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**Spring 2020**

**Culture & Events**

Read all about OISS’ latest international events, as well as all that we offer and co-sponsor this semester.

**Immigration**

Learn about your visa maintenance, current immigration updates and trends, as well as answers to frequently asked questions.

**Employment News**

It’s that time of year! Searching for summer internships, filing for OPT, and taking a gamble in the H1B lottery are all around the corner. Read through this section on information on employment.

**Health & Wellbeing**

University studies are stressful and overwhelming at times, but being an international can add to the burden. Read these important articles to help take care of yourself and others.
Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Rice International Students & Scholars,

The most rewarding aspect of being at Rice is to see Rice students and scholars succeed. Further, watching you come from countries from around the world to follow your educational aspirations at Rice, develop your interests while here, and come out on top is most worthwhile. This happens all of the time, and we celebrate your successes always.

That said, however, unexpected surprises and challenges most likely will come along the road you take. Please, please ask for assistance during those times. We have set up resources in our office to help guide you, and we will do our best. Oftentimes, it is hard to identify what the concern is, so meeting and chatting with someone in the OISS or in another office can help you to recognize apprehensions and work through them.

Most of all, please, please ask questions. Most likely, we have dealt with something similar before. If not, we welcome hearing from you, as well as walking along side of you to work through the issues. We are truly grateful to have you with us, and recognize how fortunate we are to share this part of your life with us.

Wishing you a terrific 2020!

Adria L. Baker, EdD, Executive Director, OISS
Associate Vice Provost for International Education

IEW 2019 Events

Essay competition top three winners [left to right] Aarohi Mehendele, Hung Nguyen & Lingkun Guo, with Andy Merentoja and Adria Baker from OISS.
In honor of this year’s International Education Week, OISS wanted to give back. In addition to collecting voluntary donations for the Houston Food Bank while distributing free tickets to our annual traditional Thanksgiving lunch – as has been our tradition for several years – we partnered for the first time with American Forests to plant trees.

American Forests is one of the oldest conservation organizations in the U.S. and they work to reverse trends in deforestation. They have been restoring forests for more than 140 years. Today these efforts are more important than ever and OISS was more than excited to contribute.

Throughout IEW we invited the international community to contribute to our Plant a Tree campaign by submitting entries to our virtual IEW events. For each entry submitted, OISS pledged to make a donation to American Forests for one tree. In the end, we were absolutely thrilled to make a donation for 63 trees, planted in honor – and in celebration of – International Education Week 2019 at Rice.

The virtual events included:

The IEW Essay Competition – 40 essays were submitted for the competition. To learn more, please see https://oiss.rice.edu/essay-competition. You can also read our winning essay on page 4 of this newsletter.

Recommended Reading – 9 new books were submitted to our collection this year. To learn more, please see https://oiss.rice.edu/recommendedreading.

International Recipes – 14 recipes were submitted to this new collection, where we invite the international community to share their favorite recipes from home. To learn more, please see https://oiss.rice.edu/recipes. You can also read about our Cooking Gathering, where we prepared one of the submitted recipes, on page 8 of this newsletter.

We also celebrated IEW with several other events, hosted by OISS as well as many of our partnering departments and offices across campus. Some of our highlights included an International Dance Break with an intense Dance Dance Revolution competition, the annual OISS World Cup Soccer Tournament, an International Coffee Break, co-hosted by GSA and OISS, and a special Espresso Yourself even focusing on International Poetry (read more about it on page 9 of this newsletter!).

For a complete list of the IEW 2019 events at Rice, please see https://oiss.rice.edu/iew. You can also read the Rice News article about IEW at http://news.rice.edu/2019/11/25/international-education-week-celebrates-rices-cornucopia-of-cultures/.

**IEW 2019 Essay Competition**

For International Education Week 2019, we asked members of the Rice international community to write essays on acculturation and adjustment in the U.S. as Rice internationals. The essays celebrated the uniqueness that comes with cultural exchange and gave the authors an opportunity to share personal experiences (good, bad and funny). The competition was extremely close, and in addition to the top three authors who received monetary prizes, OISS also presented certificates and an honorable mention to the three authors who tied for fourth place.

1st place: Hung Nguyen, Undergraduate Student from Vietnam

2nd place: Lingkun Guo, Undergraduate Student from China

3rd place: Aarohi Mehendale, Undergraduate Student from India

Honorable mentions:

Grace Ishimwe – Undergraduate Student from Rwanda

Hira Farooqi – PhD Student from Pakistan

Jianyi Nie – Scholar from China

You can read the other winning essays on our essay competition webpage at https://oiss.rice.edu/essay-competition, on the next page is Hung Nguyen’s 1st place essay for your enjoyment.
Cultural Adaptation: Does change equal difference?

Two months ago, as I took my first steps on the airport platform, I was full of insecurities. Coming from a country that is over twenty hours of flight from America, I knew my life was going to undergo a significant transformation, either for the worse or for the better. All I could do was to reassure myself and continue moving forward.

My first experience at Rice came with my O-Week group. I still clearly remember our first meeting, when we introduced our names and some brief personal facts in a round. There came my turn.

Before coming to Rice, I had thought of an English name to better fit myself into a Western culture. I even put it in the "preferred name" section of every form I filled out during the summer. Having a different name was my way of preparing for a new chapter of my life. Yet somehow, at that very moment, I just could not utter that name, which suddenly felt so alien.

