



Dear Visiting Scholar,

Welcome to the University of New Mexico (UNM)!

This letter provides important information regarding your J-1 Status and explains how to prepare for your J-1 program.

J-1 Visa Application

You must obtain a J-1 visa before entering the United States. Do not enter as a tourist (B1/B2/WB/WT) or you may not conduct your planned teaching or research legally. To apply for the J-1 visa, you pay the SEVIS fee (see below) and take the Certificate of Eligibility (**form DS-2019**), passport, and financial document(s) to a US Consulate or Embassy. Because you may be subjected to a security clearance that can delay the issuance of the visa; apply as soon as possible. Contact the US Embassy or Consulate directly to determine appointment details: what the fees are and how to pay, what documents you should bring to the interview, and visa processing times. For information on the US Embassy or Consulate(s) in your country, please visit the US Department of State's site <http://usembassy.state.gov/>

After issuing the J-1 visa, the U.S. consular officer returns the DS-2019 to you; **carry it with your passport and present it to the immigration officers when you enter the US.** Immigration regulations **prohibit** exchange visitors and their dependents from **arriving more than 30 days prior to the program start date** listed on the DS-2019.

Citizens of Canada and Bermuda do not require J-1 entry visas, but must present the DS-2019 when entering the US and must pay the SEVIS fee (see below). Non-citizen residents of Canada should check with the US Consulate in Canada to find out whether or not they need a US entry visa.

Accompanying Dependents

If your dependents will accompany you to the US or arrive separately, they will need their own forms DS-2019 and will apply for **J-2 visas**. If we already received information about your dependents, their forms DS-2019 are sent to you with yours. Your spouse or child will present proof of marriage or family relationship when they apply for the visas. Only spouses and unmarried children under the age of 21 qualify as dependents. If your child turns 21 or gets married while in the U.S., s/he will need a different visa status.

SEVIS Fee

All J-1 scholars must pay a mandatory US \$220 SEVIS fee. Exchange visitor dependents who enter the US in J-2 status are not required to pay the SEVIS fee. Please note that this fee is a US government fee and not a university fee. The SEVIS fee must be paid in addition to any other visa application fees but it cannot be paid at a US embassy or consulate and it also cannot be paid at a port of entry. You must pay the fee at least 3 business days prior to the visa interview or before arriving for admission at a US port of entry. This is because the payment of the fee will be recorded in the SEVIS system and should be fully processed before the applicant arrives at the US Embassy or Consulate for the visa interview (or before arriving for admission at a US port of entry for applicants who are exempt from US visa requirement). You must bring proof of payment to the interview (or when you arrive at the US port of entry for those who are exempt from the visa requirement). You can pay the SEVIS fee in one of three ways:

1. Online at www.FMJfee.com Use a credit card and complete the online Form I-901. Once you have submitted the payment please print the computer-generated receipt. This receipt will be your proof of payment. Please note that SEVP is unable to accept credit card payments on behalf of students from Ghana, Gambia, Nigeria, Cameroon or Kenya. **We strongly recommend you try to pay the SEVIS fee through the Internet.**
2. Through Western Union Quick Pay. This option is available in any country where Western Union offers its Quick Pay service. This service allows you to pay the SEVIS fee electronically and directly to the Department of Homeland Security in local currency. The receipt you will obtain at the end of the transaction will be your proof of payment. To read the detailed instructions for this form of payment, please go to www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/wu_instr.htm
3. Through the mail by submitting a completed Form I-901 and a check or money order drawn from a U.S. bank. The mailing address can be found at: www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/faq4.htm#_Toc81222043 The payment confirmation you can print from the FMJ fee website will serve as proof of payment for the I-901 SEVIS fee. Because we do not know how much time it takes to obtain this receipt we strongly recommend that you do NOT pay by mail but rather try to pay the SEVIS fee through one of the other options above. For more detailed information on the fee payment process please go to the SEVIS website at: www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/index.htm

Mandatory Health Insurance Requirements

All exchange visitors and their dependents on J visas are required by US law to carry and maintain health insurance coverage during their entire stay in the U.S. As of January 2015, the minimum health insurance coverage requirements are:

- \$100,000 per person per accident or illness
- \$25,000 for repatriation of remains
- \$50,000 for medical evacuation
- No more than \$500 deductible per accident or illness
- Coinsurance must not exceed 25% payable by the exchange visitor or sponsor
- Policy Rating requirements (ask the company about these requirements): The policy must be underwritten by an insurance corporation with an A.M. Best rating of "A-" or above; a McGraw Hill Financial/Standard & Poor's Claims-paying Ability rating of "A-" or above; a Weiss Research, Inc. rating of "B+" or above; a Fitch Ratings, Inc. rating of "A-" or above; a Moody's Investor Services rating of "A3" or above.

You must present proof of health insurance that meets these minimum requirements upon arrival in the U.S. Failure to maintain health insurance as described above will be considered a violation of J-1 status and will lead to termination of your Exchange Visitor program. If you are receiving a salary from UNM please check with your sponsoring department to determine whether health insurance is included in your benefits.

