**The Connection**

**Important Information**

**Grading Earlier than Expected?**
If you are 100% sure that you will complete all course requirements this semester, please contact your DVS advisor for further instruction.

**When to Pay the I-901 SEVIS Fee?**
- All prospective F and J students must pay the I-901 SEVIS fee prior to visa issuance at a United States Consulate or Embassy. Failure to make this payment could result in termination of a student’s SEVIS record.
- Students do not need to pay again as long as they are only renewing a visa stamp or transferring degree programs to another institution as long as the SEVIS number remains the same.
- Non-payment: If a student has not paid this fee, they will either be denied visa issuance or, if they are current students, they will be contacted by SEVP and Duke Visa Services.
- For more information regarding the I-901 SEVIS fee, please visit [https://fmjfee.com/i901fee/desktop/index.jsp?view=desktop](https://fmjfee.com/i901fee/desktop/index.jsp?view=desktop).

**J-1 Scholar Registration has Changed!!**
Effective April 4, 2016, J-1 Scholar Registration at Duke Visa Services will be held once a day instead of twice each weekday.

The new J-1 Scholar registration time will be 9:00am to 10:00am, Monday through Friday. We ask that scholars arrive by 8:45am so we can process the required information before we start the J-1 Scholar presentation.

**Traveling Abroad: Information Links**

**Travel Abroad and Reentry to the United States**

**Travel During F-1 OPT**

**Automatic Revalidation**

**Final OPT Information Session**
DVS will hold one final information session for anyone interested in applying for OPT.

**April 6th at 3 pm**

If you plan to attend this session please make sure you arrive early as we will start on time. This session will take place in the Smith Warehouse.

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**New STEM OPT Ruling for F-1 Students**

**F-1 STEM Optional Practical Training**
- The New 24-month STEM OPT rule is effective Tuesday, May 10, 2016.
- The current 17-month STEM OPT rule remains effective through May 9, 2016, and will continue to govern the STEM OPT extensions that were approved prior to May 10, 2016, and for which a 7-month extension has not been requested.

**Duration of STEM OPT**
- The OPT extension period for STEM OPT students is increased to 24 months for applications adjudicated on and after the May 10, 2016, effective date of the new final rule. It is currently 17 months.
- The 24-month extension, when combined with the period of standard post-completion OPT that must precede an application for STEM OPT, allows qualifying STEM students up to 36 months of post-completion optional practical training.
- After completing another qualifying degree at a higher degree level and receiving another period of standard post-completion OPT based on that degree, a student would be eligible for one more 24-month STEM OPT extension.

*Duke Visa Services will send a detailed email to all students affected by this change*

**Friendly Reminder for Scholars in the J-1 Exchange Visitor Visa Category**
- Does your department have a J-1 employee or scholar pursuing groundbreaking or unique research? We would like to share his or her research activities with the Department of State to highlight the importance of the J-1 Exchange Visitors Program to the Duke and the Durham communities. Send an email with the name of the scholar and research activities to Janet Williams (janet.williams@duke.edu).
- New J-1 Exchange Visitor registrations at Duke Visa Services is a core requirement of the U.S. Department of State (DOS). If a J-1 SEVIS file closes due to the scholar’s failure to register with our office, DOS will charge Duke a processing fee of over $200 to have the file reopened.

**Processing Time Change for the H-1B Visa Category**
Processing H-1B petitions for new and continuing employees is a 3 step process which includes receiving the Prevailing Wage and the approved Labor Condition Application from the Department of Labor (2 to 2.5 months processing time), filing and then receiving the H-1B petition approval from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (3 to 4 months with the additional premium processing fee of $1225).

The current USCIS processing time for H-1B extension cases without premium processing is 7 to 8 months. The processing time for new and change-of-status H-1B petitions is taking more than the standard 3 to 4 months. If you have any H-1B pending cases, discuss processing times with your Duke Visa Services advisor to see if the premium processing fee will be required to help your H-1B employee remain or change to H-1B.

**Regulatory Change in Visa Waiver Program (WB/WT Visa Waivers)**
Effective 1/21/2016, travelers in the following categories are no longer eligible to travel or be admitted to the United States under the Visa Waiver Program (VWP): Nationals of VWP countries who have traveled to or been present in Iran, Iraq, Sudan, or Syria on or after March 1, 2011 (with limited exceptions for travel for diplomatic or military purposes in the service of a VWP country). Nationals of VWP countries who are also nationals of Iran, Iraq, Sudan, or Syria. These individuals will still be able to apply for a visa using the regular immigration process at our embassies or consulates. For those who need a U.S. visa for urgent business, medical, or humanitarian travel to the United States, U.S. embassies and consulates stand ready to process applications on an expedited basis. Detailed information can be found at: [http://www.state.gov/r/ps/ps/2016/01/251577.htm](http://www.state.gov/r/ps/ps/2016/01/251577.htm).

**The Importance of Health Insurance**
Health Insurance is different in the United States than most other countries. The U.S. operates on a pay-for-your-services system, and lack of adequate health insurance coverage could result in thousands of dollars of unexpected medical costs per treated individual. You could even be refused treatment if you do not have appropriate coverage. In most cases, lack of adequate health insurance coverage could result in the termination of your visa program.

F-1 and J-1 students are automatically enrolled and required to participate in Duke’s SMIP. Any student that has insurance from another institution must clear this with Student Health before the charge may be removed (must meet certain criteria).

