

# TRAVEL AND YOUR VISA STATUS FOR UCEAP RECIPROCITY STUDENTS

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **COMING TO THE U.S.**

#### **When can I arrive in the U.S.? Can I come early to travel?**

Visa regulations allow you to arrive **no more than 30 days** prior to the start of the academic program (this date will be printed on your certificate of eligibility DS-2019) at your host UC. It is important to take this into consideration when buying your airline tickets and planning your arrival.

You will naturally want to travel and explore California and other parts of the U.S. Don't worry! There will be plenty of time to travel during and after your program. J-1 students have a 30-day "grace period" during which you can travel within the US (see more information about your grace period below). You will also have a several-week vacation period in December and another between terms (at quarter campuses) in March.

When arranging your flight itinerary, please be aware that you will need to pass through U.S. immigration inspection at the port of entry (the first place you arrive in the U.S.). If the U.S. port of entry is not your final destination, you will need to leave sufficient time before your connecting flight for verification of your immigration documents and customs inspection.

#### **Can I come to the U.S. as a tourist during the summer?**

You can come to the U.S. prior to your EAP studies as a tourist but you should be aware that you would need to exit the country after your leisure travel and re-enter the country under the J-1 status. **It may be necessary for you to return to your home country so that you can apply for the student visa and that can be very expensive.** (See Visa Applications for Third Country Nationals below).

We recommend that you make any plans for travel within the U.S. for **after** your EAP studies (during the grace periods allowed) or during school vacation periods. Please refer to the UC Academic calendar for specific dates:

<http://eap.ucop.edu/Documents/ReciprocalExchanges/AcCalendar17-18.pdf>

#### **How long will it take to process my visa application?**

The time-line for processing your visa application will vary depending on local conditions. Please contact the nearest Consulate/Embassy for specific information and instructions. Check with the Consulate/Embassy often to keep up with any changes in procedure. You can access visa related web links from the EAP Reciprocal Exchanges web pages at:

<http://eap.ucop.edu/ReciprocalExchanges/Pages/VisaResources.aspx>

#### **I would like to attend a summer course or English language instruction in the U.S. before coming to UC. Can I use my host UC issued DS-2019 to enter the U.S.?**

No. The institution where you will be completing summer study or English language instruction will issue you a visa document (usually an I-20 certificate of eligibility) so that you may attend their school. You must enter the US using the visa document issued by the institution you will be attending.

If you plan to participate in a summer study or English language program:

1) Contact UCEAP as soon as possible. We will put you in contact with your international student advisor so that your host UC will be alerted to your intention to transfer your visa sponsorship to UC after your arrival. Transfers will only be possible if both your host UC and summer session or language program institution are sponsoring your visit with the same visa type.

2) Upon arrival at your summer session or language program, you must inform the international student advisor at that institution that you will need to transfer your visa document sponsorship to UC. The international student advisor will assist you with the transfer.

**I would like to participate in a work-study program in the U.S. before coming to UC. Can I use my host UC DS-2019 to enter the U.S.?**

No. The organization that will sponsor your summer work-study will issue you a DS-2019 visa document (for the J-1 visa) so that you may participate in their program. You must enter the US using the visa document issued by the sponsoring organization.

You can come to the U.S. prior to your EAP studies for these activities but you should be aware that you would need to exit the country after your work study experience and re-enter the country under the J-1 non-degree student status. **It may be necessary for you to return to your home country so that you can apply for the student visa and that can be very expensive.** (See Visa Applications for Third Country Nationals below). We recommend that you make any plans for participation in an internship within the U.S. for **after** your EAP studies. You can receive information about the requirements for post-EAP “academic training” from your host UC international students’ office after you arrive.

**Visa Applications for Third Country Nationals**

A recent policy change at the U.S. Consulates in Mexico now prohibits Third Country Nationals from **applying for a new visa if the visa category is different** from the initial one used to enter the U.S. Third Country Nationals are individuals who are of nationalities other than the country where the consulate is located. For Example: A Chinese national seeking to obtain a visa in Canada is considered a Third Country National (TCN).

However, a TCN may apply to **renew** the visa in Mexico if it is for the same visa category that he/she was originally admitted in to the U.S. For Example: the Indian National in the J-1 category may apply to renew the J-1 visa in a U.S. Consulate in Mexico.

Other possible visa denials are for individuals who have entered the **U.S. on the Visa Waiver Program** and applicants who obtained their initial visas outside their countries of legal residence.

Although this policy has not been enacted in Canada, it is also discouraged. We recommend that you apply for the visa in the country of your nationality.

**ONCE YOU ARRIVE**

**How do I maintain my student visa status once I arrive in the U.S.?**

1) You must attend campus check-in and orientation at your host UC campus. Your host UC will provide you with specific instructions.

