



PRE-ARRIVAL INFORMATION

Purpose of the BridgeUSA Exchange Visitor Program

The objective of the BridgeUSA J-1 Exchange Visitor Program is “to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchanges.” [Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act (Fulbright-Hayes Act of 1961)] The Exchange Visitor program is often referred to as a “J-1 Program” because the “J-1” class of visa is issued to international professionals and students invited to the United States to participate in educational and cultural exchange activities. **As of October 27, 2020, the program had a re-branding and is now referred to as the BridgeUSA program instead of just the J visa program.**

All visiting international scholars, regardless of immigration status, must have official university appointments or academic affiliations with the University. Scholars may or may not be paid by the university.

The nature of the work, activities, or employment will determine the appropriate visa classification for an international visitor; in most cases, the university invites “non-immigrants” to engage in cultural and educational exchange under the Bridge USA J-1 Exchange Visitor classification. The BridgeUSA J-1 Exchange Visitor program is described on the ISS website as well as in printed documents available in the ISS office (brochures also attached). Non-immigrants are defined as those who intend to return to their home countries upon completion of their programs. Visiting scholars must come to the United States on appropriate visas. Departments and prospective visiting scholars should clearly understand these distinctions before preparing documents, working with the Office of International Students and Scholars (ISS) and interacting with consular and immigration officers.

The university must maintain strict procedures to maintain the integrity of its international exchange and employment activities. Unauthorized employment of scholars and inappropriate use of exchange visitor programs is a violation of federal law.

NOTE: As a J-1 exchange visitor you may be subject to either the 212-E Home Residency Requirement or the 2 Year Participation Bar. For more information, please visit our website here: <https://icl.okstate.edu/iss/general-information-scholars.html>

Applying for Your Visa

To apply for a J-1 visa, you will need a Form DS-2019, “Certificate of Eligibility,” issued by your program sponsor. This document will be sent to you by the International Students and Scholars Office after all necessary application documents have been received. Read the instructions on the back of the form carefully, sign where indicated, and present it along with your valid passport and appropriate financial documentation (job offer letter, funding letter from your home government or institution, and/or a personal bank statement) to the Consular Officer at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate serving your place of residence. Make sure that all supporting financial documents are originals on official letterhead. Show all funds in U.S. dollars.

U.S. Embassies and Consulates vary in their application procedures. Most now require personal interviews. Some consulates, however, will permit you to apply for your visa by mail under limited circumstances. In all cases, you will be required to complete Form DS-160, Nonimmigrant Visa Application, which is available online and from the U.S. Embassy or Consulate. You will also be required to pay a visa application fee and, perhaps, a visa issuance fee, which depends on your country of citizenship. We also suggest you visit the U.S. Embassy and Consulate Website (<http://www.usembassy.gov/>) to find the Consulate/Embassy where you will apply for your visa, and familiarize yourself with its J-1 application procedures.

SEVIS Fee:

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) requires the collection of a one-time \$220 SEVIS fee for Exchange Visitor students and scholars. The SEVIS fee is separate from and in addition to your visa application fee. Dependents are not required to pay this fee.

CANADIAN CITIZENS: Although you are exempt from visa requirements, you must pay the SEVIS fee, and submit your Form DS-2019 and supporting documents to the immigration officer at the U.S. border or other point of entry.

For instructions on how to pay the SEVIS fee see attached form.

What the Consular Officer will be looking for:

Every individual who applies for a non-immigrant visa to enter the U.S. is presumed by law to be an “intending immigrant.” This means that the U.S. Government takes the position that you do not plan to return to your home country after you complete your program. For this reason, the burden of proof will be on you to convince the Consular Officer that you have close ties to your home country and plan to return upon completion of your program. Failure to prove that you will return home is the most common reason for visa denial. We recommend that you be ready to provide proof of the following at the time of your visa interview:

- Proof of a permanent residence in your home country that you have no intention of abandoning;
- Strong economic, social, and family ties to your home country;
- The usefulness of your experience in the U.S. to your home country;
- Adequate financial resources to support yourself and any accompanying family members;
- Adequate knowledge of English.

For more information about applying for your visa, visit the State Department’s website here: <http://j1visa.state.gov/>

Arrival in the U.S.

