UNIVERSITY *of* ST. THOMAS

OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT & SCHOLAR SERVICES

F-1 Students

UNIVERSITY *of* ST. THOMAS

Educating Leaders of Faith and Character

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OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT & SCHOLAR SERVICES

Location: Crooker Center, 2ND Floor, 214A

Lily Swan
Director of International Student and Scholar Services
Primary Designated School Official/Responsible Officer
713-525-3503

Akilah Moy
International Student Advisor
Designated School Official/Alternate Responsible Officer
713-942-3412

Hiba Elroz
International Student Advisor
Designated School Official
713-942-5968

OFFICE HOURS

Summer Semester
Monday – Thursday: 8:00 am – 5:30 pm
Friday: 8:00 am – 1:00 pm

Fall and Spring Semesters
Monday – Thursday: 8:30 am – 5:30 pm
Friday: 8:30 am – 5:00 pm

IMMIGRATION AND VISA STATUS

The USCIS (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services) holds you responsible for maintaining your immigration status. It is very important for you to read through the information throughout this handbook. If you need any clarifications or guidance, please visit with an International Student Advisor.

The most important rules for you to know in order to maintain legal status:

- Enroll and complete a full course of study each Spring and Fall semester. Full-time enrollment (Under graduate: 12 credits; Graduate: 9 credits) is optional in your graduating semester.
- Do not work off-campus without authorization. One day of unauthorized work is considered as a direct violation of one's status. You may work off-campus with authorization from an International Student Advisor through *Curricular Practical Training*. See the section below for more information.
- Maintain a valid passport; this must be valid for at least six months into the future.
- Keep your I-20 valid. You are responsible for having the end date extended if you do not plan on completing your program in the time allotted.
- Obtain a travel signature on the third page of your I-20 prior to your departure. Please plan to see us at least two weeks before your departure date.

F-A-C-T-S ABOUT MAINTAINING F-1 STATUS

F - FULL TIME STATUS

MAINTAIN FULL-TIME ENROLLMENT

It is your responsibility to ensure that you enroll and complete the correct number of credit hours each long semester (Fall and Spring).

- Undergraduate: 12 credits; Graduate: 9 credits.
- Summer enrollment is optional unless it is your first semester. Full-time enrollment in the summer term is six credits. This applies to both undergraduate and graduate students.
- If you are considering dropping below less than full-time you are required to speak to the International Student Advisor. If you are authorized to fall below full-time enrollment, the International Student Advisor and Academic Advisor must sign a ***"Reduced Course Load Form"*** before you drop your class(es).
- Acceptable grades to receive: A, B, C, D, E and F. Incompletes and audits will not count towards maintaining your status.

A - AUTHORIZATION EMPLOYMENTS & TRAINING

ON-CAMPUS EMPLOYMENT

F-1 students may apply for work on-campus.

- Permitted to work part-time (≤ 20 hours) while school is in session; you may work more (up to 40 hours) during school breaks.
- You must present your valid I-20 and passport to the Career Services and Testing Center.
- You do not need approval from the Office of International Student and Scholar Services (OISSS) to work on campus. However, you must be enrolled for the semester and registered for at least 12 (undergraduate) or 9 (graduate) credit hours before you may begin working.

OFF-CAMPUS EMPLOYMENT

There are two different kinds of off-campus employment: Curricular and Optional Practical Training (please see the following sections for more details). As an F-1 visa holder, you must have completed one academic year in order to be eligible to work off-campus. Once you are eligible, you are required to obtain authorization from an International Student Advisor before you start work. ***Even one day of work that is unauthorized by an International Student Advisor is considered a direct violation of your status.***

CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING (CPT)

Per immigration regulations, CPT must be **"an integral part of an established curriculum."**

- You must be enrolled and have completed two full academic semesters in good immigration status.
- This may be an internship for a specific class or if approved by your advisor, an internship class.
- Even though you may have approval from your academic advisor and have a job offer, you should **not** begin working until you have completed all the paperwork with the OISSS and have received a new I-20 with the CPT eligibility dates. Failure to comply with these regulations is grounds for termination of your F-1 status. You may visit the OISSS for more information on CPT.
- Effective Fall 2014, CPT will only be approved if the work that the student engages in is a) an integral part of the degree program and b) credit bearing. Students must receive credit; non-credit internships will not be accepted.

  The academic department may hold discretion on a) allocating the number of credit hours (1-3) for the employment experience; b) discerning the duration of the experience (one or two semesters maximum); and c) stipulations for the expected learning outcomes from the proposed employment experience.

