



International Programs and Services

Dear Scholar!

We are glad to welcome you to our Exchange Visitor Program at George Mason University! The Exchange Visitor Program operates under the auspices of the [U. S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs](#)

The purpose of the Program is to provide you with opportunities to participate in educational and cultural programs in the United States and return home to share your experiences, and to encourage Americans to participate in educational and cultural programs in other countries. Exchange Visitors enter the United States on a J visa.

[Title 22](#) of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) regulates Foreign Relations. Part 62 regulates the Exchange Visitor Program. As a designated sponsor, George Mason University complies with the regulations and compliance administration outlined in 22 CFR Part 62. As a participant of the Exchange Visitor Program, you are expected to comply with 22 CFR Part 62.

The information below will help you to prepare for your trip to the United States.

Once you have received your Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (DS-2019 Form), please check the dates carefully. If your plans change and you have to arrive 10 days past the start date on the form, please contact Irina V. Chizhova (Responsible Officer) at ichizhov@gmu.edu to amend the dates.

DS-2019 is valid for entry to the United States for the 30-day period before the start date of your J-1 program (as listed in #3 on the form). However, you cannot begin your work and/or research until the program start date listed on your DS-2019.

Once you have arrived in the U.S., you must validate your SEVIS record within your first 10 days. SEVIS validation is a legal requirement and can be done online. J-1 advisor will provide the detailed guidance, forms and the date of orientation. On the 21st day past your start date your SEVIS record will automatically be invalidated, which will complicate your legal stay in the U.S.

Prior to Arrival

Paying I-901 fee or SEVIS fee (\$220):

The SEVIS fee must be paid at least three days prior to submitting the application for a U.S. visa. Open an international visitor record in the Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) and pay your SEVIS fee online:

- Go to <https://www.fmjfee.com/i901fee/index.html#>
- Click Pay I-901 Fee
- Enter SEVIS ID (the number on your DS-2019, starting with N), last name (family name) and first name and date of birth
- Click Submit
- Pay Fee and Print Receipt (receipt is needed for visa interview)

Applying for your visa at the U.S. embassy/consulate: <http://www.usembassy.gov>

Please bring the DS-2019 Form and your SEVIS fee receipt (I-901) to a U.S. Embassy or Consulate when you apply for your J-1 visa. DS-2019 is the form is your legal immigration document and is very important throughout your stay in the U.S.

Tip: Please check the embassy/consulate website to see what paperwork you will need to bring with you. In addition to DS-2019 and passport, you may be asked to show documentation evidencing financial ability to meet expenses, invitation letter from your host faculty, GMU contract or offer letter, evidence of residence abroad and intent to depart the U.S. after completion of the program, and proof of financial support.

The consular officer will review whether you have sufficient funds to cover expenses. Consular review of financial documentation can range from very cursory review to very detailed review of both the form and content of the documentation. The consular officer must be "satisfied" that the funding exists and is sufficient, which means the consular officer has a great deal of discretion in determining whether sufficient financial support exists.

Housing:

GMU does not provide visiting scholars with on-campus housing. However, for help with off-housing, please visit:

<http://och.gmu.edu/>

<http://www.zillow.com/fairfax-va/rent-houses/>

http://www.trulia.com/for_rent/Fairfax,VA

Tip: The current minimum figure needed to meet basic living expenses (excluding health insurance) at GMU is: \$25,200 per year for the J-1 Exchange Visitor. Please note that the cost of living in the metro Washington, DC area is one of the highest in the United States. Thus, it is very important that you research the cost of housing and other living expenses **before** you arrive in the U.S. Flyer on how to avoid housing scams is attached in the Welcome E-mail along with the Pre-Arrival Guide.

Health Insurance:

According to immigration regulations (22 CFR S62.14), J-1 exchange visitors and accompanying J-2 dependents are required to maintain medical insurance with evacuation and repatriation coverage that meets U.S. government minimum requirements beginning on the start date of the J-1 program (indicated in item 3 of the DS-2019) continuing to the end of the J-1 program.

Minimum coverage must provide:

1. Medical benefits of at least \$100,000 U.S. per accident or illness;
2. Repatriation of remains in the amount of \$25,000 U.S.;
3. Expenses associated with medical evacuation of the Exchange Visitor to his or her home country in the amount of \$50,000 U.S.
4. A deductible not to exceed \$500 per accident or illness.

** Medical evacuation and repatriation requirements.* Note the explicit requirement for medical evacuation and repatriation insurance. Most domestic health insurance policies do not include this feature, or include it only for bringing people or remains back to the United States from abroad. You may have to purchase medical evacuation and repatriation coverage separately. Many insurance companies provide this special coverage at reasonable cost.

There cannot be any breaks or lapses in insurance coverage even if one travels outside the U.S for an extended period of time during the J program. OIPS must terminate the SEVIS record of an exchange visitor who: 1) does not provide OIPS with a valid health insurance by the start of the J program at GMU; and 2) does not submit an updated health insurance when s/he seeks to extend the J-1 program.

