

Regulatory Updates Which May Affect Your Stay Here!

In the past months, there have been changes in the law, and other regulatory issues that affect nonimmigrant visitors. Below are some highlights and reminders:

- New Department of State (DOS) procedure may significantly delay petition-based nonimmigrant visas, which include H, O, and P visa categories. In the past, these visa stamps were granted by the visa officer seeing the original I-797 approval notice. As of the end of November 2007, the applicant's name will be checked against an electronic record called Petition Information Management Service (PIMS). The concern about the delay arises when the visa applicant has proof of their approval of status with the I-797, but the petition notice has not been recorded in PIMS. The applicant might have to wait several days, while the consular officer investigates further. Visa applicants are being advised to plan extra time in the country where they are applying for a visa, so they can arrive back into the USA to assume their duties on time.
- Applications for EAD cards are taking at least 90 days, so apply well in advance for Optional Practical Training. If you are waiting for your EAD card longer than 90 days, you may inquire about the possibility of getting a temporary EAD through the USCIS INFOPASS system (<http://infopass.uscis.gov/>).

- Applications to begin working on October 1, 2008 on an H-1B visa at non-exempt site in the USA opens on April 1, 2008. It is expected that the H-1B cap will be met that day, including for the additional 20,000 visas for applicants who received a graduate degree in the USA. Fortunately, universities are exempt from the cap, and working at Rice does not need to adhere to the H-1B quota
- Effective July 16, 2007, all employer-sponsored permanent resident applicants needing a labor certification, requires that the employer pay PERM fees and related legal and other costs.
- Before applying for your visa stamp, check out the procedures of the consulate you are going to visit ahead of time (<http://usembassy.state.gov/>). Information on wait times and procedures vary from consulate to consulate and change frequently

Do you have questions about employment opportunities, work authorization, travel outside the USA, other immigration concerns? Please call x6095 to set up an appointment to speak with an OISS advisor.

Article respectfully submitted by Adria Baker, Director

New Non-Immigrant Visas Application Fees Effective 01/01/2008

Effective January 1, 2008, the application fee for a U.S. non-immigrant visa has increased from \$100 to \$131. This increase allows the Department to recover the costs of security and other enhancements to the non-immigrant visa application process. This increase applies both to non-immigrant visas issued on machine-readable foils in passports and to border crossing cards issued to certain applicants in Mexico.

Applicants who paid the prior \$100 application fee before January 1 will be processed only if they are scheduled and appear for a visa interview before January 31. Applicants who paid the prior \$100 application fee and appear for visa interviews after January 31, 2008 must pay the difference -- \$31, before they will be interviewed.



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A Letter from the Director:

Dear International Students & Scholars,

I hope your 2008 has started out well, and that this is a great year for you. Did you know that in this past year Rice hosted over **1700** international students, faculty, researchers, short-term visitors, and their dependents? This includes **852** international students in all: **168** undergraduate / exchange students, **684** international graduates, and **447** international scholars representing **99** countries.

We feel it is a great privilege to work with you and try to provide trainings and other opportunities that will make your time at Rice easier and more enjoyable. Please let me know what we can do to provide better support or services for you. Where can we improve? What do we do well? I welcome your feedback, as others in the future come to make Rice their “home away from home”. You can write me directly at abaker@rice.edu, or call x6095 to set up an appointment. I welcome your thoughts.

Best wishes for a great semester!

Adria Baker, Ed.D.
Director, Office of International Students & Scholars

V.I.P. – Valuable International Perspectives

The OISS is embarking on a new opportunity to learn from you on various topics. We are interested in how things are done in your home country, or cultural perspectives on various issues, and sharing this with the Rice community.

For example, since this is an election year in the USA, we have started collecting information on how elections are handled in countries outside the USA. We plan to profile a different country’s practice each month this year. Entries, which will be posted on a special VIP link on the OISS website, will give recognition to the writer, or certainly can be anonymous.

We believe that VIP is a program that allows for the Rice community to learn from you, and allows you to contribute through sharing your **valuable international perspectives**.

We hope that you will respond to our requests on various topics. I also welcome ideas on helpful topics of interest. The VIP website is under construction and will be up and running with your input soon. For questions, submissions on topics, or suggestions, write: abaker@rice.edu.

