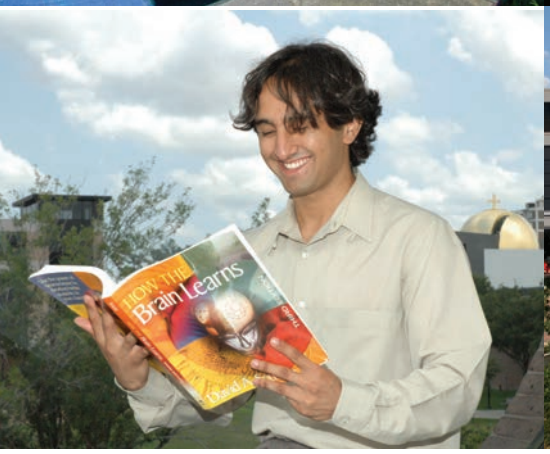
UNIVERSITY *of* ST. THOMAS

# OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT & SCHOLAR SERVICES

*J-1 Visa Holders*



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

## OFFICE HOURS

Fall and Spring Semesters
Monday – Friday: 9:00 am - 5:00 pm

Summer Semester
Monday – Thursday: 8:30 am – 5:30 pm
Friday: 9:00 am – 1:00 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 the Responsible Officer (RO) or Alternate Responsible Officer (ARO).

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

- Only engage in the activity that is on your DS-2019.
- Maintain a valid passport; this must be valid for at least six months into the future.
- Keep your DS-2019 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 travel validation section of your DS-2019 prior to your departure. Please plan to see us at least two weeks before your departure date.

# ENGAGE IN APPROPRIATE ACTIVITY

## STUDENTS

### MAINTAIN FULL-TIME ENROLLMENT 22 C.F.R. § 62.2

- Undergraduate: 12 credits; Graduate: 9 credits.
    - Degree seeking students: You must enroll and complete enrollment in a full course of study "as defined by the accredited educational institution in which the student is registered."
    - Non-degree seeking students: You must be "engaged full-time in a prescribed course of study in a non-degree program of up to 24 months duration conducted by a post-secondary accredited academic institution."
- Summer enrollment is optional unless it is your first semester.
- 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).

## SCHOLARS

Scholars are expected to engage in the activity described on their DS-2019. If you complete or cease the activity, you must leave the U.S. within 30 days.

## EMPLOYMENT

J-1 students are eligible for part-time employment, but must be authorized by the A/RO. The following are the types of employment that one may engage in:

1. It is pursuant to the terms of a scholarship, fellowship, or assistantship
2. It occurs on the premises of the college or university the J-1 is attending
3. It occurs off-campus when necessary because of *serious, urgent and unforeseen economic circumstances* which have arisen since acquiring J-1 student status

Conditions:

1. You are in good academic standing
2. You continue to engage in a full course of study during the main semesters
3. Employment is limited to 20 hours/week, except during the holidays and school breaks
4. For economic necessity authorization, the A/RO must evaluate the student's economic situation as to whether the situation is *urgent, serious and unforeseen*
5. DS-2019 must be updated to reflect the employment

## ACADEMIC TRAINING

### STUDENTS

Academic training is training/employment that is directly related to one's degree program and is authorized by the A/RO. This may be both while enrolled in school and after completion of the program of study.

Eligibility

1. Maintained good status
2. Primary goal was to study

About

1. Directly related to one's degree program
    a. Note: since Academic Training is geared specifically to those that are degree seeking, non-degree seeking students are ineligible to apply for such.
2. Training may not exceed a cumulative of 18 months
3. Part-time/Full-time; paid/unpaid

### SCHOLARS

Professors/Researchers are permitted to engage in the work that is described on their DS-2019. Unauthorized employment may result in jeopardizing one's status. Those that are here at UST as a *Professor, Research Scholar, Short-term Scholar or Specialist*, may engage in occasional lectures or consultations, but would be required to consult the A/RO beforehand. A letter from the OISSS, sponsoring program and faculty advisor will be required in order to adjudicate such a case.

## OTHER IMMIGRATION MATTERS

### KEEP IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS VALID AT ALL TIMES

- DS-2019 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 DS-2019 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.

### CHANGE OF ADDRESS

- You must inform the A/RO within 10 days of your move.