After minutes of hesitation, I was impulsed to introduce my native name in my native language. Still, I did not forget to introduce my English name afterwards, and told people to just call me by that English name if they had difficulty pronouncing my original one.

Surprisingly, everyone in my O-Week group tried to call me by my own name, even though it might be imperfect. So did many of the people I met during O-Week. This might seem a small detail, but I really appreciated it. Just from hearing people call me by my own name, I could feel that I was still myself, and that my origin and my culture were still appreciated here. Maybe I would not have to become a different person just to fit in.

The process of accustomization was not without struggles, though. O-Week was a lot of fun, but it had to end anyway. As the school year wore on, other aspects of the transition experience started to break in. I still remember my first Sociology class, when I was overwhelmed by the way many students got the confidence to stand up and share their opinions in a lecture hall of nearly 200 people. I still remember how hard I felt to laugh at jokes in a group conversation due to language and cultural barriers. I still remember how I struggled just to catch the bus to Target on a normal day, being too unfamiliar with the city. And there were nights when I was tortured with homesickness and loneliness even in my dreams, craving to see my family, to savor my hometown’s delicacies, to get back to my old life.

In fact, I shut myself out for about a week. I did not bother to hang out with anyone, and just monotonously pushed on with schoolwork. These painful struggles, however, were necessary for me to get into a more proper perspective.

It was too simplistic to assume that I could just continue being my own self. My aversion to changes in the beginning resulted from my own immaturity and insecurity. What about changing some aspects of my life for the better, while remaining true to my original core?

The following week marked my first attempts to change. I tried to become more active in my classes, starting by asking more questions in my Math class. I engaged myself more in conversations with my friends, asking them to clear up any cultural tags that went over my head. I actively sought opportunities to get more involved through joining a student organization. Meanwhile, I was essentially myself, eating Asian foods at lunch, listening to Vietnamese songs, keeping up with my old habits. I was always more than ready to share about my own culture, which my friends were in turn eager to learn about. In this process of change, I lost nothing of my original self, but only became stronger and better.

Over two months have passed since my cultural transition started, and I do now have a more thorough perspective of it. Cultural adaptation should not be a one-way drastic effort to change every aspect of our life, yet neither should we keep ourselves in our comfort zone and let nature take its course. Instead, acculturation is a two-way exchange in which both sides - the foreign and the domestic - make some efforts to learn more about each other, and through that process of mutual learning, become better versions of ourselves.

Author: Hung Nguyen
Vietnam
Undergraduate Student from Jones College
Culture and Events

OISS 2019-2020 Winter Events Magnets

As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words, and here are a few to recap the activities we shared with you this holiday season.

Whether you joined us for celebrating old holiday traditions; volunteered at the Rice Holistic Garden; visited the Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern; glided into the New Year at Discovery Green; strolled through the Houston Zoo grounds; enjoyed the guided tour in the Museum of Fine Arts or visited the NASA Space Center, we hope you made new friends, cherished each other’s company, and had lots of fun.

Thank you for sharing your time with us and making this holiday season memorable, and best wishes for a wonderful New Year!
Culture and Events

International Ladies Network Lunches

by Marjorie Cerejo

OISS organizes one of the most well-attended and fun activities for the international ladies at Rice! The ladies meet to have lunch and network the first Monday of February, March and April. The gatherings take place at the GSA Lounge of RMC basement from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m.

OISS staff organizes the luncheons to be a fun way for internationals to meet each other and to learn about American culture as well as other cultures. During the last events we have celebrated Valentine’s Day with makeup lessons, Mardi Gras with samba class, fall season with pumpkin decorations, and December holidays with Christmas movies.

All the international female students, scholars and wives of international students and scholars are welcome to join and connect with their peers!

For more information, including the schedule, please visit https://oisss.rice.edu/international-ladies

February 3rd, 2020 – RUDP: Presentation on personal safety

March 2nd, 2020 – TBA

April 6th, 2020 – Humor around the world
In October, OISS hosted a fall event for all international students with children. They gathered at Fleming Park to decorate pumpkins, play badminton, and enjoy a morning at the park. OISS is planning more events for 2020 and invites you to participate in events like this. For more information, please be sure to visit https://oiss.rice.edu/programs.

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**GSA CULTURE NIGHT!**

February 13, 2020

5pm-10pm

Come celebrate the many rich cultures and diverse communities represented within the graduate student population with us at Rice’s Annual Culture Night! Booths created by campus cultural groups will showcase their food, native attire, pictures, trivia, and more. Enjoy music and dance performances all night. We hope you will join us with an open mind and empty stomach!

The Culture Night is hosted by GSA, OISS, MCC, GPS and Rice’s multiple cultural and diversity groups!

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**Free English & Culture Classes**

Online sign-up will be available at 10:00 a.m. on Monday, January 13, 2020. For more information, please see http://oiss.rice.edu/english-class

**CLASSES OFFERED FOR SPRING 2020:**

**BEGINNING ENGLISH CONVERSATION**

(WITH ROSEMARIE DONNELLY)

TUESDAYS, 12:00 - 1:00 PM
JANUARY 21, 2020 - APRIL 28, 2020

**ADVANCED/INTERMEDIATE ENGLISH CONVERSATION**

(WITH CATHERINE SPAIN)

WEDNESDAYS, 1:00 - 2:00 PM OR 2:00 - 3:00 PM
JANUARY 15, 2020 - MAY 6, 2020

**GRAMMAR & PRONUNCIATION**

(WITH CHRIS SNELLER & NONA ZEILER)

THURSDAYS, 12:00 - 1:00 PM
JANUARY 23, 2020 - APRIL 16, 2020
Brazil@Rice and OISS hosted two amazing International Cooking Gatherings as part of International Education Week (IEW) in November. Two recipes were selected from the IEW Recipe Exchange and prepared in Housing and Dining’s kitchen at Rice. These dishes were Beef and Potato Pilau from Kenya directed by Abigael Kosgei and Spanish Paella cooked by Elena Camacho. International students and scholars enjoyed the evenings cooking, chatting and eating these delicious meals.

