

# J-1 Student Handbook

**The U.S. immigration system is complicated!  
This is a guide to help you understand it better and avoid future problems  
during your journey in this country.**



**Please contact our office if you have any questions about the information in this packet.**

The International Center  
Simmons Hall, Suite 205  
The University of Akron  
Phone: 330-972-6349  
Email: [immigration@uakron.edu](mailto:immigration@uakron.edu)

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# Important Definitions

**Exchange Visitor Program** – The U.S. Department of State administers the Exchange Visitor Program to foster global understanding through educational and cultural exchanges.

**SEVIS – Student & Exchange Visitor Information System** – This is the information database used by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and Department of State to monitor international students and Exchange Visitors in the United States.

**Responsible Officer (RO) & Alternate Responsible Officers (AROs)** – The University of Akron employees authorized to enter required information into the SEVIS database to issue your Certificate of Eligibility (**Form DS-2019**) and maintain your record.

**\*Note:** Students sponsored by Fulbright or another organization must obtain travel signatures from their current program sponsor and report changes of their personal contact information to their sponsoring organization. They must also seek employment authorization and/or changes to their program from their program sponsor.

# Guidelines for Maintaining Lawful J-1 Status

- Keep your passport valid for at least 6 months past your anticipated program end date.
- Enroll in a full course of study.
- Notify the International Center of your address, phone number, and email address upon arrival, and report changes to these within 10 days of the change.
- Maintain required health insurance coverage.
- Extend your DS-2019, if needed, prior to its expiration.
- Obtain approval from the International Center prior to reducing your enrollment, withdrawing from classes, or taking a leave of absence.
- Consult an RO or ARO if you intend to switch majors or degree levels.
- Receive work authorization in writing from an RO/ARO prior to working on campus.
- Do not engage in off-campus employment unless authorized by an RO or ARO.

# Maintain a “Full Course of Study”

To remain in the U.S. lawfully, it is extremely important for you as a J-1 international student to maintain status throughout the duration of your exchange visitor program.

**Graduate students** are required to register for a minimum of 9 credit hours each fall and spring semester.

**Law students** are required to register for a minimum of 12 credit hours each fall and spring semester.

**Undergraduate students** are required to register for a minimum of 12 credit hours each fall and spring semester.

*Students are not required to take summer classes during a summer break unless summer happens to be your first or final semester of study at The University of Akron. In this case, you would need to take the required 9 credits (graduate) or 12 (undergraduate or law) to maintain student status.*

**Online/Distance Learning:** Your courses should primarily be in person. If needed, you may take 3 credits toward your "full course of study" online or through distance learning. *Fulbright students should check with their RO about requirements.*

## Exceptions to “full course of study”:

1. Illness or medical condition – must have a recommendation from a medical doctor or clinical psychologist
2. Academic reason – e.g., placed in the wrong course level, difficulty with English language, difficulty with American teaching style
3. Final semester of degree program

*\*\*Students who meet one of the above exceptions may apply for a *Reduced Course Load* through the International Center, Simmons Hall 205. IMPORTANT: Do not drop below full-time enrollment before receiving approval from an RO or ARO.*

If you are struggling academically and believe you may be dismissed from the university, contact the International Center as soon as possible so we can discuss your options.

# Report Changes to Your Contact Information

Report changes to your address, phone number, and/or email address to the International Center within 10 days of the change(s) by updating your MyAkron account.

# Maintain Mandatory Health Insurance

- Health insurance is required of all J students and their dependents throughout the duration of his/her stay in the U.S.
- The insurance must meet the minimum requirements set forth in federal regulations at 22 C.F.R. § 62.14. For more details, visit <https://j1visa.state.gov/sponsors/how-to-administer-a-program/> and click on “Insurance.”

Willfully failing to meet the State Department’s minimum health insurance requirements may lead to The University of Akron terminating the exchange visitor’s stay, and the exchange visitor and his/ her dependents will be required to leave the U.S. immediately. There is NO reinstatement available to correct this matter for J visa holders.

## Minimum Health Insurance Coverage:

- \$100,000 per person for accident or illness medical benefits
- \$50,000 for medical evacuation
- \$25,000 for return of remains
- \$500 maximum deductible per accident or illness

The plan must also meet the rating requirements at 22 CFR § 62.14.

# Extend your DS-2019, If Needed

Your initial DS-2019 dates of attendance that reflect a “normal” length of time typically needed to complete your studies. However, there are instances when students require additional time to complete their program of study (e.g., illness, change of major, delay in research). Should you need an extension of your program, please visit the International Center and complete the Extension request form. You must apply for an extension prior to the end date on your current DS-2019. If you fail to do so, you will be out-of-status and will be required to leave the U.S. or take action to resolve your situation.

# Report a Change of Major or Education Level

- If you are changing your major or education level (e.g., Bachelor to Master’s, Master’s to PhD), submit the appropriate documents to the International Center to apply for a new DS-2019.

- If you are a Non-Degree student and wish to begin a degree program, consult the International Center as soon as possible. You will probably need to leave the U.S. to apply for the change of category.