**NB:** Remember to bring your passport and visa document (DS-2019 form) with you to check-in. ***Campus check-in is mandatory.***

- 2) You must be enrolled **full-time** each term of your participation in the EAP program.
- 3) You must report your California address and any changes of address during the time you are a student to your host UC campus. At your check-in and international student orientation you will receive instruction on how to update your address at your host UC, usually through the student information system.

### **What is full-time enrollment?**

Undergraduates must enroll in a **minimum of 12 units** (at UCB most colleges require **13 units minimum enrollment**). Graduates must enroll in the minimum number of units as required by their host UC and department (usually 8-12 units) for full-time enrollment.

### **What will happen if I am not able to enroll full-time?**

Full-time enrollment requirements are strictly enforced. Students who need less than full-time enrollment must receive the approval of their host campus international student advisor **prior** to pursuing a reduced course of study. A reduced load may be approved by an international student adviser under very strict immigration guidelines. If not approved, you will fall **out of status and need to leave the U.S.** It is critical to see an advisor **before** falling below full-time.

### **What is SEVIS?**

**SEVIS** (pronounced SEE-viss), the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System, is the system that US immigration services and DOS (Department of State) uses to track the status and dependents of international students and scholars in F, J, and M (vocational) programs, from the time of the production of the initial visa document to the individual's program completion or departure from UC, or in the case of those students who elect to participate in what Immigration calls "Academic Training" - a period of employment (internship) after the completion of studies.

There are two main components in SEVIS: (1) visa document production (generation of the DS-2019 form); and (2) reporting "events" (any updates to your personal or program information)

### **What international student information is reported to SEVIS?**

- The information on the DS-2019.
- Examples of "events" for students include:
  - Registration each term
  - Full-time enrollment
  - Residential address and any changes (Post office boxes and departmental addresses are not accepted). Address changes must be reported within 10 days.
  - Changes of major
  - Leaves or reasons for interrupting the program of study through withdrawal - this must be reported to your international student advisor **before** any change takes place
  - Completion of program - either earlier than the date specified on the DS-2019, on that specified date, or on a later date (which requires an extension) - exceptions must be reported to your international student advisor **before** the current end date
  - Dependent information (if applicable)
  - Employment Authorization (both on campus and off campus work)

### **When do I need to leave the U.S.?**

In **J-1 status** you have **30 days** after the end date of the DS-2019 or completion of program, whichever comes earlier, to depart. You may **not** exit and re-enter the U.S. in J-1 status during this thirty-day grace period.

If you need to leave UC before the end of your exchange period, contact your home university International office and UCEAP to discuss your decision. Leaving the program may affect your academic progress, standing, and scholarship awards at your home university.

If you **officially withdraw** prior to the end of your program, you must leave the country immediately. Your DS-2019 will be “ended” for inability to complete the program and your DS-2019 will be inactive. Contact the international student advisor at your host institution to determine the official withdrawal date and to coordinate your planned departure.

If you do **not officially withdraw** from the program but stop attending UC, you must depart **immediately**. Your DS-2019 will be terminated which may have negative implications on future visa applications.

### **Can I return to my home country or travel outside the U.S. during vacation periods?**

**Before** you leave the U.S. you will need to have your DS-2019 signed by your host UC’s international student advisor. Be certain to make an appointment to talk with your host UC international student advisor well in advance of your planned travel. You will also need to have a valid visa for re-entry.

### **Immediately after my EAP study program, can I exit the U.S. (to travel to Mexico or Canada, for example) and re-enter in the tourist status or as visa waiver visitor before returning to my home country?**

This is an option, but if you proceed with this travel plan, it is **very** important that you have a copy of your flight itinerary upon re-entry to show the immigration officer that you are intending to leave the U.S. This flight itinerary must show a departure date within 90 days of your entry into the U.S. in tourist/visa waiver status.

NOTE: It will be at the discretion of the U.S. immigration officer whether to admit you in the tourist or visa waiver status at the time you are re-entering the U.S. There are no assurances that you would be allowed to re-enter the U.S. in the tourist/visitor status and, as mentioned above, you could not enter in the J-1 student status. If the U.S. immigration officer denies your re-entry to the U.S., you would have to return to the country you were visiting (i.e., Mexico or Canada in this example) and then return to your home country from there.

### ***WHOM DO I CONTACT?***

#### **If I have questions about when and where I will get my certificate of eligibility so I can apply for my visa?**

You should contact your home university international advisor or the Education Abroad Program at [uc-reciprocity@eap.ucop.edu](mailto:uc-reciprocity@eap.ucop.edu)

#### **If I have questions about my visa status or travel?**

You should contact your international student advisor in the office of international students and scholars in your host UC campus. You will find contact information for the International Students’ Office in the **pre-arrival instructions** for your host UC on the Reciprocal Exchanges web pages at: <http://www.eap.ucop.edu/ReciprocalExchanges/Pages/BeforeYouArrive.aspx>