You can find a variety of delicious recipes from Brazil, Costa Rica, Finland, Hungary, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Mexico, Spain, USA, Vanuatu (and more being added all the time) at https://oiss.rice.edu/recipes.

OISS will be hosting more fun events like this! Check OISS Events to learn more about upcoming events.

Rice Alumni Holiday Dinner

Ten Rice international students represented their countries at a Rice Alumni holiday dinner in early December. The Rice alumni, who are also involved in the Traveling Owl program, were delighted to meet students from many wonderful countries – some of which they had previously toured - or have hopes to visit in the near future.
If you ask me, one of the most successful events during International Education Week 2019 was International Poetry Night, co-organized by OISS and Espresso Yourself. In one hour, eight students read a range of different poems. Some were longer, others very short; some were original works, others by established poets; some were translated, others were not. Whether we read or listened, we left feeling full: of great poems, free coffee, beautiful human beings. We'll hopefully see you there next year. - Scott
Immigration

It’s Tax Time!!

by Sandra Bloem-Curtis

Taxes? I have to file taxes?!?
Yes! Anyone in the US for any length of time in 2019 is required to file a tax return to be legally compliant — whether you received US funds or not. So don’t forget - the deadline for filing your tax forms with the US government is April 15, 2020!

But where do I even start?
OISS has some great options and resources to help you out!

Tax Preparation Resources:
1) Tax Workshop for Internationals (February 19 at 4 p.m.) — Come listen to tax experts guide you through the process and answer your specific questions.

2) Glacier Tax Prep (GTP) software for $2 – GTP is a web-based software program that Rice provides to its foreign nationals to assist “non-residents for tax purposes” to prepare their tax forms. The program also helps determine your tax residency status if you are not sure. For information on how to purchase GTP visit: http://oiss.rice.edu/tax


What if I didn’t receive any income during 2019?
There are still forms you will need to fill out. You may only need to complete the Form 8843, but GTP or the Tax Workshop can help you with this determination.

What documentation will I need?!?
There are some important documents that you will need in order to file your taxes. You may not need all of these listed below, as it will depend on your situation, but make sure you have received all your supporting tax documents from employers, Rice, or other scholarship/fellowship sponsors before filing your taxes.

1) ITIN or SSN - You will need a SSN or ITIN to file your taxes. If you are receiving wages, you may be eligible for a Social Security Number (SSN). If you are not eligible for a SSN (you have not been employed in the US), then you will need to file for your ITIN application as part of your tax return. Please see http://oiss.rice.edu/ssn on how to apply.

2) W-2 form - Rice employees (including student employees) who receive reportable wages will receive a W-2 to be filed with your tax return. W-2s are available through your ESTHER account after January 31. If you worked for another employer during 2019, you will receive a W-2 from that employer by January 31. If you don’t receive one, be sure to contact that employer.

3) 1042-S form - Foreign nationals may receive a 1042-S if they are recipients of tax treaty benefits, scholarships or fellowships from nontax treaty countries. Your Rice 1042-S form will be available after March 15 if you have created a Rice Payroll FNIS account, otherwise check with Payroll.

4) 1099 – If you worked as an independent contractor during 2019, you may receive a 1099 to report your wages. Be sure to keep an eye out for this important tax form in the mail.

What about tax treaties? How do I know if I have a tax treaty!?
Foreign nationals who have tax treaties can learn the terms of their treaties by visiting the IRS website, which is available at 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. An ITIN or SSN and additional forms may need to be completed in Payroll in order to receive those benefits.

DEADLINE IS April 15, 2020!!!

Be sure to mail your completed tax forms on time to avoid financial penalties.
Immigration

Come and Attend OISS' Annual Tax Workshop

Presented by Briggs & Veselka

All Internationals are required to file taxes!!!

Date: Wednesday, February 19, 2020

Time: 4PM

Place: Keck Hall, Room 100

We understand that filing your U.S. tax return can be a confusing process, but it is a legal requirement. Join us for the Tax Workshop, where we will have an expert guide you through the process and be available for questions. We are proud to have Crystal C. Gates, CPA, Tax Manager and Kelley Heng, CPA and Tax Supervisor, from Briggs & Veselka Co. (http://www.bvccpa.com/)
Immigration Day

Wednesday, February 5, 2020

has been earmarked for an Immigration Day at the OISS. You will have the opportunity to get walk-in advising, specific questions needed for applying for OPT Priority Processing, specialized advising times, and an immigration lawyer seminar.

Stay tuned to the OISS-Announce messages, and the OISS website, for specific times and information. Take advantage of a day separated for you to get quick immigration answers and support (of course, as we are able). We will have some treats for you, to help ease any tough immigration challenges.

Advanced Immigration Seminar

Be sure to mark your calendars to attend a presentation by Silvia Graves, local board certified immigration attorney.

This session will offer immigration updates and changes that affect Rice’s international students, faculty, researchers – and the departments that host them.

