SPRING 2012 UPDATE

In this issue:
Spring 2012 International Food Fair
Follow the ISSS on Facebook
2012 Tax Workshop Information
Protect Your Identity
Travel Information
Keep Us in the Loop
Optional Practical Training
Online Courses May Affect Your Status
Upcoming Events

Spring 2012 International Food Fair

The University of Southern Mississippi international students will showcase their homelands during the Sixth Annual International Food Fair on Thursday, April 12, 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 Thursday, April 5, by 5 p.m. You will be reimbursed in full for all supplies and grocery items that you purchase for food preparation. We need your assistance by showcasing your homelands to make this event a success.

For more information, call Barbara Jackson at 601.266.4841.

Follow the ISSS on Facebook

ISSS has a Facebook page. Feel free to view our page to keep up-to-date on announcements, upcoming events and other important information. We invite you to post your questions, comments and pictures on our page. You can view our page by going to www.facebook.com/ISSS5151.

2012 TAX INFORMATION

Were you physically present in the United States in 2011? 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 a special tax form proving their presence here, 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 your tax forms, you must register in advance to attend one of the eight interactive tax sessions listed below. In addition, prior to coming to the workshop, you must go to the www.irs.gov website and complete the IRS form 13614NR. You must have this form in-hand when you come to the tax workshop. This form will help us with determining your tax status prior to completing your tax return.

**You will receive assistance with completing your U.S. tax returns during the following times:**

Monday, March 19, 2012  3:30-5:30 p.m.  International Center 102
Tuesday, March 20, 2012  3:30-5:30 p.m.  International Center 102
Wednesday, March 21, 2012  3:30-5:30 p.m.  International Center 102
Thursday, March 22, 2012  3:30-5:30 p.m.  International Center 102
Monday, March 26, 2012  3:30-5:30 p.m.  International Center 102
Wednesday, March 28, 2012  3:30-5:30 p.m.  International Center 102
Thursday, March 29, 2012  3:30-5:30 p.m.  International Center 102
Friday, March 30, 2012  3:30-5:30 p.m.  International Center 102

**PLEASE NOTE:** You will **not** be able to complete your tax return if you are missing vital information. 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 Payroll department), 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 23, 2012  3:30-5:30 p.m.  International Center 205
Tuesday, March 27, 2012  3:30-5:30 p.m.  International Center 205
Wednesday, April 4, 2012  3:30-5:30 p.m.  International Center 205
Tuesday, April 10, 2012  3:30-5:30 p.m.  International Center 205

**Please note:** Since this year’s sessions have been changed to an interactive format, you **must** be on time for your selected workshop. I am encouraging you to select a workshop that fits your schedule. If you are unable to attend a workshop, we are asking you to notify us in a timely manner. Seating is limited. We are expecting sessions to fill fast.

**Protect Your Identity**

During tax season, it is imperative for you to know that you should not give your Social Security Number (SSN) or individual taxpayer identification number (ITIN) out via the Internet, (email) or phone. The IRS will never contact you via email – 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. You should consider this as suspicious behavior and not respond to inquiries of this nature.

**Travel Information**

If you plan on traveling during the upcoming Spring Break, 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.
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 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 spring 2011 must have a completed application in the ISSS office on or before **Monday, April 23, 2012.** 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 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 regulation. You can find more information on the 17-month OPT extension at our website at [http://www.usm.edu/international-services](http://www.usm.edu/international-services).

**Online Courses May Affect Your Status**

As per federal regulations, you are only permitted to register for three credit hours of online courses per semester. Only three hours of online courses may count toward your required enrollment hours--12 for undergraduate or nine for graduate. Enrolling in any online courses beyond this limit will not harm your status if you have already enrolled for the required number of courses for your level. Those students found to be in violation of this guideline will be considered as being in violation of their lawful F-1 status.

**Upcoming Events**

**Optional Practical Training and Employment Information Seminar**

On Friday, April 13, 2012, from 10:00 am – 12:00 pm. (Advanced Immigration, EB1/EB2) and 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. (H1B and OPT), 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. During the OPT seminar Ms
Gasparian will provide information on F1/J-1 student compliance, optional practical training procedures, 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.

**Spring Break Excursion**

We are inviting you to join us as we go to New Orleans, La., on Monday, March 12, 2012. This will be a fun-filled day as you will be given an opportunity to explore the wonderful city of New Orleans on your own. Maybe you would like to go to the zoo or the aquarium, visit the French Market or ride the street cars. We expect you to have a day of fun in New Orleans. We will depart the ISSS building at 8 a.m. and plan to return around 9 p.m. The total cost of the trip is $10.

Seating is limited as we only have space for 28. Come by to reserve your seat by making a nonrefundable cash payment of $10 by **Friday, March 2, 2012**. 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 27, 2012

**Where:**  
Baptist Student Union

**Time:**  
5:30-7 p.m.

**Cost:**  
Free

Feel free to bring your picnic blankets, chairs and outdoor toys.