May I travel while I am on OPT?

Yes, only if you have the following:

1. A valid F-1 visa stamp (except for the Canadians).
2. Travel endorsement for your I-20 form
3. Passport which is valid for at least 6 months in the future
4. Valid EAD (OPT) card
5. Job offer letter to verify that you will start your employment after re-entering the U.S.

Spring Break Trips to Canada, Mexico and Caribbean

Many of you may be planning to travel to the adjacent countries and islands from the US like Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean islands (except Cuba) during the spring break. Please come to our office to check with one of the advisors if you can re-enter the US with or without a valid visa. You may be eligible for “automatic revalidation” and be able to return even if your F or J visa stamp is expired. However, you still need the following if you qualify for this program:

- You need our travel endorsement on your valid I-20 or DS-2019
- You need to check with the Consulate of the countries which you plan to visit to find out if you need to apply for a tourist visa to enter their countries.
- To be safe, please plan your trip early and make an appointment to come to talk to one of our advisors regarding your trip.

Student Visa Renewal Requirements

By Jacqueline Carmana, International Student Advisor



If you plan to travel outside of the U.S. while you are a student, you should check with OISS to make sure that your immigration documents are in order. Check your passport for your F-1 (student) visa. It is a full-page document issued by the U.S. Consulate in your country. The visa has an "issue date" and an "expiration date." If the expiration date is before you plan to return to the U.S., you will have to obtain a new F-1 student visa.

The visa is like a "ticket" to enter the U.S. and it must be valid at the time you enter.

Visas may only be renewed at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate outside of the United States. It is best to renew an F-1 student visa in your home country. The visa process is complicated and consulates seem to be taking longer to issue visas. In addition, it seems to be more and more difficult to obtain or renew visas. So, be sure to make an appointment with the U.S. Consulate 2-3 weeks in advance and allow plenty of time (three weeks, at least) to renew your visa. **To renew your visa, you will need the following items:**

1. **A valid passport.** Your passport needs to be valid for at least six months past the planned re-entry date.
2. **Your I-20 form.** The form must be endorsed and dated by an OISS advisor before your departure from Houston. If any information on the form is incorrect or changed, a new I-20 will have to be issued.
3. **A letter of good standing** written by OISS.
4. **A transcript** of all previous work at Rice University. You can obtain the Rice University transcript in a sealed envelope from the Registrar's Office.

5. Proof of financial support

(For example, if you are on personal funding you will need to provide a bank statement; if you are on a stipend there is no need to provide a statement).



TOP TEN TAX TIPS

by Sandra Bloem Curtis
Manager, International Compliance & Administration

Be sure to file your taxes! All international students and scholars who were in the U.S. during 2007 must file U.S. tax forms, whether or not income was received during the 2007 calendar year.

Check ESTHER: Make sure your "Permanent Address" information in ESTHER has your updated local address where you would like to receive your tax documents from Rice.

Check your mailbox! If you have received wages or scholarships from Rice during 2007, you will receive tax documents in the mail. You should receive your W-2 (for wages earned) in early February or your 1042-S (for scholarships or fellowships) in March, depending on what kind of income you received from Rice.

Confusing or missing documents? If you do not receive your documents, believe the information is incorrect, or if you need clarification on the tax documents received from Rice, please contact the Payroll office (2nd floor, Allen Center).

Non-Resident for tax purposes? International students & scholars who have been in the U.S. for less than 5 years and are considered non-residents for tax purposes are eligible to use CINTAX on a first-come-first-serve basis. CINTAX is a web-based software program that will assist you in preparing your tax forms. You will need to apply for a password to login to use this service available to you, to do so, please visit: (<http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~ois/tax.html>)



Have questions? Take advantage the tax assistance options available: Attend the Tax Workshop: (<http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~ois/announcements.html>) Check out UT's international tax website: <http://www.utexas.edu/international/taxes/>. Contact the IRS: www.irs.gov or call 1-800-829-1040.

Students on fellowships check your tax forms! You should be taxed at the most 14% of your income. This does not include any additional tax benefits. If you have reason to believe you are being taxed more, please visit the Payroll office.

Didn't receive any income in 2007? If you received no income in 2007, you will most likely only need to file Form 8843.