Date: Wednesday, February 5, 2020
Time: 4:00 pm – 5:30 pm
Room: Sewall Hall, Room 301
Who: Silvia Graves, from Graves & Graves, Attorneys Counselors at Law
What: Current immigration updates and various visa categories / options. Questions & Answers at the end.

Note: This is part of our day-long “immigration Day On-the-Spot” with the OISS. There will be many other happenings on that day to help you get your immigration questions completed.
Please invited any and all in our Rice community that may benefit from this information.
Navigating as an International Student

TOUGH QUESTIONS: HONEST ANSWERS
by Adria Baker

There are times that we get overwhelmed with the amount of work, the immigration responsibilities or personal obligations that we must face. Here are a very few, not-so-easy questions that many international students and scholars tend grapple with at times while they are here with us at Rice.

1) OPT card arrival:
Q: If I can only apply for OPT within 90 days of my graduation, with I get my work authorization (EAD card) within three months?
A: Unfortunately, the government may take from 3–5 months to process an EAD card. Despite your applying early and being diligent with your paperwork, there is no way to expedite this processing. Informing your employer of this possible delay can help.

2) STEM OPT fees:
Q: Why is there a $500 fee for Rice University to apply for a STEM OPT extension?
A: The fee goes to support services for those on STEM OPT. Unfortunately, there are still many compliance responsibilities required of Rice University and the OISS during the STEM OPT period. Please read more on the FAQs at: https://oiss.rice.edu/stem

3) Re-entering the USA after travel:
Q: If I forget to get a travel signature before I leave the USA, can I re-enter on y F or J visa?
A: If you are making normal progress on your studies, research or teaching program, AND if your I–20 or DS–2019, you could still possibly re-enter. It is at the discretion of the Customs & Border Protection (CBP) to allow any kind of possible entry, non-entry or deferred inspection.

4) YIKES! Too much:
Q: I am feeling overwhelmed, anxious and/or sad a lot of the time. Are there steps I need to take?
A: You should talk to someone and ask for help. You can always come to the OISS, as the staff seeks to give you the help you need – or find helpful resources for you. Students can also make an appointment at the Wellbeing Office of the Rice Counseling Center (RCC). Benefits eligible employees may contact Rice’s free and confidential EAP.
https://people.rice.edu/benefits-rewards/wellnessrice/eap/

5) Feeling pulled between two worlds - my home country and life at Rice in Houston:
Q: I want to focus on my studies (or research work for all levels of researchers), but I feel bad that I’m not at home when my family and loved ones are struggle and/or missing me. How can I handle feeling pulled between my two worlds?
A: This is a very common dilemma for anyone who leaves their home country to live temporarily (or permanently) in a different country to pursue their academic, professional and personal goals. I’m sorry that there is no easy answer. Doing your best to communicate with your loved ones at home as much as possible helps. Working toward possibly inviting them for a visit, or seeking to travel in the future to see them helps. Communicating with them – and reminding yourself – of the long-term goals you are seeking and why you came can help. Talking to a friend, your loved ones, someone in the OISS or other Rice offices can help, too. You will find out that you will identify with many others and you are not alone. Unfortunately, travel can be hard or impossible for many, given visas, costs or other circumstances out of your control. We are here at the OISS to listen and try to help.
Immigration

VISA APPLICATIONS

by Elmira Ganiyeva

You may be nervous or anxious with hope when awaiting a visa approval. You hope for that “Yes” and “Approved” from the person on the other side of the window. You may have learned a few helpful tips from you friends’ experiences or discussion forums on the Internet. However, below are a few tips that may increase your chance of seeing the desired approval stamp on your passport.

Preparation

- Your passport should be no less than 6 months from its expiration date when you plan to enter the US.
- In addition, your passport should have at least one blank page for the new visa stamp.
- Complete your DS-160 (Non-Immigrant visa Application) form and check it multiple times for accuracy.
- Remember to bring your I-20 (Certificate for Eligibility for Non-immigrant Student Status) or DS-2019 (Certificate for Eligibility for Exchange Visitor) forms.
- Remember to bring your Rice University acceptance letter.
- Prepare your financial documents, or the financial documents of your sponsor.
- With your financial documents, remember to mention any Rice fellowships you have received. This not only proves financial sponsorship, but also shows that you are a talented student deserving of a scholarship from Rice.

This list is not comprehensive. You can bring as many additional documents as you believe will help you get your visa approved. If you have questions or need clarifications never be shy to call the US Embassy or Consulate.

Interview

Aside from being early, here are some suggestions to help with your visa interview:

- Even if you are nervous at the time of the interview, do your best to appear calm, confident, and collected.
- Give short, accurate, and truthful answers to the Consul’s questions. Brevity is the soul of wit!
- You should be ready to prove your intent by answering a range of questions. Rehearse some general queries such as:
  ◊ “What is the purpose of your visit?”
  ◊ “What is the name of your university?”
  ◊ “What subject will you study?”
  ◊ “How long will you be in the US?”
- Practice answering along with any supporting documents.

All of your documents and responses must be authentic and genuine. Otherwise, you could be denied a visa at the current interview, and possibly for several years into the future.

Visa denials

Consular officers may deny visa applications for many different reasons. If your visa is denied the consular officer will notify you about what section of law that applies to the denial. Some common reasons for visa denial are:

INA Section 221(g) – Incomplete Application or Supporting Documentation
This is a temporary refusal. Your visa will likely be approved upon filing in missing items on the application form, or supplying missing or additional documents. You will be informed of which documents are required, and how to provide them to the embassy or consulate. Sometimes, additional administrative processing of the application is required. This may take anywhere from a few weeks up to 6-8 months. Thus, it is best to check and recheck your application and list of required forms!

