



International Programs and Services / 183 Belk Bldg., Cullowhee, NC 28723/ Fax: (828) 227-7080 Phone: (828) 227-7494

IMMIGRATION INFORMATION FOR NEW & TRANSFER STUDENTS

International Programs and Services (IPS) is pleased to welcome you to Western Carolina University (WCU). You will be joining a diverse student body of 9,000 that includes 200 students from over 30 different countries. IPS is not a part of the U.S. government, can and will assist you with governmental agencies including U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), immigration regulations and required documentation during your stay at WCU. USCIS regulations for international students have been going through many changes recently. Student & Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) legislation has affected the procedures that staff at higher education institutions must follow when advising international students & scholars. SEVIS, an internet-based system developed by USCIS, will streamline existing reporting and record keeping within USCIS & Department of State Regulations. IPS' responsibility is to Western Carolina University and to you. We keep very current with the latest changes in the complex legislation and procedures. Our office is a safe place to ask any questions you may have regarding your immigration status while in the U.S. **The first step in maintaining a good immigration status is to report to IPS for mandatory orientation so the required copies of your passport and other immigration documents can be made.** Once again, we welcome you to WCU and are very happy that you have chosen this outstanding educational institution at which to pursue your educational objectives.

*** NEW REQUIREMENTS TO ENTER THE USA ***

SEVIS I-901 Fee Payment- The U.S government starting September 1, 2004 requires students and exchange visitors to pay a SEVIS fee in order to qualify for a non-immigrant F or J visa **for an initial entry** to begin a program of study in the USA. Proof of SEVIS fee payment is required before a student can apply for a **visa to begin a new program of study**. A student will use the I-20 issued by the school where he or she intend to study in order to pay the fee on-line via the following website, <http://www.FMJfee.com>. The student should print the receipt and bring it to the consulate interview as proof of payment in order to be qualified for the F-1 visa. Please visit the following websites for more detailed information about the SEVIS fee and payment options; www.wcu.edu/ips or www.cafss.nafsa.org/SEVISFee/SEVIS_Fee_QA_general.htm (Canadian & Bermuda citizens, who are not required to have an F-1 visa, must pay the SEVIS fee and show proof of payment in order to qualify for admission at the Port of Entry.)

Mandatory Immigration Orientation – All new international students, including students transferring from other U.S. institutions, **must attend a mandatory immigration orientation session**. Please bring your passport and all immigration documents (e.g. I-20 or DS-2019, passport, I-94 card, and visa) with you to this orientation. Contrary to written instructions on the form I-20 or DS-2019, please contact the IPS once you arrive on the WCU campus. Exact dates and activities for International Student Orientation will be announced before your arrival in the USA.

Immigration Documents - Many different types of immigration statuses are available for entry to the United States. Western Carolina University issues documents that allow you to apply for a student entry visa at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate. Student status is a non-immigrant status because students are temporarily in the U. S. for educational purposes only and are expected to return home after their studies are completed.

Undergraduate students (new international, exchange, and transfer students from other U.S. institutions) will receive their immigration documents and admission letters directly from IPS – 183 Belk Bldg. Cullowhee, NC 28723

Graduate students (new international, exchange, and transfer students from other U.S. institutions) will receive their immigration documents and admission letters directly from IPS – 183 Belk Bldg. Cullowhee, NC 28723. If you have admission questions, please contact IPS directly. Further assistance for immigration and visa matters can be also obtained at IPS after your arrival.

Applying for a Visa - Although WCU has admitted you to the university, if you are coming directly from overseas, the U.S. Embassy/Consulate will make the final decision in granting you a student visa to enter the U.S. (Not required for Canadians)

Where should you go? The U. S. Embassy/Consulate closest to your home will process your visa application.

When should you go? Most Embassies/Consulates have specific hours to review non-immigrant visa applications. Most applicants will go to the Embassy/Consulate and have to wait in long lines, but there are a few that will process your application by mail. Please check with the one located closest to your home for their application procedures.

