FACULTY & STAFF GUIDE TO BASIC IMMIGRATION REGULATIONS

All international students and visiting scholars on campus are required to comply with a number of complex regulations in order to remain legally in status while in the U.S. The federal SEVIS system generates required documents, monitors compliance and processes requests for visa benefits. The most important requirements are explained briefly below. We encourage you to always direct students to OIP (Office of International Programs, 400 Culbertson Hall, x4031) for advising on these important issues, and we welcome your questions as well.

STUDENTS (F-1 visa)

1. **Enrollment**
   - All students must be fully enrolled (12 credits for undergraduates and 9 credits for graduates) in the fall and spring semesters. (The majority of international students on the MSU campus have F-1 visas.)
   - There are few exceptions to this rule – however, one important exception allows graduate students who hold a GTA or GRA position to enroll in 6 credits, as their work is considered part of their academic load.
   - Undergraduate students can also apply for a “drop below”, with the same form, but the permission is limited to one single time during their entire period of study, unless there is a serious, documented medical condition. Additionally, any student in the final, graduating semester can enroll in only the credits required to graduate.
   - Any “drop below” (including for GTAs/GRAs) must be approved in advance. This process utilizes a special form ("Blue Form") that is circulated and signed first by the Advisor, then the Graduate School (graduates only) and finally by OIP to be logged into the SEVIS system and kept in the student’s file.
   - Enrollment is optional in summer, unless the student initially arrives in the U.S. for summer session, in which case the minimum requirement is 3 credits per session.

2. **Work**
   - International students are allowed to work ON campus (maximum 20hr/wk during the academic year and 40 during summer or periods of vacation).
   - Any OFF campus job is subject to approval by OIP and must be closely related to the student’s major. This is called CPT (Curricular Practical Training). The student needs to enroll for at least a 1“internship” credit to participate in CPT and approval of the student’s Advisor is required. CPT is limited to part time work during the academic year and can be full time in summer. OIP can grant permission for CPT.
   - In order to be eligible for CPT a student has to have been enrolled for a minimum of 2 semesters.

OIP “Faculty and Staff Information” revised 3-4-15
• At the end of each level of study, the student is eligible to work one year in a position related to the field of study in the U.S. (potentially two years if the degree is in eligible science, technology, engineering or math fields), via OPT (Optional Practical Training). The application process through the Department of Homeland Security takes approximately 3 months. The student should apply before graduation.
• Spouses of F-1 students cannot work.

3. **Social Security Number**
• A student needs to have a job in order to be eligible to apply for a SSN.
• A new student has to wait 10 working days after arrival in the U.S. before applying at the SS Office.
• All paperwork has to be issued through OIP; the SSN is issued approximately 2 weeks after application.
• A student is allowed to start working prior to applying for or receiving a SSN.

4. **Taxes**
• All foreign students who have worked in the U.S. are required to file tax returns every year. Free tax assistance is organized on campus every year in the spring.
• Students who have not earned any money, must still file form 8843.

5. **Address**
• International students are required to keep OIP informed of any change of address (lodging or e-mail).

6. **Travel**: 
• The U.S. visa stamp in the passport is an entry document only; a student can stay in the U.S. with an expired visa as long as his/her form I-20 is kept up to date and he/she is maintaining legal status.
• However, if the student is going to travel outside of the U.S. and his/her visa has expired, he/she will have to apply for a new visa in order to re-enter the U.S.
• Before traveling, OIP needs to sign form I-20. This signature confirms that the student is in status, fully enrolled and eligible to return to MSU.
• At the end of their program of study the F-1 student has a 60 day “grace period,” allowing him/her to stay and travel in the U.S.
J-1 EXCHANGE VISITOR STUDENTS and SCHOLARS

J-1 Exchange Visitor Students
- J-1 students are bound by the same basic rules as F-1 students. Most are exchange (visiting) students or government-sponsored students.
- Their permission to work in their program is called “academic training,” which also needs to be directly related to their studies. Permission is granted by OIP – unless they are sponsored students in which case the sponsor needs to give the approval.
- The grace period for J-1 students is 30 days after the end of their program.
- The spouse of a J-1 student can apply for permission to work, and is allowed to work both on and off campus once he/she gets the EAD (Employment Authorization Document) card.

J-1 Exchange Visitor Scholars
- Scholars can be admitted to the U.S. for up to 5 years. Short-term scholars are limited to 6 months.
- MSU is authorized to invite Researchers, Short-term scholars, Specialists or Professors/Teachers.
- Participants in the Professor category are eligible only for non-tenured positions.
- Exchange visitors MUST carry insurance for the entire duration of their stay in the U.S.
- There are financial requirements for support of an Exchange Visitor; OIP will explain the details.
- The grace period for J-1 scholars is 30 days after the end of their program.
- The spouse of a J-1 scholar can apply for permission to work, and is allowed to work only after she/he receives the Employment Authorization Document card (application processing takes several months).