

# **J-1 Exchange Visitor Pre-Arrival Handbook**



# The University of Akron

## J-1 Exchange Visitor Pre-Arrival Information

### FLYING TO AKRON

*Transit visas: If you are traveling through Canada you will need to [secure a visa](#). All visitors, except Canadian or US citizens, require a visa to enter or to transit Canada. This applies even if you are not planning on leaving the Canadian airport. Be sure to check any other country you plan to transit on your way to Akron, too - you may need additional visas.*

The two closest airports to campus are:

1. **Cleveland Hopkins International Airport (CLE)** – 40 miles north of campus
2. **Akron/Canton Regional Airport (CAK)** – 17 miles south of campus

Please check with your academic department to see whether they will be arranging for your pickup from the airport. If not, you will need to make your own transportation arrangements from the airport.

Private Taxi or Shared Shuttle (Please note: these services can be very expensive).

- [Cleveland Hopkins International Airport \(CLE\)](#)
- [Akron/Canton Airport \(CAK\)](#)
- [Uber.com](#)

### MANDATORY IMMIGRATION CHECK-IN

Check-in is required by federal immigration regulations. Failure to check-in will result in termination of your SEVIS record. Check-in will take place at the International Center in Buchtel Hall, Suite 202, during business hours (M-F from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.). Be sure to bring your immigration documents (and those of any accompanying J-2 dependents) with you!

### LIFE IN AKRON

#### Housing

- **Undergraduate J-1 students** are required to live on campus. For more information about campus residence halls, visit <https://www.uakron.edu/international/plan/arrival-information>.
- **Visiting Scholars, Student Interns, and Graduate Students:** visit <http://www.uakron.edu/offcampus/> for more information about off-campus housing. This is not an exclusive list and many apartments that are for rent may not be listed online.

- We strongly encourage you to thoroughly inspect your apartment/house and make sure that you understand the terms and conditions of the lease before you sign the legal Lease Agreement.
- The Off-Campus Housing [Facebook page](#) provides some options if you will only be at UA for a short period of time or are looking for a housemate to live with. Please note: this is a public Facebook page (it is monitored by the Off-Campus Housing team) and you should be careful about the information you share directly on the page. We suggest you message someone privately with your contact information if you are interested in finding out about one of the houses or apartments advertised.

### **UA Identification Number, UA Email Account, and ZipCard**

- **Research Scholars, Professors, Short-Term Scholars, and Student Interns:** When you arrive, your academic department should be able to provide you with your UA identification number. With this number, you can obtain a UA email account and your ZipCard. The ZipCard is the official identification card for The University of Akron. It provides students and employees with access to campus services. If you need help obtaining these after your arrival, please contact the International Center.
- **Students:** If you have not already received your UA identification number and/or set up your UA email account before you arrive, request assistance from the International Center upon arrival. When you check in, we will also explain how you can apply for a ZipCard.

### **Social Security Number (SSN)**

A SSN is a unique taxpayer identification number issued by the Social Security Administration (SSA). Exchange Visitors who will be paid by The University of Akron must obtain an SSN after arrival. This number will be yours for life and your card should be kept in a safe place. The card will state “Valid for work only with DHS authorization.” Visit the [SSA website](#) to review the documents you will need to take to the SSA office to apply for a SSN. The [SSA office](#) nearest to The University of Akron is located at 2 S Main Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Akron.

### **Opening a Bank Account**

When you open an account, the bank will ask for your passport, DS-2019, I-94 number, and Social Security Number (SSN). Some banks require you to have a SSN, but others will allow you to open an account using another identification number. If you will be having funds wired from abroad, be sure to ask the bank official to provide you with the necessary information you will need for such a transfer. If you have a spouse or other dependents, you may wish to open a joint account so you can access the same funds.

