

**West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (HEPC)
Exchange Visitor Program**



Consortium Member Institutions:

Bluefield State College
Concord University
Fairmont State University
Glennville State College
Shepherd University
West Liberty University

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I. Welcome to West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (HEPC)

The Exchange Visitor Handbook has been prepared by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (HEPC) consortium member institutions. All of us at HEPC join in welcoming you to West Virginia. We hope that your stay at our consortium member institutions will be both pleasant and successful. This handbook has been prepared in an attempt to provide you with the information you will need to begin your program with the HEPC. Please take the time to read the handbook carefully. Please give special attention to the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) section. It is important that you understand the regulations you must follow.

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Alternate Responsible Officer

Important Note

All new exchange visitors must schedule a check-in with the HEPC institution he/she will be collaborating with immediately upon arrival in West Virginia. At your Check-in, your SEVIS record will be made active. Bring all your immigration documents with you (passport, DS-2019, and I-94 card). You must arrive and check-in NO LATER than 30 days from the start date indicated on your DS-2019. If it becomes clear that you won't arrive within this time period,

please contact the appropriate Responsible/Alternate Responsible Officer so a new DS-2019 can be made.

ALL NEW EXCHANGE VISITORS MUST REPORT IN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. At the time you check in, you will receive information about obtaining a U.S. Social Security number. You will also receive information about a mandatory orientation you must attend.

Again, welcome to the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (HEPC), and best wishes for a successful professional and personal experience.

II. Immigration Issues

Purpose of Exchange Visitor Program

The purpose of the Exchange Visitor Program with West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (HEPC) member institutions is to enhance understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries through educational and cultural exchange. Our consortium member exchange visitor programs expose participants to American techniques, methodologies, and expertise and expand upon the participants' existing knowledge and skills. The activities for your particular exchange visitor program, as well as the category most appropriate for those activities, will be indicated on the Form DS-2019. It is your responsibility to make sure you engage in only those activities specified on the Form DS-2019.

Important Immigration Documents

Forms

DS-2019: Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Status (J-1 Visa)

1. Facilitates the entry of a new participant of the Exchange Visitor Program.
2. Extends the stay of an exchange visitor.
3. Facilitates program transfers.
4. Facilitates entry of an exchange visitor's spouse or minor unmarried children into the United States separately.
5. Facilitates re-entry of an exchange visitor who is traveling outside the United States during the program.
6. Facilitates a change of category when permitted by the Department of State (DOS).
7. Updates significant changes in information about the exchange visitor program

I-94 Entry Permit (Arrival/Departure Record Admission Number)

The I-94 is an entry document that indicates the visa classification and the expiration date of your authorized stay. It is issued electronically upon entry to the U.S. and can be downloaded at <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/>. All Exchange Visitors should have J-1 written as the visa classification. "D/S"(Duration of Status) refers to the period during which you pursue your stated program. Upon completion of your program, you have 30 days in which to depart the country.

Passport

A passport is your country's identification of you as a citizen. Your passport must remain valid at all times. **It is not allowed to expire.** You may renew it by contacting your Embassy/Consulate within the U.S.

Visa: Stamped Page in Passport

A visa normally is a stamp placed in your passport by an official of the United States (or the country you are entering). **IT IS NECESSARY TO RENEW AN EXPIRED VISA ONLY IF YOU ARE GOING TO LEAVE THE UNITED STATES AND RETURN AFTER IT HAS EXPIRED.**

Keep in mind, a visa only admits you to the United States. Having a valid visa does not mean you are in proper immigration status.

Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS)

As a J-1 exchange visitor you will become part of the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). SEVIS is a national tracking/monitoring system that will allow the U.S. government to monitor and track various events during your program of study. The HEPC and member institutions will be required to provide the following information through SEVIS:

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1. Your name | 6. Date of commencement of program |
| 2. Date and place of birth | 7. Program activities |
| 3. Country of citizenship | 8. Program extensions |
| 4. Address | 9. Termination date and reason |
| 5. Status (arrived or not) | 10. Documents related to your admission |

You will learn more about SEVIS at orientation upon arrival at your HEPC institution. However, before you enter the U.S., you need to understand that once you have arrived, you must be committed to following all the rules related to your status. Any violations of status will be reported to the U.S. government. Individuals who do what is required of their status will not be greatly affected by SEVIS.

SEVIS Fee

Before applying for a J-1 visa you will be required to pay a fee of \$180 called the “SEVIS fee”. Individuals who are not required to obtain a visa (citizens of Canada and Bermuda) will be required to pay this fee before entering the United States. The fee can be paid by mail, by credit card through the internet, or by Western Union (made payable to the Department of Homeland Security). If your visa has been denied, you do not need to pay the fee again if you re-apply for the visa within 12 months of the denial.

Who must Pay the Fee

You will be required to pay this fee if:

- You are seeking a J-1 visa from a U.S. Embassy or Consulate for initial participation in an exchange program. **The fee must be paid before applying for the visa.**
- You will enter the U.S. in J-1 status, but are not required to have a visa. **The fee must be paid before you apply for admission to the U.S.**
- You are applying for a change of status to J-1. **The fee must be paid before you submit your change of status application.**

The fee is NOT required:

- For J-2 dependents.
- For J-1 participants in an exchange program sponsored by the U.S. federal government.
- If your immigration status is J-1 and you are transferring from another program or program category.
- If you are requesting an extension of your program.
- If you paid the fee but your application for a J-1 visa was denied and you are re-applying for the same status within 12 months of the denial.

Fee Payment Process

Option #1: Payment by Credit Card

Go to <http://www.fmjfee.com>. Exchange visitors from the following countries are not eligible to use the credit card option and must use option #2 or option #3: Cameroon; Ghana; Kenya; Nigeria.

Option #2: Payment by Western Union

This option allows Western Union to collect the SEVIS fee in local currency. This option is only available in countries where Western Union offers its “Quick Pay” service. Instructions for paying using this payment option can be found on the SEVIS website at http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/wu_instr.htm. To find the nearest Western Union agent location go to <http://www.payment-solutions.com/agent.asp>

Option #3: Payment by Check or Money Order

When paying by check or money order there are two options:

A. Internet-generated coupon. Go to the fee payment website (<http://www.fmjfee.com>), enter basic information, print out a coupon, and then mail a check or money order with the coupon to a lockbox address in Missouri. Once the information and fee are processed, SEVIS will then be updated with the fee payment information.

B. Paper option. You can download or otherwise obtain Form I-901, fill it in, and mail it, with a check or money order, to the specified address in Missouri. Once the information and fee are processed, SEVIS will be updated with the fee payment information.

In both cases, a receipt notice will be issued when the fee is processed. The mailing addresses for paying by check or money order using the coupon or the paper Form I-901 are:

P.O. Box Address:

I-901 Student/Exchange Visitor Processing Fee

P.O. Box 970020

St. Louis, MO 63197-0020

Street Address for Courier/Express Delivery:

I-901 Student/Exchange Visitor Processing Fee

1005 Convention Plaza

St. Louis, MO 63101

Check Specifics:

All checks and money orders must be:

- Payable to the “I-901 Student/Exchange Visitor Processing Fee”.
- The check or money order must be made in U.S. dollars and drawn on a bank located in the U.S. Only checks and money orders may be used when paying by mail. Payment of the SEVIS fee is not limited to the exchange visitor. DHS will accept fee payment from a third party individual or institution, either in the United States or abroad, using any of the options above. The fee must be paid at least three business days prior to the scheduled date of your visa interview in order for the payment information to show up on the SEVIS system. **You should bring your I-901 receipt with you to your visa interview.** The paper receipt can be used as verification in place of the internet verification.

Completing Form I-901:

A. You must have a Form DS-2019 in order to complete the I-901.

B. You must have the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission’s Exchange Visitor Program number. HEPC’s program number is P-X-XXXX.

Exchange Visitors from Canada or Bermuda:

Exchange visitors from Canada and Bermuda are exempt from having to apply for a visa. You will have to provide SEVIS fee payment verification, along with your DS-2019 Form, to an immigration inspector at the port of entry when applying for entry into the United States as a J-1 exchange visitor.

If your Visa is Denied:

If your visa is denied, you may reapply for the visa within a 12-month period, without having to pay the SEVIS fee again.

Dependents:

If you have obtained a DS-2019 for a spouse or children, they do not have to pay a SEVIS fee in order to apply for a J-2 visa.

Visa Application and Initial Admission to the United States

Exchange visitors are required to have a valid passport and visa to enter the United States. Upon receipt of your Certificate of Eligibility (DS-2019), you will need to make an appointment with the American Consulate or Embassy having jurisdiction over your place of permanent residence. In theory, you may apply for a visa at any consular post in the world. In practice, the administrative officer at the post may or may not accept applications from individuals residing outside the jurisdiction of that post.

Security Checks

Many visa applicants will be checked against databases maintained by the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation). This new security procedure will delay visa issuance by 20 days or more. If you are from Iran, Sudan, or Syria, you will be subject to a security check. If you are working in one of the following fields, listed online at <http://tecworld.inr.state.gov/>, you will likely be subject to a security check.

The Visa Application Process

Before you apply for the visa, you should understand the process and the rules governing visas. Many visa applications fail. In some countries, most applications fail. Often it is because the exchange visitor did not know the rules or was not prepared. We do not want this to happen to you. Please read what follows very carefully. The most important rule may seem strange to you. The consular officer who makes the decision on your visa application is required to think of you as someone who plans to come to the U.S. permanently, and you must prove that you intend to return to your country after completing your project. U.S. law very clearly states that J visas may be given only to persons who intend to remain in the U.S. temporarily. This rule is the number one reason that J-1 visa applications are denied.

You must document ties to your home country. If you are employed and going on sabbatical, bring a letter from your employer. If you own a business, take letters from a bank, describing the business, to the visa interview. If you own property, take the deeds. Do not emphasize any ties you may have to the United States or to family members in the United States.

Other important rules are: (1) You must have a definite professional objective. You must know what you are coming to do and where it will lead; (2) You must be qualified for the program; (3)

You must be adequately financed and have documents to prove it; (4) You must have proficient English skills to carry out your program.