Whether your department will cover your health insurance or you will buy your own, you must be covered by insurance at all times during your stay in the U.S. If your health insurance coverage does not begin until after your arrival, you must purchase a short-term insurance policy before leaving your home country to cover you for approximately the first two months in the U.S. You can try the travel medical insurance here: <http://www.internationalstudentinsurance.com/travel-medical-insurance/>

Please be aware that scholars who are "residents for tax purposes" are also required to comply with the US Affordable Care Act (ACA). This means that your insurance requirements increase once you become a tax resident. J1 scholars typically become tax residents if they are present in the US in more than 2 of the previous 6 calendar years. Individuals who do not comply with the ACA requirements may be subject to tax penalties.

If your department will cover your health insurance, the insurance will NOT start immediately. There is a 15-day waiting period from the start date of your employment contract before you can be covered by the UNM insurance plan. After the 15-day waiting period your insurance will begin on the 1st day of the **following** month. You will have a total of 31 days to enroll for your UNM health benefits after the 15-day wait period. If you wait longer than the 31 days allowed, you will no longer be eligible for coverage. Here is an **example** of when the UNM insurance coverage begins:

- Hire date: September 1, 2026
- Eligibility Waiting Period: September 1, 2026 - September 15, 2026

- First day employee is eligible to enroll in benefits: September 16, 2026
- Employee must enroll in benefits within 31 days
- Employee enrolls September 16, 2026 - September 30, 2026; coverage is effective October 1, 2026
- Employee enrolls October 1, 2026 - October 16, 2026; coverage is effective November 1, 2026

If your department will NOT cover your health insurance, you MUST buy your own insurance. Our website lists some companies which offer options for health insurance plans for both temporary and long term coverage that will meet the mandatory minimum requirements: http://geo.unm.edu/scholars/health_care/health_insurance/non_unm_insurance.html
DO NOT PURCHASE AN INSURANCE POLICY UNTIL YOU ARE SURE THAT IT MEETS ALL OF THE REQUIREMENTS! **You MUST ALSO have a copy of the complete benefits and exclusions for the policy in English that shows these minimum requirements as well as insurance policy information so you can access health care in the U.S.**

Dental and vision care are not covered by medical insurance in the U.S., so it is recommended that you take care of any vision or dental needs before you arrive.

Orientation and arrival information

You will find arrival and relocation information for incoming scholars attached to this email. You can also visit our website for incoming scholars at: <https://iss.unm.edu/scholars/coming-to-unm/arrival-information.html>

Immediately after your arrival in the Albuquerque area, please schedule to come to a scholar orientation here: <https://calendly.com/unm-geo/j-1-scholar-orientation?month=2022-07> . If none of those dates fit your schedule, email iadvisor@unm.edu. In compliance with US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) regulations, we are required to copy your documents and to notify immigration of your arrival at the university. **Failure to attend orientation could result in the termination of your J-1 program.** At orientation, please bring your passport, DS-2019 form, insurance policy information, and I-94 arrival record (which you will print out at cbp.gov/i94 after your arrival).

Social, Cultural and Informational Events for Scholars

GEO also sponsors activities for international students and scholars each semester. For more information about these events, please reference our calendar at: <https://iss.unm.edu/programs-events/calendar-of-events.html> . You can also ask to join our [UNMGlobal Facebook group](#) and our [MSTeam](#) to communicate with other international students and scholars at UNM.

Airport Pick-Up and Temporary Homestay

A non-UNM, community Christian volunteer organization called ISI (International Students, Inc.) offers free airport pick-up and a temporary home-stay with a local family not to exceed 3 days. If you are interested, you must contact them at least one month prior to your arrival in Albuquerque to ensure they will have time to locate volunteers to assist you. This service is free. ISI is a Christian Organization, but there is no obligation to participate in any religious activities. If you are interested in airport pick-up or the home-stay opportunity offered by ISI, sign up at their website: www.isiabq.org or contact them by e-mail at: ISIABQ@isionline.org They may also be able to assist you with finding housing for your stay and other relocation issues related to families or individuals. In addition, some departments may offer assistance with airport pick-up or arranging temporary housing. Check directly with your department to see if this assistance is available.

Additional Resources

If you should have any questions or concerns about the Exchange Visitor Program, you can contact:
United States Department of State
Office of Exchange Coordination and Designation
ECA/EC/CU-SA-44, Room732
301 4th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20547

E-mail: jvisas@state.gov

Fax: (202) 203-5087

Finally, as a temporary visitor to the U.S., it is important that you are aware of your rights, as well as protections and resources available when you come to work or study here. For additional information or to report mistreatment or rights violations, please go to https://j1visa.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Wilberforce_Pamphlet_October2016.pdf

We look forward to meeting you upon your arrival and wish you a pleasant trip to Albuquerque!

Sincerely,

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