### **Writing a Check**

You will often be provided with a book of checks when you open a bank account. You may wish to use checks to pay your rent, electric bill, etc. and keep track of your payments. Here are steps to follow:

1. Write the date on which you are “issuing” or writing a check.
2. Write the name of the person or business to which you are making the payment.

3. Write the dollar amount in numerals (e.g., \$10.35). Put the first number directly after the dollar sign so there is no room for someone to add another number.
4. Write out the dollar amount (e.g., "Ten and 35/100") and draw a line to fill the space.
5. Sign your name in English as it is printed on the check (not in Chinese, Japanese, etc.).
6. Write a description of the purpose of the check in the lower left-hand corner (e.g. "July rent"), or if it is for payment of an account, write the account number in that space.

## Ohio Driver's License

You are required to have a valid driver's license to drive in the United States. If you already have a valid driver's license from your home country *and* your country has a reciprocity agreement with the United States as part of the U.N. Convention on Road Traffic, you may use your home country license combined with an international driving permit for up to 1 year without having to obtain an Ohio driver's license. Contact the [Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles](#) if you have questions about the reciprocity agreement or how to obtain a license.

To obtain an Ohio driver's license, follow these steps:

1. Obtain the [Digest of Ohio Motor Vehicle Laws](#) from the Bureau of Motor Vehicles.
2. Visit the nearest [Deputy Registrar Office](#) with the necessary identification documents and pay the fee to get a temporary permit application packet.
3. Go to the nearest driver's license exam station to take a vision and written test on Ohio motor vehicle regulations and traffic signs.
4. You will then be issued a temporary instruction permit, which authorizes you to practice for your road test only if there is a licensed driver in the front seat next to you.
5. When you feel confident in your driving skills, contact the nearest [exam station](#) to schedule a road test.
6. To be issued a license, you must present a valid passport, your U.S. visa, your I-94 record, your DS-2019, and have proof that you will reside or have resided in Ohio for 12 months.
7. You must also purchase auto insurance for the vehicle that you are driving. It is unlawful to drive without maintaining the minimum insurance coverage.

For more information, visit [bmv.ohio.gov](http://bmv.ohio.gov).

## Links to Additional Resources in the Akron Area

- Public Transportation: [Akron Metro](#)
- [Akron Public Library](#)
- English Language Courses (for adults): [English Language Institute](#), [International Institute](#), [Akron Internationals](#)
- [Akron Public Schools](#) (elementary & secondary education)
- [Social Security Administration](#)
- Banks: There are [numerous banks](#) in the local area. The only on-campus bank is [PNC Bank](#).
- Major medical facilities: [Akron General](#), [Summa Health](#)
- Recreation centers: [UA Recreation & Wellness Center](#), [Balch Street Fitness Center & Citi Center Athletic Club](#)
- [Community centers](#)
- [Akron Visitor Information](#)

- Ohio Tourism Information: [Ohio: Find it Here](#), [Ohio.gov/tourism](http://Ohio.gov/tourism)
- Parks: [Summit Metro Parks](#), [Cuyahoga Valley National Park](#)
- Zoos: [Akron Zoo](#), [Cleveland Zoo](#)
- Museums and Historical Sites: [Akron Art Museum](#), [Cleveland Art Museum](#), [Rock & Roll Hall of Fame](#), [Stan Hywet Hall & Gardens](#), [Hower House](#)

## Weather

Weather in Akron is generally cold in winter (December through March), mild in the spring (March through May), hot in the summer (June through September), and mild in autumn (September through November).

## Alcohol & Tobacco

In Ohio, the legal age to purchase and/or drink alcohol is 21. It is illegal to carry open containers of alcohol in public places like the street or transport them in your car. The laws against drunk driving are strict. Do not drink before you drive. If you are arrested for driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol, your visa will be automatically revoked. The University of Akron is a non-smoking campus.