U.S. government officials are convinced more easily by documents than by spoken statements. When possible, have papers to show your connections to your home country. The consular officer will take a very legalistic view. In the U.S., it is considered important to be impersonal when administering laws. This is considered rude or improper in many countries, but not in the U.S., where the ideal is to apply laws equally to all regardless of status or sex. Do not try to negotiate or discuss personal matters. A valid passport and a properly executed Form DS-2019, completed and signed must be presented to the consular officer.

You also will be required to present other documents that may be requested by the consular officer to establish that you are a bona fide non-immigrant exchange visitor, have adequate financial support, and meet all of the other requirements for exchange visitor status, including having a residence abroad that you have no intention of abandoning.

If the consular officer approves the visa application, he or she will stamp the visa in your passport and note the period of validity of the visa and the number of entries for which the visa is valid. The consular officer also will note in the space on the lower left corner of Form DS-2019 whether, in his or her judgment, you are subject to the two-year home country physical presence requirement. The notation is a preliminary finding; the Department of State will make the final determination.

Upon arrival at the U.S. port of entry, present your passport, visa, and Form DS-2019 to an immigration officer. If you are found to be admissible to the United States, the immigration officer will return the Form DS-2019 to you. The officer will create an electronic Form I-94 (Arrival/Departure Record), with the date and place of your admission to the United States, the immigration classification (J-1 for exchange visitor and J-2 for dependents), and the abbreviation "D/S" which stands for "duration of status". You will not be permitted to enter the U.S. more than 30 days prior to the scheduled start date of your program as indicated on your DS-2019. **You will also not be allowed to enter more than 30 days after the scheduled start date on your DS-2019. You must report to HEPC within this 60-day period.**

Exchange Visitors Not Subject to Visa Requirements

Certain exchange visitors are not required to have a valid visa stamp for entry to the United States. The most common examples are citizens of Canada and Bermuda. Such individuals should be instructed to apply directly to an immigration officer at a U.S. port of entry for admission as a J-1 exchange visitor, bypassing the procedure of applying for a visa. The procedure at entry is the same as that described previously, except that you are not required to present a passport with a visa stamp. Landed immigrants of Canada must apply for a visa stamp at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

Temporary Admission with Form I-515A

If you have lost or misplaced your Form DS-2019, or for other reasons are unable to produce that form at the port of entry, you should ask to be admitted on a Form I-515A. In such a case, the immigration officer will determine if you have a valid J-1 visa and are qualified in all other respects for admission as an exchange visitor. The officer may admit you to the United States in exchange visitor status for a period of 30 days and issue the Form I-515A. That form instructs you to submit Form DS-2019 and I-94 by mail to the DHS office in Washington D.C. Upon receipt of these forms, the DHS will convert the date on Form I-94 to "duration of status". If the

immigration officer at the port of entry is not able to determine that you are eligible for admission as an exchange visitor, the officer may parole you into the United States for “deferred inspection”, which requires that you report in person to a USCIS office.

Visa Expiration/Renewal

This procedure is only necessary when you intend to travel outside the U.S. and the visa stamped in your passport is expired. To get your visa renewed, you will need a valid passport, a properly executed DS-2019, proof of financial support and/or letter of certification, and evidence of ties to your home country. You must visit the American Consulate/Embassy office in the country you are visiting in order to get the new visa issued. Your J-1 visa cannot be renewed in the U.S.

Maintaining Your Status

It is your responsibility to maintain your immigration status. There are several requirements you must follow to maintain status:

Requirement to Keep Your Passport Valid.

Your passport must be valid at all times. Renewal applications must be made with the Embassy or Consulate of the country issuing the passport. You will need a certification of exchange visitor status from the HEPC (this can be obtained from the HEPC institution you are collaborating with). Addresses of embassies and consulates are available on the U.S. Department of State website at: <http://www.state.gov/countries>.

Requirement to Report Address Changes to HEPC.

You are required to report any address change to your HEPC institution within 10 days of the address change. This includes address changes of any of your dependents as well. To report a change of address complete the SEVIS update form and submit it to the appropriate office.

Requirement to Report Departure Date and Reason to HEPC.

For a variety of reasons, exchange visitors leave their programs early. You are required to inform your HEPC institution if you plan to leave your program, and the reason for doing so. You can do this by submitting a SEVIS Update form.

Requirement to Abide by Employment Regulations.

An Exchange Visitor is permitted to work for the HEPC institution indicated on the DS-2019 form. The work must be related to the project for which you have been brought to the U.S. Additional jobs unrelated to that project are not permitted. Other employment, except for occasional lectures by professors and research scholars, is not permitted.

Transfer to Another Institution/Sponsor

You are currently authorized to attend an HEPC member institution. If you decide to transfer to another exchange visitor program, you must notify your HEPC institution of your intent to transfer and the name of the program sponsor to which you intend to transfer. This is done by submitting a transfer request form. We will then enter a "Release" date in SEVIS. After this date is reached the new program can issue a DS-2019 to you.

Requirement to Apply for an Extension of Program.

You must apply for an extension of your program **prior to** the expiration date on your Form DS-2019 if you cannot complete your program by that date. Requests for extensions should be submitted to your host HEPC institution prior to the expiration date on the Form DS-2019 so the

extension process can be completed before the expiration date on the document. Exchange Visitors must submit a program extension request in a timely manner.

Requirement for Receiving Authorization to Travel.

You must notify your host HEPC institution prior to traveling outside the U.S. so that your DS-2019 can be endorsed for travel or a new form can be issued, if required. Your DS-2019 form must be signed within the past 12 months or your re-entry will be denied. Exchange visitors must complete and submit to the HEPC host institution a Travel Signature Request form **at least 5 days** prior to the anticipated travel date.

IMPORTANT NOTE: This information is not exhaustive and **is subject to change without notice**. Exchange visitors should contact the appropriate HEPC Responsible/Alternate Responsible Officer with questions on any of the information presented above.

Visits for Spouse and Children

As an exchange visitor, you must obtain a DS-2019 to send to dependent family member(s) who wish to reside with or visit you by submitting a Dependent Request form. The family member(s) will use the DS-2019 to support their application for a J-2 visa at the American Embassy or Consulate in their home country. The embassy or consulate will require evidence that you have adequate resources for their support. As such, you must show proof of financial support to your HEPC institution in the amount of \$4,000 per year for a spouse, and \$2,000 per year for each child, in addition to the amount needed for your own expenses plus the cost of health insurance. We will need to know the name, date of birth, gender, city of birth country of birth, country of citizenship and country of permanent residence for each dependent in order to issue DS-2019 forms for your dependents.

Employment

You may receive compensation from the HEPC institution that sponsors your DS-2019 for the activities that are associated with your exchange visitor program. You are not allowed to take other paid positions on or off campus. If you engage in unauthorized employment, you shall be in violation of your status and subject to termination as a participant in the exchange visitor program.

Professors and research scholars may participate in occasional lectures and short-term consultations only if authorized by their HEPC host institution. Such lectures and consultations must be incidental to the exchange visitor's primary program activities. If wages or other remuneration is received by the exchange visitor for such activities, the exchange visitor must receive written authorization to engage in the activities by the appropriate HEPC Responsible/Alternate Responsible Officer. . In order to satisfy the regulators, the lecture or consultation must:

- (1) Be directly related to the objectives of the exchange visitor's program;
- (2) Be incidental to the exchange visitor's primary program activities;
- (3) Not delay the completion date of the exchange visitor's program; and
- (4) Be documented in SEVIS.

To obtain authorization to engage in occasional lectures or short-term consultations involving wages or other remuneration, the exchange visitor must present to the appropriate HEPC Responsible/Alternate Responsible Officer the following:

(A) A letter from the institution at which the lecture or consultation will occur setting forth the terms and conditions of the offer to lecture or consult, including the duration, number of hours, field or subject, amount of compensation, and description of such activity; and

(B) Approval from your current supervisor at the HEPC host institution recommending such activity and explaining how the activity would enhance your exchange visitor's program.

(C) The Permission to Engage in Outside Lecture/Consultation Request Form.

Duration of Status and Extension of Program

When you are admitted to the United States as an exchange visitor, you are issued a Form I-94 (Arrival/Departure Record) which will be marked "D/S" (duration of status) for the validity period. Your form DS-2019 is also annotated to reflect "D/S". This means you may remain in the United States as long as you maintain J-1 status, until 30 days after the termination date written on the DS-2019. The D/S notation means that USCIS considers you to be in valid J-1 status as long as your DS-2019 is valid and you engage only in activities permitted by the DS-2019. You may file for an extension of stay if it is necessary to accomplish your program objectives. An extension request will need to be submitted by your sponsoring employer.

Limitations of Stay

The length of time you may remain in the United States on exchange visitor status is determined by the general limitations for the category and the length of time needed to complete the exchange objectives. These limitations apply to the total length of stay as an exchange visitor. Exchange visitors are allowed an additional grace period of 30 days to prepare for departure from the United States. It is important to be aware that the exchange activity and any related employment are permitted only until the end date on the Form DS-2019. During the additional 30 days, your status will be much like that of a tourist in that you may remain and travel in the U.S. If you transfer from one program sponsor to another, you cannot use that transfer to prolong your stay in the United States beyond the limitations of the pertinent category.

Professors and Research Scholars

The Form DS-2019 may be issued for the period of the exchange up to a maximum of five years for professors and research scholars. Extensions beyond five years are not possible.

Short-Term Scholar

A short-term scholar is defined as a professor, research scholar, specialist, or a person with similar education or accomplishments who is coming to the United States on a short-term visit for the purpose of lecturing, observing, consulting, training, or demonstrating special skills at research institutions, museums, libraries, post-secondary accredited educational institutions, or similar types of institutions. Examples include educators, scientists, research fellows, writers, and museum administrators. A short-term scholar is permitted to participate in activities such as conferences, workshops, seminars, and other events if these activities are stated on his or her Form DS-2019. The maximum duration of stay is limited to six months.

Specialists

A specialist is an "individual who is an expert in a field of specialized knowledge or skill coming to the United States for observing, consulting, or demonstrating special skills". The exchange of specialists promotes mutual enrichment and furthers linkages among scientific institutions, government agencies, museums, corporations, libraries, and similar types of institutions. "This category is intended for exchanges with experts in such areas, for example, as mass media

communication, environmental science, youth leadership, international educational exchange, museum exhibitions, labor law, public administration, and library science.” The maximum stay for a specialist is 12 months.

