SPRING 2011 UPDATE

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Spring 2011 International Food Fair

The University of Southern Mississippi international students will showcase their homelands during the Sixth Annual International Food Fair on Thursday, April 7, from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Baptist Student Center, located at 214 North 31st Ave. (on the Southern Miss Hattiesburg campus).

The International Food Fair allows those in attendance to have an opportunity to sample cuisine from various countries, prepared by our international students. There is no cover charge, but we are asking for a $5 donation, and entertainment will be provided as well.

All participants must fill out an entry form. Your entry form must be received in the International Student and Scholar Services Office (ISSS) by Friday, April 1, by 5 p.m. You will be reimbursed in full for all supplies and grocery items that you purchase for food preparation.

For more information, call Barbara Jackson at 601.266.4841

ISSS on Facebook

ISSS is now on Facebook. Feel free to view our page to keep up-to-date on announcements and other important information. Go ahead and post questions, comments and pictures on our page. You can view our page by going to www.facebook.com/ISSS5151.

2011 Tax Information

Were you physically present in the United States in 2010? If so, then you must fill out a federal tax form, even if you were not employed. If your spouse was present in the United States, he/she must complete tax forms, also. The governmental agency, Internal Revenue Service (IRS), has created a two-page tax form to make filing easier for you.
For assistance in completing tax forms you should attend one of the four scheduled sessions listed below. In addition, prior to coming to the workshop you must go to www.irs.gov and complete the IRS form 13641NR. You must have this form in-hand when you come to the tax workshop. This form will help us with completing your tax return.

**These dates are reserved for assistance with your “U.S. federal” returns only:**

- **Friday, March 25, 2011**
  - 3:30-5:30 p.m., International Center 205
- **Tuesday March 29, 2011**
  - 3:30-5:30 p.m., International Center 205
- **Monday, April 4, 2011**
  - 3:30-5:30 p.m., International Center 205
- **Tuesday, April 12, 2011**
  - 3:30-5:30 p.m., International Center 205

You may also choose to file your returns via “CINTAX.” CINTAX is tax-preparation software that has been purchased on your behalf to assist you with preparing your 2010 1040NR and 1040NR-EZ tax forms. The use of this software is very simple and can be accessed from any personal computer. You can access CINTAX by going to http://www.cintax.us. Once you enter this site, enter our site code X353AF6J. Please note: The site code listed has only been purchased for use by Southern Miss students and scholars. Due to the limited number of seats purchased, please do not share this number with individuals outside of Southern Miss.

**You should bring the following documents with you to the tax workshop:** Passport, I-20/DS-2019, I-94 card, W-2 form (sent to you from Southern Miss payroll), 1042S form (sent to you from the Controller’s Office) and information from your department concerning your scholarship, if applicable.

**These dates are reserved for assistance with your “State of Mississippi” tax returns only:**

- **Friday, March 25, 2011**
  - 3:30-5:30 p.m., International Center 205
- **Thursday, March 31, 2011**
  - 3:30-5:30 p.m., International Center 205
- **Tuesday, April 5, 2011**
  - 3:30-5:30 p.m., International Center 205
- **Wednesday, April 13, 2011**
  - 3:30-5:30 p.m., International Center 205

**Please note:** It is imperative that you are on time for these workshops. You will not be able to complete your tax return if you are missing vital information. Please be on time or plan to attend a workshop that fits your schedule.

**Beware of Identity Scams**

During this tax season it is imperative that you are reminded that you should not give your Social Security Number (SSN) or individual taxpayer identification number (ITIN) out via e-mail or phone. The IRS will never contact you via e-mail – any communication from someone who claims to be the IRS should immediately cause you some concern. This type of electronic communication may contain some sort of virus or malware. You should never give out your SSN or ITIN to anyone over the phone. This is not good practice.

**Travel Information**

If you plan on traveling during the upcoming Spring Break period, be sure to come by the ISSS office to have your documents signed before leaving the United States. All international students and scholars leaving the United States temporarily must be certain to 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 with this most important matter.

Keep Us in the Loop

If you have changed addresses or apartments, dorms, etc., please make sure that you have completed a blue “Change of Address Form” in the ISSS office. It is imperative that you keep us apprised of any changes in your whereabouts as this is a federal requirement.

In addition, after your return from your travel abroad, it is imperative that you bring a copy of your updated immigration documents to the ISSS office. We are required by federal law to keep updated copies of your immigration documents on file at all times. In addition, if you are currently employed and fail to give us your updated information, this may cause a disruption of your payment. I strongly encourage you to make sure that you share your most current immigration information with our office. This also applies to your dependents that have re-entered the country. We need copies of their updated immigration documents as well.

Optional Practical Training

Attention students graduating in May 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 spring 2011 must have a completed application in the ISSS office on or before Monday, April 25, 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 at this time. This qualification will vary based on your field of study and various other 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 at our Web site www.usm.edu/issss.

Verify 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 expiration 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.

If your I-20/DS-2019 will expire on May 31, 2011, and you will not graduate or participate in optional practical training, you must contact the ISSS Office for an extension. You should handle this process in a timely manner. Your failure to extend your stay in the United States could result in a violation of your lawful immigration status.

Upcoming Events

Optional Practical Training and Employment Information Seminar

On Friday, April 15 2011, from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m., ISSS will host Attorney Kathleen C. Gasparian of Dave Ware and Associates from Metairie, La. This event will take place at the Baptist Student Union located at 214 North 31st Avenue. Ms Gasparian will give an immigration seminar and provide information on F1/J-1 student compliance, optional practical training procedures, rules and the H-1B process. She will also give a brief overview of permanent residence in the United States. There will be an opportunity for questions and answers.

This is a free seminar open to all international students and scholars,
Spring Excursion

We are inviting you and your family to join us as we spend the day in New Orleans, Louisiana, on Saturday, May 14, 2011. This will be a fun-filled day as we start at the New Orleans Zoo, then head to the Aquarium and IMAX theatre. We will allow time for you visit the French Market and enjoy lunch on your own. This will be a day of fun in New Orleans. We will depart the ISSS building at 7 a.m. and plan to return around 10 p.m. The total cost is $35.

You can reserve your seat by making a nonrefundable deposit of $17.50 by Friday, March 18, 2011. The remaining balance must be paid on or before Friday, April 29, 2011. Feel free to come by the ISSS Office should you have any questions regarding this excursion.

Hope you plan to join us for this fantastic occasion!

Event: End of Year Party
When: Friday, April 29, 2011
Where: Baptist Student Union
Time: 6-8 p.m.
Cost: Free