VISA



INTRODUCTION

All foreign students (except Canadians) must obtain a passport and visa stamp to enter the United States. Student visas are issued in two categories, F-1 and J-1.

You must apply for your visa stamp 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/>

APPLYING FOR A VISA

First, review the documents provided and ensure that all of the information is correct. The name on the form you have received must match your name as it appears in your passport. If there is an error, please contact IIE **immediately** so that the information may be corrected and the form reissued if necessary.

If you have received form DS-2019:

You are eligible to apply for a J-1 visa.

You must be sponsored by an authorized Exchange Visitor program.

To obtain your visa, you must present to the U.S. Consulate or Embassy the following:

- Form DS-2019 issued by your sponsor
- Acceptance letter from Rensselaer
- Valid passport
- Proof of payment for the SEVIS I-901 fee
- Proof of sufficient financial support

IF YOUR DS-2019 FAILS TO ARRIVE IN TIME TO SECURE A VISA STAMP:

- ◆ You should obtain a B-2 “**Prospective Student**” visa stamp (not a B-2 “Visitor” visa stamp) from the U.S. Consul in your country.
- ◆ Be sure that the Consul writes “**prospective student to attend Rensselaer**” in your passport.
- ◆ You must apply for a change when you arrive. If you have an assistantship, you will not be able to start it until you have obtained a change to J-1 status.



APPLYING FOR A VISA



IF YOUR VISA STAMP 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.

IMPORTANT

- ◆ You must attend the school whose form DS-2019 you used to enter the U.S.
- ◆ A J-1 visa requires full-time study.
- ◆ 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 DS-2019.
- ◆ Applicants need to 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.



HEALTH SERVICES



HEALTH INSURANCE

Students on a J-1 visa

All J-1 students must purchase Rensselaer's 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.

MANDATORY HEALTH SERVICE FEE

All Rensselaer students pay a mandatory health service fee of approximately \$285.00 per semester. The fee covers all visits to the Student Health Center, including the Counseling Center and health education, as well as lab tests performed on premises, such as throat cultures. However, there are additional charges for immunizations, splints, and copying medical records. All registered students are eligible to use the Student Health Center. The Health Service fee covers these visits.

IMMUNIZATIONS

New York State law requires all students to provide the Student Health Center with physician certified evidence of immunity to various diseases. Rensselaer is required by the provisions of this law to refuse to allow you to continue in attendance if you have not supplied this evidence. For information on required immunizations, call the Student Health Center at (518) 276-6287 or visit <http://studenthealth.rpi.edu/> .

Students, please be sure to review the immunization form with your doctor and make sure that all your shots are current. If they are not current, you will have to pay for the shot in the U.S. and they are expensive.



HEALTH SERVICES



HEALTH FORMS

Please take time to read this section carefully.

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 our website: <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.
2. Mail in the “Pre-entrance Immunization Form” signed by your family physician. If you are playing a sport, you will also need to have your family physician fill out the physical form and mail or fax the documentation before you will be cleared to participate. These forms can also be found on our website.
 - a. Physical Form (Varsity sport athletics only)
 - b. Pre-entrance Immunization Form
3. Complete all on-line forms in the pending forms section of the Health Portal. Please feel free to contact the Student Health Center if you have any questions.

Student Health Center at RPI
110 8th Street
Academy Hall Suite 3200
Troy, NY 12180-3590

Telephone: (518) 276-6287
Fax: (518) 276-8573
Email: healthrecords@rpi.edu



HOUSING & ACCOMMODATION



ON-CAMPUS HOUSING

On-campus housing is coordinated through the Residence Life Office at Rensselaer. You should have received information regarding on-campus housing with your acceptance packet from the Office of Admissions.

Brazilian students are required to live on campus.

Benefits of living on campus include:

- ◆ Convenient access to academic facilities.
- ◆ All rooms are furnished.
- ◆ Utilities are included (heat, electricity, water, internet service, television and phone).
- ◆ Close proximity to athletic and recreational facilities.
- ◆ There is no deposit required and room charges will be included in your Rensselaer student bill.

Residence Halls are open for all students to move in on Friday, August 22, 2014 at 12:00 PM. If you plan on arriving before August 22, 2014, you will have to contact Residence Life to see if any arrangements can be made for you to move into your Residence Hall early. Otherwise, you will need to make a reservation at a local hotel until you can move in.