Students

The duration of status or length of time permitted for participation in a program is different for a student engaged in a degree program and a student engaged in a non-degree program. The ending date on the Form DS-2019 controls the end date of authorized stay. Except for non-degree students, a student’s stay in the United States could continue uninterrupted from the first year of a bachelor’s degree program through the third year of postdoctoral training. Degree students are authorized to participate in an exchange visitor program as long as they are “studying at the post-secondary accredited educational institution listed on their Form DS-2019”, are “pursuing a full course of study”, and are “making satisfactory advancement towards the completion of the academic program”. Duration of status may continue for non-degree students for a total maximum stay of 24 months as long as they are participating full-time in a prescribed course of study.

Repeat Participation

Professors and Research Scholars present in the U.S. for any amount of time will not be allowed to return to the U.S. as a J-1 research scholar or professor for at least 24 months. Exchange visitors in the U.S. in categories other than Professor and Research Scholar for more than 6 months would be will not be allowed to return to the U.S. as a J-1 research scholar or professor for at least 12 months.

Transfer of Program

It is possible for you to transfer from one program sponsor to another if the purpose of the transfer is to complete the objective for which you were originally admitted in exchange visitor status and if you remain within the same category. The transfer is accomplished through correspondence between the two responsible officers and notification to the Department of State in SEVIS. When transferring from a consortium member institution, HEPC will provide a release of your records in SEVIS to the new school, but only if it is clear that the transfer is for the purpose of completing the original objective and is consistent with the goals of the exchange visitor program. You must indicate to HEPC the name and program number of the sponsor you want to transfer to and the date you want to transfer using the SEVIS Update form.

Change of Category

When a Form DS-2019 is prepared for you, a particular category of activity is indicated on the form. This designation of a category helps to establish and define your program objective. For example, the intern category indicates a formal program designed to enhance the skills and expertise of exchange visitors in their academic or occupational fields through participation in structured and guided work-based training and internship programs designed to improve participants’ knowledge of American techniques, methodologies and expertise. The Research scholar category indicates the objective of academic research. In general, a change of category represents a change of objective and is not permitted. However, you may request an exception to this policy through the new program sponsor. HEPC is not authorized for any categories besides Interns and Trainees will not be able to assist you with a change of category request. There is a \$246 fee that must be paid when submitting a request of this nature to the DOS.

Termination of Program

Exchange visitors who fail to meet the requirements of the program, or who engage in unauthorized employment, are subject to termination from the program. If terminated, you will be out of status and deportable and therefore must depart the United States. A person who is out of status is ineligible for change of status, extension of stay, or other benefits. According to regulations, HEPC institutions must notify the U.S. Department of State (DOS) if you withdraw from or complete your program 30 or more days prior to the end date on your Form DS-2019, or if you have been terminated from your program. As such, if your program ends more than 30 days before the expiration date on your DS-2019, **you must notify HEPC** so we can notify the Department of State. If for any reason you decide to terminate your program and leave the U.S., you must immediately inform HEPC by using the SEVIS Update form.

Travel Abroad and Re-entry

If you wish to make a temporary visit outside the United States and return to complete your program, you must be sure to have the proper documents to visit another country and return to the United States.

Entering Another Country

If you wish to travel to your country of citizenship or permanent residence, a valid passport or travel document will ensure entry. For travel to another country, it may be necessary to secure a visa or entry permit. Those wishing to visit other countries should contact the consulate or embassy of the country to be visited to determine what documents are necessary for entry.

Re-entering the United States

If you are making a temporary visit outside the United States, you must have the following documents in order to reenter the United States in exchange visitor status: A valid passport and a valid visa (unless exempt from passport and visa requirement); and a current Form DS-2019 signed by your HEPC institution to affirm that you are in status. By signing the revalidation section, HEPC is confirming that you are in status.

If your visa is no longer valid, or if the number of authorized entries have already been used, you must apply to a U.S. consulate or embassy outside the United States for a new visa. You do not need a new U.S. visa if traveling to Canada, Mexico, or other contiguous territories for less than 30 days.

Two-Year Home Country Physical Presence Requirement

The Two-Year Home Country Physical Presence requirement is one of the most important special characteristics of exchange visitor status and should be thoroughly understood by you as a participant. As an exchange visitor, you may not be eligible to obtain permanent resident, H-1B specialty occupation or trainee, or L intra-company transferee status in the United States until you have resided and been physically present in your country of nationality or last legal permanent residence for a total of at least two years following departure from the United States. If you are subject to the two-year home residency requirement, you are also **not** permitted to change to any another non-immigrant status in the United States.

These restrictions apply when:

- Your participation in the program for which you came to the United States was financed in whole or in part, directly or indirectly, by an agency of the U.S. government or by the government of your home country;

- At the time of admission or acquisition of exchange visitor status, you were a national or resident of a country which the U.S. Department of State designated as clearly requiring the services of persons engaged in the field of specialized knowledge or skill in which you are engaged;
- You came to the United States or acquired exchange visitor status in order to receive graduate medical education or training.

Government Financing

“Financed directly” means financed in whole or in part by the United States government or your home government with funds contributed directly to you in connection with an exchange visitor program. “Financed indirectly” means 1) financed by an international organization with funds contributed by either the United States or your home government for use in financing international educational and cultural exchange, or 2) financed by an organization or institution with funds made available by either the United States or your home government for the purpose of furthering international educational and cultural exchange.

Exchange Visitor Skills List

The determination as to whether you are subject to the two-year home country physical presence requirement, depending on the need for your specialized knowledge or skills in the home country, is made by reference to the Exchange Visitor Skills List. This is an official list of fields of specialized knowledge and skills needed in each country as determined by each country’s corresponding government. You are subject to the two-year home country physical presence requirement only if participation in an exchange program began after your field of study appeared on the skills list. You can view the skills list at http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_4514.html.

Waiver of the Two-Year Home Country Requirement

Exchange visitors who are subject to, but do not wish to comply with the two-year home country residence requirement, may apply for a waiver of that requirement under any one of the five applicable grounds provided by the United States immigration law.

Applicable Grounds for a J-1 Visa Waiver

1. "No Objection" statement from the home government

The law precludes use of this option by medical doctors listed in "c" above. The exchange visitor’s government must state that it has no objection to the exchange visitor not returning to the home country to satisfy the two-year foreign residence requirement of Section 212(e) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, as amended, and remaining in the U.S. if he or she chooses to do so.

2. Request by an interested (U.S.) Government Agency, or IGA

If an exchange visitor is working on a project for, or of interest to, a U.S. Federal Government Agency, and that agency has determined that the visitor’s continued stay in the United States is vital to one of its programs, a waiver may be granted if the exchange visitor’s continued stay in the United States is in the public interest. For applications on behalf of foreign physicians, who agree to serve in medically underserved areas, please refer to Federal Register Volume 62, No. 102 of May 28, 1997.

3. Persecution

If the exchange visitor believes that he or she will be persecuted upon return to the home country due to race, religion, or political opinion, he or she can apply for a waiver.

4. Exceptional hardship to a U.S. citizen (or permanent resident) spouse or child of an exchange visitor

If the exchange visitor can demonstrate that his or her departure from the United States would cause extreme hardship to his or her United States citizen or lawful permanent resident spouse or child, he or she may apply for a waiver. (Please note that mere separation from family is not considered to be sufficient to establish exceptional hardship.)

5. Request by a designated State Department of Health or its equivalent

The law permits only medical doctors to apply for a waiver on this basis. Pursuant to the requirements of Public Law 103-416, of October 25, 1994 and Public Law 107-273, of November 2, 2002, foreign medical graduates who have an offer of full-time employment at a health care facility in a designated health care professional shortage area, and agree to begin employment at the facility within 90 days of receiving such waiver, and who sign a contract to continue to work at the health care facility for a total of 40 hours per week and not less than three years, may apply for a waiver. Each state is allowed thirty waivers per federal fiscal year. Five of the thirty requests may be specialists who can practice medicine outside of Health and Human Services designated health shortage areas.

Procedures for Waiver Applications

To apply for a recommendation for a waiver of the two-year home residence requirement under any of these bases, applicants must complete the following steps:

Step 1

The Online J Visa Waiver Recommendation Application, Form DS-3035 must be used. No other version of the DS-3035 will be accepted. Upon completing the Form DS-3035 online, your information will be downloaded into a barcode and you will be issued immediately a waiver case file number and further instructions. Once you have completed this online form, you must print and mail in your DS-3035 Application with barcode, and payment as explained below. Please note that the barcode must be printed in black and white only.

Two self-addressed stamped legal-size envelopes (S.A.S.E.) and a cashier's check or money order for US \$215, made payable to the U.S. Department of State to:

Postal Service Courier Service

U.S. Department of State U.S. Department of State
Waiver Review Division Waiver Review Division
P.O. Box 952137 (Box 952137)
St. Louis, MO 63195-2137 1005 Convention Plaza
St. Louis, MO 63101-1200

Please Note:

ONLY APPLICATIONS USING THE ONLINE FORM DS-3035 WILL BE ACCEPTED.
Applications with other versions of Form DS-3035 will be returned to the sender without processing fee. THE \$215 PROCESSING FEE IS NON-REFUNDABLE.

Please write the applicant's full name, date of birth and Social Security Number, if any, on the cashier's check or money order. Please do not send cash. Remittances must be drawn on a

bank or other institution located in the U.S. and made payable in U.S. currency to the U.S. Department of State. If the applicant resides outside the U.S. at the time of application, remittance may be made by bank international money order or foreign draft drawn on an institution in the U.S. and made payable to the U.S. Department of State in U.S. currency.

Your application must be sent to the lock-box address at the Waiver Review Division. If you fax or mail your application to the Waiver Review Division, it will NOT be processed.

Step 2

It is your responsibility to submit all requested documents and ensure that required documents are sent on your behalf by third parties. The Waiver Review Division will not follow up on documents that have not been received. Rather, it will be your responsibility to ensure that your file is complete. Once you have your waiver case number, you should check on the status of your application by visiting the J Visa Waiver Status Check website. If you notice an error regarding your waiver case, you should contact Public Inquiries at (202) 663-1225. Some documents, such as "No Objection" statement from EV's home government, an IGA request from an Interested Federal Government Agency, a Conrad request letter from a state public health department, or CIS' finding of exceptional hardship or persecution (on Form I-613) will be submitted directly to the Waiver Review Division by the responsible third party. However, you, the waiver applicant, must initiate the process by requesting such documents directly from the responsible third party or by applying directly with these other agencies. And, if the third party agrees, your other required documents, such as your DS-2019, may be forwarded to the Waiver Review Division through the third party.

