

# **Current Travel and Visa Application Information for International Students and Scholars at Rutgers University**

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International students and scholars at Rutgers University can and should expect international travel to be marked by increased security measures and a tightening of visa application reviews and clearances by the federal agencies that oversee visa issuance (U.S. Department of State--**DOS**) and port-of-entry admissions to the U.S. (Department of Homeland Security's Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services--**BCIS**, previously INS).

At a May, 2003 conference of NAFSA: Association of International Educators, a spokesman for the Visa Services division of the DOS recommended that, in particular, those who travel abroad with expired U.S. visas (and who will therefore need to apply for a new visa before re-entering the U.S.) should do so only if absolutely necessary, because many can expect delays of up to several months in obtaining a new U.S. visa. While ultimately, it is an individual's decision as to whether or not to travel abroad, the Center urges Rutgers' nonimmigrant students and scholars to consider all of the information below prior to making any international travel plans.

## ***Before making final travel plans, we suggest you do the following:***

- Verify that your documents are valid and in order. Your passport should be valid for six months into the future; your U.S. visa must be valid for reentry or you must be prepared to apply for a visa abroad before returning to the U.S. (see below); and your immigration document for your particular nonimmigrant classification must be valid, as follows:
  - For F-1 and F-2 students and dependents: your I-20 expiration date must be later than the date you plan to reenter the U.S.
  - For J-1 and J-2 visa holders: your DS-2019 expiration date must be later than the date you plan to reenter the U.S.
  - For H-1B and H-4 visa holders, your I-797 approval notice must be valid past the date you plan to reenter the U.S.
- Review the travel document checklist on our **May 8, 2003** Regulatory Update at [http://peterbox.rutgers.edu/cifss/past\\_updates.htm](http://peterbox.rutgers.edu/cifss/past_updates.htm). (See item # 5, May 8, 2003.) Be sure you will be able to obtain all those documents prior to traveling.

## ***If your U.S. visa will expire before your re-entry date to the U.S., you will need to apply for a new U.S. visa before returning to the U.S. If this is your case, it is very important that you read and understand the following:***

- Do not assume that the procedure and time frame for applying for a new visa will be the same as it was the last time you applied! Many U.S. visa offices have changed their procedures, and all applicants for U.S. visas are currently required to have a personal interview prior to being issued a visa. Go to <http://travel.state.gov/links.html> to find the link to the website of the U.S. embassy or consulate at which you will apply for your visa. Check to see if that particular visa office has any special visa application instructions (some visa offices require advance appointments, special documentation, etc.) and also whether there is information on routine turn-around times for nonimmigrant visa applications. ( Keep in mind, however, that your case might not be "routine." See information on security clearances and special registration, page 2)

- **Find out whether your field of research or study is on the DOS’s “Technology Alert List” (TAL)**, a list of fields of study and research that the DOS considers to be technologically sensitive. If your field is listed on the TAL, the visa office is now *required* to conduct a DOS security clearance prior to issuing either an initial or renewal U.S. visa to you. Such clearances generally take at least one month—and sometimes as much as several months, depending on the case. An explanation of how the TAL works, as well as the most updated version of the list itself, can be found in a DOS cable at: <http://www.travel.state.gov/state147566.html>

If your field of study or research is on this list, we recommend you get a letter (on letterhead) from your supervisor, department chair, center director or graduate program director to carry to submit with your visa application. The letter should explain as much about your program of study and research as possible, and should state and emphasize--only if true, however!--that the applications of your program do not fall into the specific sensitive areas listed on the TAL, but rather, into the areas of (fill in the blank) which are not on the TAL list. If you are working on a grant, the letter can name the Principal Investigator and the granting agency, grant number and grant name. It should also explain the purpose of the grant research. *Any and all information or evidence the letter can offer to convince the DOS that your work does not threaten national security, the better it will be.* It will still not allow the visa officer to waive the required security check, but if the letter is sent along with the security check forms, it might move the process along more quickly.

- Even if your field of study or research is not on the TAL list, you could still be subject to visa delays at U.S. embassies and consulates overseas due to new security-related procedures that have been put into place in certain non-immigrant visa application cases (these primarily affect applicants from certain countries, but any visa applicant can be subject to these procedures). Visa delays can run from a few weeks to several months, depending on the case. Further information is available on the website of NAFSA: Association of International Educators at <http://www.nafsa.org/content/ProfessionalandEducationalResources/ImmigrationAdvisingResources/PA2001E.htm>
- If you are subject to “Special Registration” procedures for nationals of certain countries and for other nonimmigrants who have made unexplainable trips to these and other countries, you should check to be sure you are following all the rules. ***In particular, those subject to Special Registration must use specific ports of departure when leaving the U.S.*** Please review the in BCIS website at <http://www.immigration.gov/graphics/shared/lawenfor/specialreg/index.htm> for specific information on countries affected and rules of the program.
- Find out in advance what information you will need to supply on your visa application. All nonimmigrant visa applicants must complete Forms DS-156 (Nonimmigrant Visa Application) and DS-158 (Contact Information and Work History for Nonimmigrant Visa Applicant). Others will need to submit DS-157 (Supplemental Nonimmigrant Visa Application) as well. You can access all of these forms at <http://travel.state.gov/visaforms.html>