Unless you are a citizen of Canada, you cannot enter the U.S. as an Exchange Visitor unless you have a J-1 visa in your passport. You can enter the U.S. no more than 30 days before the beginning of your program as shown on your Form DS-2019 and you can remain in the U.S. no more than 30 days after the ending date. Employment is prohibited during these 30-day “grace periods.”

When you arrive in the U.S., you have to “apply for admission” to the U.S. As you go through U.S. Customs and Immigration, an immigration officer will inspect your documents. Present your passport, visa, and Form DS-2019 to the officer.

If your documents are in order, you will be “admitted to the U.S.” in J-1 status. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (also known as CBP) now gathers travelers’ arrival/departure information (I-94 information) automatically from their electronic travel records. Because advance information is only transmitted for air and sea travelers, CBP will still issue a paper form I-94 at land border ports of entry.

Upon admission, a CBP officer stamps the passport of each arriving non-immigrant traveler with the admission date, the class of admission, and the date that the traveler is admitted until.

It is very important that you keep your Forms DS-2019 and your passport in a safe location. These documents provide evidence that you have a legal right to be in the U.S.

Once you arrive you can access your I-94 here: <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/recent-search> by entering your passport information.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection: <http://www.cbp.gov/>

Travel to Stillwater

For questions pertaining to transportation to Stillwater, please make contact with your host department first, as they can assist you in finding transportation to Stillwater.

Fly into Stillwater Regional Airport (SWO): American Airlines services SWO daily.

Travel to Stillwater from Oklahoma City

You may choose one of the options below to travel to Stillwater if prior arrangements have not been made. **This is NOT a free service** and does require cash (or credit card) for the fare.

- Oklahoma City Airport Express (Blue Van): This service is a charter service and thus available at any time of the day just outside baggage claim. The cost ranges between US \$100.00 and \$135.00*. If there is more than one passenger in the van the cost is split among the passengers. <http://www.airportexpressokc.com/>
*Prices are subject to change.
- Taxi Service (Yellow Cab): Phone – 405-232-6161
Cost: Between US \$110.00 and \$130.00

Travel to Stillwater from Tulsa

- Taxi Service (Yellow Cab): Phone – 918-582-6161
Cost: Between US \$110.00 and \$130.00

For travel in Stillwater, the local taxi service is Cowboy Country Cab (phone – 405-372-8294). There is also the Oklahoma State University Bus System; you can visit their website here: <https://parking.okstate.edu/> (click “Transit Services” on the right of the page to view bus route information).

Reporting to ISS

As prescribed by federal law, the ISS is required to maintain records on all international scholars at OSU. After you arrive on campus, please report to the International Students and Scholars Office in 309 Wes Watkins Center. During check-in, we will copy your passport and immigration documents, verify health insurance coverage, and obtain some personal and emergency contact information from you. You will be given an orientation which will give you information about Oklahoma State University and the Stillwater community. Dependents are also required to check in with the ISS Office within 10 days of arrival to the US.

Health Insurance Coverage

U.S. Department of State regulations require all J-1 Exchange Visitors to have medical insurance for the scholar and any accompanying J-2 family members for the duration of the program (dates of the program as listed on the DS-2019). This insurance must meet the following requirements:

- Major medical coverage: \$100,000 (deductible not to exceed \$500)
- Repatriation of Remains: \$25,000
- Medical Evacuation: \$50,000

Fulfilling this requirement is essential, not only because medical treatment in the U.S. is very expensive, but also because **Exchange Visitors and their family members are considered to be in violation of J-1 status if they do not have insurance coverage and the ISS is required to terminate their program.** Also, the ISS cannot provide program benefits to scholars or family members who are not maintaining valid status (for example, extend the J-1 program, or provide signatures for travel.)

It is the responsibility of the J-1/J-2(s) to notify the ISS of dependents who are currently in the U.S. or who arrive at a later date and present evidence of the appropriate insurance coverage for the J-2(s).

If your program duration is less than one year, you must purchase an insurance policy for the entire duration of your program as indicated on the DS-2019. If your program will continue for more than one year, you must purchase insurance for the first year and provide proof each additional year that the insurance had been renewed. The proof of health insurance must be submitted to the ISS within 10 days of your arrival on the OSU campus. However, it is highly recommended to purchase your health insurance and have it active for the beginning of your travel.