- Remember that the Embassy/Consulate will close for both U.S. and local holidays.
- All student visa holders are required to pay the SEVIS fee before making an appointment for a student visa.
- Try to arrange an interview **long** before the day you plan to travel to the U.S.
- Most U. S. universities begin their academic year in August, so this is a very busy month at the Embassy/Consulate. Plan ahead so you can arrive in time for orientation and class.

What should you take to the U.S. Embassy/Consulate? – It is crucial that you take **all** the proper documents with you during your visa appointment. If you don't, you may be required to return for a second time, which may delay your visa for several weeks.

Common Forms/Documents/Items Required for Visa Application- additional information at <http://travel.state.gov/visa/index.html>

- visa application forms from the Embassy/Consulate
- visa application fee – amount varies per country
- receipt of SEVIS fee payment
- I-20 provided by WCU or sponsoring agency
- letter of admission from WCU
- valid passport
- copy of TOEFL Score (WCU requires for non native English speakers)
- original proof of finances, assistantship letter if applicable
- photographs for visa
- previous school transcripts, diplomas or records (be prepared to present them if requested).

What happens at the U.S. Embassy/Consulate – You may be required to speak with a consular official that reviews many visa applications every day. The consular officer will quickly review your documents and ask about your plans of study. The officer will verify that you have the academic ability, English language skills, and the financial resources to study at WCU. Since you are applying for a non-immigrant visa, the officer will require documentation of proof of intent to return to your home country. The officer will then give you instructions about when to return to pick up your documents and your visa or when to expect them in the mail. A few applicants may receive a request to submit additional information.

Tourist Visa – You should **not** enter the U.S. as a tourist using a B-1/B-2 visa or using the WT-Visa Waiver Process! You are intending to be a student, so you should **not** apply for a tourist visa. You may encounter immigration problems if you enter the U.S. using an inappropriate visa. Don't worry if you already have a tourist visa in your passport, this will not prevent you from getting a student visa. You cannot attend Western Carolina University, if you enter the U.S. on a tourist visa.

Entering the U.S. - Do not arrange to fly to the U.S. prior to getting your visa from the U.S. Embassy/Consulate. Also, remember that you cannot enter the U.S. more than 30 days before the start date listed on your I-20/DS-2019. If you do not have the correct immigration paperwork, you may not be allowed to board the plane. **Carry your immigration documents with you onto the plane because you will be required to present your passport and these documents to the Immigration Officer at your port of entry.** On the plane you will be given a form to complete called the I-94 arrival/departure record. Since you are coming to the U.S. in the F or J visa category, you will complete a white card. When you arrive at your port of entry, you will be inspected for admission into the U.S. At this time, you will present your passport, I-20/DS-2019 and I-94 card, and financial information to the Immigration Officer. Your passport and I-94 will be stamped with an entry date and the departure part of the I-94 card will be stapled into your passport. The inspector will stamp your I-20/DS-2019 and return it to you. Put these documents in a safe place because you will need to present them to IPS upon your arrival at Western Carolina University. Losing these documents will cost you significantly in time and money to replace. **Please Note: You are required by USCIS to attend the institution whose Immigration documents you use to enter the U.S.**

Transferring from another U.S. institution – IPS will include a transfer clearance form for all individuals coming to WCU from another U.S. institution. You will be required to have the international student advisor at your current school complete the form and forward it IPS PRIOR to your arrival at WCU. Failure to process your transfer to WCU within the first 15 days of the semester will be a violation of your visa status, so please attend International Student Orientation to avoid this.

Mandatory Student Health Insurance-

All WCU international and exchange students are required to have medical insurance while attending WCU. WCU has strict requirements with regard to what comprises adequate medical insurance coverage in the United States and has selected an international student insurance plan with Pearce & Pearce to serve WCU. Insurance a student purchases before coming to the U.S. is considered supplementary to the Pearce & Pearce mandatory policy. Enrollment in the WCU Health Insurance Plan is automatic, and the cost of the insurance policy will be included in the tuition and fee bill upon registration for classes each semester. The fall insurance premium appears on the fall semester bill; the premiums for spring coverage are on the spring semester bill. Individual student coverage for academic year costs \$596. Please contact IPS regarding the policy and mandatory enrollment.