

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT HANDBOOK

INTRODUCTION

The office of the *Coordinator of International Student Support* and the *Office of Community Life* are here to provide support for international students. A great deal of the needed information for your life here at PSR is the same for national and international students.

However, because of the particular restrictions for students who must maintain their F-1 legal status, some information is of particular importance to international students. This handbook is intended to provide guidance and the relevant information to assist international students to settle into life here at Pacific School of Religion and to maintain their legal F-1 status.

The International Student Support Task Group meets monthly throughout the academic year. The ISSTG is composed of faculty, staff, international and national students. All international students are welcome to attend and to suggest issues for the task group to engage.

ORIENTATION FOR NEW INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

One week prior to the orientation for all entering students, PSR provides a one week orientation especially designed for newly entering international students. The orientation assists the students with the challenges of settling into a new cultural/social/academic environment and with practical tasks of living in Berkeley, California. This is done in cooperation between the *Coordinator for International Student Support [CISS]* and the *Office of Community Life [OCL]*. A sample agenda is provided for your information.
<link to PDF>

ACADEMIC SUPPORT/TUTORING

The office of the *Coordinator for International Student Support [CISS]* provides academic tutoring: developing written and oral assignments, editing papers, analyzing reading assignments, reading for efficiency and understanding. Regular office hours and meeting by appointment make this support available. Academic writing and critical analysis workshops are offered periodically. Students are encouraged to suggest topics for these workshops.

CROSS-CULTURAL SUPPORT/COACHING

The challenges of living and studying in a new culture and in a second language are present and significant. The *Coordinator for International Student Support [CISS]* is available for consultation, problem-solving, and conversation.

FINANCIAL AID AND HOUSING ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility for financial aid and housing for Pacific School of Religion (PSR) students is as follows:

- MDiv students are eligible for only 6 semesters (3 years of full-time study) of financial aid and housing.
- MA and MTS students are eligible for only 4 semesters (2 years of full-time study) of financial aid and housing.
- CSS and CTS students are eligible for only 2 semesters (1 year of full-time study) of financial aid and housing

Please note that when your financial aid and housing eligibility expires, you will no longer receive financial aid from PSR and you will be ineligible for on-campus housing. If you extend your program beyond the time specified above, you will be responsible for your tuition/fees and off-campus housing.

MAINTAINING LEGAL STATUS

F-1 students are responsible for maintaining their legal status. The CISS has authorization from the U.S. government to help with this process. F-1 students provide the CISS with the information required by the U.S. government and the CISS will transfer that information through SEVIS [Student and Exchange Visitor Information System]. *Link to pdf “What is SEVIS”* The CISS also prepares the I-20 for international students.

In order to maintain legal status an F-1 student must keep all necessary documents up-to-date. *Link to pdf “Living and Studying in the U.S.; Essential Documents”* In addition, F-1 students’ employment is strictly regulated. *Link to pdf “Maintaining F-1/J-1 Status”*

EMPLOYMENT

F-1 students are allowed by the US government to work on campus up to a maximum of 20 hours/week. The employment guidelines and procedures are explained here. *Link to pdf “International Student On-Campus Employment at PSR”* Off campus employment allowed for international students is authorized either through Curricular Practical Training [CPT] or Optional Practical Training [OPT]. *link to pdf “Types of Employment”*

CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING

CPT allows an international student to work off-campus as part of the student's academic program. CPT must be approved by faculty and the Designated School Official for international students. See the regulations [<link to PDF of “Curricular Practical Training”](#) and download the application form. [<link to PDF of CPT Recommendation Form”](#)

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

OPT allows an international student to work off-campus while still an F-1 student. This is an opportunity to pursue more deeply your vocational interests, and is most especially useful after graduation. Students must apply to the US Immigration Service. OPT is time-limited. See regulations [<link to PDF of “Optional Practical Training](#)

SEVERE ECONOMIC HARDSHIP

F-1 students who have been enrolled full-time, are in good academic standing, and holding F-1 status for a minimum of one academic year are eligible to apply for employment authorization due to economic hardship. Read about requirements and procedures for obtaining employment authorization. [<link to PDF of “Severe Economic Hardship”; this doc still needs editing>](#) In addition PSR has several emergency funds available to students. These are administered through the *Community Life office*.

