

IMMIGRATION ESSENTIALS FOR NEW UAH STUDENTS (TRANSFERS TOO!)

Welcome to the University of Alabama in Huntsville!

You are joining a diverse student body of approximately 7,000 students that includes over 450 international students. It is our role as International Student Advisors to serve as the liaison between the U.S. immigration service and the University. As the international advisors, we will assist you with governmental agencies such as USCIS, immigration regulations, Social Security Administration and other required documentation during your stay at UAH. Our responsibility is to the University of Alabama in Huntsville and to you. We keep very current with the latest changes in the complex legislation and procedures. Our office is a safe place to ask any questions you may have regarding your immigration status while in the U.S.

If you have questions after reading this please e-mail visahelp@uah.edu. We will send additional information to you, via the email address listed on your admission application, about three months prior to the start of the semester. To be sure that you receive these important reminders and helpful pre-arrival information please check to be sure your email address is on file with the admissions office or send an email to the international student advisors at visahelp@uah.edu. Once again, we welcome you to UAH and look forward to meeting you.

Mrs. Marisa Atencio, Mrs. Reva Bailey and Mrs. Amanda Owens, International Student Advisors

Immigration Documents - Many different types of immigration statuses are available for entry to the United States. UAH issued you an I-20 that allows you to apply for an F-1 student visa at a U.S. Embassy/Consulate (Canadian and Bermudan Citizens are not required). Student status is a non-immigrant status, because students are temporarily in the U.S. for educational purposes only and are expected to return home after the student completes their studies.

SEVIS I-901 Fee Payment - The U.S. Government requires students and exchange visitors to pay a **SEVIS fee** in order to qualify for a non-immigrant F or J visa **for an initial entry to the U.S.** to begin a program of study. Use the I-20 issued by the school that you intend to study in order to pay the fee on-line at <http://www.FMJfee.com>. The F1 student should print the receipt and bring it to the consulate interview as proof of payment in order to be qualified for the F1 visa. If you have questions about the fee, please refer to <https://www.fmjfee.com/help.jhtml>. **Canadian and Bermudan citizens, who are not required to have a F1 visa, must show proof of SEVIS fee payment for admission at a U.S. Port of Entry.**

Applying for a Visa -The U.S. Embassy/Consulate will make the final decision in granting you a student visa to enter the U.S. <http://usembassy.state.gov/>

Where should you go? The U. S. Embassy/Consulate closest to your home will process your visa application.

When should you go? Most Embassies/Consulates have specific hours to review non-immigrant visa applications. Please check with the one located closest to your home for application procedures.

- A F-1 visa can be issued to you up to 120 days before the school start date listed on the I-20; **APPLY EARLY**
- Remember that the Embassy/Consulate will be closed on both U.S. and local holidays.
- Plan your visa and travel 1-2 months prior to the start of classes so you can arrive at UAH in time for orientation.

What happens at the U.S. Embassy/Consulate – You have to speak with a consular official who reviews many visa applications every day. The consular officer will quickly review your documents and ask about your plans of study. The officer will verify that you have the academic ability, English language skills, and the financial resources to study at UAH. Since you are applying for a non-immigrant visa, the officer will require documentation of proof of intent to return to your home country. The officer will give you instructions about picking up your documents and your visa or when to expect them in the mail. You must take **all** the proper documents with you during your visa appointment. If you don't, you may have to return for a second time, which may delay your visa for several weeks.

Common Forms/Documents/Items Required for Visa Application- <http://travel.state.gov/visa/index.html>

- visa application forms from the Embassy/Consulate
- visa application fee – amount varies per country
- receipt for SEVIS I-901 fee payment
- I-20 from UAH
- letter of admission from UAH
- valid passport
- copy of TOEFL Score (non-native English speakers)
- proof of finances and assistantship letter
- photographs for visa
- previous school transcripts, diplomas or records

Tourist Visa – You should not enter the U.S. as a tourist using a B-1/B-2 visa or using the WT-Visa Waiver Process! You intend to be a student and should not apply for a tourist visa. Don't worry if you already have a tourist visa in your passport. This will not prevent you from getting a student visa. You should just be certain that you present your F1 visa and I-20 at the U.S. Port of Entry. Immigration laws do not allow a person who entered the U.S. on tourist visa to take classes at a university or college.