INA Section 214(b) – Visa Qualifications and Immigrant Intent
All non-immigrant visa applicants must prove that they qualify for the type of visa they are applying for. You will have to demonstrate that (1) you do not intend to immigrate to the US, and (2) you have strong ties to your home country, and (3) you will leave the US when you complete your studies. Even if you receive this denial, it is not permanent. While you cannot appeal it, you can reapply for a visa.

INA Section 212(a)(4) – Public Charge
The consular officer may determine that you may become a public charge in the US (dependent upon the US government for funding). To avoid this denial, you must demonstrate proof of sufficient financial support while in the US. You must show that you have sufficient personal funds, a scholarship, or other sources of financial independence.

INA section 212(a)(6)(C)(i) – Fraud and Misrepresentation
You could have visa denied or withdrawn if you willfully misrepresent facts on your application, during your interview, or you are found to have committed fraud. This is a permanent ineligibility. All of your future applications will also be rejected. However, a consular officer may advise you to apply for a waiver for this ineligibility. Always provide truthful and accurate information!

INA section 212(a)(9)(B)(i) – Unlawful Presence in the United States
This denial occurs if you have remained in the US past the expiration date of a previous authorized stay, or you have entered the US without receiving proper authorization from the US Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) at a port of entry. If the amount of time that you overstayed is between 180 days and one year, you will be ineligible for a visa for the next 3 years. If the time you overstayed exceeds 1 year, you will remain ineligible for a visa for 10 years from your date-of-departure from the US. The consular officer may advise you to apply for a waiver of this ineligibility.

Complete information can be found at: https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/visa-denials.html.

OPT Priority Processing

by Andy Meretoja

OISS will once again offer Priority Processing for early OPT applications for students graduating in May. What does that mean? Read on!

What on earth is Priority Processing?
Priority Processing is a benefit offered by OISS, where if you submit your OPT applications by the Priority Processing deadline, OISS guarantees that your OPT I-20 will be processed first, and will be ready in time for the earliest available OPT I-20 Pick-up Appointments, based on when the application window opens with USCIS.

When does the application window open?
USCIS can receive your OPT application no earlier than 90 days before your graduation date. For May graduates that would be February 16th, 2020, which is 90 days before Commencement.

Why do I need to apply that early if I'm only graduating in May?
Because USCIS can take a really long time to approve OPT applications, and you will not be able to start your OPT employment until you receive the EAD card issued by USCIS. Therefore applying early is very beneficial for you, especially if you want to start working (or travel internationally) soon after Commencement, as it gives you the best chance of getting the EAD card by the time you need it.

But I don't have a job offer yet, can I still apply for OPT? What start date should I ask for?
Yes, you can apply for OPT even if you don't have a job offer! However, deciding on which start date to request can be a bit tricky, as all options have pros and cons (you can ask for a start date within 60 days after graduation). Ultimately it's your choice, but here are a couple of "ground rules" or tips to keep in mind.

Requesting an early OPT Start Date:
- Pro: Assuming that your OPT has been approved, you have work authorization to start on whatever date your employer wants once you find the job.
- Con: If you don't have a job on your OPT start date, you will start accruing unemployment days. Not an immediate concern since you can accrue up to 90 during your OPT, but may be problematic if it takes you a bit longer to find the job.

Requesting a late OPT Start Date:
- Pro: You don't have to worry about accruing unemployment days until much, much later.
- Con: If you find your dream job and they want you to start already in May, you will need to convince them that you are worth waiting for, since your work authorization doesn't start until later (on your OPT start date).

I want to travel during Spring Recess and/or Spring Break, can I still apply for OPT with Priority Processing?
Depends, where are you going?
Florida
You're good! Domestic travel inside the U.S. does not affect OPT, so apply away!
My friends are going to Mexico and I might end up joining them, does that change the answer?
Yep, international travel is strongly discouraged once your OPT application has been submitted to USCIS until you receive the EAD. So if you want to leave the country during Spring Break, you may just need to wait until you're back before applying, and take the risk that you'll get your EAD late.

I'm still not sure if I want to stay in the U.S., I might just go back home and get a job there. What happens if I miss the Priority Processing deadline? Can I still apply for OPT?
Of course! For applications received after the Priority Processing deadline, we are no longer able to guarantee that the I-20 can be ready in time for the very earliest pick-up appointments, but OISS will still process your OPT application as soon as possible once it's received. Just remember that the later you apply, the later you will get your OPT EAD. And if you end up applying super late, you may not get a full 12 months of OPT, since the OPT end date can't be later than one year + 60 days after your graduation date.

Okay, let's do this! How do we do this?
Attend a CPT/OPT Workshop or look through the OPT Tutorial at https://oiss.rice.edu/studentwork to learn about the process of applying for OPT. Then check out https://oiss.rice.edu/priorityprocessing to learn what is needed to qualify for Priority Processing. For extra tips, see also https://oiss.rice.edu/OPTtips. Then submit the documents needed by the Priority Processing deadline of February 7, 2020. Then respond in a timely manner to OISS if they have any questions or feedback on your documents. Finally, attend an OPT I-20 Pick-up Appointment (OISS will tell you when and how to schedule the appointment) and mail your application to USCIS. That's the hard part, after that all you need to do is actually finish your degree and graduate, but that should be a piece of cake!