  Furthermore, each department may determine other requirements that their students must fulfill before being eligible for CPT. For example, a graduate program may require students to complete at least 12 credit hours of specific courses in order to be considered for an internship.

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)

OPT is "temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student's major area of study" authorized by USCIS. If approved, they will issue you an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) also known as an OPT card. You may apply for OPT no more than 120 days before graduating from your program. Processing time averages around 90 days. You must have your EAD and your start date must come to fruition before you are allowed to work lawfully in the U.S. Employment that takes place before/after the designated time frame on your card will be considered unlawful and a direct violation of your F-1 status.

C - CARRY CURRENT DOCUMENTS

KEEP IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS VALID AT ALL TIMES

- I-20 must have accurate program info and valid dates.
- I-94 must be valid for Duration of Status (D/S).
- Passport must be valid for six months into the future.
- The visa sticker in your passport may expire while you reside in the U.S. and is to be used for travel purposes only. It is more important to maintain your status (following the rules, keep your I-20 and passport valid) than the sticker. If you choose/need to travel outside of the U.S., you will have to get it renewed in order to re-enter the U.S. This can only be done in your home country.

ATTEND THE SCHOOL THAT IS ON YOUR I-20

- Only attend the school listed on your current I-20. To attend another school, you must transfer to that school (obtain approval on a new I-20) or receive a concurrent enrollment letter from our office

I-20 EXTENSION

- If you are unable to complete your degree program in the time allotted on your I-20, then you must request an extension **before** the noted end date. Any student who comes after their I-20 has expired to request an extension will be required to file for reinstatement.
- Complete an I-20 extension form. You and your academic advisor must complete this form before you submit it to the OISSS.

T - TRANSITION

Due to the intensive reporting requirements of the International Student Advisors, it is important to notify them in the event of any of the following:

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

- You must inform the International Student Advisor **within 10 days** of your move.

CHANGE IN LEVEL OF STUDENT OR CHANGE OF DEGREE PROGRAM

- For example, Bachelor's to Master's level; Biology to Math degree program. The International Student Advisor will issue you a new I-20 form reflecting the change. ***This should be on your I-20 before you begin the new program.***

TRANSFERRING OUT TO ANOTHER INSTITUTION

- Submit new school's admission letter and transfer form to an International Student Advisor.
- If there is a student section on the new school's form, you must complete it before submitting it to the ISA at UST.

COMPLETING YOUR PROGRAM

- You must complete your program of study (academic major) before the completion date on your I-20 (item 5). It is highly advised that you complete an "I-20 Extension Form" **prior** to the expiration date of your I-20. Failure to do so will mean that you will be out of status and will have to file for reinstatement.

Upon completing your program you have a few options:

- Depart the U.S. within 60 days of completion of given semester.
- Transfer out and receive an I-20 for a new degree program to a different institution.
- Complete a change of visa status.
- Apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT) – Available to degree recipients only.

TRAVEL CHECKLIST

- ❑ Valid passport*
- ❑ Valid visa

**If your passport will expire, you may apply for a renewal at your country's closest Embassy or Consulate in the U.S. The embassies are located in Washington and certain countries do have consulates in Houston. You must contact the embassy or consulate to find out how to go about applying for a new passport.*

- ❑ When you return to the U.S., please bring your I-20 and new I-94 to office so we may update your file.

S - STAY IN TOUCH

Due to the intensive reporting requirements of the International Student Advisors, it is important to communicate to them in the event of any of the following:

Type of Change	When to inform your International Student Advisor
Address	10 days
Degree Program	Upon approval for the new degree program
Degree Level	Upon approval for the new degree program
Transfer out to another school	Before you plan to attend the new school

HEALTH AND MEDICAL INSURANCE

It is your responsibility to update your medical insurance for your individual needs. Please remember to notify the International Student Advisor of policy changes and renewals each semester. You will **not** be allowed to register for classes without appropriate/current insurance. You must purchase insurance for at least **one full semester** at a time. If your health insurance has expired, a hold will be placed on your student record preventing you from registering for future semesters. The hold will remain on your record until you have provided the OISSS with the appropriate health insurance information.

The Department of State recommends the following the requirements for international students' health insurances:

- Medical benefits with minimum coverage of 50,000 USD
- Medical evacuations with minimum coverage of 7,500 USD
- Repatriation with minimum coverage of 10,000 USD

ILLNESS

As an international student, it is completely normal to feel homesick. Whether or not you have been in the U.S. for two days or two years, we understand that you will miss your family and friends back home. To lessen your homesickness, we advise that you get involved on campus and to meet other people. UST is a unique environment where almost 11% of the student population is international; you are bound to meet someone who is going through or has gone through the same situation as you.