Step 3

At the conclusion of the review process, the Waiver Review Division will forward its recommendation directly to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in the Department of Homeland Security. You will receive a copy of that recommendation at the address you listed on your Form DS-3035, or the most current address we have for you if you reported a change of address. USCIS has the responsibility for making the final determination on your waiver request. USCIS will notify you directly, whether your waiver application is denied or approved.

ANY TIME THERE HAS BEEN AN ADDRESS CHANGE PLEASE NOTIFY THE WAIVER REVIEW DIVISION OF THE CHANGE. IF WE DO NOT HAVE YOUR MOST CURRENT ADDRESS, WE MAY NOT BE ABLE TO CONTACT YOU IN CASE WE NEED ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FROM YOU TO PROCEED WITH YOUR CASE, OR YOU MAY NOT RECEIVE THE RESULTS OF THE WAIVER REQUEST.

Please do not fax or contact the Waiver Review Division directly regarding your waiver case. The Division does not have the manpower to respond to such inquiries. You should contact the Public Inquiries Division, which was created to respond to inquiries from the public, regarding your waiver case, (202) 663-1225.

Effects of Waivers on Extensions

No exchange visitor who has received a favorable recommendation from the DOS for a waiver of the "Two-Year Home Country Residency Requirement" will receive a program extension beyond the date of the current DS-2019 form, even though the exchange visitor may not have completed the maximum time in their category. The DOS considers an exchange visitor's filing of a waiver application as evidence of his or her intent to abandon his or her exchange visitor

program participant status. Accordingly, the DOS no longer considers the exchange visitor to be a bona fide J-1 participant.

Change of Exchange Visitor Status to Another Status

Your eligibility to change to another non-immigrant status may be limited. If you are not subject to the two-year home country residence requirement, or have had that requirement waived, you may apply for a change to any other non-immigrant status for which you are qualified. If you are subject to the two-year home country physical presence requirement, you are eligible to change only to A (diplomatic or government official) or G (international organization) status, provided that you are accredited by the foreign government or international organization to the Department of State.

An alien outside the United States who previously had been in the United States as an exchange visitor may apply for a different non-immigrant visa at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate. Authority to grant such a visa lies within the discretionary power of the consular officer. No minimum time abroad is required to obtain a different visa unless you are subject to the two-year home country physical presence requirement, in which case you must satisfy that requirement or have it waived before being eligible for an immigrant, H or L visa. Returning to the United States in another status does not absolve you from a previously incurred two-year home country physical presence requirement.

If you are eligible to apply for a change of status, you may do so by submitting to USCIS the Form I-539, a copy of the Form I-94, the required fee, and any other documentation needed to demonstrate eligibility for the new status. USCIS and the DOS generally do not look favorably on a request by a J-1 exchange visitor to change to J-2 dependent status, since the J-1 exchange visitor is expected to return home immediately upon completion of the exchange visitor program in the United States. Such requests usually are either denied or referred to the DOS. An alien who wishes to request such a change of status should submit the following documents to the USCIS: his or her Form I-94, the Form DS-2019 and a copy of Form I-94 of the principal J-1 alien whose dependent he or she will be, Form I-539 with appropriate fee, information about passport validity, and a letter explaining the reasons for the requested change and justifying the extended period of stay in the United States.

Dependents of Exchange Visitors

Your spouse and unmarried children under the age of 21 who accompany or follow you to the United States are usually admitted in J-2 classification, but are not exchange visitors. You are not permitted to bring dependents to the United States in J-2 classification if adequate funding for their support and health insurance coverage is not available.

Eligibility Requirements

Only your spouse and unmarried minor children under 21 years of age are eligible for J-2 status. Other family members, such as parents, brothers, and sisters are not eligible. Further, J-2 documentation for family members can only be issued if you can show funding for their support and health care. If your dependents are to accompany you or join you in the United States, they may obtain their visas and admission to the United States along with you on the basis of the Form DS-2019 issued in their names.

Obtaining a J-2 Visa and Entering the United States

Dependents who come to the United States must obtain their J-2 visas using the Form DS-2019 in their name. The J-2 applicant then presents the Form DS-2019 to the immigration officer at the port of entry to the United States. Upon entry to the United States, each dependent is issued a Form I-94 (Arrival/ Departure Record), indicating the date of entry, classification, and an admission for D/S.

Employment of J-2 Dependents

J-2 dependents may apply to the regional USCIS office having jurisdiction over their place of temporary residence for permission to accept employment, provided the income from such employment will be used to support your family's customary recreational and cultural activities and related travel, among other things.

Employment will not be authorized if this income is needed to support the J-1 principal alien. Application for employment authorization is made on Form I-765, which is filed with the USCIS and accompanied by the appropriate fee. In addition to the Form I-765, one should submit a letter stating why the employment is desired, indicating the source and amount of support for the principal participant, and specifically stating that the income derived from employment will not be used for the support of the J-1 exchange visitor.

Financial need is not a criterion for employment authorization of a J-2 dependent. However, USCIS sometimes requires a budget or statement of estimated expenses to determine that you have adequate income. HEPC will provide J-2 dependents with complete application instructions and will meet with such dependents to ensure that the materials are in order. If permission for employment is granted, an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) is issued and is valid for any kind of full-time or part-time employment. If an extension of stay is required in conjunction with extension of work authorization, the extension of stay notification must be filed prior to the extension of employment authorization. It is important to file the Form I-765 for continuation of employment authorization in a timely manner in order to preserve the J-2's right to work.

Travel Abroad and Re-entry

If a J-2 dependent wishes to travel outside the United States for a temporary visit and to re-enter the country, he or she follows basically the same procedures as a J-1 exchange visitor. To reenter the United States, the dependent must have a valid passport and visa (unless exempt from passport and visa requirements) and a current Form DS-2019 issued in his or her own name. The DS-2019 must be endorsed by the Responsible Officer (HEPC). The same regulations and procedures for automatic revalidation of visas for the J-1 principal participant apply to the J-2 dependent. The dependent may travel outside the United States and return either with the J-1 Exchange visitor or separately.

Study

Current regulations allow J-2 dependents to study full-time or part-time at any level without having to change status to a student visa.

Change of Status

As in the case of the J-1 exchange visitor, the J-2 dependent may change from J-2 status to another nonimmigrant classification if not subject to the two-year home country physical presence requirement, or if the requirement has been waived. A J-2 dependent can change to J-1 status only if he/she has been in the U.S. as a J-2 dependent for less than six months prior to the change of status and only if not subject to the two year home residency requirement. To

accomplish this change, the J-2 dependent should submit to USCIS a Form DS-2019 made out in his or her own name, a copy of his or her Form I-94, Form I-539, and the appropriate fee. If it appears to USCIS that the change from J-2 to J-1 will cause the applicant's stay to extend beyond that of the original J-1 principal, USCIS will also require a letter from the applicant stating 1) that he or she understands that the original J-1 principal probably will not be allowed to change to J-2 status and thereby extend his or her stay beyond its original duration to remain in the United States with the person who has changed from J-2 to J-1 and 2) that he or she wants the change from J-2 to J-1 despite that understanding. The applicant can save much time by including such a letter with the application for change from J-2 to J-1 status.

Departure or Termination of Program

The J-2 dependent's status terminates in the United States when that of the J-1 participant terminates. The dependent reports his or her departure from the United States in the same way as the J-1 participant, by surrendering Form I-94 at the time of departure and notifying HEPC using the SEVIS Update Form.

III. Packing and Travel **What to Bring to the U.S.**

Clothing

The climate in West Virginia changes with the seasons. In the spring, temperatures are moderate, although it can still be quite cool, particularly in March and April. Temperatures in the summer can get rather high. Summer is hot and humid. Temperatures of 90°F (33°C) and above are not unusual. You are advised to bring some light clothing for this season. Fall (beginning of the school year) is pleasant with its bright colors and moderate temperatures. Winter can get very cold and snowy (10°F/-12°C). It is recommended that you bring warm clothing with you, such as a hat, scarf, gloves, snow or rain boots, sweaters, and a warm winter coat. However, winter clothing is available in West Virginia at reasonable prices.

Finances

Before beginning your travel to West Virginia, please remember that your initial expenses here will be considerably higher than those you will incur later. Therefore, **it is necessary for you to bring at least \$2,000 in United States currency or travelers' checks to cover these expenses.** Even if you are going to receive a salary from your employer, your first check will not be available upon your arrival. You will need to pay rent, and buy food and other necessities! **You must figure your finances carefully and plan on these expenses without help from the HEPC.**

To prepare to meet your financial needs for the entire year, you should make the necessary arrangements with your government, your sponsor, and any banks in your country to ensure that these funds will be available to you. **Remember that checks drawn on foreign banks will require several weeks to clear and therefore you will not have access to those funds right away!** In order to have money available to you upon arrival, the necessary funds should be transferred to a local bank in West Virginia **at least one month prior to your arrival!**

Linens, Bedding and Room Furnishings

Blankets, towels, and room furnishings are things you might bring with you if you have space for them in your luggage. However, remember that you can buy anything you need in the U.S. **You should not attempt to bring food, plants, or anything that can be interpreted as being**

drug paraphernalia, such as pipes or tobacco rolling papers. These will most likely be confiscated from you at the port of entry.

Tips on Travel

1. Travel with your passport, visa, and original DS-2019 in your carry-on luggage. Your documentation will be inspected at the port of entry before you claim your checked baggage.
2. Arrange for a family member, friend, or colleague to meet you at the airport, or plan to take a taxi from the airport to your destination.
3. Take some of the things that are important to you such as prescription eyeglasses, a bilingual dictionary, and medication etc., and keep them in your carry-on luggage.
4. To avoid unnecessary delays, make sure your ticket is confirmed at least one month before the day you are required to arrive.
5. Government-sponsored students, and those sponsored by private organizations, should work together with their sponsors every step of the way.
6. Shop around for airfare and check for baggage regulations before deciding which airline to take to the U.S.
7. Arrive at the airport about three hours before the intended flight.
8. Make sure your schedule allows sufficient time for connecting flights.
9. Carry sufficient money for unexpected expenses or events, such as missing your flight. You may also want to carry an extra change of clothing in your carry-on luggage in case of unexpected delays.