Does your country have a tax treaty with the U.S.? Foreign nationals who have tax treaties should pay close attention to the terms of their treaties (<http://www.irs.gov/publications/p901/ar01.html>). If you have questions concerning benefits you think might apply to you, please inquire at the Payroll office.

REMEMBER: Tax forms must be filed with the IRS by April 15, 2008 to avoid penalties.

IEW Recap

We had so much fun at the 7th IEW (International Education Week) at Rice and we hope you did too!

Many of you have participated in our numerous events during this week. The number of students who participated in the World Mini Soccer Cup has reached another record high, as more than 80 international and US students were enthusiastically involved in this event. This year's winner was the ASIAN Team; three cheers for them! Our office co-sponsored and hosted with IIE the Round Table on Scholar Rescue Fund. The purpose of the panel discussion was to examine the nature and underlying causes of the problem that the Scholar Rescue Fund was created to mitigate: the intimidation, persecution and killing of intellectuals by repressive governments and other agents around the world. Other new programs for the IEW were A Taste of Languages, and the "Best Picture" Competition. Thanks to the diligent efforts of Dr. Jose Narbona who put together many free introductory languages classes, including Hindi, Japanese, Arabic, Spanish and Portuguese. Over 60 participated both as volunteers and as attendants, and it was at these languages classes that many became inspired to learn a foreign language. The "Best Picture" Competition invited students and scholars to submit their pictures according to different themes with international flavor, and the winners were: Suzana Bloem, Galen Papkov, Michail Stamatakis, Oded Hod, Shujing Li. Another three cheers for them!

OISS would like to give our special appreciation to Ms. Maria Rovira for her creativity and leadership in making the IEW 2007 so memorable and successful. Maria has returned to Spain with her husband, Dr. David Rossell who was a Rice doctoral student who graduated in 2006.



Asian Team
the winner of the Mini Soccer World Cup

This bi-annual publication is designed specifically for the needs of Rice international students and scholars. Please take the time to read it.



Leaders of international clubs who help make Rice a community which celebrates our diversified cultures.

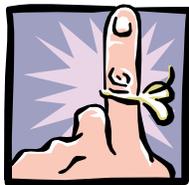
Upcoming Events and Reminders, Spring 2008

Tax Seminar

Mr. Andrew Lai, ESQ,
CPA on tax issues
3/13/2008
4-5:30 pm:
1st and 2nd yr students
5:30-7pm:
upper classmen and
post-docs
Keck Hall Rm 100

Volunteers Needed!

Many international student volunteers needed in August to help the newly arrived international students! If interested, please contact Lily Lam: llam@rice.edu or call X8755



Cultural Fair

March 21, 2008
Friday
Grand Hall, RMC
12pm-4pm

Sir Lunches

Meeting for the international ladies will be held on 2/4, 4/2, 5/7, Wednesdays at 12 noon in the Abercrombie Lab lobby. Please come to join us for a great social time and lunch. Hope to see many of you, please stay tuned for the announcement from the OISS list serve.

Undergraduate Corner

Have you been involved any activities organized by the OISS? If not, now is your chance. I encourage you to participate in our events and activities. The Undergraduate Connection calendar is posted on our website www.ruf.rice.edu/~ois/announcements.html, with opportunities for you to connect with other students. You can even join us for lunch...and meet a few more Rice students.

See the UG Connection calendar for the next lunch location and date.

Stay connected!

Extract from the Continuing Education Program

Your Cultural Adjustment: What Worked and What Didn't work

On November 1, over 50 international students gathered at the RMC for the last session in the Continuing Orientation program. The topic of the session was "Your Cultural Adjustment – What Worked and What Didn't." The lecture was by Ms. Beth O'Sullivan, the lecturer from the Communication Department of the Jones School of Management. During the pizza lunch, students talked with each other about what had worked and what might have been better, in three areas of cultural adjustment experiences: 1) In the classroom, 2) With friends, and 3) Off-campus or in the community. Students wrote down short stories or examples of what had worked for them on yellow cards, and stories or experiences that hadn't worked so well on red cards.

Students posted the yellow and red cards on easels around the room and then we had a chance to talk about a few of the stories from each group. One piece of good news is that students wrote 32 yellow cards (about good experience) and only 22 red cards (about difficult experiences). So overall, the cultural adjustment of our international students seems quite good!! We have printed some of the good experience cards and also addressed some of the questions posted during the session so that our international orientation can still continue!

