

Overview of the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program

The purpose of the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program is “to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchanges.” [*Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act (Fulbright - Hayes Act) of 1961*]

Four principal parties are involved in the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program.

- **Department of State (DOS):** issues J visas to Exchange Visitors (EV) and their dependents and creates and administers federal regulations and policies governing the Exchange Visitor Program.
- **Exchange Visitor Program Sponsors:** legal entities – such as the University of Michigan – Ann Arbor – that have applied for and received designation from DOS to conduct an Exchange Visitor Program. The International Center administers U-M/Ann Arbor’s Exchange Visitor Program (Program Number P--00142), and serves as the University’s official representative to Department of State for this program. An International Center staff member serves as the Responsible Officer (RO) for the J-1 program on the Ann Arbor campus, and is the point of contact on any issue that relates to the school's compliance with J-1 program regulations.
- **Exchange Visitors:** foreign nationals who have been selected by an exchange visitor sponsor to participate in a particular exchange visitor program.
- **Department of Homeland Security (DHS):** manages the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), admits an alien to the U.S. in J exchange visitor status, and which adjudicates certain immigration benefits for J exchange visitors and their dependents.

Primary Activities/Duration and Funding: The University of Michigan, as a J-1 Program Sponsor, can invite J-1 Exchange Visitors to the university for a period of up to five years. Some of these exchange visitors, often referred to as international scholars, are U-M employees; others are supported by external funding or by personal funds. Regardless of the funding source, U-M Exchange Visitors’ primary activities must consist of teaching, lecturing, observing, or conducting research, and their program must include components of cultural and educational exchange. Although J-1 status allows employment, the primary purpose of the program is not employment, but rather, cultural and educational exchange.

Form DS-2019 and the J-1 Visa: Participants in the exchange visitor program will enter the U.S. on a J-1 visa, which is the nonimmigrant visa classification for “exchange visitors.” The International Center issues Form DS-2019 to J-1 Exchange Visitors, which will allow them to apply for a J-1 visa at a U.S. consulate. Form DS-2019 will include the Exchange Visitor’s category. The University of Michigan/Ann Arbor can invite international scholars in the following categories: Professor, Research Scholar, Short-Term Scholar, or (rarely), Specialist.

Basic Eligibility Requirements for all J-1 Exchange Visitors [22 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) § 41.62(a)]

- Intent to pursue appropriate activity
- Intent to return to home country
- Sufficient funding
- Appropriate background for program activity
- Adequate English

Note: J-1 Exchange Visitors must have the English proficiency required to carry out their J-1 program objective (research, teaching, etc.), to navigate everyday life in the U.S., and to participate in cross-cultural activities.

Health Insurance

U-M J-1 Exchange Visitors are required to maintain U-M approved health insurance. Examples include U-M Benefits Office-administered plans, the International Student/Scholar Health Insurance Plan, or another plan that meets [U-M and federal standards](#) [1].

Some Additional Important Considerations for Departments and Prospective J-1 Exchange Visitors

The regulations that govern the J-1 Exchange Visitor program are complex and involve some specific restrictions.

For example:

No tenure or tenure-track positions: A J-1 Professor or Research Scholar cannot hold tenure or be placed in a position “on a tenure track.”

Foreign Medical Graduates: The U-M International Center is authorized to issue a Form DS-2019 to foreign medical graduates (M.D.s) to enable them to come to the U.S. for the primary activity of observation, consultation, teaching, or research. They can participate in a non-clinical exchange program, either with NO PATIENT CONTACT OR CARE, or where patient contact is only INCIDENTAL to the primary activity. M.D.s with direct patient contact must be sponsored by ECFMG

If the J-1 Exchange Visitor is not an M.D., no patient contact is permitted.

Two-year home country physical presence requirement: certain J-1 Exchange Visitors may be subject to this requirement for a variety of reasons, including their source of funding and/or the education, training, or skill they are pursuing in the U.S. Exchange visitors who are subject to the two-year home country residence requirement must "reside and be physically present" in their "home" country for an aggregate of two years before being eligible for certain immigration benefits.

- [Two-Year Foreign Residency Requirement and Waiver \(INA 212e\)](#) [2]

Prior J status may result in required waiting periods: Prior participation in any J category may subject the prospective exchange visitor to the "12-month bar", and prior participation in the Professor or Research Scholar category may subject the prospective exchange visitor to the "24-month bar" on repeat participation..

- [12- and 24-Month Bars for Professors and Research Scholars](#) [3]
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Links

[1] <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/resources/healthins/waiver>

[2] <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/j-two-year-requirement>

[3] <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/scholars/j1-scholars/12-and-24-bars>