Housing

Lease Agreements

When you rent a room or an apartment you will be required to sign a lease. A lease is a written contract between you and the landlord (the owner of the rental property). When you sign a lease, you agree to pay a certain amount of money each month and to follow certain rules in exchange for the right to occupy the rental property for a set period of time. Most lease agreements require that you pay a security deposit which is usually equal to one month's rent. This security deposit will be returned to you if you fulfill all the terms of the lease. Read the lease carefully and be sure you understand it before signing it.

Here are some key questions to ask any landlord when considering an apartment:

- How many minutes does it take to get to work walking? And driving?
- Is there a bus line close by?
- What type of apartment is it? A house? An apartment complex?
- How many bedrooms does it have?
- How much is the rent per month?
- Is a security deposit required?
- What type of lease is offered (monthly, 6 month, 9 month, year)?
- Are children allowed?
- Are pets allowed? Is an extra security deposit required for pets?
- What kind of heat is used (gas, electric, oil, etc.)?
- Who pays for utilities (heat, electric, water, etc.)?
- Is the apartment furnished or unfurnished?
- What type of flooring is there (carpet, hardwood, tile)?
- Is there a stove? Is there a refrigerator?
- Is there air conditioning? Are there laundry facilities?

- What type of parking is available (garage, off-street parking, on-street parking)?
- How soon will the apartment be available?

Once you have moved in, your main responsibilities are to pay rent on time (use checks only; **do not pay with cash**) and keep the property in a clean and safe condition. While you have responsibilities to pay rent and keep the property in good condition, your landlord has responsibilities, too. If you believe the landlord is treating you differently than he would treat an American student, or if the landlord is not keeping the property in working condition, be assertive. Do not accept negligence from your landlord.

Demand that the apartment is in a safe, clean, livable condition. Otherwise, you are inviting the landlord to take advantage of you. If you have problems with your landlord, it is a good idea to photograph the contested areas of the apartment which are in disrepair. In addition, put all of your complaints in writing, send your landlord a copy, and keep a copy of your complaints for your own files. If the problems are not resolved, consider taking legal action.

Money and Banking

This section introduces you to a few of the basic banking options available. When selecting a bank, you should compare services, service charges and bank locations before making your decision.

Banks

When you open an account with a bank, most banks require two pieces of identification, such as your passport.

Types of Accounts

Bank Cards: Many banks issue cards that enable you to deposit and withdraw money 24 hours a day by use of an Automated Teller Machine (ATM). These machines, which are frequently located outside the bank, are very convenient. By using a bank card, customers avoid waiting in line at the bank and have access to cash after the bank closes. Banks that are members of a national ATM network allow you to access your funds with your bank card at selected ATM's throughout the country. There may be small fees associated with ATM use.

Cashing checks: To cash a check, you will need to endorse it by signing your name on the back. In addition, you will be asked for personal identification in the form of a passport, driver's license or a state ID card.

Checking Accounts: Banks offer different types of checking accounts designed to fit individual needs. The cost of checking varies from bank to bank. Some banks charge per transaction, some have a basic monthly fee, and others offer free services if you maintain a certain minimum balance in your account at all times. A list of all the account activity for the preceding month, and in some cases your cancelled checks will be mailed to you in a monthly statement, or will be available to you online. Be careful to keep an accurate record of every check you write in order to avoid having checks returned due to insufficient funds and incurring additional charges. "Bouncing" a check (writing a check for more money than you actually have in the account) is illegal and can cost you time and money. Through some banks, you can apply for a line of credit attached to your checking account that provides overdraft protection.

Credit Cards: Credit cards may be convenient, especially if you unexpectedly have major expenses. You can pay expenses such as University and medical fees, airplane tickets and car

repairs with any major credit card. You must understand that you can easily accumulate large bills with credit cards, and before you know it, you may be in debt. Before you accept a credit card, you must be sure to understand all your obligations. Most banks charge an annual fee. If you are unable to pay your full balance each month, you will be charged high interest rates (usually 18% or higher) on the remaining balance and any additional charges you make. Make sure you stay within your budget when making credit card purchases.

Debit Card: A debit card, also known as a check card, allows you to withdraw or deposit money to your bank account using an automatic teller machine (ATM) and to make purchases at stores that accept the card. Some debit cards carry a credit-card logo (such as Mastercard or Visa), and can be used in place of a check or credit card. Debit cards are not credit cards, however, and they can be used only to the extent that you have funds in the account to which they are linked.

Savings Accounts: A savings account enables you to save money and accumulate interest on your savings. Interest is paid either monthly or quarterly. The difference between a savings and a checking account is that you cannot write checks from a savings account.

Foreign Currency

If you deposit a check drawn on a foreign bank in your U.S. checking account, it may have to go through a collection process. This means that the money is not available to you until the U.S. bank has collected it from the foreign bank. It may take several weeks before the money is credited to your account. In countries with restrictions on foreign exchange, you may need to provide your sponsor or your family with certification of enrollment in order to receive money from your home country.

IV. Arrival in West Virginia

How to get to Your HEPC Institution

From the Airport

A list of airports in West Virginia can be found at http://www.airport-data.com/usa-airports/state/West_Virginia.html. Depending on the institution you will be working with, arriving at one of the major airports in Washington, DC may be the closest airport to use. Your HEPC host institution will provide further details on the best way to get to campus.

V. Taxation Issues

All J-1 Exchange Visitors (and accompanying dependents) are required to complete an income tax return annually. For most exchange visitors, this will mean completing the form 1040NR or 1040NR-EZ (U.S. Nonresident Alien Income Tax Return) and a form 8843. You are required to file an income tax return even if you have no income from U.S. sources, or if your income is exempt from U.S. taxes due to treaties between the U.S. and your home country. You must file a return even if you don't earn income during a tax year.

Important Dates, Documents and Forms

April 15: The last day on which residents and non-residents who have earned wages from U.S. sources may file their U.S. federal income-tax returns.

June 15: The last day on which non-resident students and their dependents who have no wage income from U.S. sources may file their income tax returns.

Form 519: U.S. Tax Guide for Aliens, an IRS publication. This publication is essential for individuals from nations having tax treaties with the United States.

Form 8843: Statement for Exempt Individuals and Individuals with a Medical condition. This one-page document must be completed and returned with the 1040NR and 1040NR-EZ. It verifies nonresident alien tax status. **Students who have not earned wages from U.S. sources will file this form only.**

Form 1040NR: U.S. Non-resident Alien Income Tax Return. The longer version of the return completed by many non-residents. This form is distinct from the 1040, 1040A, or 1040EZ filed by residents for tax purposes. It is not interchangeable with those forms. The IRS publishes an instruction booklet to accompany the form.

Form 1040NR-EZ: U.S. Income Tax Return for Certain Non-resident Aliens with No Dependents. A simplified version of the 1040NR. Most J-1 exchange visitors may file the 1040NR-EZ. The IRS publishes an instruction booklet for this form.

Form W-2: Wage and Tax Statement. A form issued annually by employers (normally during the month of January). Copies of the W-2 must be filed with federal, state, and local tax returns.

Form W-4: Employee's Withholding Allowance Certificate. A form completed by employees at the time of hire to indicate how much tax is to be withheld from the paycheck.

Form 1042S: Foreign Persons U.S. Source Income Subject to Withholding is a form used to report total scholarship/fellowship payments income tax withheld and other information relating to grant payments.

Form W-8BEN: Certificate of Foreign Status of Beneficial Owner for United States Tax Withholding is a form used to certify an individual's foreign status for tax purposes. Exchange visitors who receive service-free scholarships or fellowships must file Form W-8BEN.

Form 8233: Exchange visitors who are employed in the U.S. and are partially or fully exempt by treaty from U.S. taxation must file Form 8233 and the appropriate attachment with the employer to claim exemption from withholding each year.

VI. Exchange Visitor Health Insurance

All exchange visitors must have insurance that covers themselves and any accompanying dependents. Levels of coverage and special conditions are as follows:

- Medical benefits of \$100,000 per accident or illness;
- \$25,000 for repatriation of remains;
- \$50,000 for expenses associated with medical evacuation to home country;
- Must include a deductible not in excess of \$500.00 per accident or illness and shall not exclude coverage for perils inherent to the activities of the program;
- The insurance policy must be underwritten by an American 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, or a Weiss Research, Inc. rating of 'B-' or above. Insurance coverage backed by the full faith and credit of the government of the exchange visitor's home country shall be deemed to meet this requirement.

FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THIS REGULATION COULD RESULT IN THE TERMINATION OF YOUR EXCHANGE VISITOR PROGRAM.

You are required to have such insurance from Day 1 in the U.S. Contact information for insurance companies with qualifying policies:

- **The Harbour Group, L.L.C.**
<http://www.hginsurance.com>

- **HTH Worldwide Insurance Services**
<http://www.hthstudents.com/index.cfm>

- **T.W. Lord & Associates**
Toll Free: 1-800-633-2360
Tel: 1-770-427-2461
Fax: 1-770-429-0638
25 Dodd Street
P.O. Box 1185
Marietta, GA 30061

- **Gateway USA**
<http://www.gatewayplans.com>

- **International SOS Assistance, Inc.**
(for medical evacuation and repatriation of remains only)
<http://internationalsos.com>

- **Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI)**
<http://www.culturalinsurance.com>

- **The American Institute for foreign Study, Inc.**
<http://www.aifs.com>

- **American College Student Association**
<http://www.acsa.com>

- **ISO Student Health Insurance**
<http://www.isoa.org>

VII. Living in the U.S.

The United States is a diverse country with people from many parts of the world. For people of any age and background, being in a new country combines a sense of excitement and anticipation with some fears, loneliness, and doubts. Culture is a pattern of beliefs, values, and behaviors shared by groups of people. Cultural differences among groups can be sources of interest, pleasure, and growth. Learning about new and different languages, music, foods, and social customs will enhance your experience. Differences, however, can also lead to confusion about how to behave in different situations and the meaning of others' behavior. Understanding some common cultural patterns in the United States can ease the transition and help students (and family members here with them) feel more at ease and a part of things. Understanding another culture does not mean, however, that a person must abandon his or her own ways. Getting acquainted with social and cultural differences is a very important process because it

will help you to build successful relationships with Americans. The following are some common American customs you will probably encounter.

