SPRING 2014 UPDATE

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Spring 2014 International Food Fair

The University of Southern Mississippi international students will showcase their homelands during the annual International Food Fair on Thursday, April 10, 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 will be a cover charge of $2 collected at the door.

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 4, 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.

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.

2014 TAX INFORMATION

Were you physically present in the United States in 2013? 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 for a seat to attend one of the eight interactive tax sessions listed below. In addition, prior to coming to the workshop, you must determine your filing status. If you were present in the U.S. from 2007 to 2011 in F, J, M or Q status, you
should not attend the nonresident tax sessions listed below. You should seek assistance from a tax professional or try using Turbo Tax.

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

- **Monday, March 17, 2014** 3:30-5:30 p.m. International Center 102
- **Wednesday, March 19, 2014** 3:30-5:30 p.m. International Center 102
- **Monday, March 24, 2014** 3:30-5:30 p.m. International Center 102
- **Tuesday, March 25, 2014** 3:30-5:30 p.m. International Center 102
- **Wednesday, March 26, 2014** 3:30-5:30 p.m. International Center 102
- **Thursday, March 27, 2014** 3:30-5:30 p.m. International Center 102
- **Monday, March 31, 2014** 3:30-5:30 p.m. International Center 102
- **Wednesday, April 2, 2014** 3:30-5:30 p.m. International Center 102
- **Friday, April 5, 2013** 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Gulf Park Campus, FEC 304

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 university 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:

- **Tuesday, March 18, 2014** 3:30-5:30 p.m. International Center 205
- **Friday, March 21, 2014** 3:30-5:30 p.m. International Center 205
- **Wednesday, April 2, 2014** 3:30-5:30 p.m. International Center 205
- **Friday, April 4, 2014** 3:30-5:30 p.m. Gulf Park Campus, FEC, 304
- **Tuesday, April 8, 2014** 3:30-5:30 p.m. International Center 205

Please note: I encourage 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 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 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 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. You must contact your department for an updated statement of employment. 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 2014: 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 2014 must have a completed application in the ISSS office on or before Monday, April 21, 2014. 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. Feel free to visit the Department of Homeland Security website located at www.ice.gov/sevis/stemlist.htm for those STEM-approved majors. Please 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: www.usm.edu/international-services.

Insurance Waiver Guidelines for International Students

A more structured set of insurance waiver guidelines will be implemented beginning in the fall 2014 term. Please note the following:

- International students are required to have continuous insurance coverage throughout their program of study. Students who purchase the university-approved UnitedHealthcare plan will be covered from August 15 – January 14, and from January 15 – August 14. If you buy your own insurance from another source, you may buy insurance coverage for the entire year at one time, or you may buy it for the same time periods as the
university-approved plan. Your coverage must extend through the summer term even if you will not be in the United States during that time.

- Your policy must have a maximum benefit of at least $150,000 per sickness/injury per policy year.
- It must have a lifetime maximum benefit of at least $500,000.
- Your policy must provide for emergency and non-emergency care, mental health care and maternity health care.
- Your plan must provide prescription drug coverage.
- It must have a deductible of $500 or less.
- It must provide repatriation coverage of at least $7,500.
- It must provide medical evacuation coverage of at least $10,000.
- It must be administered by an insurance company with a licensed claims office in the United States.*
- You must provide a copy of your policy details in English and documentation (letter, receipt, card, etc.) of the coverage period.

If you currently have insurance from a company other than the university’s UnitedHealthcare plan, then you should check your policy now to make sure it adheres to the new guidelines. If your current plan does not meet these guidelines, then you should find another plan for the upcoming academic year. Please keep these guidelines in mind as you select your insurance policies for the upcoming academic year.

*Special considerations will be made on a case-by-case basis for government-sponsored insurance plans.

**Upcoming Events**

**Optional Practical Training and Employment Information Seminar**

On Thursday, April 24, 2014, from 2 to 5 p.m., ISSS will host Attorney David Ware of Ware/Gasparian Law Firm from Metairie, La. This event will take place in the Baptist Student Union. Mr. Ware will give an immigration seminar and 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. This is not a presentation for those interested in permanent resident options.

**Event:** End-of-Year Party  
**When:** Friday, April 25, 2014  
**Where:** Baptist Student Union  
**Time:** 5-7 p.m.  
**Cost:** Free

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