The willful failure to carry the required insurance for yourself and, if applicable, your dependents, or material misrepresentation of insurance coverage will result in the termination of your J program and legal status in the U.S.

Understanding your health insurance options:

Please email Della Jarret at djarret2@gmu.edu for more information about GMU's health insurance for scholars (NOT paid by GMU, not eligible employees). Eligible employees should reach out to the [Central HR](#). George Mason University makes health insurance available to eligible students and scholars through Aetna Student Health: <https://shs.gmu.edu/insurance/>

Visiting Scholar Plan & Tentative Monthly Rates:

	First Month	Each Additional Month
Scholar	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 285.00	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 225.00
Spouse	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 225.00	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 225.00
One Child	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 225.00	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 225.00
Two or more Children	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 450.00	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 450.00
Spouse and 2 or more Children	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 675.00	<input type="checkbox"/> \$ 675.00

If you are **employed at GMU** and eligible for health insurance benefits, please visit:

<https://hr.gmu.edu/benefits/insurance-and-benefits/>

Exchange visitors and automatic payroll deductions for insurance: 22 CFR 62.14(b) requires that, "If the sponsor provides health insurance, or arranges for health insurance to be offered the exchange visitor, via payroll deduction at the host organization, the exchange visitor must voluntarily authorize this action in writing and also be given the opportunity to make other arrangements to obtain insurance.

Note: You do not have to purchase GMU's Health Insurance Plan for visiting scholars.

Below is the list of some recommended outside insurance companies that provide health insurance for visiting scholars.

VISIT® International Health Insurance Program for International Students, Scholars, Spouses, Families & Visitors

Website: <http://www.visitinsurance.com/>

ISO Insurance: <https://www.isoa.org/>

Tips for selecting a health insurance provider:

There are many health insurance providers available and the options can be overwhelming. When selecting an insurance plan, you should choose a plan that meets your individual needs and the minimum requirements mentioned above. A plan that worked for your friend or colleague may not be the best option for you. You should carefully review the details of any insurance plan you are considering.

Understanding the U.S. Health Care System:

Your health insurance may not cover the full cost of your doctor's visit, hospitalization or medication. Please review the rules related to the plan you choose to understand fully what is covered. Here are some of the terms defined:

Premium: The amount you pay to your insurance company for your insurance policy. This is paid on a monthly or a yearly basis, depending on your insurance plan.

Co-Pay: The co-pay or co-payment, is the amount you are expected to pay directly to the healthcare provider at the time you receive medical treatment. This is usually a small amount and varied depending on your insurance plan.

Deductible: The deductible is a part of the medical bill that you are expected to pay in addition to the co-pay. Insurance plans usually specify the amount of a medical bill they cover and the amount you must pay. The deductible is usually described as a flat amount or as a percentage, depending upon the policy. Generally high premiums have a lower deductible while lower premiums have a high deductible. In many cases, the doctor's office or hospital where you seek treatment may not bill your insurance directly. They may require you to pay them directly and be reimbursed by your health insurance company.

Information on possible applicability of the Affordable Care Act

The general rules regarding applicability of the individual mandate of the ACA and availability of ACA-compliant coverage also apply to J nonimmigrants, but that the minimum levels and types of coverage are still required as a condition of J-1 or J-2 status, even if those nonimmigrants are additionally subject to the ACA's individual mandate. For more information please visit:

<https://shs.gmu.edu/insurance/resources/>

Two-Year Home-Country Physical Presence Requirement

Some J-1 exchange visitors are subject to what is called the two-year home country physical presence requirement. The "two-year residence" requirement applies to J-1 exchange visitors in the following situations:

- If you receive any indirect or direct funding (including nominal travel grants) from your home government or a U.S. government agency at any point during your J-1 visa stay in the U.S.
- If your country of permanent residency and field of work are identified by your home government as being in short supply and consequently listed on the U.S. State Department's Exchange Visitor's "Skills List."

Please note:

1. If you are subject to the home-residency rule, then any family members who entered the U.S. as J-2 dependents are **also** subjects to the home-residency rule.
2. J-1 Exchange Visitors who are subject to this requirement must first return to their country of legal permanent residence for an aggregate of two years (24 months) or receive a waiver of the condition before they can change to H-1B or a U.S. Permanent Resident.
3. Exchange Visitors who are subject to the return requirement may return to the U.S. in other non-immigrant categories including but not limited to F-1 student, J exchange visitor, B visitor and the O-1 foreign national of extraordinary ability.

What is an I-94 Record?

