

Life in the United States

If this will be your first time travelling to the US, you are encouraged to learn about life and customs in the US. While American society is complex and comprised of many different cultures, this website can provide some basic information about living in the US: <https://www.usa.gov/life-in-the-us>.

Living in Harrisonburg

James Madison University is located in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Harrisonburg is a city of about 55,000 people and has public transportation, medical centers, libraries, banks, and recreational opportunities. To learn more about life in Harrisonburg and community resources, please visit this website: <https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/> or contact the ISSS office with specific questions.

Contact Us

Please contact the Office of International Student and Scholar Services if you have any questions at iss@jmu.edu.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT
& SCHOLAR SERVICES

J-1 SCHOLAR INFORMATION

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<http://www.jmu.edu/international/iss/faculty/immigration/j-visa-holders.shtml>

Overview

The purpose of this brochure is to provide you with the information necessary to obtain a J visa, meet the requirements for J visa holders, and prepare for your arrival at James Madison University (JMU). Topics are listed in chronological order.

Purpose of the Exchange Visitor Program

As a J visa holder, you will be a participant in the Exchange Visitor Program, sponsored by the US government. The purpose of the Program is to provide foreign nationals with opportunities to participate in educational and cultural programs in the United States and return home to share their experiences, and to encourage Americans to participate in educational and cultural programs in other countries.

Applying for a Visa

There are several very important steps in the application for nonimmigrant visa. First you must pay your SEVIS fee and receive the SEVIS fee receipt. Next you must locate a U.S. embassy or consulate, preferably the one that is closest to your place of residence <http://www.usembassy.gov/>. You must follow the instructions found on the website of the US Embassy or Consulate to which you will be applying in order to obtain your visa. If you are required to schedule an appointment, you must take the following documents to your interview:

- A valid passport
- The DS-2019 form
- The SEVIS fee receipt
- Letter of invitation from the sponsoring department at JMU
- Proof of your financial ability to pay for living expenses. This can be a bank statement of personal or family funds, documentation from a sponsor such as a scholarship letter, or an employment letter.

In addition, be prepared to concisely explain your background, qualifications, specific reasons for coming to JMU, and your ties to your home country. Ties to your home country could be the family you intend to return to, the job opportunities available to you upon your return, and property that you own.

SEVIS Fee (Form I-901)

You will be required to pay the SEVIS fee prior to applying for a visa, unless you are transferring to JMU from another U.S. university in J-1 status. It is strongly recommended that this fee be paid electronically by credit card, after which you will print out a receipt immediately. The receipt is needed to process your request for a visa and it is recommended that the payment be made at least 3 days prior to attending your visa interview. For additional information about and/or to pay this fee, see the official SEVIS instructions at: <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901>.

J-2 Dependents

If you wish for a spouse or unmarried child under the age of 21 to travel to the US with you or at a later date, you should have received additional DS-2019 forms. You will use these forms so that your dependents can obtain a J-2 visa. The process for obtaining the J-2 visa is basically the same as obtaining the J-1. All J-2 dependents are also subject to the health insurance requirement explained in this brochure. In addition, J-2 dependents may apply for work authorization cards in the US, although this requires a filing fee of \$380 and will take several months to process. More information about J-2 dependent visas can be found here: <https://j1visa.state.gov/basics/j2-visa/>

2-year Foreign Residency Requirement

Some J-1 scholars are subject to a two year foreign residency requirement following their stay in the J-1 status. If you are subject to this rule, you will be required to return home for two years prior to re-entering the U.S. or changing your status to an H, L or K visa, or obtaining permanent residence. However, you are eligible to return to the US on all other non-immigrant visa types (such as an F-1). The rule will apply to you if you are in a program in one of these categories:

- *Government Funded Program:* If you are financed in whole or in part by a national government (including either the U.S. government or your own government.)
- *Graduate medical Education or Training:* If you entered the U.S. to receive graduate medical training
- *Specialized Knowledge or Skill:* If your field of specialty is considered necessary to the development of your own country, as shown on the Exchange Visitor Skills List: <http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/study-exchange/exchange/exchange-visitor-skills-list.html>

Waiver of Foreign Residency Requirement

If you are subject to the foreign residency requirement, you *may* qualify for a waiver to allow your approval under an H, L, or K visa and/or permanent residence application. However, waivers are at the discretion of the U.S. government (and sometimes also require approval from the home government) so they are in no way guaranteed and permanent plans should not be finalized before a waiver is granted. For more information visit: <https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/study-exchange/student/residency-waiver.html>.