For more information regarding on-campus housing, see:

<http://reslife.rpi.edu/setup.do>

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

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. Book early as August can be a busy time and hotels may be sold out. Be sure to ask for the RPI discount. Both are within walking distance.

Franklin Square Inn/Best Western
14th Street
Troy, NY 12180
Phone: (518) 274-8800
Fax: (518) 274-0427

Hilton Garden Inn
235 Hoosick Street
Troy, NY 12180
Phone: (518) 272-1700
Fax: (518) 272-1701



PRE-DEPARTURE PLANNING



TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

Once you have paid your SEVIS I-901 Fee, applied for your Visa Stamp, submitted your health forms and made arrangements for housing, you will need to make travel arrangements.

ARRIVAL ITINERARY

Once you have made proper travel arrangements you must complete and return the Arrival Itinerary form, which you have received with this booklet. You may submit this form by email or fax to:

ISSSOffice@rpi.edu

(518)-276-4839

This form must be received at least two weeks prior to your arrival in the United States.

If you have any questions or concerns about completing this form, please contact the ISSS office at the above email address.

SHIPPING ITEMS OR BELONGINGS TO THE U.S.

If you must ship unaccompanied baggage, we strongly recommend that you 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. Insure all your shipments for 'all risk' coverage. 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.

The ISSS 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 and Scholars
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Academy Hall, Suite 4600
110 8th Street
Troy, New York 12180-3590
U.S.A.



PRE-DEPARTURE PLANNING



INTERNATIONAL FINANCE

Often, banks and credit card companies 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. You do not want to be without any funding in your first month here, because that is when you will most likely be spending the most money.

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. Having smaller bills (5 and 10 dollar bills) can also be helpful in such situations. 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

There are many banks in the Troy area, including Bank of America and First Niagara. There are also two ATMs around campus. International students are welcome to open bank accounts in the United States. In order to open a bank account, you must provide to the bank:

1. Proof of your local address
2. Phone Number
3. Your passport
4. Rensselaer I.D. Card (You will receive it upon arrival)

Please note that many 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.



ARRIVING IN THE UNITED STATES



BEFORE YOU TRAVEL...

- ◆ Make sure you have not packed your DS-2019 documents in your checked baggage, as you will need them at U.S. Immigration.
- ◆ You may also be asked for proof of financial support, so this should also be in your hand luggage.

I-94

- **FORM I-94 IS NO LONGER GIVEN WHEN ENTERING THE US**

The form I-94, “Arrival/Departure Record” was a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Document issued to nonimmigrant aliens at the time of lawful entry to the United States at an air or sea port of entry. The Form I-94 was evidence of a nonimmigrant’s term of admission and used to document legal status in the United States, including length of stay and departure.

With the new automated Form I-94, the CBP (United States Customs and Border Patrol) Officer will create an electronic automated arrival Form I-94 during the admissions process for nonimmigrants entering the United States at an air or sea port, with information already available in various law enforcement databases.

- **ARRIVAL**

Upon arrival at the U.S. port of entry (airport, etc.), immigration will ask you to present your DS-2019, and your passport. You may also be asked to show your proof of financial support. **It is very important that you do not pack any of these items in your checked baggage.**

The immigration officer will then stamp your passport with the date of your arrival, port of entry and your nonimmigrant status and return them to you. They should have marked your status as being D/S. D/S means Duration of Status.

Again, you will NOT be issued an I-94 card. If for any reason an office needs to see your “Admission (I-94) Number” you will have to print out an “Admission (I-94) Number retrieval sheet. This can be found at www.cbp.gov/I94.

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.



GETTING TO RENSSELAER



GETTING TO ALBANY, NEW YORK

The easiest way to get to Rensselaer is to fly into Albany International Airport (airport code ALB). 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. The airport is approximately 20 minutes from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute by taxi. Taxis are readily available outside of the airport terminal.

Reserve all of your flights at the same time. It is less expensive to reserve all of your flights at once than to purchase tickets when you arrive in the U.S. **Be sure to reconfirm all flights and reservations before leaving your home country.**

PREMIERE EXPRESS SHUTTLE SERVICE

There is a shuttle bus service that will bring you from La Guardia Airport in New York City to the Albany International Airport, from which you can take a taxi to campus. The company that operates this service is called **Premiere Express Shuttle Service**. Advance reservations are required. For more information on baggage requirements or to make a reservation, please contact Premiere at 1(800) 515-6123 or visit their website:

http://www.premierelimo.com/index.php?option=com_reservations&Itemid=26

MEGABUS

Megabus (<http://us.megabus.com>) provides a low-cost bus services from New York City to the Albany-Rensselaer Train Station. It is a double-decker motorcoach bus that has free Wi-Fi and panoramic windows. Megabus is very popular and can book-up quickly, so we recommend that you purchase your ticket as soon as possible. The Megabus departures are located at 10th Ave between 40th and 41st Street in New York City.