## YOUR ACTIVITIES AS A J-1 EXCHANGE VISITOR

### Categories

You are coming to the U.S. as an Exchange Visitor to pursue a specific program objective. You have been assigned a category in Section 4 of your DS-2019 based on the description of your intended activities at The University of Akron. The primary activity for each category is described below. You are generally not permitted to change your category.

- **Research Scholar:** Conduct research, observe, or consult in connection with a research project. A research scholar may also teach or lecture in his or her field.
- **Professor:** Teach, lecture, observe, or consult. A professor may also conduct research.
- **Short-Term Scholar:** Teach, lecture, observe, consult, train, or demonstrate special skills.
- **Student:** Pursue a full course of studies (degree or non-degree) at the university level.
- **Student Intern:** Participate in a full-time internship (a minimum of 32 hours per week) that will fulfill educational objectives for the student's current degree program at his or her home institution.

### Time Limits

- **Research Scholars and Professors:** Minimum stay of 3 weeks. Maximum stay of 5 years.
- **Short-Term Scholars:** No minimum stay. Maximum stay of 6 months.
- **Non-Degree Students:** Minimum stay of 3 weeks. Maximum stay of 24 months.
- **Degree-seeking Students:** You may stay for the duration of your degree program, as well as any authorized Academic Training.
- **Student Interns:** Minimum stay of 3 weeks. Maximum stay of 12 months at each degree level.

## Changes

You are expected to conduct your Exchange Visitor program activities at your current academic department at The University of Akron unless special arrangements have been made. The International Center must approve all changes. Please consult the International Center if you are considering a change to your duties, site of activity, funding source, supervisor, and/or duration of your program.

## Coursework

- **J-1 Students** must enroll in a full course of study. For more information, see the J-1 Student Handbook.
- **J-1 Research Scholars, Professors, Short-Term Scholars, and Student Interns** may attend courses part-time, but the activities listed in Section 4 of the DS-2019 must be your primary activity. If you decide to become a full-time student, you will need to change to the Student category. Please see the information below about “Change of Category.”

## Off-Campus Employment

- **Students:** Please see the J-1 Student Handbook for information about acquiring the necessary authorization for off-campus and on-campus employment.
- **Research Scholars, Professors, & Short-Term Scholars:** It is possible to receive payment or reimbursement for occasional short-term activities such as lecturing, consulting, or conducting a seminar in your field at another institution or conference with the approval of the International Center. You must obtain approval from your supervisor and the International Center prior to the activity, and the opportunity must meet these criteria:
  - Directly related to the objective of your Exchange Visitor program;
  - Incidental to your primary Exchange Visitor program activities; and
  - Does not delay the completion date of your Exchange Visitor program.

## IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS, TERMS, and INFORMATION

**U.S. Department of State (DOS):** Has authority over J-1 Exchange Visitors. Operates U.S. embassies and consulates around the world.

**U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS):** Oversees 3 agencies –

- **U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS):** Responsible for citizenship, asylum, lawful permanent residency, changes of status within the U.S., employment authorization, and family-based and employment-related immigration.
- **Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE):** Responsible for immigration investigations, detention, removal, and intelligence.
- **Customs and Border Protection (CBP):** Responsible for immigration inspections at U.S. ports of entry, border patrol, and custom services.

**SEVIS:** The U.S. government database that monitors F, J, and M students and Exchange Visitors in the U.S. Your DS-2019 is generated through SEVIS, and The University of Akron is required to update SEVIS with changes related to your program, such as your U.S. address, changes in financial support, and departure from the program.