Cultural Issues

Social Invitations

While you are here, we hope that you will meet and spend time with Americans and their families. These suggestions may help you feel more comfortable when you are invited out. The invitation is usually for you only, unless your hosts specifically invite your family or friends. Bringing guests of your own without asking your host's permission is considered impolite. The written invitation will include the date, time, place, and description of the occasion. You should always answer a written invitation, especially if it says R.S.V.P. (Répondez s'il vous plaît; French for "please respond"). You may respond by telephone or by email; prompt notice is appreciated. Never accept an invitation unless you really plan to go. If you must decline an invitation, it is enough to say, "Thank you for the invitation, but I am unable to attend". If an unavoidable problem makes it necessary for you to change plans, be certain to tell the host as soon as possible before the time when you are expected. Make sure you get directions to the place where the event will be held.

When accepting an invitation for a meal, be sure to explain to your host if there is anything you are not supposed to eat. This courtesy will help the host to plan for food and beverages that everyone can enjoy. If you must refuse something after it has been prepared, refuse politely. Never hesitate to ask for any food on the table: "Would you please pass the rolls?", since asking for more food is considered to be a compliment to the host. Being on time is very important in American culture.

Hygiene

Americans put a great deal of emphasis on personal cleanliness. The standard of personal cleanliness that an individual maintains will determine (to a large extent) how he or she is accepted in society. Most Americans are very sensitive to the smells and odors of the human body-sometimes their own, but especially someone else's. For this reason, most Americans bathe once a day, and sometimes more during hot weather or after strenuous exercise. They use deodorants and antiperspirants, and they wash their clothes frequently. Most Americans are also very concerned about having clean hair and fresh breath.

Individualism and Privacy

The most important thing to understand about Americans is their devotion to individualism. From childhood, they have been trained to consider themselves as separate individuals who are responsible for their own situations in life and their own destinies. They have not been trained to see themselves as members of a close-knit, tightly interdependent family, religious group, tribe, nation, or other collectivity. Closely associated with the value they place on individualism is the importance Americans assign to privacy. Americans assume that people need some time to themselves or some time alone to think about things or recover their spent psychological energy.

Directness and Assertiveness

Americans generally consider themselves to be frank, open, and direct in their dealings with other people. Americans will often speak openly and directly to others about things they dislike. They will try to do so in a manner they call "constructive", that is, a manner which the other person will not find offensive or unacceptable. If they do not speak openly about what is on their

minds, they will often convey their reactions in nonverbal ways (without words), but through facial expressions, body positions, and gestures. Americans are not taught that they should mask their emotional responses. Their words, the tone of their voices, or their facial expressions will usually reveal when they are feeling angry, unhappy, confused, or happy and content. They do not think it improper to display these feelings, at least within limits. They are much less concerned with avoiding embarrassment to themselves or others than most cultures. To Americans, being honest is usually more important than preserving harmony in interpersonal relationships.

Friendship and Dating

While many Americans are fairly open and warm people who are quick to make new acquaintances, their mobility and sense of individualism mean that their relationships are often casual and informal. This is not to say that Americans take friendship lightly. It just means that while Americans know a lot of people, their lasting friendships are often few. Comparatively, women in the United States are generally less inhibited than women from other countries. They are not usually shy with Americans or international visitors. Their relaxed and more independent attitude may be misunderstood by people whose native culture is more restrictive of women's activities. It is not unusual, for example, for unmarried women to live by themselves, to share living space with other single women, or to go to public places unescorted.

American Holidays

Which American Holidays Are Important?

Generally, throughout the United States, both the federal and state governments, and much of the public, consider the following dates holidays

New Year's Day - January 1: Federal holiday for schools, offices and banks. Stores are open. New Year's Eve, December 31, and is more important to Americans than New Year's Day itself. Everyone gathers with family and friends to "ring out the old and ring in the new", an expression that reflects the old custom of ringing church bells to greet the new year.

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday - January 16 (Observed on 3rd Monday in January): Federal holiday that began in 1986. Martin Luther King, Jr. organized and led the civil-rights movement in America during the 1960s.

Valentine's Day - February 14: Not a federal holiday. Lover's holiday celebrated by sending cards and giving candy or flowers.

Saint Patrick's Day - March 17: Not a federal holiday. St. Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland, and this holiday was brought to America by Irish immigrants. People celebrate this holiday by wearing something green and getting together with friends to party and sing Irish folk songs.

April Fool's Day - April 1: Not a federal holiday. As in many other countries, this day is marked by the custom of playing practical jokes on friends and colleagues.

Easter – Date varies: Not a federal holiday. A religious holiday for Christians who believe that on this day Christ rose from the dead. Many folk traditions are now connected with Easter, including the decoration of brightly colored eggs and giving gifts to children.

Mother's Day – varies in May: Not a federal holiday. On this day Americans honor their mothers by sending flowers and buying small gifts.

Memorial Day - May 28: Federal holiday. Memorial Day is the day on which Americans remember those who died in military service to their country. Many families visit graves and decorate them with flowers. The day is also marked with patriotic parades. This day is considered the beginning of the summer season.

Father's Day – varies in June: Not a federal holiday. Fathers are honored on this day. Children give them cards and gifts.

Independence Day - July 4: Federal holiday. Independence Day commemorates the day the Declaration of Independence was signed in Philadelphia on July 4, 1776. The holiday is celebrated all over the country with picnics, political speeches, and community get-togethers that culminate in fireworks displays.

Labor Day - September 3: Federal holiday. This holiday was established in recognition of the labor movement's contribution to the productivity of the country. This day is the last holiday of the summer season and is celebrated with picnics and other outings.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur - September 16-18, 25-26: Not a federal holiday. Rosh Hashanah, which commemorates the beginning of the Jewish New Year, is the first of the Ten Days of Penitence, which end with Yom Kippur, the most solemn of Jewish holidays. For Rosh Hashanah, families gather for a feast in which an apple is dipped in honey to express hope for a sweet year ahead. In Judaism, Yom Kippur is the day of atonement; on the eve of Yom Kippur, Jews ask forgiveness from those they may have wronged. The keynotes of the holiday are fasting and a collective confession, repeated several times throughout the day.

Halloween - October 31: Not a federal holiday. This was originally a religious holiday, but its religious character has been lost in the United States, and it is now celebrated mostly as a children's holiday. Traditions include carving out pumpkins with funny faces, as well as dressing up in costumes and going around the neighborhood to receive treats of candy, fruit, and cookies. When people come to the door, children say "trick or treat", meaning "if you don't give me a treat, I will trick you."

Thanksgiving Day – date varies in November: Federal holiday. The first Thanksgiving Day was celebrated by the Pilgrims at Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts in 1621 to give thanks for the bountiful harvest and their triumph of survival over the wilderness. Now it is a time when Americans give thanks for the good life they enjoy. They celebrate by getting together with family and friends to enjoy turkey, cranberry sauce, sweet potatoes, and pumpkin pie.

Hanukkah - December 8-16: Not a federal holiday. One of the less solemn of the Jewish holidays, but one widely observed even by nonreligious Jews. The only Jewish holiday connected with war, Hanukkah celebrates the victory of Jewish Maccabees over their Syrian rulers in 167 B.C. Hanukkah is marked with parties, games, gifts for children, and the lighting of the eight candles of the menorah.

Christmas - December 25: Federal holiday. Many people regard Christmas as the most important holiday of the year, with the holiday season extending from a few days before Christmas to New Year's Day. Although its origins are religious in nature, it is a holiday celebrated by almost everyone in the country. Family members travel great distances to be together on this day on which gifts are exchanged, and a traditional dinner is shared. Even families who do not have strong religious convictions decorate a Christmas tree and join in the festivities of the Christmas season.

VIII. About West Virginia

The Campus Locations

Among the six consortium members, you will find a variety of offerings for our exchange visitors to engage in academically. These institutions include two master's universities (Fairmont State University & Shepherd University), and four baccalaureate institutions (Bluefield State College, Glenville State College, West Liberty University & Concord University) enrolling approximately 17,000 students, including nearly 350 international students. We have the ability to find the right academic program in the right setting for any of our exchange visitors. Our diversity of geographic locations, campus settings and academic programs is one of our greatest strengths.

Each campus has a variety of cultural activities on and off campus to ensure that the exchange visitor has the opportunity to participate not only in education exchange but cultural exchange as well. Fostering cultural exchange is an important role of the Exchange Visitor Program. In this section, we have provided a sample of the activities that exchange visitors may participate in on their campuses as an opportunity for cultural exchange. These include clubs, extracurricular activities, special programming and events. Many campuses have a strong history of cultural programming on their campuses. As members of the consortium, campuses will supplement existing cultural activities to encourage the involvement of exchange visitors in cultural experiences both on and off campus.

Bluefield State College

Bluefield, WV

Bluefield State College, a historically black four-year public undergraduate college located in Bluefield, is an hour and a half from Charleston, West Virginia, and Roanoke, Virginia. The college offers accredited profession oriented degree programs in the Humanities, Applied Science, Teacher Education, Business Administration, Accountancy, Business Information Systems, Health Services Management, Nursing, Radiology Technology and Imaging Science, Civil, Electrical, Mining, and Mechanical Engineering Technologies, and Computer Science.

Bluefield State College prepares students for professions that will always be needed in all nations and the USA within the private, public and non-government/not for profit sectors such as education and healthcare; manufacturing, infrastructure development and maintenance; economic development; high tech and information technology; behavioral health and safety, security, and corrections; governance and accountability, and human resources management.

Exchange visitors coming to Bluefield State College will have the opportunity to engage in a host of cultural activities including:

International Peer Advisors

The International Student Association/Club will be inviting currently enrolled international students to be part of a group of International Peer Advisors (IPAs) who volunteer their time and enthusiasm to the Association/Club's activities throughout the year. The IPAs will answer your questions about student life at BSC.