If you are a J visa holder and not categorized as a student on your J visa documents, please click on the following link to determine what you will need to do in order to fulfill the Health Insurance Requirement: [https://visaservices.duke.edu/category/j1/j1_health_insurance/index.php](https://visaservices.duke.edu/category/j1/j1_health_insurance/index.php).
If you have ambition to work or participate in an internship this summer for a company away from Duke’s campus, you will need to apply for special work authorization.

If your I-94 expires before the appropriate action is taken, you will be illegally present in the U.S.

Your passport must be valid for the period of time you are in the U.S. If your passport expires before your visa H-1B, O-1, E-3 or H-1B1 status approval end date, sometimes upon reentry the U.S., the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials at the port of entry may put the end date of the passport as your electronic I-94 end date and not the end date of your visa status. Always check your electronic I-94 after reentry to the U.S. at: http://www.cbp.gov/travel/international-visitors/i-94-instructions. If the end date is incorrect:

- Report to the local port of entry (Raleigh-Durham Airport) and for a correction of the I-94.
- If the officials cannot correct the end date, contact your Duke Visa Services Advisor so he/she can assist you in correcting your I-94.

If your I-94 expires before the appropriate action is taken, you will be illegally present in the U.S. and must stop your employment immediately.

**DUKE VISA SERVICES EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT**

Betty Henderson  
International Student & Scholar Advisor

Q- How long have you been at Duke Visa Services and what do you do?  
A- I have been working at Duke Visa Services since October 2010. I am an International Student/Scholar advisor primarily for the F-1 undergraduate population at Duke.

Q- What do you like to do on your spare time?  
A- I love spending time with my grandchildren and dreaming of retiring from Duke again.

Q- If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go?  
A- I have always wanted to visit Jerusalem to see the Old City along with the other sacred religious sites.

**Off-Campus Student Work or Internship Beginning this Summer**

If you have ambition to work or participate in an internship this summer for a company away from Duke’s campus, you will need to apply for special work authorization.

⇒ F-1 students: Apply for **Optional Practical Training** (OPT) if the work/internship is related to your academic program of study. Apply for **Curricular Practical Training** (CPT) if the internship will count as academic credit towards your degree program.

⇒ J-1 students: Apply for **Academic Training** for internships or work in your field of study.

First, review our website with information about OPT, CPT or AT with the links above  
You must set up an appointment with your International Student Advisor for questions and to apply for OPT, CPT, or AT, and you must contact your advisor directly to do so.

**TIMELINES FOR APPLICATIONS**

**OPT**  
First day to apply: February 15th  
Last day to apply for continuing students: 90 days prior to employment start or graduation date  
Last day to apply for students graduating May 2015: July 2nd  
Processing time at USCIS: Approximately 90 days  
Students should start preparing to file for OPT NOW!

**CPT**  
Last day to apply: 2 weeks prior to employment start date  
Processing time at Duke Visa Services – Approval after appointment

**AT**  
Last day to apply for continuing students: 2 weeks prior to employment start date  
Last day to apply for May 2015 graduates: April 29th  
Processing time at Duke Visa Services – Approval after appointment

Note to all applicants: **DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE TO APPLY.** If you fail to meet the deadlines and application requirements, you will lose your opportunity to apply for work authorization.

**Travel Hints for H-1B, O-1, E-3, and H-1B1 Employees**

Your passport must be valid for the period of time you are in the U.S. If your passport expires before your visa H-1B, O-1, E-3 or H-1B1 status approval end date, sometimes upon reentry the U.S., the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials at the port of entry may put the end date of the passport as your electronic I-94 end date and not the end date of your visa status. Always check your electronic I-94 after reentry to the U.S. at: http://www.cbp.gov/travel/international-visitors/i-94-instructions. If the end date is incorrect:

- Report to the local port of entry (Raleigh-Durham Airport) and for a correction of the I-94.
- If the officials cannot correct the end date, contact your Duke Visa Services Advisor so he/she can assist you in correcting your I-94.

If your I-94 expires before the appropriate action is taken, you will be illegally present in the U.S. and must stop your employment immediately.

**DEPARTMENT CONTACT SPOTLIGHT**

**Q & A**

Kim E. Hall  
Biostatistics and Bioinformatics

Duke Visa Services appreciates Kim for her assistance processing visa document requests for her department. Her knowledge of Duke policies as well as governmental regulatory issues assists our office in maintaining a high standard in the service to her department’s international population.

Q- What hint would you like to share with other departmental Visa Services administrators that makes your job easier?  
A- Don’t assume the process in a particular visa category will be the same each time. There are usually different scenarios and situations to consider with each application. Be cautious when communicating a hire date and always consider delays in processing. Also, I keep a lot of notes as I experience the different situations so that I can easily refer back to them and determine a plan of action before contacting Visa Services for advice.

Q- How has your contact with Duke’s international population changed your world view?

A- My daily interactions are a reminder that we all come from different backgrounds and cultures. Staying open-minded is important. I try to be thoughtful in how I communicate to others and to keep in mind that the different languages, behaviors, and motivations are learning experiences for everyone.

Q- Are there any comments you would like to share?  
A- Consult with your Visa Advisor early in the process. DVS has a great staff who are always willing to provide guidance.