Good experiences and tips that worked for people:

"As I try to do different activities rather than study all the time, my performance increases! Be sure to exercise and participate in sports!"

"Don't be afraid about your pronunciation – just talk with people!"

"When you ask professors questions, make your sentences short and speak slowly and clearly."

"I collaborate with my lab-mate on experiments. We can discuss all aspects and it is a great experience to learn from each other. We always get new ideas from each others' suggestions."

"I set out with a few friends to explore Houston on a bright, sunny morning. Though we have never gone out using public transportation, somehow we managed to use the metro, find the proper busses, and get to the places we wanted to go!"

Experiences that could be better (situations provided by international students):

Advice By: Beth O'Sullivan, lecturer of communication, Jones School of Management

"I had an appointment with a clerk at a bank. I arrived on time, but the clerk left me waiting for nearly an hour!"

This should not have happened! Are you certain that the clerk was aware that you were there? If you are sure the clerk knew and still kept you waiting, you might have approached this situation in three ways:

- 1) It would have been OK to approach another person at the bank and ask how long they expected the wait to be, or*
- 2) even to say, "I had an appointment with Mary, but she is still busy; is there someone else who could help me?"*
- 3) Finally, you could have told another clerk that you had been waiting and needed to reschedule on a less busy day. Advice by Beth.*

"I often feel left out in class because the class is made up of mostly American students. I don't think that American students like to mingle with International students."

As the new semester begins and you are in new classes, look for a student from your previous class and go up to them and say "hello". Say that you missed the chance to meet him last semester but are looking forward to getting to know him this spring. Try to begin a conversation about things you think you might have in common. Advice by Beth.

"Someone in my lab pays no attention to safety. I talked to him about this and asked him to pay attention, but he responded by saying "I have no choice." I don't know how to deal with this situation."

I'm not sure why this student feels he has no choice, and you might ask him why he said that. But if he continues to ignore safety, you might want to bring the issue to the attention of the faculty member. Safety is everyone's concern! Advice by Beth.

Extract from the Continuing Orientation Program

How do I communicate effectively with my advisor?

By Dr. T.S.. Eugene Ng, Assistant Professor of Computer Science

On October 4, 2007, over 70 students attended this popular seminar, eagerly listening to Dr. Eugene Ng on how to improve their communication skills with their advisors. The following is a summary of the advice provided by Dr. Ng.

International student language barrier

- Don't be shy, you're not the only one with an accent!
- You must speak up to get noticed!
- Expand your social circle beyond people from your own country

Your advisor is not your boss

- Your advisor is your mentor, your colleague, your advocate
- Your advisor cannot be your conscience. You must think for yourself, and try to be an independent scholar!

Treat your advisor like you would treat anyone else with honesty and respect

Be prepared for meetings. Make the most out of the time with your advisor

Don't patronize or lie to your advisor- you are only fooling yourself!

Build a friendship with your advisor

- A student's success is the advisor's success and vice versa
- This can be a life long relationship. If you greatly dislike your advisor and vice versa, you probably should get out of the relationship

Communicating with the academic community- at a conference:

- A conference is not an ethnic gathering
- Don't be a loner
- Looks can be deceiving. Great scholars may not be well-dressed
- Start talking to other students. These may be your future collaborators
- Ice-breakers: Talk about other people's work you have read, ask questions, tell people what you work on, compare your graduate school experience, etc.
- Talk with people whose works you have read
- Talk with random strangers. You may be pleasantly surprised!



Asian Film Festival



**Five movies in Three
Days
Feb 8-10, 2008**

**For more information, Visit:
Ricecinema.edu**

Feb. 8, 7:15 p.m.— "Lust, Caution"
Featured speaker: Writer, Dr. Yu Lihua

Feb. 9, 3:30 p.m.— "Spring, Summer, Winter,
Fall... and Spring"

Feb. 9, 7:30 p.m.— "Daughter from Danang"
Featured speaker: Film Director, Gail Dolgin

Feb. 10, 3:30 p.m.— "My Neighbor Totoro"

Feb. 10, 6:30 p.m.— "Earth"