International Discussion Group

The International Student Association/Club, the BSC Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, and the OJI will also convene a weekly International Discussion Group for informal discussions that cover a wide range of topics.

Grocery Shopping

Exchange visitors will be able to purchase spices and other ingredients needed to prepare national cuisines by taking advantage of our trips to Oasis World Market in Blacksburg, Virginia. Trips are taken monthly.

Buddy Program

The International Students Association/Club and the OJI will invite BSC students to sign up for the Buddy Program which will pair you up with an American student who may take you around the area, take you home to meet his/her family, take you to area ball games, concerts, fairs and other local events

The Office of International Initiatives' Friendship Families' Program has members from the community who will take you to their homes for meals on major holidays or long-weekends, area varsity sports activities, concerts, festivals, and/or family cook-outs.

A social mixer coordinated by the International Students Association/Club, the BSC Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion and the Oii will conduct a social mixer in early fall so as to introduce international students to their fellow American students (Buddy Program) and area community members (Friendship Families' Program).

Concord University Athens, West Virginia

Concord University was established on February 28, 1872 and has a distinguished legacy of quality education for many generations. Concord University is a career-focused liberal arts institution with a strong commitment to programs of excellence in teacher education, business, pre-professional programs in the arts and sciences, and public service. The University's mission is to: "provide a quality career- focused liberal arts education, to foster scholarly activities, and to serve the regional community."

Concord University is nestled on 123 acres in the scenic Appalachian Mountains at 2,600 feet above sea level. The campus is located in the town of Athens, a community of approximately 1,048. It is also located in the heart of the state's top outdoor recreational area where skiing, white-water rafting, snowboarding, hiking, mountain biking, kayaking, camping, golfing and other outdoor recreational opportunities are abundant. Nearby Pipestem and Bluestone State Parks and WinterPlace Ski Resort are among the region's finest resort and recreational facilities. Regional population centers and airports located in Charleston, West Virginia, and Roanoke, Virginia, are within easy driving distance of the campus via Interstate I-77/ I-64/I -81 and U.S. Route 460.

Concord University provides rigorous programs, primarily at the baccalaureate level on its campus as well as at the Higher Education Erma Byrd Center in Beckley, which prepares students to pursue various graduate study and career options and to assume leadership and professional roles in a multicultural society. The University offers 13 baccalaureate degrees in 64 major areas, 41 minors, and one certificate. It also offers four master's degrees in health promotion, education, and education.

The university offers 13 degree programs at the undergraduate level which lead to a Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Social Work, the Regents Bachelor of Arts, or an Associate of Arts degree. These programs are housed in six divisions: Business, Education, Fine Arts, Languages and Literature, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences. There are four online/hybrid master's programs that lead to a Master of Arts in Teaching, a Master of Education, a Master of Health Promotion, or a Master of Social Work degree.

The Office of Multicultural Affairs ensures a diverse and inclusive community of learners, works corroboratively with other university units, builds a capacity to recognize and value difference, encourages and supports positive interactions between and among diverse populations, and maximizes the benefits of a multicultural perspective.

The goal of Multicultural Affairs is to graduate a more diverse student population and to prepare all students to function productively in a rapidly changing global, multicultural society. Diverse cultural interests are promoted through lectures, seminars, theatrical presentations, and musical groups. Examples of activities include:

- Special activities, including: once-per-month off campus trips, such as Blacksburg, Roanoke, and Charleston, for shopping at international food stores, restaurants, and exposure to American culture and more metropolitan areas
- Service opportunities: visiting local schools and sharing cultures. Students visit local elementary schools to share a presentation about their countries. Students prepare and present a program about Holidays Around the World
- Child Development Center Program: Students take participants on a "Trip Around the World" through pictures, costumes, and crafts.
- International Banquet: Students share their cultures through music, food, costumes and dance for the Concord Community.
- 1000 Villages fundraiser for international artisans
- Yearly International Banquet to showcase culture and cuisine
- International Incident (talent show)

Fairmont State University Fairmont, West Virginia

Fairmont State University, with a 120-acre main campus in Fairmont, is part of the state's growing high technology corridor. Fairmont is within an easy drive of Washington, D.C., Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati. The campus of Fairmont State University sits on a hillside. In fact, we were known for years as "the college on the hill." Fairmont is noted for being the home of the original pepperoni roll, the inaugural celebration of Father's Day, Olympic champion Mary Lou Retton and Johnnie Johnson, the "father of rock and roll."

Fairmont State University is a state-supported institution within the West Virginia system of higher education, offering six associate degrees, more than 80 baccalaureate degrees and graduate programs in business, criminal justice and education. Unique programs include National Security and Intelligence and Aviation Technology and minors in Folklore Studies and TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). With approximately 200 full-time faculty, the student-to-faculty ratio is 17:1.

The University is part of the state's growing high technology corridor with a metro area of approximately 50,000 residents. The main campus is home to the Frank and Jane Gabor West Virginia Folklife Center. The University currently enrolls approximately 4600 students, including more than 70 citizens of 22 different countries, representing five continents who

attend Fairmont State University.

The Office of International Student Services offers an array of educational and cultural opportunities for students and scholars including:

Fall Semester Activities

- Reception to welcome international students and faculty
- International Participation in Homecoming
- International Poetry Reading
- Activities with Office of International Student Services, including visits to schools and field trips (Cooper's Rock, Washington, D.C, movie night at a local cinema, visit local restaurants}
- International Student Organization - student-planned events
- Fine Arts events - plays and musical programs on campus
- Lectures and roundtable discussions related to campus-wide projects
- Honors Program and International Dormitory - hosts cultural programs

Spring Semester Activities

- Spring Welcome Reception
- ISO sponsors Taste of the World
- ISO sponsors International Exhibition and Fashion Show
- Language Programs sponsor cultural event
- Activities with Office of International Student Services continue
- Fine Arts events continue
- Lectures and roundtables continue
- Dormitory programs continue
- International Graduation Celebration

Glennville State College

Charleston, West Virginia

Glennville State College is located in central West Virginia. The main campus is located on a hill side overlooking the city of Glennville and the Gilmer County Courthouse. The College is a few miles off of Interstate 79, which provides ready access to the state capital in Charleston.

Glennville State College is a state-supported undergraduate institution within the West Virginia system of higher education. The school was established in 1872 by the West Virginia Legislature. The Legislature recognized the institution as Glennville State Teachers College in 1931. The name of the institution was changed by the Legislature to Glennville State College in 1943.

The College offers 32 four-year degree programs and five two-year degree programs. The baccalaureate programs encompass the fields of business administration, creative arts, criminal justice, language and literature, teacher education, the social and natural sciences, health, and land resources.

The College's five associate degree programs are in business, criminal justice, forestry, general studies, and land surveying. The College currently enrolls approximately 1800 undergraduate students. A significant percentage of these students are first-generation college students and adult learners. The College draws the majority of its students from central West Virginia, but has recently enrolled a growing number of students from northern and southern West Virginia and neighboring states.

Cultural Events

Throughout the school year, the Fine Arts Gallery hosts local, regional and national art exhibits, including an annual juried Glenville State student art show. Many opportunities exist for Glenville State students and faculty to attend or participate in the performances of:

- Marching, Bluegrass, Concert, and Jazz Bands
- Choir and Chamber Singers
- Woodwind Ensembles
- Brass Ensembles
- Percussion Ensembles

The College's theatre program produces three full-length plays per year on campus, choosing from a variety of genres and performance styles. Casting is open to the entire college community, as are all design/technical positions.

Fitness and Health Center

The Fitness Center offers a state-of-the-art exercise facility and is open daily. The Center is available free of charge for use by Glenville State students. The Health Center provides basic health care to all currently registered students by a full-time registered nurse and a part-time physician or mid-level provider. The Campus Health Center is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. during the fall and spring semesters. Additionally, a privately run clinic is located nearby.

Intramural Sports

Glenville State College provides an array of recreational and intramural programs for students, faculty and staff in the Health and Physical Education building. Activities include both team and individual competitions. Additionally, the College offers a High Adventure Program for outdoor sports.

Varsity Athletics

The College is a member of the Mountain East Conference (NCAA Division II) and sponsors six men's and six women's varsity teams

Shepherd University
Shepherdstown, WV

Shepherd University is situated in the lower Shenandoah Valley, on the banks of the Potomac River, in historic Shepherdstown, West Virginia. The oldest town in the state, Shepherdstown is a quaint university community, with the town and campus combining to offer a unique learning-living environment. Located in the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia, Shepherdstown is within 20 miles of nearby Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. It is only 65 miles from the metropolitan areas of Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, Maryland. Within a short hike or drive of the campus are such well-known historic landmarks as Harpers Ferry and the Antietam Battlefield. Across the Potomac River from the campus is the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park. The C & O Canal National Historical Park, developed along the towpath of the old canal, is a beautiful recreational sanctuary, extending 184.5 miles from Cumberland, Maryland, to Georgetown, in the nation's capital. Richmond and Williamsburg, Virginia, as well as New York and Philadelphia, are all within a few hours' drive of Shepherdstown.

Shepherd University is a state-supported institution within the West Virginia system of higher education. From its beginnings over 130 years ago, the University has evolved into a comprehensive center of higher learning serving a number, yet distinctive roles:

The University offers 27 baccalaureate degrees in a wide range of fields, encompassing the liberal and creative arts, business administration, teacher education, the social and natural sciences, and nursing and other career-oriented areas. It also offers 5 masters level graduate programs in education and business and, beginning in fall 2015, it will offer a doctoral program in nursing practice.

The University currently enrolls approximately 3300 students, of whom approximately 200 are in graduate studies. International student enrollment is approximately 20, representing 14 countries.

The host community for the University offers the exchange visitor a unique view into early American history, the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, and rural life. The town center features a restored main street, small shops, diverse eateries, and multiple galleries, and the surrounding region is known for its thriving farm industry (to include orchards, specialty produce, wineries, and non-GMO practices). The Antietam Battlefield National Monument in neighboring Sharpsburg, MD, offers special insight into the region's history and the cost of freedom.