Entering the U.S. - Do not arrange to fly to the U.S. prior to getting your visa from the U.S. Embassy/Consulate. Immigration laws do not allow an F1 student to enter the U.S. more than 30 days before the start date listed on your I-20. **Carry your immigration documents with you onto the plane. You must present your passport and these documents to the Port of Entry Officer.** On the plane you need to complete a form called the I-94 arrival/departure record. Since you are coming to the US in the F status, complete the **WHITE** I-94 card. When you arrive at your port of entry, your documents will be inspected prior to your admission into the U.S. At this time you will present your passport, I-20 and I-94 card, and financial information to the Immigration Officer. Your passport and I-94 will be stamped with an entry date and the departure part of the I-94 card will be stapled into your passport. The inspector will stamp your I-20 and return it to you. Put these documents in a safe place at all times. If you lose these documents you will pay a lot of time and money to replace them.

Please Note: USCIS regulations require you to report to the institution listed on the I-20 you used to enter the U.S.

Transferring from another U.S. institution –All F1 students who are transferring from another university in the US to UAH will be given a transfer clearance form from the Undergraduate or Graduate Admissions Office. The International Student Advisor at your previous school must complete the form and forward it to the appropriate Admissions Office. You will then need to ask your previous school to transfer your I-20 record electronically in SEVIS. Lastly, you must report to UAH at Immigration Processing where an advisor will issue you a final I-20 that shows you are a UAH student.

Requirements for ALL F1 International Students:

MANDATORY Immigration Processing-

To maintain valid immigration status you **must** report to a UAH for mandatory immigration processing. Immigration laws require that UAH obtain copies of your passport and other immigration documents that were used to enter the U.S. All F1 students are blocked from enrolling in classes and ineligible to begin assistantship duties until after reporting to Immigration Processing and New International Student Orientation.

Spring 2009 immigration processing will be on January 2 in the University Center.

English Language Placement Test-

All new non-native English speakers must take the English Language Placement Test administered at UAH, unless the ESL Director gives you a waiver. This exam occurs multiple times prior to the start of each semester. The exam is coordinated with immigration processing and New International Student Orientation. Students are blocked from registering for classes until they have taken the ELPT exam. To get more information and to register for an exam date please see

<http://esl.uah.edu/ELPT.htm>

ELPT will be held on January 2, 2009 for new students.

TB Examination-

All new international students (foreign-born, non U.S. citizens who are not U.S. permanent residents) admitted and enrolled for on-campus coursework must be tested for tuberculosis before the first semester of attendance at UAH. The only TB skin test accepted at UAH is a Mantoux purified protein derivative (PPD) test that must be read within 48-72 hours from the time it is administered. **Documented negative TB tests performed outside the United States are not acceptable.**

Free testing on January 5, 2009 in the University Center.

Mandatory New International Student Orientation-

Orientation is an opportunity for new international students to get acquainted with the services and resources at UAH and help your transition to life in the U.S and at UAH. Campus officials and students provide information about all of the facets of being a student at UAH and are available to answer questions you may have.

Orientation for all new students will be held on January 2, 2009.

Mandatory Health Insurance

All F-1 students must have insurance under the UAH mandatory policy. Each F-1 student is automatically enrolled in the mandatory policy each semester of enrollment in classes. The tuition bill for each student will reflect the payment due to the university to cover health insurance. **Students should not purchase insurance from their home country prior to arrival as no waivers of the mandatory policy will be given.** If you have questions about insurance, call the Office of Student Development Services at (256) 824-6203.