I-94 record is the "Arrival/Departure Record" issued by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) whenever you enter the United States. This record confirms that you have been legally admitted to the U.S. in a specific visa status, and for duration of time. For J visa holders the amount of time is indicated by the notation "D/S" which means you can be in the U.S. for the Duration of Status of your student or scholar program. The CBP officers will enter the I-94 data into an on-line registration system using your passport and visa stamp. You will be able to access an electronic version of your Most Recent I-94 record by visiting

<https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/#/home>

This record must be printed when applying for immigration benefits, such as a driver's license or a [Social Security Number \(SSN\)](#). If you are an employee of GMU and do not have a SSN, please follow the steps below:

1. Apply for SSN: <https://www.ssa.gov/ssnumber/>. Locate your local SSA by your zip code or postal code <https://www.ssa.gov/locator/>

2. Complete MasonOnBoarding (hiring department will send login information) & Upload your I-9 document via [Dynamic Forms website](#)
3. Request & Complete Foreign National Information form (email to inttax@gmu.edu to request access)
4. [Book & Attend your in-person I-9 appointment](#)

Banks, Pre-K-12 Schools, Driver's License & Car Rental

Banking:

For help with opening a bank account on campus, please visit:

Bank of America (10440 Main Street, Fairfax, VA)

Website: <https://www.bankofamerica.com/>

Trust (4020 University Drive, Fairfax, VA)

Website: <https://www.suntrust.com/portal/server.pt>

Daycare and Preschools:

For information about daycare, private pre-schools and childcare, please visit:

<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/ofc/>

<http://family.arlingtonva.us/child-care/>

<http://www.northernvirginiamag.com/top-daycare-centers-preschools/>

Public Schools: If you go to realtor.com you can search for desired schools within their rentals section.

Please visit the appropriate county website of where your local address is located:

[Fairfax County Public Schools](#)

[Arlington Public Schools](#)

[Loudoun County Public Schools](#)

High Schools in NoVA- <https://www.ffxnow.com/2023/10/04/fcps-dominates-ranking-of-top-high-schools-in-northern-virginia/>

Other than Thomas Jefferson High School which you need to test into, most are public High Schools are assigned on where you live.

GreatSchools.com is a good resource to see parent reviews and school's test scores in comparison with other schools in the state.

Driver's License: If you plan to apply for a driver's license, OIPS can assist you. The closest [DMV office is located inside Fair Oaks mall](#): Address: 11805 Fair Oaks Mall, Fairfax, VA.

Please note that road tests are not given at this location. If the DMV requires for you to take a road test, then you may want to visit another location. DMV offices are also located in other locations in Fairfax, Prince William, Loudoun counties and Alexandria. Find other locations here: <http://www.dmv.state.va.us/DMVLocator/>

Requirements obtaining VA driver's license: <https://www.dmv.virginia.gov/licenses-ids/license/applying/eligibility>

Car rental: George Mason University students, faculty, and staff can join Zipcar. Get 24/7 access to Zipcars parked right on campus!

Transportation from airport to GMU: Please follow the link to explore your transportation options from Virginia airports: <https://transportation.gmu.edu/transportation-services/#OtherTransportationOptions>

Fairfax Campus Map: Our office at the Fairfax campus located in Student Union Building (SUB) I Room 4300 is open from 8:30am – 5:00 pm M-F. SUB I is building #53 on the map: <https://info.gmu.edu/campus-maps-and-directions/>

EMPLOYMENT & WORK AUTHORIZATION OFF-CAMPUS

J-1 Professors, Research Scholars and Short-Term Scholars

Your ability to work legally in the United States is determined by your immigration status. It is your responsibility to know the limits of your ability to work and what you must do to obtain work permission.

J Advisor is required by law to report to the Government any periods of unauthorized employment about which they have concrete knowledge. Please discuss any potential employment opportunities with your J Advisor in advance.

Please note: Please submit the following documents to Irina Chizhova ichizhov@gmu.edu 5 business days prior to the start date of your lecture or consultation to allow enough time for processing:

- **A letter from the employer** (on letterhead and signed) which outlines the terms of the proposed lecture or consultation including the date of employment, a brief description of the activities involved, and the amount of payment offered.
- **A letter from the GMU host faculty member** (on letterhead and signed). This letter should:
 - ✓ Recommend the proposed employment as relevant to the scholar's objectives,
 - ✓ State that the employment is within the field of teaching or research for which the scholar came to the United States, and
 - ✓ State that it will not delay the departure date originally proposed or interrupt the original objective.

TAKING CLASSES

For J-1 Professors, Research Scholars and Short-Term Scholars

There is no regulatory prohibition on a J-1 Scholar enrolling in class as long as the classes are incidental to your primary activity and you continue to pursue research objectives, and the program continues to fulfill the objectives of the Scholar category.

A J-1 Scholar should never be admitted to a degree-seeking program or enroll in classes on a full-time basis. If enrollment in classes or a degree program will become your primary activity, you should change your visa classification before engaging in a full-time degree-seeking program.

Please email ichizhov@gmu.edu to schedule online check-in & orientation.

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