Health Insurance Requirement

It is required by the US government that all J-1 scholars have health insurance that meets or exceeds specific coverage minimums throughout the program dates listed on your DS-2019. If your family will travel with you, they must obtain health insurance as well. If a J-1 scholar or dependent willfully refuses to maintain a valid health insurance policy, then the DS-2019 and SEVIS record will be terminated. The minimum benefits required by the US government [22 CFR 62.14] are:

- Medical benefits of at least \$100,000 per accident or illness
- Repatriation of remains in the amount of \$25,000
- Expenses associated with medical evacuation to your home country in the amount of \$50,000
- A deductible not to exceed \$500 per accident or illness

JMU offers a health insurance policy to J-1 scholars and dependents that meets these requirements and is accepted by many medical providers in the Harrisonburg area. Coverage can begin on any date. You may also choose to purchase your own insurance policy that meets the necessary criteria by submitting a J-1 health insurance waiver. If you do not purchase a health insurance policy and submit the waiver form by your program start date, you will automatically be enrolled and billed for the health insurance policy offered by JMU. You will receive an email with more information about the health insurance options available to you.

Housing in Harrisonburg

If your sponsoring department has informed you that you are responsible for obtaining your own housing, you should begin searching for a place to live immediately, as it can be difficult to find housing for lease in Harrisonburg. The ISSS office has created a Housing Directory that can assist you in finding housing and understanding common terms: <http://www.jmu.edu/international/iss/faculty/immigration/j-visa-holders.shtml>. Should you change your address, phone number, or email, you must notify the ISSS office within 10 days.

Estimated Living Expenses

The ISSS office estimates that the minimum amount of money necessary to cover basic living expenses in the Harrisonburg area are \$1367 a month for J-1 scholars and an additional \$380 for each dependent. Living expenses included in this estimate are rent in a shared apartment, utilities, bus transportation, health insurance and food. Please note that these are minimum estimates and that we recommend that you budget more money for living expenses if you wish to live on your own, buy a car, or travel.

Travel to the US

J visa holders are granted a 30 day grace period both before and after the program dates listed on the DS-2019 form. For example, if your program start date is July 1, then you would be able to enter the US beginning on June 1. You will be inspected by a US Customs and Border Protection agent upon your arrival in the US. It is very important that you that you have your passport, DS-2019, SEVIS fee receipt, and letter of invitation ready to give to the agent for inspection upon your arrival. The agent may also ask you questions about your purpose for being in the US. Be prepared to answer these basic questions as concisely as possible.

Travel Out of the US While in J-1 Status

While you are in the United States on a J-1 visa, you are free to travel internationally provided you have remained in legal status throughout your stay. However, you must always have your DS-2019 signed by an ISSS staff member before you travel, and you will also need a valid, unexpired visa to re-enter the U.S., unless you are traveling to Canada, Mexico, or an adjacent island in which case you would qualify for automatic revalidation of your expired visa: <https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/general/automatic-revalidation.html>.

Employment While on a J-1 Visa

As a J-1 visa holder you are only permitted employment that is related to the objectives for which you entered the US, and at the location(s) noted on the DS-2019. It is possible to work at more than one university with prior approval from the ISSS office. In general, a J-1 Scholar or Professor may be employed only by the institutions listed on the DS-2019 form. However, if the sponsoring institution gives prior permission, the Scholar or Professor may participate in occasional lectures or short-term consultations at a different institution not listed on the DS-2019. This additional employment must be incidental to the main purpose of the stay and must not cause a necessity for an extension of the DS-2019. If you have been offered an occasional lecture or consultation with another institution, you must bring a letter of permission from your department to ISSS. A letter from that office will be written to the offering institution verifying your eligibility to accept payment for the lecture or consultation. You are encouraged to read the Wilberforce Pamphlet, which details the rights of temporary workers: <https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/general/rights-protections-temporary-workers.html>