Health Insurance for Dependents

As indicated previously, federal regulations require that all J-1 scholars purchase and maintain health insurance for themselves and all accompanying family members. Health insurance in the U.S. is expensive and can cost more than \$500 per month or more for a family plan. **Do not plan to bring your family if you cannot afford the cost of health insurance.**

Public Aid or Assistance

As a J-1 student or scholar you and your families are not eligible for “public aid or assistance”. In the U.S., common forms of “public aid or assistance” are subsidized housing, food stamps, medical care, and nutritious foods for pregnant women and children.

When you accept “public aid or assistance” benefits it may cause you to lose your legal status in the United States and prevent your lawful re-entry into the U.S. At the time you applied for a J visa you as a visiting scholar, you certified to the U.S. Consulate that you and your family have sufficient funds to support yourselves while participating in your program.

At present, cooperation between state social service agencies and the Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) and Department of State make it possible for a Port of Entry inspector or U.S. Consular officer to verify that a scholar and his/her family have accepted “public aid or assistance” benefits.

The acceptance of “public aid or assistance” benefits is interpreted that the student/scholar is unable to meet his or her financial obligations and which makes him or herself ineligible for J-1 status. You may have heard from other international families that social service agencies, hospitals or public housing administrators may offer such assistance and not realize that non-immigrants are ineligible for “public aid or assistance” benefits. Additionally, even though U.S. born children of non-immigrant parents may be eligible for pre- and post-natal public benefits, the non-immigrant parents may still be denied visas or re-entry based upon the child receiving those benefits. Again, this could be interpreted as the non-immigrant family not being able to meet their financial obligations despite the child being born as a U.S. citizen.

Women who become pregnant before medical insurance is purchased will not be covered under most insurance plans because pregnancy is considered a pre-existing condition. If the family cannot afford the birth of the child in the U.S. another option would be to return home for the duration of the pregnancy and the delivery.

Affordable Care Act

Additionally, J-1 scholars may be mandated to comply with the regulations set forth in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. <https://www.healthcare.gov/>

The Affordable Care Act mandates that all individuals who are considered U.S. residents for tax purposes (as defined by the IRS) carry adequate health insurance coverage. Most J-1 scholars are considered nonresidents and are not subject to the mandate. In general, J-1 scholars are considered nonresidents if they have been in the United States for less than 2 calendar years. It is the responsibility of the scholar to determine whether or not they are subject to the mandate.

Housing

For questions pertaining to housing, please make contact with your host department first, as they can assist you in your search for housing in Stillwater.

On-Campus Housing – If you are planning to secure on-campus housing, please apply as soon as possible; you can apply online at the Residential Life website. Housing accommodations on campus are limited and are sometimes difficult to reserve.

If you want to secure on-campus housing, contact Family Graduate Student Housing at fgsh@okstate.edu or reslife@okstate.edu with the following information; they will then reply with a temporary ID that you will be able to use to apply for on-campus housing:

- Biographical page of your passport
- Invitation letter
- Dates requested for housing

Residential Life: <http://reslife.okstate.edu/>

Off Campus Housing Guide:

https://offcampushousing.okstate.edu/?gclid=CjwKCAjwzeqVBhAoEiwAOrEmzY1tX1u_NneGCoGGm_bFgE6P7yaTcTC25c_tM_JOA7yOWaTuzDVwTPhoCSIEQAvD_BwE&gclidsrc=aw.ds

Bringing Your Family

If you are thinking about bringing your spouse and/or children with you, there are a few things you should consider. It is often more difficult to obtain a visa if you are bringing your family members. It may be more difficult to convince the consular officer of your intention to return to your home country if your family is in the U.S.

In addition, the Consular Officer must verify that you have sufficient financial resources to support your family in the U.S. In general, the consulates refer the latest U.S. poverty guidelines established by the Department of Health and Human Services. They expect you to exceed those guidelines by at least 25% in order to issue visas to family members. If you cannot provide evidence of the minimum requirement, it is likely that visas for your family members will be denied.

Listed below are the minimum financial guarantees required by OSU. This includes living expenses and health insurance. Please note that the cost of health insurance can increase with age.