### ATTEND/WORK AT THE SCHOOL THAT IS ON YOUR DS-2019

- Only attend the school listed on your current DS-2019. To attend another school, you must transfer to that school (obtain approval on a new DS-2019) or receive a concurrent enrollment letter from our office

### DEPARTURE INFORMATION

- Upon completion of your program, you and your dependents are allowed a 30 day grace period to depart the U.S. Employment is not authorized during this time period.
- Before you depart the U.S., you will be required to complete our *International Student Departure Form*.

### EXTENSIONS

- If you are unable to complete your degree program in the time allotted on your DS-2019, then you must request an extension before the noted end date. Any student who comes after their DS-2019 has expired to request an extension will be required to file for reinstatement.
- A *Research Scholar* and *Professor* are eligible to stay in the U.S. for a maximum of five years. A *Short-term Scholar* may only stay for a maximum of six months. No extensions can be granted beyond the maximum allotment of time.

### 212 (E) AND 12/24 MONTH BARS

- Depending on which country you are from, you may be subject to the 212 (e) or 12/24 month bar. Please see the A/RO for more information.

### TRAVEL

- To travel outside of the U.S., you must have a:
    - Valid passport
    - Valid visa
    - DS-2019 with a travel endorsement less than six months old
- If your visa has expired, you will have to apply for a renewal at a U.S. Consulate or Embassy in your home country. One cannot renew their visa in the U.S.
- To travel within the U.S., you are advised to carry your passport, DS-2019 and I-94. A travel endorsement from the A/RO is not required.

# HEALTH AND MEDICAL INSURANCE

Per Immigration regulations, all J-1 and J-2 visa holders are required "to carry health and accident insurance at all times during their program period." The minimum requirements are (in U.S. dollars):

- Medical benefits of at least $50,000 per person per accident or illness;
- Deductible that does not exceed $500 per accident or illness;
- Repatriation of remains in the amount of at least $7,500;
- Medical evacuation expenses of at least $10,000

Proof of insurance is due at check-in. Failure to produce health insurance coverage will result in termination of your J-1 and/or J-2 record and you will be required to depart the U.S. immediately.

# 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 is not a hold and 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 notes in your mystthom account under "Notes & Holds." In these cases, you must see the International Student Advisor immediately.

# 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 **http://www.txdps.state.tx.us** to find the closest location to where you live.

**TEXAS ID OR DRIVERS' LICENSE**
What to have when you apply:

- Passport
- Visa
- DS-2019
- I-94

Note: You do **NOT** need a social security number to apply for a Drivers' 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 academic training.)** 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 DS-2019 to the closest social security office to apply for the Tax ID number.

# SAFETY ISSUES

While the U.S. 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. International 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

# 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.

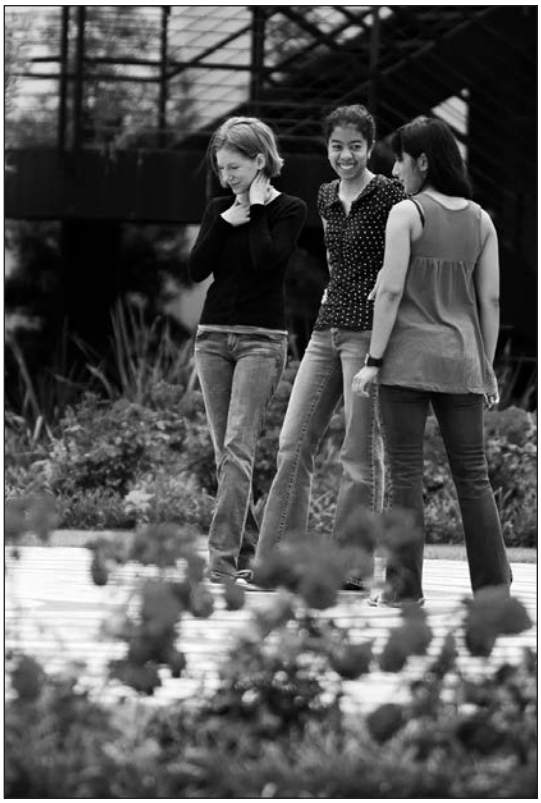
**BEING ASKED QUESTIONS**

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 (ISA):** 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, Women's Basketball, Men's Basketball, Men'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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