OPT Priority Processing deadline for May graduates is Friday, February 7, 2020. For more info, see https://oiss.rice.edu/priorityprocessing.
Employment

SPRING 2020

CPT / OPT WORKSHOPS

Come learn about the practical training authorization process for F-1 student visa holders.

TUE. JANUARY 14
1 pm -- Sewall 309

FRI. JANUARY 17
11 am -- Sewall 309

WED. JANUARY 22
11 am -- Sewall 309

FRI. JANUARY 24
1 pm -- Sewall 309

MON. JANUARY 27
3:30 pm -- Sewall 307

TUE. FEBRUARY 5
7 pm -- Sewall 301

FRI. MARCH 6
11 am -- OISS

TUE. APRIL 7
4 pm -- OISS

Remember:
All off-campus training must be authorized by an OISS advisor!
NEW!
Government Guidance on OPT Reporting Compliance
By Irena Aleksic

In September 2019, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) provided new policy guidance requesting more detailed OPT reporting by students which reflected higher scrutiny in establishing a direct relation of students’ employment to their major areas of study. With growing concern regarding lack of oversight during OPT, the government is attempting to have institutions provide this oversight via periodic review of students’ SEVP Portal information. In response to this new guidance, the OISS sent an email request to all active OPT and STEM OPT students to comply with the directives outlined in SEVP’s new policy guidance, and update their SEVP Portal accounts accordingly.

As you may have seen, the government also provided sample explanations, which we have outlined on our website along with links to SEVP guidance and Study in the States information. If you have not done so already, visit https://oiss.rice.edu/opt to review this important information and make an appointment with an OISS advisor if you have additional questions. We are always here for you!

UPDATED OPT Reporting Requirements

ICE NEW Sample Explanations citing direct relation of work to major area of study

International Postdoc Luncheon: – Professional Development Opportunity
Rice international postdocs are invited to join staff of the OISS for the spring postdoc luncheon. Dr. Jennifer Wilson, Director of the Program for Writing & Communication will be the guest speaker. Her topic is “Communication in a Professional Environment”.

Session abstract: This workshop will help post doctoral scholars learn to present their research to general audiences, create short talks (“elevator pitches”), and communicate effectively with supervisors and staff.

When: Thursday, February 27, 2019
Where: Faculty Club, Esther Room (2nd floor)
Time: 11:30 1:00pm
What: Get your food and come on up. Professional development presentation is from 12:00 1:00pm.

Space limited, so please RSVP to: Andy Meretoja thm1@rice.edu
Questions? Ask Adria Baker at abaker@rice.edu
SUMMER INTERNSHIPS

by Irena Aleksic

It’s that time again! F-1 students who have been enrolled since fall 2019 (or earlier) can apply for summer curricular practical training (CPT). Please attend one of OISS’ CPT/OPT workshops for a chance to learn the details and ask questions. Since CPT is granted only for curricular reasons, the work/practicum off-campus must be required for your Rice studies. The options for the curricular justification are listed below.

UNDERGRADUATE F-1 STUDENTS ⇒ Work is required for a course within your major

GRADUATE F-1 STUDENTS (3 options)
⇒ Work is required for a course (enroll for summer or fall; must be toward degree)
⇒ Work is integral to thesis/dissertation research
⇒ Work is required for degree program (Like some Professional Master’s programs)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)
• Eligibility: Anyone who will finish 1 academic year (2 semesters) before the start of CPT is eligible to apply now. This includes transfer students and students who were on different visa types. As long as you have remained an active student and will complete 2 semesters (continually), you should be good to go.
• When to apply: You can apply ahead of time! Submit paperwork to OISS at least one week prior to your intended internship start date, but earlier is better.
• Part-time or Full-time: Since there is no cap on the number of hours you are permitted to work during the summer term, you can apply for either a part-time internship (20 hrs/wk or less) or a full-time internship (21+ hrs/wk). Note: Only full-time CPT has effect on OPT eligibility and if you accumulate 12 months of FT CPT, you will lose the eligibility to apply for OPT.
• Approval: It should take the OISS about 1 week to issue your CPT I-20, which will show your employer’s name, location, and authorized dates of work/participation for the internship.
• Multiple internships: CPT authorizations are employer-specific, which means you need to submit a separate CPT request for each internship you do this summer.

PREPARING FOR YOUR INTERNSHIP
One way to prepare for an internship is to get help from Rice’s Center for Career Development (CCD). The CCD provides many services, including:
• http://ccd.rice.edu/content.aspx?id=123: Job searches, how to network, business etiquette, and resume writing
• http://ccd.rice.edu/guides/: Guides to interviewing, dressing appropriately, and writing cover letters
• http://ccd.rice.edu/jobs-internships/: RICElink and other tools for job searches
• http://ccd.rice.edu/appt/: Career counseling appointments
• http://ccd.rice.edu/students/events/: Event listings and job expos

INTERNSHIP CHECKLIST
• Have you obtained work authorization from OISS?
• Do you have a Social Security Number? If not, do you know how to get one?
• Have you completed all appropriate paperwork and submitted to employer?
• Do you have professional clothes to wear at work?
• What do you need to bring on your first day?
• Have you arranged housing/transportation in the city where your internship takes place?