If you still feel sad about being away from home, we advise that you see the staff of Counseling and Disabilities Services. They are licensed counselors that will be able to listen and help you through your problems, no matter how small. Like the rest of the resources on campus, they are free and there is not shame in seeking out this kind of help.

REGISTER FOR CLASSES - ACADEMIC STATUS

ADMINISTRATIVE HOLDS

Each international student will have a reminder on his/her record that he/she must be registered for full-time classes. This is only a reminder; it will not prevent you from registering for classes. However, other holds may be on your record for various reasons.

For example expired health insurance coverage, if you are out of status, if you are not registered for the appropriate number of hours for the semester or if a specific form is required for your file. These holds will prevent you from registering. You will find these holds and note in your mystthom account under "Notes & Holds." In these cases, you must see the International Student Advisor immediately.

Since you will be studying in the U.S., there are some specific academic guidelines that you must adhere to. Most professors will note it in their syllabi, but following (in blue) is from the Undergraduate Catalog 2012-2014.

Academic Probation *– Students who perform at a deficient level may be placed on probation. Undergraduate students need to maintain at least a 2.0 cumulative GPA; graduates need to maintain at least a 3.0 cumulative GPA. Academic probation will be posted to the semester in which the cumulative GPA falls below the minimum and will begin with the first class meeting of the next semester. This will be noted permanently on your school record.*

Being on academic probation will not affect your immigration status, but you will receive a notice from the Director of International Student and Scholar Services about it. It is your responsibility to seek out additional assistance/guidance while you are on probation.

***Academic Dismissal** – Students who have manifested severe deficient performance may be dismissed from the University. Students who are on academic probation and earn less than a minimum 2.0/2.0 GPA will be dismissed. Students may not enroll, audit or visit classes. Academic dismissal will be noted permanently on your student record. The Registrar's Office will indicate whether or not you may be able to appeal this decision.*

Academic Dismissal **will** have a negative impact on your immigration record. Since you will not be able to enroll for classes, you will not be able to maintain your status. The OISSSS will be required to report these findings in SEVIS within 15 days by terminating your record. You are advised to see an ISA as soon as possible if you are dismissed.

***Academic Dishonesty/Plagiarism** – This includes but not limited to:*

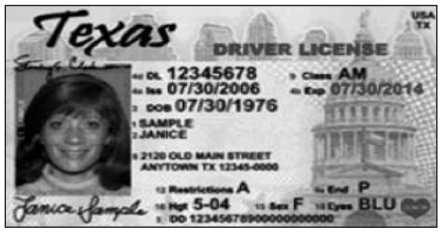
1. *Cheating on an examination or test; for example, by coping from another's paper or using unauthorized materials before or during the test.*
2. *Plagiarism, which represents as one's own the work of another, whether published or not, without acknowledging the precise source.*
3. *Knowing participation in the academic dishonesty of another student, even though one's work is not directly affected.*
4. *Any conduct which reasonable persons in similar circumstances would recognize as dishonest in an academic setting.*

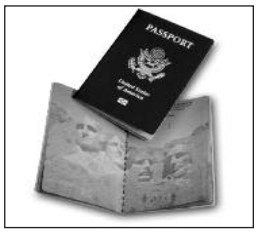
***Penalty:** At the discretion of the faculty member, either a mark of zero for the work in questions or the grade of "F" for the course.*

TYPES OF IDENTIFICATION CARDS

You may apply for a Texas ID or Drivers License by visiting the closest Department of Public Safety (DPS). You can visit the DPS website at to find the closest location to where you live.

TEXAS ID OR DRIVER'S LICENSE





What to have when you apply:

- Passport
- Visa
- I-20
- I-94
- Proof of residency that shows you have been in the U.S. for at least 30 days.

Note: You do **NOT** need a social security number to apply for a Driver's License. You may ask to speak with a supervisor at the DPS office if you are denied a driver's license because of failure to provide a social security number.

SOCIAL SECURITY CARD

You cannot apply for Social Security unless you have an on-campus job offer (or if you have been approved for CPT or OPT.) If there is a department on campus that will hire you, you must obtain a formal letter from the department and take it to the Office of International Student and Scholar Services. You will not be given a social security card if you are not currently registered for classes. You can visit the social security website at http://www.ssa.gov to find the closest location to you.

TAX ID NUMBER

If you are not eligible for a Social Security number you may apply for a Tax ID number. This number may be used when opening a bank account or leasing an apartment. Take your passport and I-20 to the closest social security office to apply for the Tax ID number.