**Responsible Officer (RO) and Alternative Responsible Officer (ARO):** Individuals employed by the sponsoring program who are authorized to access the SEVIS database and advise Exchange Visitors. The RO and AROs at The University of Akron are:

- Robyn Brown, Responsible Officer, [rkb@uakron.edu](mailto:rkb@uakron.edu), 330.972.6798
- Tracy McCune, Alternate Responsible Officer, [mccune@uakron.edu](mailto:mccune@uakron.edu), 330.972.6405
- Emily Aronson, Alternate Responsible Officer, [era1@uakron.edu](mailto:era1@uakron.edu), 330.972.6296
- Jung Shin, Alternate Responsible Officer, [jshin@uakron.edu](mailto:jshin@uakron.edu), 330.972.7762

**DS-2019 (Certificate of Eligibility):** This document designates you as a J-1 Exchange Visitor and identifies your sponsor, program number, activities, financial support, dates of your program, and other information. When you first enter the U.S. with your DS-2019, an official from CBP will review the document. You must have your valid DS-2019 with you any time you leave and re-enter the United States. Please keep all copies of your DS-2019 during and after your stay for your records.

- **Note:** You must enter the U.S. within 30 days of the “From” date in Section 3 of your DS-2019 and report to the International Center within those 30 days, or your SEVIS record will automatically change to No Show.” If this occurs, you may not enter the U.S. with the DS-2019 you were issued.

**Form I-94 (Arrival-Departure Record):** CBP gathers travelers’ arrival/departure information electronically at air and sea borders. After your arrival in the United States, you may obtain your I-94 online at [cbp.gov/i94](http://cbp.gov/i94). This form verifies your immigration status, date of entry to the U.S., and authorized length of stay. J-1 Exchange Visitors are authorized for “D/S”; which means “duration of status.” This means you may lawfully remain in the U.S. until the date indicated in Section 3 of your DS-2019, plus a 30-day grace period. You MAY NOT work during the 30-day grace period.

**Visa:** J-1 Exchange Visitors, except those from Canada, are required to have a valid entry visa to enter the U.S. The J-1 visa will show an expiration date and the number of entries for which you may use it during that time. For example, “M” stands for “multiple.” If your visa expires while you are in the U.S., you may remain in the U.S. as long as your DS-2019 is valid and you are still maintaining J-1 status. However, if you leave the U.S. and wish to return, you must obtain a valid J-1 visa abroad (there are exceptions to this for some travelers to Canada, Mexico, and some Caribbean islands).

**Passport:** Your passport must be valid throughout your stay in the U.S. and least 6 months beyond your duration of stay (as shown by the Program End Date on the DS-2019). If you have an expired passport, you may be denied re-entry to the U.S. after a trip abroad or you may be denied immigration benefits such as employment authorization, changing status, or extending your stay. Contact your home country’s consulate or embassy in the U.S. to apply for passport renewal.

## **IMMIGRATION PROCEDURES**

**Grace Period:** Your permission to stay in the U.S. ends 30 days after the expiration date of your DS-2019. Employment permission ends on the date listed as your Program End Date on the DS-2019 (or earlier, if you are a student and your work authorization letter expires earlier). During this period, you may prepare for departure, travel within the U.S., or apply to change your visa status.

**Extensions:** To be eligible for an extension, you must be working toward the same objective on your DS-2019, have adequate funding for the additional time period, have the required health insurance, and the extension must not exceed your time limit. Apply for an extension at least 2 weeks in advance of the expiration of your DS-2019.

- **Student:** If you are a degree-seeking student, you will need your academic advisor's explanation of why an extension is needed. If you are a non-degree student, you must obtain permission from your home institution and the International Center.
- **Research Scholar, Professor, Short-Term Scholar, or Student Intern:** Your host department must request the extension and submit required supporting documentation before your grace period begins.

*Note:* If you have obtained a waiver to the 212(e) home residency requirement, you are not eligible for an extension.

*Plan ahead:* If your J-2 dependent has employment authorization, he or she may not apply for an extension of employment authorization until your J-1 extension is processed. Please plan accordingly, as employment authorization can take around 3 months for USCIS to process.

**Transfer:** If you will be completing the same objective for which you entered the U.S. and still have time remaining in your category, you may transfer from one program sponsor to another. The International Center must first transfer your SEVIS record to the new program sponsor. We will only authorize a transfer to another program sponsor if it is for the purpose of completing the original objective, consistent with the goals of the Exchange Visitor program, and your sponsoring UA department agrees.