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBERS

In order to work in the United States, including on PSR campus, a student must have a Social Security number. The requirements of obtaining a SS# for international students are quite specific. See step 6 of the guide to employment for international students. [<link to PDF of “Obtaining a Social Security Number”](#)

CALIFORNIA DRIVERS LICENSE & CALIFORNIA IDENTIFICATION CARD

A California Drivers License or Identification Card is often required in order to cash checks, open a bank account, or to buy something with either a check or a credit card. Without one of these documents, you would need to carry your passport with you at all times – which is not recommended. These documents are obtained at the Department of Motor Vehicles [DMV]. An appointment is recommended. What is needed to obtain one of these identity documents is explained in detail. *Link to pdf “California Drivers License & California Identification Card”*

MONEY AND BANKING IN THE U.S.

Having a bank account while you live here at PSR is essential for keeping your money secure and handling financial transactions. Carrying much cash around is not wise. Banks provide both checking and savings accounts. Different banks have different

procedures and different fees. Before you open a bank account, read this information. *Link to pdf “Money and Banking in the United States”*

HEALTH INSURANCE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Pacific School of Religion has an agreement with a health provider. All students are required to have health insurance which meets the same standards. See a fuller explanation of these standards and PSR's expectations. [<link to the page that contains health insurance plan information.>](#)

TAXES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The U.S. tax system may seem confusing to international students. That is because it is confusing. In addition, each country has its own way of regulating taxation. The U.S. tax system may be very different from the system in your home country. For example, in some countries students are not taxed. In the U.S. anyone who earns money must file a tax return. To help you understand the U.S. tax filing procedures, click on this link, *link to pdf “Taxes in the United States”*

International students pay state tax and, depending upon income, federal tax. The regulations for international students are different than those for U.S. citizens and Permanent Residents. The regulations also vary depending upon the country from which the international student comes. PSR will offer a tax-filing workshop early in the spring semester. Links to current regulations and appropriate forms are provided below:

An excellent source of information on this topic is the websites of the University of Texas at Austin. [<link to http://www.utexas.edu/international/taxes/nr.html>](http://www.utexas.edu/international/taxes/nr.html) Although this is not an official IRS site, the information is reliable, updated each year, and is the reference to which the IRS liaison directs international students. It is clear and has links to all the needed form.

In addition, the official government sites are the following:

Employment Taxes for Students with F-1 Visas:

U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Publication 519 – U.S. Tax Guide for Aliens
IRS Publication 901 – U.S. Tax Treaties
IRS website for forms and publications:
<http://www.irs.ustreas.gov/formspubs/index.html>

State of California Employment Development Department (EDD) Website for forms and publications: <http://www.edd.ca.gov/taxrep/taxform.htm>

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website:
<http://uscis.gov/graphics/index.htm>

TRANSFERRING SCHOOLS

F-1 students in good standing may transfer to another school provided that school is one accepted by the U.S. government as appropriate for international students. The procedure is explained here. [<link to PDF of “Transfer Procedures for F-1 Students”](#)

TRAVEL OUTSIDE AND RE-ENTRY TO THE U.S.

During your stay at PSR you may wish to travel back to your home country or travel outside the U.S. for vacation. F-1 students must be careful to have all the documents required which will allow the student to re-enter the U.S. and continue studying. Immigration regulations may change. If you are planning to travel outside of the U.S., go to www.ice.gov/sevis and click on the frequently asked questions. However, the basic regulations can be found here. *Link to pdf “Travel Outside and Re-entry to the U.S.” and pdf “Travel to Canada or Mexico”*

INVITING FAMILY MEMBERS FOR A VISIT TO THE U.S.A.

If you are interested in having family members visit you at PSR, the following link will give you some guidance. *Link to pdf “Inviting Family Members for a Visit to the USA”*

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

If you have children when you arrive at PSR or if you have a child born while you are studying here, schools, child care information, and community resources may be important to you. Although some resources will change, perhaps the following information will be helpful. **Link to pdf “Information for Parents”**