SAFETY ISSUES

While the UST campus is generally a very safe place to live, we encourage you to educate yourself and take the appropriate steps to reduce the potential for problems. By doing so, you will also feel more confident and comfortable.

You should always:

- Familiarize yourself with well-lit paths and sidewalks on campus.
- Pay close attention to your surroundings
- If a situation appears uncertain to you, trust your instincts and avoid it.

UST SECURITY: (713) 525-3888
The school's security office offers an escort service, where designated people walk with you from one place to another on campus, particularly at night.

EMERGENCY CONTACT NUMBER: 911
HOUSTON POLICE DEPARTMENT: NON-EMERGENCY – 713-884-3131

LAWS & LEGAL ISSUES

Rules about Drinking & Drugs
It is illegal to:

- Drink any form of alcohol under the age of 21.
- Be drunk in public (public intoxication).
- Drive after drinking (driving while intoxicated).
- Have an open container of alcohol in a car for both the driver and passengers.

Have possession of illegal substances: Department of Immigration Laws states that any alien guilty of a drug offense (including simple possession of marijuana) may be deported. Foreign students must remember to obey the laws.

PUBLIC INTOXICATION (PI)
Intoxicated to the degree that you are a danger to yourself or another person. Sometimes, an individual charged with Public Intoxication will be arrested and may spend at least six hours in jail. If so, you would have to post cash bail before being released. In other cases, a citation would be issued and you would be released to the care of an adult who agrees to assume responsibility. You can be fined up to $500 and a criminal record could be created.

DRIVING WHILE INTOXICATED
The legal limit for intoxication in Texas is .08 blood alcohol concentration. However, drivers can be stopped and cited if any amount of alcohol has been consumed. You will have to pay a fine (can range from $2000 and up), you will be sent to jail (up to 180 days) and you will lose driving privileges for up to one year.

HOUSTON TRANSPORTATION

HOUSTON HIGHWAY SYSTEM
Houston is the crossroads for Interstates 10 and 45. Other major highways serving Houston are Loop 610, US 59, US 290, US 90, Texas 288, Texas 225, Hardy Toll Road and Sam Houston Tollway.

FREEWAY NAMES: MORE THAN A NUMBER
Every freeway in the city has at least two names, some as many as seven, so it's quite likely that visitors will be baffled by this phenomenon.

Beltway 8: Sam Houston Toll way
Interstate 10 West: Katy Freeway, West Freeway
Interstate 10 East: East Freeway
Interstate 45 North: North Freeway
Interstate 45 South: Gulf Freeway
Interstate 45 through Downtown: Pierce Elevated
Interstate 610: The Loop, often preceded by North, South, East or West
US 59 North: Eastex Freeway
US 59 South: Southwest Freeway, Sen. Lloyd Bentson Highway, Future Interstate Corridor

INTERNATIONAL DRIVER'S LICENSE
Anyone between 18 to 75 years of age, with a valid out-of-country driver license, can drive in the State of Texas for up to one year from the date of entry into the United States if their home country has a reciprocity agreement with the U.S. To check for reciprocity agreement status, please visit www.txdps.state.tx.us

TAXIS
$6 Cab Fare Anywhere Downtown
Yellowcabhouston.com 713-236-1111
Unitedcab.com 713-699-0000

METRO
A combination of services, including bus, train, and vanpool. This is the transportation authority for the Houston area.

- Q Card: This METRO Bus program lets you ride Metro for 50% off with your enrollment at UST.
- Use the METRO Bus Trip Planner at www.tripplanner.ridemetro.org
- Another helpful website is www.maps.google.com