Be aware that Megabus has strict rules for baggage:

Megabus.com will accept up to ONE (1) piece of luggage per passenger. This must not exceed 62 inches when adding the total exterior dimensions of the piece (length + width + height) and should not weigh more than 50 pounds. Passengers can also take on board ONE (1) small carry-on bag that will fit in the overhead storage compartments or under the seat. Please be advised that passengers wishing to travel with more luggage than specified above will have items refused.



GETTING TO RENSSELAER



AMTRAK

Amtrak is a national train service that leaves from Penn Station and will take you to the Albany-Rensselaer Train Station. The Amtrak website is here:

<http://www.amtrak.com>

Please note the following rules about baggage:

- ◆ Two-Piece Limit: Each ticketed passenger may check up to two pieces of luggage at no charge. Up to three additional pieces may be checked upon payment of \$20.00 per piece.
- ◆ 50-Pound Limit: Each checked bag may weigh no more than 50 lbs. They will not accept heavier pieces.
- ◆ Size Limit: Each checked bag may not exceed 76-100 linear inches in size. Linear inches (length + width + height).
- ◆ Check-In Time: Check all baggage at least 45 minutes prior to departure. Allow additional time at larger stations, during busy travel, if you have special items or also need to obtain tickets. Baggage checked less than 45 minutes prior to departure may be delayed.

TO RENSSELAER'S CAMPUS

Unfortunately, we are unable to provide transportation to the RPI campus. Once you arrive in Albany, we recommend you take a taxi to campus. 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. We have had students in the past who have been overcharged by certain transportation services. Do not let this happen to you!

Have the taxi take you to the Public Safety Office on 15th Street. You may leave your luggage there while you check in with ISSS Office or Residence Life. If you arrive after office hours, it is advisable to have your taxi take you to any of the nearby hotels for the night.



CHECK-IN & ORIENTATION



CHECKING-IN WITH ISSS STAFF

Checking-in dates with ISSS staff begins on **Monday, August 11, 2014** and ends on **Thursday, August 21, 2014**.

You must check in during one of the following times:

Location: Academy Hall, 4th Floor suite 4600

Monday, 8/11/2014 – 9:00am – 3:00pm

Tuesday, 8/12/2014 - 9:00am – 11:00am

Friday 08/15/2014 9:00am-11:00am

Monday, 8/18/2014- Wednesday, 8/20/2014 9:00am-11:00am

Thursday, 8/21/2014 – 9:00am - 3:00pm

Closed on Saturday and Sunday

Please bring your passport with valid visa stamp, DS-2019 or I-20.

ORIENTATION

All new international Brazilian students must attend Transfer Orientation and International Orientation. You will receive information from the Office of First Year Experience (FYE) regarding your specific orientation.

On **Friday, August 22, 2014**, there is a mandatory Orientation Program in the morning that you must attend. All new international students must attend International Orientation. When you check in with the ISSS office, you will receive a packet of information regarding Orientation.



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.
- ◆ Seek advice from others who have visited the U.S. recently, or contact international students currently studying at Rensselaer, many of whom express their desire to help you as much as possible.
- ◆ Bring pictures of your home and family.
- ◆ 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.

We wish you a safe journey to Rensselaer
and we look forward to meeting you!



IMPORTANT NUMBERS



International Services for Students and Scholars

(518) 276-6266 fax (518) 276-4839

Undergraduate Admissions

(518) 276-6216 fax (518) 276-4072

First Year Experience

(518) 276-6864 fax (518) 276-4839

Residence Life & Dining

(518) 276-6284 fax (518) 276-6223

Bursar's Office

(518) 276-6610 fax (518) 276-6180

Student Health Services

(518) 276-6287 fax (518) 276-4049

Rensselaer Public Safety

(518) 276-6656 – non emergency

(518) 276-6611 - emergency

Rensselaer (switchboard)

(518) 276-6000 fax (518) 276-6003