FALL 2011 UPDATE

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Welcome

The staff of the International Student and Scholar Services office would like to extend a warm heartfelt welcome to the newly arriving students. As a result of your desire to become a part of the Golden Eagle family, we had 100 new students at this year’s international student orientation program. This was a monumental moment for us. We are excited that you are allowing us to help you prepare for your future! We are glad that you chose Southern Miss, and we want you to know that this is your new home. Please feel free to come by the ISSS office if you need our assistance or if you have any concerns.

International Education Week

The University of Southern Mississippi will celebrate International Education Week Nov. 14-18, 2011. International Education Week is an opportunity to celebrate the benefits of international education worldwide. This is a joint initiative of the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Education. The idea is to promote programs that prepare Americans for a global environment and attract future leaders from abroad to study, learn and exchange experiences in the United States.

The International Programs (IP) office will host a series of programs during this week. Any student interested in participating should contact this office. We will be sending out more details later concerning this event.

For more information, contact Jessica Lamb at 601.266-6809 or via e-mail at Jessica.lamb@usm.edu.
Travel Information

All international students and scholars leaving the United States temporarily must have all the necessary documents in order to re-enter the United States. Remember to have your I-20 (F-1 students) or DS-2019 (J-1 exchange visitors) signed before leaving the United States. H-1B temporary workers should carry the approval notice I-797 and a letter from the department verifying employment. You must have a valid passport and visa stamp (unless you are going to Canada or Mexico for less than 30 days) before being permitted to re-enter the United States. All F-1 students and F-2 dependents should be reminded that if your nonimmigrant visa stamp (located in your passport) has expired, you will need a new I-20 in order to obtain a new visa stamp for re-entry into the United States. All students in F or J status will need to be issued new SEVIS travel documents. To receive these documents, you must give ISSS a five-working-day notice.

H-1B temporary workers who need to obtain an H-1B visa stamp will need to come by the ISSS office to obtain a copy of the H-1B petition, the labor condition application and a copy of the employer’s letter. This supplemental information will need to be presented with the original I-797 approval notice at the U.S. embassy or consulate abroad. All nonimmigrant visa holders should seek the advice of ISSS prior to leaving the United States. H-1B temporary workers who need to obtain an H-1B visa stamp will need to come by the ISSS office to obtain a copy of the H-1B petition, the labor condition application and a copy of the employer’s letter. This supplemental information will need to be presented with the original I-797 approval notice at the U.S. embassy or consulate abroad. All nonimmigrant visa holders should seek the advice of ISSS prior to leaving the United States.

Please note: After returning to the United States, you are required by law to provide the ISSS office with updated copies of your new arrival documents. Be sure that we have this information so that your immigration file remains updated. Thanks for your cooperation in this most important matter.

Change of Address

In order to change your address, all international students must complete a blue change of address form with the ISSS office. This process cannot be done via SOAR. This must be done with the ISSS office. If you live out of town you must notify us via e-mail at gina.barker@usm.edu. Remember, your address verification is a condition of your immigration status. You must notify us immediately of any change in address. If you are in H-1B status, you must notify both the ISSS office and go online to www.uscis.gov and complete the AR-11 form.

Optional Practical Training

Attention students graduating in December 2011: If you wish to apply for optional practical training (OPT) after completion of studies, you should make plans now to submit your application to the Immigration Service. It could take at least two to three months to receive your Employment Authorization Document (EAD). Under the new government regulations, you are permitted to apply for OPT within a 90-day period prior to graduation. However, you may also apply for OPT during the 60-day period after graduation. If you choose to apply during this time period, you will not receive your full 12 months of OPT. Those students wishing to apply for OPT for fall 2011 must have a completed application in the ISSS office on or before Monday, Nov. 28, 2011. Please do not hesitate to schedule an appointment with an ISSS staff member to discuss employment after graduation.

As per new governmental guidelines issued on April 8, 2008, some students now qualify for an additional 17-month OPT extension. Those students in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields are the only qualifying fields. This qualification will vary based on your field of study and various others factors. You should inquire with an ISSS staff member for clarification on this directive. Do not take it for granted that you qualify for this benefit. There are other stipulations associated with this new regulation. You can find more information on the 17-month OPT extension on our website at www.usm.edu/isss.

Do not hesitate to contact ISSS if you have any questions concerning your immigration status.
2013 Diversity Visa Lottery

ISSS has information available for the 2013 Diversity Visa Lottery program. The application period begins the afternoon of Tuesday, October 4, 2011, and ends the afternoon on of Monday, November 5, 2011. Entries for the DV 2011 Lottery must be submitted electronically. You may obtain the electronic DV entry form at www.dvlottery.state.gov. In addition, the qualifying countries can also be found at this website. PLEASE NOTE: Paper entries will not be accepted.