	Expense per Month	Expense per Year
J-1 Exchange Visitor	\$1,700	\$20,400
J-1 EV and Spouse	\$2,550	\$30,600
J-1 EV and Child	\$2,125	\$25,500
J-1 EV, Spouse, and Child	\$2,975	\$35,700
J-1 EV, Spouse, and 2 Children	\$3,400	\$40,800

Work Authorization for Your Spouse

J-2 dependent spouses are eligible to apply for employment authorization from U.S. Customs and Immigration Services (USCIS). The income derived from the spouse's employment, however, **may not** be used to support the J-1 scholar and/or the family. Your spouse will be required to submit an estimate of the family's monthly budget and proof of adequate financial resources with the application for employment authorization. **Do not** plan to depend upon your spouse's income to support your family while you are in the U.S. Be aware that the process to apply for employment authorization can take months to process.

Additional Expenses

While at OSU you may encounter the following expenses:

- The Colvin Recreation Center is an on campus sports, recreation, and fitness center. Membership is not included with your program at OSU; however, you can purchase one for an additional fee. The fees are charged per semester, and as an affiliate you will receive a discounted rate. For more information you can visit their website here: <https://wellness.okstate.edu/recreation/membership.html>
- OSU Parking Permit – If you will have a vehicle while in the U.S., you may want to purchase a parking permit that allows you to park on the OSU campus. If you live in on-campus housing (dormitories or university apartments) and have a vehicle, you will be required to purchase a parking permit. Visit the OSU Parking Services website for more information: <https://parking.okstate.edu/>

Paying Taxes in the U.S.

Please be aware that you will be required to pay income taxes on any money you earn from within the U.S. unless a tax treaty between the U.S. and the country in which you most recently resided exempts you from payment of these taxes. J-1 visa holders are not required to pay into the U.S. social security system during the first two calendar years (or parts thereof) after arrival. They are required, however, to pay federal and state income taxes. Dependents of J-1 visa holders (J-2) who obtain employment authorization are required to pay both federal and state income taxes and social security taxes.

You will be given more information about taxes after you arrive in the U.S. If you would like to find out whether your country of residence has a tax treaty with the U.S, check out Publication 901 on the IRS website: www.irs.gov

How to Activate Your O-Key Account

If you are on your own funding, you will be issued an ID number in advance, and you can follow the instructions below. If you are on funding from OSU, you will receive this after your employment papers are processed upon arrival.

Step 1: Prior to your arrival at OSU, you will receive an email from ID Services stating that you can activate your O-Key Account. This email should include a temporary ID number and a PIN number.

Step 2: Visit <http://okey.okstate.edu>

Step 3: Click O-Key Activation

Step 4: Enter the following information:

1. First two letters of your family name
2. The last 5 digits of your temporary ID (found in the email sent to you by ID Services)
3. Your Birthdate - Month/Day/Year

Step 5: The next step requires entering the PIN number that was sent to you in email from ID Services

Step 6: Finish the O-Key Activation Steps

NOTE: If you do not have a cell phone number you can enter 000-000-0000. After you enter the ten-digit phone number and click submit, you will return to the previous page. Once there, click refresh, and you will be able to submit your O-Key application. **Questions?** Email ID Services at: helpdesk@okstate.edu.

****If you do not receive an email regarding your O-Key Account by the week before your travel to Stillwater, please contact the ID Services Helpdesk at helpdesk@okstate.edu. You will not be able to access OSU Wi-Fi internet or campus computers without an active O-Key Account!****

Sim Card Phone Services

In case you would like to get a U.S. phone number before you arrive, there are some companies that allow students to get their U.S. phone number in their home country, so service is ready to use as soon as you step off the plane. Here are a couple of options.

campusSIMS: <https://www.campussims.com/>

StudentSIMS: <https://studentsims.com/>

Other Resources

OSU ID Card Service Policies: <https://it.okstate.edu/policies-procedures-and-guidelines/id-services.html#:~:text=New%20students%20enrolled%20in%20credit,cost%20of%20a%20new%20card.>

Applying for a Driver's License: http://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/dmv_factsheet.pdf

OK State ID Card: <https://www.dps.state.ok.us/dls/okid.htm>

Oklahoma Department of Public Safety: <https://www.dps.state.ok.us/dls/default.htm>

Child Care Locator: <http://childcarefind.okdhs.org/childcarefind/>

Stillwater Public Schools: <http://www.stillwaterschools.com/>

OSU Family Resource Center: <https://reslife.okstate.edu/housing-options/neighborhoods/family-resource-center.html>