HOUSTON INFORMATION

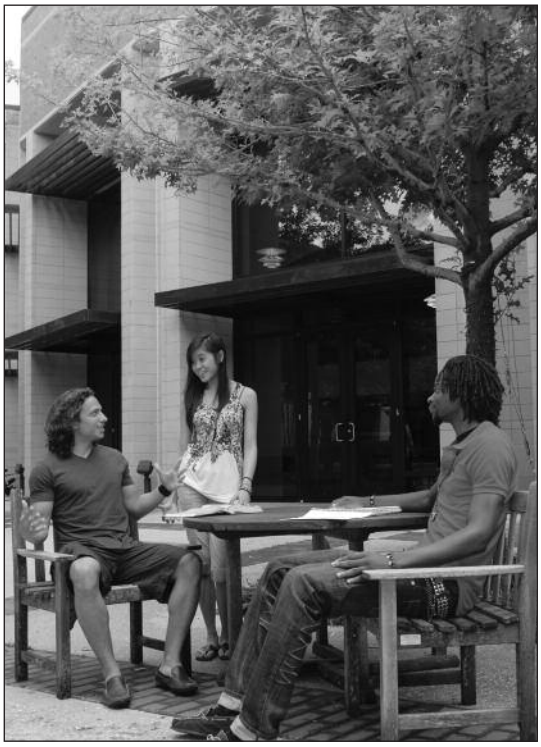
HOUSTON FACTS

- Fourth-largest city in the U.S. - 2008
- Estimated city population of 2.2 million
- Houston City Statistical Area covers 12,476 square miles
- Located in Harris County
- Texas Medical Center: Texas Medical Center (TMC) with 47 member institutions is the largest medical complex in the world.

HELPFUL WEBSITES

Official Visitors Site for Houston: www.visithoustontexas.com
Houston Chronicle Newspaper: www.chron.com
Houston Press Newspaper: www.houstonpress.com
Houston Museum District: www.houstonmuseumdistrict.org
Travel Texas Guide: www.traveltex.com
Multicultural Houston Website: www.visithoustontexas.com/media/story_ideas/Multicultural

CULTURAL ISSUES AND NORMS



Culture Shock: The anxiety, feelings of frustration and alienation that may occur when a person is placed in a new culture. This is common among international students, so we encourage them to get involved in student groups/organizations to cope with this transition.

Friendship: Most people you will come in contact with will be friendly. They will talk about current events, politics, hobbies, and sports. However, personal matters are often not spoken about such as financial or family problems.

Dress: The attire worn is usually informal, unless otherwise told to wear formal clothing. It is not necessary to wear Western-style clothing. Clothing you have brought from home is acceptable.

Greetings: When Americans greet each other, whether male or female, a handshake is generally the custom. Spatial distance is a very important aspect of nonverbal communication. Most Americans stand 3 feet apart when talking.

Schedules: Americans place a high priority on being punctual. You will be expected to be on time to events that have specific starting times, such as class, dinner arrangements, appointments, etc.

Professors: The relationship between student and professor is usually open and informal. Most professors want their students to talk directly to them about any questions they have, in order to resolve them quickly.

WALKING ON THE CORRECT SIDE OF THE STREET

For safety reasons, when walking on a street without a sidewalk pedestrians are expected to walk facing traffic, on the left side of the street.

BEING ASKED QUESTIONS

Many students are sincerely interested about you, where you are from and/or your culture. Consider this as a wonderful learning experience to learn about each other.

Just remember things are going to be different. Sometimes it may take a while to get adjusted to this new culture. If you ever have any questions or need anything, please stop by our office!

INTERNATIONAL CAMPUS INVOLVEMENT

With more than 75 student organizations, a full slate of social events, fitness activities, and international student clubs, campus life at UST is always active.

- International Student Association: This organization assists international students with the transition to life at UST and within the Houston community. Open to all students the ISA focuses on representing the international students on campus.
- Academic Student Organizations: There are numerous academic organizations on campus that include Engineering Club, Pre-Health Professions Society, Accounting Society, American Chemical Society, Cameron Business Society, and many more.
- Athletic Programs: Intercollegiate Women's Volleyball, Men's & Women's Basketball, Men's & Women's Soccer, as well as numerous intramural and club athletic programs

U.S. HOLIDAYS AND CELEBRATIONS

JANUARY
New Year's Day, 1st - Beginning of Gregorian calendar.
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, 3rd Monday - Birthday of civil rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

FEBRUARY
Valentine's Day, 14th - Celebration of love and romance.
President's Day, 3rd Monday - Honors past American presidents.

MARCH
St. Patrick's Day, 17th - Celebration of the patron saint of Ireland.

APRIL
Easter, Sunday between March 22 and April 25 - Christian celebration of the resurrection of Christ.

MAY
Memorial Day, Last Monday - Remembrance of the men and women who died while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces.

JULY
Independence Day, 4th - When thirteen states declared their independence from England in 1776.

SEPTEMBER
Labor Day, 1st Monday - Honors the contributions of workers.

OCTOBER
Columbus Day, 2nd Monday - Celebrates the anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Americas.
Halloween, 31st - Holiday known throughout Western societies with costumes and parties.

NOVEMBER
Thanksgiving Day, Last Thursday - Celebrates the first dinner shared by the Pilgrims (first settlers of the thirteen colonies) and the Native Americans.

DECEMBER
Christmas Day, 25th - Celebration of the birth of Christ
New Years Eve, 31st - The night before the new Gregorian year

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