The Diversity Visa Lottery program has been designed to give individuals of various countries an opportunity to compete for a chance to receive an immigrant visa (green card) for permanent resident status in the United States. There is no filing fee nor is it necessary to pay a fee to an attorney or any other individual or service. The process is relatively simple and self-explanatory. All interested students may come by the ISSS office to receive information or visit the website listed above.

Check Your Documents

Check the expiration of your passport and I-20/DS-2019. You must have a valid passport and I-20/DS-2019 at all times. You should not allow these two documents to expire. The expiry of these documents could jeopardize your legal stay in the United States. At least six months prior to the expiration of your passport, you should contact your consulate/embassy concerning their procedures for renewing/extending your passport. Remember this is a condition of your legal status in the United States and could jeopardize your eligibility for other immigration benefits.

Christmas International House

If you are looking for something to do for the Christmas holiday season, you might be interested in joining the celebrations at Christmas International House (CIH). Christmas International House is a Christian ministry designed to offer hospitality to students during the Christmas holidays. This is a peacemaking program. This program will give you an opportunity to visit an American home and become acquainted with different areas of the country. This program will allow you to promote diversity and explore cultural differences.

Feel free to visit CIH online at www.christmasih.org. Registration will begin on October 17, 2011.

Upcoming Events

New Orleans-Fall Break 2011

On Thursday, October 13, 2011, we will leave the Hattiesburg campus at 8:30 a.m. for a fun-filled day in New Orleans. We have a Ghost Tour scheduled at 8 p.m. that night followed by Beignets at Café Du Monde. You are on your own to visit New Orleans until then. The bus will leave New Orleans at 10 p.m.

The cost is $25, which includes your ticket to the Ghost Tour. Sign up with Chrissy Gill by October 5 if you would like to attend.

PLEASE NOTE: You must be 18 or older to go on the New Orleans trip. In addition, be sure to have enough money to purchase food and merchandise/souvenirs.
Homecoming Parade

Homecoming is October 22, 2011. The parade will kick off the festivities. It will be in historic downtown Hattiesburg at 10 a.m. Parade participants will line up along Green Street (behind the Hattiesburg Public Library) at 9 a.m. on the day of the parade. The parade will enter onto Hardy Street (eastbound) and will travel along Front Street, make a left onto Main Street, a left on McLeod Street and then a right onto Forrest Street. The parade will conclude back at the staging area on Green Street. The estimated length of the parade route is 0.8 miles.

Optional Practical Training Workshop

On Thursday, Nov. 10, 2011, from 4 to 6 p.m., ISSS will provide information on F1/J-1 student compliance, optional practical training procedures and rules, and the H-1B process. There will be an opportunity for questions and answers.

This is a free seminar open to all international students and scholars.

International Holiday Party

ISSS will host the third annual International Holiday Party on Friday, Dec. 2, 2011, from 6 to 9 p.m. at the Peck House located at 3601 Pearl Street. This will be our end-of-semester celebration party to tie in the festivities of the holiday season. Light refreshments will be served. Everyone is invited to attend this free event. Feel free to bring your iPods and mp3 players so that we can enjoy your favorite tunes.

However, to make sure that we have enough food and space for all, we will ask you to reserve your spot. More information will be sent out closer to event time. Watch for this in your e-mail.

Disney World-Spring Bring 2012

On Saturday, March 10, 2012, through Wednesday, March 14, 2012, we will travel by chartered bus to Disney World for five days/four nights in Orlando, Florida. The price is $500 per person, which includes your Disney World admission ticket, hotel room and bus fare. This is based on four persons per room (Individuals of the same gender will room together). For families, please contact Gina.Barker@usm.edu for room rates as prices may differ; children ages two and under are not required to have a Disney World admission ticket.

You may pay the entire amount at once or via the “payment plan” as follows:

- $160 non-refundable fee due by October 15, 2011
- $100 due by November 15, 2011
- $100 due by December 15, 2011
- $100 due by January 18, 2012
- $40 due by February 1, 2012

PLEASE NOTE: You will only need money for food and merchandise/souvenirs.

***One day has been set aside to possibly go to Universal Studios for an additional $80 for the admission ticket. If you are interested in going to the day trip to Universal Studios, you must notify us when you pay your deposit.

AA/EOE/ADA