FALL 2012 UPDATE

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Welcome

The staff of the International Student and Scholar Services office we 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 would like to welcome our 105 newly arriving students. 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. 12-16, 2012. 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 email 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.

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 email 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 2012: 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. 26, 2012. Please do not hesitate to schedule an appointment with an ISSS staff member to discuss employment after graduation.

Some students may 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 or by viewing the STEM designated program list at www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm.

Do not hesitate to contact ISSS if you have any questions concerning your immigration status.
2014 Diversity Visa Lottery

ISSS has information available for the 2014 Diversity Visa Lottery program. The application period begins the afternoon of Tuesday, Oct. 2, 2012, and ends the afternoon on of Monday, Nov. 3, 2012. Entries for the DV 2014 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.

Christmas International House

If you are looking for something to do for the 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 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. CIH runs from Dec. 18, 2012, until Jan. 2, 2013.

Feel free to visit CIH online at www.christmasih.org. Registration will be accepted from Sept. 15 to Nov. 15.

Elimination of Entry Stamp

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) recently announced the elimination of the entry stamp on I-94 cards. CBP plans to place admissions stamps in your passports which will include a handwritten notation indicating your status and authorized period of stay in the U.S. Therefore, your form I-20 and DS-2019 will no longer have an arrival date stamp placed on them at the port-of-entry. The future plan is to consider eliminating issuance of the I-94 card. However, at this time this measure has not been implemented. During this transitional period, you are encouraged to maintain copies of your travel documents. This includes passport, entry stamps and entry dates. Be sure to keep hard copies of all travel entry and exit information in all immigration statuses for future reference.

You will be notified via email of any immigration updates or changes.

Health Fee Increases

Beginning spring 2013 the cost of the immunizations at the Student Health Services will increase to $70 each. The cost of the mandatory x-ray will continue to be $75. As an alternative, students are encouraged to go to the Forrest County Health Department located at 5008 Highway 42, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, to obtain the state required immunizations. Immunizations may be given at a reduced price at the Health Department.

Scholarship Opportunities for Women from Developing Countries

The application period for the annual Margaret McNamara Memorial Fund (MMMF) opens Oct. 15, 2012. The MMMF provides scholarship grants to women from developing countries to help further their education and strengthen their leadership skills to improve the lives of women and children in developing countries. Please go to www.mmmf-grants.org to see if you qualify to apply.
Upcoming Events

Homecoming Parade

Homecoming is Oct. 20, 2012. 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. 16, 2012, 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 Dinner

ISSS will an International Holiday Dinner on Friday, Nov. 30, 2012, from 6 to 9 p.m. at the BSU located at 3500 Montague Boulevard. This will be our end-of-semester celebration party to tie in the festivities of the holiday season. Dinner will be served. Everyone is invited to attend this free event.

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 email.

AA/EOE/ADA/IAI