Available Cultural and Extracurricular Activities Welcome and Orientation

(Students). This is a formal multi-day program that:

- welcomes, initially at the airport and later on campus;
- offers introduction into the University and local community;
- provides orientation into on-campus residential life and important information about their student visa status;
- offers information on critical topics, such as academic integrity and wellness;
- introduces students to the service learning part of a liberal arts education by participation in a Day of Service; and
- contains a number of programs and activities designed to connect the student to other students, particularly Americans, and to facilitate a smooth start academically and socially.

Welcome and Orientation (Visiting Scholars). This is a formal single-day program that:

- welcomes, initially at the airport and later on campus;
- offers introduction into the University and local community;
- provides orientation into on-campus resources and important information about the J-1 visa status; and
- serves as a transition into the hosting academic department and its faculty and staff.

On-campus Student Programming.

There are over 60 registered student clubs and organizations and 20 co-curricular clubs and Greek fraternities and sororities. These span a wide range of interests and offer on-campus activities, excursions, and student leadership opportunities. In addition, each residence hall provides an active schedule of events and programs to build community and have fun. Shepherd Intramurals, located in the Butcher Center, offers various competitive sports and activities. These include both in-door and out-door opportunities and often extend to regional competition.

Washington Gateway Program.

This leverages Shepherd University's proximity to Washington, DC and Baltimore, MD. The Program provides a series of organized, in-depth, academic, cultural, and career experiences in the political and global information center of our nation's capital.

Academic Studies and Special Lectures.

There are many extra-curricular activities and opportunities available through the academic departments, and these are enhanced by the programming administered through the President's Office. Special topics (e.g., government and politics, health, social concerns, etc) are chosen for their relevance to current issues. Additionally, senior diplomats, government executives, recognized experts, and visiting professors are invited for guest lectures and seminars. These join other long-standing, critically-acclaimed series, such as Appalachian Heritage Festival and the Contemporary American Theatre Festival.

West Liberty University

West Liberty, WV

West Liberty University is a forward-looking, four-year public university steeped in rich heritage as West Virginia's oldest institution of higher education. Established as West Liberty Academy in 1837, WLU was created in response to the need for higher educational opportunities west of the Appalachians. Today WLU is a public institution characterized by its recent growth into University status in 2009.

Situated on a 290-acre hilltop, just an hour from Pittsburgh, Pa., WLU enrolls nearly 2,800 students on its main campus and a nearby satellite campus, located at the Highlands Shopping Complex. Both locations are just minutes from the Pennsylvania and Ohio state borders, near Wheeling, in West Virginia's Northern Panhandle and situated on the beautiful Ohio River. Shopping, recreational and social activities abound.

Five vibrant colleges and a School of Professional Studies make up the University: the College of Arts and Communication, the College of Education, the College of Liberal Arts,

the College of Science and the Gary E. West College of Business. All offer a personalized education delivered by a team of highly qualified faculty. With more than 60 majors and 30 programs that are nationally recognized or accredited, WLU students are rewarded with a successful future.

Graduate programs include the Master of Arts in Education, the Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies and the Master of Professional Studies degrees. The Master of Physician Assistant Studies program has been rated number one for career security by Forbes Magazine recently and attracts thousands of applicants.

WLU also offers several degree completion programs for non-traditional students, including its Bachelor of Arts in Organizational Leadership and Administration (BLA) and the Regents Bachelor of Arts degree.

WLU is a member of the NCAA and Mountain East Conference (MEC) and offers a wide range of intercollegiate athletics at the NCAA Division II level, including men's football, cross country, basketball, wrestling, track, tennis, baseball and golf; women's softball, volleyball, cross country, basketball, track, tennis, golf and soccer. The Hilltoppers men's basketball team are currently undefeated and ranked number one in Division II. WLU also is ranked as one of the most affordable liberal arts colleges in the country for both in-state and out-of-state students, making a student's return on investment another valuable trait of a WLU education.

Available cultural and extracurricular activities

We have a good and developing infrastructure for International students and scholars, through the International Student Office, which helps each international students and scholars to adapt and settle in their new environment, their new life in the US and adapt to their new education system. Through the International Student Office, we help students connect with other international students, we provide orientation programs once students arrive to our campus, cultural activities and programs, weekend travels and exploration trips in the area, and most important the International Student Office, helps each student effectively deal with transition issues, personal problems and English barriers. The office provides other services such as airport pick up and drop offs, cultural enrichment activities, community service opportunities, and a host family program.

Examples of activities organized: The International Student Office at WLU is organizing throughout the semester different educational and fun events that provide students with opportunities to learn more about the culture in the area, make friends and network, travel and explore the United States. Examples of programming: WLU Thanksgiving dinner for students, Halloween in the community, Christmas with host families, explore the local artistic life, attend theater plays and Broadway shows at the Wheeling Capitol Theater or in Pittsburgh, visit the Legislature in Charleston – WV, Kayaking, biking, shopping trips, city exploration trips Wheeling, Pittsburgh, Columbus, Cleveland, Niagara Falls, trips to amusement parks, zoos, Mosques, churches, museums or other destinations of interest etc

WLU's International Student Club

The [International Student Club](#) is a special a multicultural student organization that supports the welfare of international students and facilitates interaction between American students

and international students at West Liberty. The International Club organizes many activities throughout the school year for its members and annual events in the community like: the Culture Fair, International Food Festival and the International Tea Time Festival. The club is a great support system for international students, as they have a place where they can bond with other international students in addition to having fun. The International Student Club has been gaining in recognition, and its events are some of the most anticipated and well-known across campus.

Athletics

[WLU Hilltoppers](#) as they are popularly known as - the athletes of WLU are champions and have regularly excelled in national-level sports events. Baseball, basketball, football, golf, tennis and wrestling are popular options for men. Women have sports options like basketball, golf, soccer, tennis, volleyball and softball. There are also intramural sports in which students can participate.

Wellness Center

The Wellness Center currently has several cardio-respiratory machines, including treadmills, stair climb machines, elliptical machines, and stationary bikes. The facility also has several weight machines and free weights, including dumb bells, kettle bells, and weight plates for barbells. The Center gives students and staff access to training equipment that can help them remain strong and fit.

Winter Weather Health Tips

Coping with the extreme winter weather conditions can be challenging. Here are some tips that will help make the weather conditions more tolerable.

Wear layers of clothing. You will be much warmer if you wear several layers of clothing rather than one heavy shirt and a coat. Benefits to wearing layers are that you can remove some of them if you get too warm indoors, or you can add more if you are still too cold.

Wear a hat! Between 35-50 percent of body heat is eliminated through the head. If you want to use that heat to stay warm, cover your head! If you are displeased with the way a hat can mess up your hair, you can use a long winter scarf instead. Just lay it over your head and wrap the long ends around your neck. It won't mess your hair up as much. You can also use the hood of your winter jacket (if it has one). In extreme cold, some people use both a hat and the hood.

Keep your socks dry. If you have had your socks on all day, your feet will have perspired some. If you've walked a lot, they will have perspired more. Even a little perspiration will cause your socks to be damp. If your feet are even a little damp, they will be cold, and if your feet are cold, you will be cold. Walking through snow or walking in the rain will obviously contribute to the problem. It's a good idea to change into a clean, dry pair of socks before you go back outside-especially if you have to be out for very long.

Transportation

The transportation system in the United States is quite different from that in most other countries. Most Americans own cars, which are the most common form of transportation. Our rail and bus systems are not as extensive as those of many other countries.

Information about West Virginia's public transportation system can be found at <http://www.apta.com/resources/links/unitedstates/Pages/WestVirginiaTransitLinks.aspx>.

How to Obtain a West Virginia Driver's License

If you have a valid Foreign Driver's License or driver's license from another U.S. state, you may drive a car in West Virginia for up to one year from the date of your arrival in the U.S. Your DS-2019 must have been issued for a duration of time that exceeds one year in order to obtain an West Virginia Driver's license. However, if you purchase a car and register it in your name, or if you do not have a valid driver's license from West Virginia, the procedure for obtaining a West Virginia Driver's license is as follows:

1. Get a copy of the Digest of the West Virginia Driver's License Manual from any Bureau of Motor Vehicles or online.
2. Go to the nearest Division of Motor Vehicles Office, submit a driver's license application, take a vision test, a written test on West Virginia motor vehicle regulations and traffic signs, and pass a driving test.
3. In order to be issued a license, a foreign national must present: valid passport; U.S. visa; I-94; card; and DS-2019.
4. You must also show two acceptable documents establishing residency in West Virginia, a birth certificate, a US social security number.

You have the choice between a Not For Federal Use driver's license or ID card, or a REAL ID/For Federal Use card that contains a gold star, indicating that the card meets full federal requirements for future use at airports and other designated federal facilities and uses nationwide.

Auto Insurance

In order to obtain license plates for a car, you will be required to show proof that you have auto insurance. It is illegal to drive without car insurance. Many companies offer a variety of auto insurance policies, so you should "shop around". When you have selected a policy, read it carefully before signing any documents. The following companies offer auto insurance.

Company Web Site Phone

Allstate Insurance <http://www.allstate.com> 1-847-402-5000
American Family Insurance <http://www.amfam.com> 608-249-2111
Geico Direct <http://www.geico.com> 1-800-841-3000
Liberty Mutual <http://www.libertymutual.com> 1-800-225-2467
Nationwide Insurance <http://www.nationwide.com> 1-800-882-2822
Progressive Insurance <http://www.progressive.com> 1-800-776-4737
State Farm Insurance <http://www.statefarm.com> 1-877-734-2265

Dining, Entertainment & Shopping

West Virginia is full of places to purchase all amenities to meet your living needs as well as places and activities to keep you entertained during your free time. This includes being relatively close to Washington, D.C. from many host campuses. More information about these opportunities will be provided to you by your host campus.

Office of Exchange Coordination and Designation

As an Exchange Visitor you are permitted to contact the Department of State Office of Exchange Coordination and Designation with questions or concerns about your J-1 program.

Below you'll find the contact information for the J-1 Visa Exchange Visitor Program of the U.S. Department of State:

Mailing Address: U.S. Department of State Office of Exchange Coordination and Compliance ECA/EC/ECC, SA-44 ROOM 664 WASHINGTON DC 20547-4406

Street Address (couriers): U.S. Department of State Office of Exchange Coordination and Compliance ECA/EC/ECC, SA-44 ROOM 664 WASHINGTON DC 20547-4406 FAX number: (202) 632-2900 Email: jvisas@state.gov.