## Comply with your Grace Period

- Upon completion of the exchange program, J visa holders have **30 days** to remain in the United States to prepare for departure.
- Employment is not permitted during this 30-day period.
- If an RO/ARO authorizes the student's early withdrawal, the student may remain in the United States for up to **15 days** from the time the early withdrawal is entered into SEVIS.
- J-1 exchange visitors who fall out of status are not granted a grace period to leave the U.S.
- If you depart the U.S. during your grace period, your grace period ends.

## Abide by Employment Regulations

### On Campus Employment

The University of Akron permits students to work on campus as student assistants as long as they meet the following:

- **The employment must be authorized in advance, in writing, by the RO/ARO** of the program that issued the initial DS-2019.
  - The student must be in good academic standing.
  - The student must continue in a full course of study except during school breaks/school vacations.
  - The campus job must be located "on campus."
  - The work is limited to **20** hours per week while school is in session, and **29** hours per week during breaks (winter, spring, summer).
  - The job may not take the place of a U.S. worker.
  - Students preparing to leave the U.S. permanently may not work during the 30 day grace period.
- \* Find on-campus jobs here: <http://www.uakron.edu/student-employment/on-campus.dot>

### Off Campus Employment

J-1 students may be eligible to engage in practical training by applying for Academic Training.

### Requirements for Academic Training

- The student is primarily in the United States to study rather than engage in academic training;
- The student is participating in academic training that is directly related to his or her major field of study;
- The student is in good academic standing; and
- The student receives written approval in advance from the RO/ARO for the duration and type of academic training.
- The academic training can be paid or unpaid.
- The training can be during the student's studies or it may start no later than 30 days after completion of studies.

### Economic Hardship Employment Authorization

\*If a J-1 student is experiencing “serious, urgent, and unforeseen economic circumstances which have arisen since acquiring exchange visitor status,” the student may qualify for Economic Hardship employment authorization. If you think this describes your situation, make an appointment to meet with an RO or ARO to discuss your eligibility.

## **Travel and Re-Entry**

If you would like travel outside the U.S for a short time and return to The University of Akron you will need the following:

- A valid DS-2019 form with a travel signature endorsed by an RO/ARO from the organization that issued your DS-2019,\* and
- A valid passport,
- A valid visa to re-enter the U.S.
  - If your visa expires while you are in the U.S., you must obtain a new J-1 visa when you travel abroad to apply for re-admission into the U.S.
  - Exception: If you and your dependents travel less than 30 days to Canada, nearby Caribbean islands (excluding Cuba), or Mexico, you do not need a new visa. (This exception does not apply to students from certain countries.)

\*For a travel signature on your DS-2019, complete our Travel Signature Request form and allow three business days for processing. The travel signature is valid for one year or the length of your J-1

exchange program, whichever is shorter. At The University of Akron, the following officials are authorized to sign the DS-2019:

- Robyn Brown, Responsible Officer
- Emily Aronson, Alternate Responsible Officer
- Jung Shin, Alternate Responsible Officer

Contact the International Center if you have questions about your specific circumstances: for example, if you are renewing your visa, if your DS-2019 will expire within 30 days of your expected return to the United States, if you have been arrested or convicted of a crime in the United States, if you are currently on Academic Training, or if you have applied for another visa status or lawful permanent resident status.

## **Two-Year Home Country Residence (212(e))**

- Exchange visitors may be subject to the two-year home country residence requirement if they are government-funded or fall into a program of study by which their government identifies as being a needed skill in the home country.
- Exchange visitors who require a two-year home country residence must live and physically be present in their home country for two years before being eligible for certain immigration benefits.

Some reasons why you may be subject to this rule:

- Your participation in the exchange visitor program was funded by the United States Government or a foreign government directly or indirectly;
- You are developing skills in a field which your home country has asked to be put on the skills list; or
- You are coming to the U.S. for graduate medical education or training.

*The two-year home country residence requirement here may be waived in some situations. Refer to the Department of State website for more information:*

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study/exchange/waiver-of-the-exchange-visitor.html>

## **Abide By Laws**

You are required to follow all criminal and civil laws governing the jurisdiction(s) in which you are living, attending school, and traveling. This includes federal, state, and city laws, regulations, and ordinances about:

- Filing annual tax returns;
- Alcohol, tobacco, and drugs;
- Driving;
- Immigration;
- Violence (including domestic violence); and
- Firearm possession.

## **Visa Revocation**

If you are arrested, your visa may be revoked. Discuss your situation with the International Center right away if you have been charged with a crime, especially if you are planning to travel outside the U.S.

## **Stay Aware of Important Updates**

Please be sure to check your UA email account regularly to receive updates from the International Center. This is the primary way we communicate changes to U.S. immigration regulations and policies that may affect you. This is also how we inform you of changes to International Center policies and processes.

Disclaimer: The International Center is able to provide you with general guidance. However, any advice provided to you by our office, as well as the information in this packet, should not be construed as legal advice. Additionally, due to the fluid nature of governmental interpretation, the USCIS may change its interpretation of these immigration laws, regulations, and eligibility requirements for benefits at any time. We will do our best to provide you with the most current guidance. Each case is fact-specific and it is advised that you contact an experienced immigration attorney if you have questions regarding your situation.