**Change of Category:** Changing your J-1 category requires approval by the Department of State and can be difficult to obtain because it usually represents a change of objective. In many cases it will likely be most expedient to either leave the U.S. and apply for a new J-1 visa for the new category, or apply to change to another relevant visa category (e.g., F-1, H-1B) if your circumstances allow.

- Changing from the Research Scholar to Professor category, and vice versa, does not require approval by the Department of State.
- Students matriculating from one educational level to another (e.g. Master's to PhD) also does not require approval by the Department of State.

**Change of Status:** If you are not subject to the 212(e) home residency requirement (see below), or if you obtained a waiver, you may apply for a change to any other status for which you are qualified. Processes depend on the type of status you wish to obtain, and you must apply before your J-1 status expires. For more information about changing to another nonimmigrant status, review this [USCIS brochure](#).

**Completing or Withdrawing from your Program and Departing the U.S.:** Complete the Notice of Departure form available on the [Visiting Scholars website](#) and submit it to the International Center prior to departure.



## **TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE U.S.**

If you travel abroad, you must take the following documents to re-enter:

- Passport (valid at least 6 months beyond your expected return date to the U.S.);
- Valid J-1 visa; and
- DS-2019 endorsed for travel.

We also recommend that you bring proof that you are conducting the objective for which you were provided the J-1 visa (e.g., students may provide an enrollment verification letter and scholars may provide a confirmation letter from their supervisor).

### **Travel Endorsement**

Before traveling outside the U.S., bring your DS-2019 to the International Center and complete the Travel Signature Request Form. An RO or ARO will endorse your DS-2019 to confirm you are in good standing at The University of Akron. This signature remains valid for 1 year from the date of signature, or until the end date on your DS-2019 (whichever is earlier). The signature is no longer valid if your SEVIS record has been terminated.

### **Travel to Mexico, Canada, and Adjacent Caribbean Islands (except Cuba)**

Individuals from certain countries are required to have a visa or Electronic Travel Authorization (eTA) to enter these countries. For more information, visit the embassy or consulate website of the country you plan to visit.

If your trip to these countries will be for less than 30 days and you have an expired U.S. visa, you can typically return through “Automatic Visa Revalidation,” unless you are from a country designated as a state sponsor of terrorism, if you have previously overstayed a U.S. visa, or are applying for a new visa abroad.

### **When to Seek Guidance**

Set up an appointment to discuss your travel plans with an RO or ARO at the International Center if you:

- Have been arrested or convicted of a crime in the U.S.;
- Have applied to change to another visa status;
- Have applied for adjustment of status to lawful permanent residency;
- Are a student with authorized Academic Training;
- Are planning to travel abroad more than 30 days;
- Are traveling within 30 days of the end date noted on your DS-2019;
- May be subject to the “travel ban”; or
- Have other questions relating to your travel abroad and re-entry.

In some of these situations, we will recommend that you consult an experienced immigration attorney.

## **2-YEAR HOME RESIDENCY REQUIREMENT – 212(e)**

Some J-1 Exchange Visitors are subject to the 2-year home country residency requirement, also known as 212(e). If you are subject, you are ineligible for H, K, L, or lawful permanent residency until you fulfill the requirement or obtain a waiver, and you may not apply for a change of status within the U.S. To fulfill the requirement, you must be physically present in the country listed on your DS-2019 for 2 years. The 2 years need not be consecutive.

The most common reasons for being subject to 212(e) are:

- Your J-1 Exchange Visitor program is funded in whole or in part by your home government or the U.S. government;
- Your field of work or study appears on the [Exchange Visitor Skills List](#);
- You participated in a J-1 graduate medical education or training program; or
- You are the dependent of a J-1 Exchange Visitor who is subject to the requirement.