We at OISS wish you success in your summer internships!
Employment

H-1B QUICK GUIDE
By Irena Aleksic

What is it?
The H-1B is a temporary work visa for a person in a specialty occupation, sponsored by a U.S. employer. The employer applies for this visa on your behalf and, if approved, you will have full-time work authorization for that specific employer. The maximum length of an H-1B is 6 years and the authorization for it is typically issued in two 3-year increments. Additionally, it is a dual intent visa, which means you may have nonimmigrant or immigrant intent, and are permitted to apply for permanent residency (green card) while in H-1B status.

What is the “Cap”?
The cap refers to the “capacity,” or limitation, of annual issuance of H-1Bs. If an employer is cap-subject, it means that they may or may not get the chance to get the visa that year. If the employer is cap-exempt, there is no limitation on the number of H-1Bs and as long as the petition is complete and USCIS determines that the applicant and position both qualify for the H-1B visa, it should be approved.

Industry vs Academic H-1B
Industry/For-profit (cap-subject): If your employer is a company or for-profit entity, then they must apply for an H-1B for you via the lottery system. The annual “lottery” consists of nationwide employers filing H-1B petitions on or around April 1. Effective this year, Prior Electronic Registration by the employer is also required in March! Some petitions get selected for review and processing while others must try again next year (since the “cap” has been reached).
Academia/Research (cap-exempt): If your employer is an educational or research institution (and some others), then they may file for the H-1B anytime for any start date throughout the year. These types of H-1Bs do not go through the lottery system.

Timelines
It is important to know that employers may only apply a maximum of 6 months prior to the requested H-1B start date. For industry employers, this is April 1 (with intended start date of October 1). For universities and colleges, the employer can apply year-round and request any start date. If the H-1B is approved prior to your start date, it will still show the requested start date. Often, employees and companies opt to choose premium processing for an additional cost, due to how long it takes to process an H-1B.

Change of Status vs Consular Processing
Change of Status: If the prospective employee (you) is already here in the U.S., employers tend to file for an automatic change of status to H-1B for the new fiscal year, which starts on October 1. Because of this, even if your H-1B gets approved quickly, the start date on the H-1B will always be October 1 and you will automatically change from your current status (such as F-1) to H-1B on that day (October 1st date applicable only if the lottery system is required, which has been the case for many years).
*Do not travel internationally while a change of status is pending with USCIS!*
Consular Processing: If your employer files for consular processing of the H-1B, then nothing will automatically occur on October 1. Instead, you will receive an approval notice from USCIS that you must take later on to a U.S. embassy or consulate to obtain the H-1B visa stamp/sticker in your passport. You will only activate H-1B status when you enter the U.S. on that date.

Requirements/Paperwork
The immigration attorney or your employer’s legal counsel will confirm exactly what will need to be included in your H-1B application to USCIS. At the very least, you want to have copies of 1) ALL immigration documents (all I-20s, passports, visas, I-94s, etc.), all pertinent employment experience, and all work authorization documents for work performed in the U.S.
Start your leadership journey today!

Because the path to leadership is different for everyone, so is the leadership training you’ll find at The Doerr Institute for New Leaders. Our objective is to connect all Rice University students with the awareness and tools that will help them find, sharpen and grow their true leadership potential. You do not have to be in a formal leadership role to participate with the Doerr Institute. We provide professional leader development training to all Rice students at no cost.

**Where International Students Learn to Lead**

"Going through CoachRICE helped me better articulate my thoughts, which enhanced my communication skills. In my opinion, being able to communicate effectively is one of the major challenges international students face when they move to America."

Noor Elsonbaty, Computer Science and Business

"Through the programs at Doerr, I learned several nuances about the American culture and etiquette. In addition to that, my improved communication skills certainly brought me closer to the local community."

Priscilla Dias da Silva, Chemical Engineering

"When I took part in these programs, I didn’t have many leadership roles, but the seeds of leadership planted early on during my college years unconsciously encouraged me to take on more leadership responsibilities. Currently, as a leader in multiple student organizations, I find the skills I acquired during these programs to be very helpful and I am able to lead the teams more efficiently."

Hayden Xu, Math Economics

**Our Programs**

**Activation** - one-on-one sessions with a personal leadership coach
Register by Jan. 24

**Synthesis** - sessions with your peers, facilitated by a leadership coach
*Offered in English and Mandarin
Register by Jan. 24

**Catalyst** - modules focused on a single leadership competency
Registration closes 48 hours prior to session launch date

**CoachRICE** - leader development training designed to improve personal leadership skills and the ability to develop others
Registration for the 2020-2021 cohort opens in fall 2020

**Excursions** - meetings with top Houston leaders off campus
*Transportation and meal provided
Registration closes 48-hours prior to excursion date

Visit riceleader.org to register today.

*Spring registration will open in late December.
Health Insurance for International Students

by Elmira Ganiyeva

Many international students come from a socialized healthcare system. Therefore, US health insurance may seem complex and challenging. Here is a summary of how it works.

Health insurance covers a portion of your doctor bills, surgery, emergency room visits, and hospital costs. The amount covered depends on whether your doctor is In-Network or Out-of Network (working with, or not working with the insurance company). It is always in your best interest to find a physician that is In-Network, as insurance companies have negotiated discounted rates with some doctors and facilities. The portion of costs paid by insurance (coverage) is most always higher than the portion paid by patients. Also, be aware that not all medical services are covered by insurance plans. Therefore, always check the exclusions and limitations that are listed in your insurance policy paperwork.

As a student with an F-1 or J-1 visa, you are required to choose between Rice Aetna insurance and a Rice-approved alternate Student Assurances Service (SAS) plan while studying at Rice. You can purchase a plan of your choice during an Open Enrollment Period. This period only occurs twice each year before the Fall and Spring semesters.

How much does medical insurance cost? The amount you pay when you purchase the insurance plan is called a premium. In addition, insurance companies typically require you to pay a fixed amount of medical costs each year before they start paying (take over) the bills. This fixed amount is called a deductible. For example, if your policy has a $500 deductible, and you have to pay for a $100 clinic visit, a $300 emergency room visit, and a $150 medical imaging visit, your total bill will be $550 (without insurance). Paying this in full, you would pay $50 over the $500 deductible. Thus, the insurance company will pay the remaining $50 plus most additional costs for the rest of the year. Generally, the remaining exceptions are fixed fees called a copay and a coinsurance that you must pay when you receive medical services. For example, if a doctor charges $400, your yearly deductible has already been paid, and you have a $25 per-visit co-pay and 10% coinsurance, the insurance company will pay the remaining of your $400 bill. Generally, medical insurance pays in full for preventative care (i.e., physical check-ups). So even if you feel healthy, never feel shy away from using that benefit! Again, coverage may vary, so check the exclusions and limitations listed in your insurance policy paperwork.

Visit https://oiss.rice.edu/studenthealth for the information on Rice international student health plans, enrollment dates, contact information, helpful links, and related items.
OVERCOMING IMPOSTER SYNDROME

BY SCOTT PETT

"YOU THINK, ‘WHY WOULD ANYONE WANT TO SEE ME AGAIN IN A MOVIE? AND I DON'T KNOW HOW TO ACT ANYWAY, SO WHY AM I DOING THIS?’"

This quote is attributed to Meryl Streep, arguably the most accomplished actress of this or any generation. She’s describing something most Rice students are likely familiar with -- imposter syndrome -- which Harvard Business Review defines as "a collection of feelings of inadequacy that persist despite evident success."

Imposter syndrome is a common phenomenon in academia, which is both good news and bad. On one hand, you’re not alone! On the other hand, it means you have to train yourself to overcome harmful thought patterns that can exacerbate mental health struggles. Knowing you’re part of a club that includes the likes of Meryl Streep is an important first step.

You can work to identify and understand your imposter syndrome triggers. A big one for many people is new environments (such as studying in a foreign country!). You might be a perfectionist who is struggling to articulate new ideas. Maybe you have a skewed perception of other people’s abilities and achievements. Be careful when comparing yourself to others, and remember that failure is inevitable and ultimately productive. Don’t let that voice in your head convince you that self-worth and professional victories are the same thing.

Imposter syndrome can manifest itself in various ways and tends to impact people from underrepresented communities more deeply. I recommend reading this article by clinical psychologist Jaruwan Sakulku, if you want to learn more.

Imposterism is something we all deal with at Rice, and in various ways. Be kind to yourself, and remember you are here because you deserve to be.
You Are Not Alone: Anxiety and Depression

While we know it’s very important to maintain a healthy wellbeing, we understand that going to school thousands miles away from home is not easy. You will struggle, you will miss home, and you will be stressed. As an international student, talking about feelings and asking for help may be even harder than it may be for domestic students, especially when we experience mental health concerns. Some of us may believe having mental health condition is a sign of weakness, some of us may think we should not talk about personal issues and feelings outside of our family, some of us may be worried about language or cultural barrier when we talk about our concerns, and some of us may not aware of the resources available.

Nonetheless, you are not alone when you are faced with a mental health challenge. There has been an increase in the prevalence of mental health conditions among university students in the U.S., especially those related to anxiety and depression. Although everyone experiences it differently, it’s important to understand the common signs and how to get help to manage these conditions.

Common Signs and Symptoms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anxiety</th>
<th>Depression</th>
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<tr>
<td>Is a mind and body’s reaction to stress. It’s completely normal to feel worried, but it’s something you should address before it affects your life too much. Some typical signs and symptoms of anxiety disorder may include:</td>
<td>is a mental health condition when our intense sad feelings keep affecting our ability to study, interact with others and perform daily tasks for an extended period. Some common signs and symptoms of depression may include:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Intense worry or fear</td>
<td>- Intense sadness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Restlessness, keyed up, on edge</td>
<td>- Feeling hopeless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Easily fatigued &amp; irritability</td>
<td>- Body aches and pains</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Agitation</td>
<td>- Chronic fatigue</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Change in ability to focus</td>
<td>- Too much or too little eating/sleeping</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Self-doubt</td>
<td>- Difficulty to focus on school or work</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Muscle tension &amp; sleep disturbance</td>
<td>- Withdrawing from activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Heart racing or fast breathing</td>
<td>- Self-harm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Severe mood swings</td>
<td>- Thoughts of suicide</td>
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Depression and anxiety disorders are different, but it’s also not uncommon for individuals diagnosed with both conditions. It’s important to consult early and often to learn about ways to manage these conditions. If you or your friend are struggling with anxiety disorder and/or depression, there are many resources and supports available. You can walk in to the Rice Wellbeing and Counseling Center which is located at Gibbs Wellness Center on Monday - Friday, 9am - 5pm. If it is during non-business hours, you can use the 24 hour hotline by dialing 713-348-3311. In addition to the resources in the Wellbeing and Counseling Center, there are a variety of on-campus and off-campus resources you may find helpful. Asking for help may not be easy in the beginning, you can also start with someone you trust, like your friends and peer resources. Please remember, asking for help is a sign of strength and it’s okay to speak up and ask for help at Rice.