Your visa, DS-2019, or both may indicate if you are subject to the 212(e) requirement, but it does not always appear on these documents. If you are uncertain, contact the International Center.

## **HEALTH CARE AND INSURANCE**

Health insurance coverage is required for all J-1 Exchange Visitors and their dependents. The U.S. Department of State has established minimum requirements for the coverage in order to protect you and your family members who are in the U.S. with you. You must maintain health insurance meeting the regulations for the time period specified on your DS-2019. If you willfully fail to maintain the minimum insurance coverage or make a material misrepresentation to The University of Akron concerning your coverage, your J-1 Exchange Visitor program will be subject to termination.

In the U.S., certain kinds of medical care, such as eye exams and dental care, are typically not covered by health insurance, and can be very expensive. We recommend that you take care of these needs prior to entering the U.S.

- **Students:** You will be automatically enrolled in The University of Akron's student health insurance plan. Information about this plan is included with your DS-2019.
- **Professors, Research Professors, Short-Term Scholars, & Student Interns:**
  - **If you will receive health insurance through The University of Akron:** You must obtain insurance meeting the minimum requirements to cover the gap between when you arrive and when their health coverage begins. The coverage begins on the first day of the month *following* the start of your program at UA. After your UA insurance coverage begins, you must nevertheless have supplemental insurance that includes repatriation and evacuation insurance meeting the minimum requirements listed below. We have included information about health insurance providers with your DS-2019.
  - **If you will NOT receive health insurance through The University of Akron:** You must obtain insurance meeting the minimum requirements. We have included information about health insurance providers with your DS-2019.

## **Minimum Insurance Requirements**

- Medical benefits of at least \$100,000 per accident or illness;
- Repatriation of remains in the amount of \$25,000;
- Expenses associated with medical evacuation to your home country in the amount of at least \$50,000;
- A deductible not to exceed \$500 per accident or illness;
- Underwritten by an insurance corporation with an A.M. Best rating of “A-” or above, an Insurance Solvency International, Ltd. (ISI) rating of “A-1” or above, a Standard & Poor’s Claims Paying Ability Rating of “A-” or above, a Weiss Research, Inc., rating of “B+” or above, or be backed by the full faith and credit of your home country’s government.

## **EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS AND LAWS**

Visit [this website](#) for information about rights and protections for workers in the U.S.

## **DEPENDENTS (J-2)**

Your spouse or child(ren) under age 21 can apply for J-2 dependent visas and accompany you or join you if you have enough funds to cover their expenses. If you informed us that your dependents will be coming with you to the U.S., you have received a DS-2019 for each dependent, which will allow them to apply for J-2 visas when you apply for your J-1 visa. If you came to the U.S. alone and your spouse and/or child(ren) decide to join you, you may apply at the International Center for their DS-2019(s).

The J-2’s status is dependent on yours. When you travel outside the U.S. and your dependents stay in the U.S., you must return within a reasonable time or the J-2 may be considered out of status. If the J-1 departs the U.S. after the J-1 program ends, the J-2 dependent should also leave or change to a different status.

**Insurance:** J-2 dependents must have the same insurance coverage as the J-1 Exchange Visitor.

**2-Year Home Residency Requirement:** If you are subject to the 212(e) home residence requirement, your dependents are also subject.

**Travel:** If your dependent travels outside the U.S., he or she will need a travel endorsement on the DS-2019 and should follow the travel guidelines mentioned above.

**Employment Eligibility:** J-2 dependents age 16 or older are eligible for employment authorization. They must first be present in the U.S., then apply to USCIS for an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) that is valid for one year at a time or the same length as the J-1 program length, whichever is shorter. Approval for employment authorization may take around 3 months, and the J-2 may not begin employment until he or she has the EAD and the start date has begun.

**Departure:** If a J-2 dependent is departing the U.S. prior to the J-1’s departure, it must be reported to the International Center.