Guide Book for Accepted Incoming Exchange Students

OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS
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Welcome!

On behalf of the Office of International Programs (OIP), we would like to welcome you to Rensselaer. As an exchange student, you will be joining a dynamic academic community that includes over 1500 international students and scholars. As you prepare for your arrival in the U.S. and your time at Rensselaer, we ask that you carefully read the information in this guide and contact our office with any questions.

We wish you safe travels and look forward to welcoming you to campus!

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Fall 2022 Checklist for New Exchange Students

Now that you have been accepted to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute as an exchange student, there are a number of important tasks that you need to complete. The Office of International Programs (OIP) has prepared the following checklist to assist you:

- Check your DS-2019 for accuracy
- Pay your SEVIS fee and apply for a visa
- Register for courses online through SIS
- Submit your ID card photo online by July 8th: [https://info.rpi.edu/campus-card](https://info.rpi.edu/campus-card)
- Apply for on campus housing (not guaranteed) through the StarRez Portal or secure off-campus housing. It is strongly recommended that exchange students look in to off-campus housing options due to limited on-campus housing availability.
- Complete the required health forms for new students
- Affirm enrollment in the Rensselaer Health Insurance plan
- Make travel arrangements. You may arrive in the U.S. up to 30 days prior to the start date on your DS-2019. Please be sure to arrive in time to attend the orientation which is scheduled for August 26th.
- Enroll in the eBill. Rensselaer expenses will appear here (Health Center Fee: $360/semester; *Rensselaer Health Insurance: $642/semester; Student Activities Fee: $377) *This fee has not yet been finalized and only reflects the cost from 2021*
- Complete the electronic check-in with the Office of International Programs (instructions below)
- Carefully read through the information below

### Important Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date/Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online Course Registration</td>
<td>June 27th at 10:00am EST - July 10th, midnight EST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Check-in with OIP</td>
<td>Upon arrival at Rensselaer - See instructions below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory Immigration Orientation</td>
<td>Friday, August 26th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Registration Session</td>
<td>Friday, August 26th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First day of classes</td>
<td>Monday, August 29th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor Day - No classes; Staff holiday</td>
<td>Monday, September 5th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Last day to add classes</td>
<td>Monday, September 12th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last day to drop classes</td>
<td>Friday, October 21st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last day of classes</td>
<td>Friday, December 9th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final exams</td>
<td>Wednesday, December 14th – Tuesday, December 20th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The Academic calendar can be found at: [https://info.rpi.edu/registrar/academic-calendar](https://info.rpi.edu/registrar/academic-calendar)*
Please review the following immigration checklist and carefully read the information below.

Prior to departure from your home country:
☐ Carefully check your DS-2019 for accuracy
☐ Complete Form I-901
☐ Pay your SEVIS I-901 fee
☐ Apply for your J-1 visa

Upon arrival in the U.S.:
☐ Check accuracy of your I-94 online
☐ Check in electronically with the Office of International Programs

Important: Check-in with the Office of International Programs is required as a condition of your immigration status. You must obtain a DS-2019 travel signature from OIP staff in order to reenter the U.S. following any international travel.

Receiving your DS-2019
The Form DS-2019 or “Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Status” is the document that is used to administer the exchange visitor program. It defines the nature and length of your program, as well as how you are financing your stay. This document is required in order to be able to apply for a visa to enter the United States.

After receiving the DS-2019 Form, carefully check its accuracy. Please contact the Office of International Programs at Rensselaer if any changes need to be made. Once you have checked the accuracy of your DS-2019, visit www.fmjfee.com and complete Form I-901. You will need to pay a one-time fee of $180 required by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to fund the operation of the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). This fee is in addition to the visa application fee. The SEVIS fee should be paid directly to DHS at least 3 business days prior to your visa interview. You may wish to print out proof of payment for your own records. When completing Form I-901 be sure to write your name exactly as it appears on your DS-2019, which should match your passport. Your SEVIS Identification Number can be found at the top right corner of your DS-2019 Form. It starts with an “N,” followed by a 10 digit number. The Program Number can be found in Box 2 of your DS-2019.
**Visa Application**

A visa is a document used to enter the United States. It specifies the following:

- The status in which you may apply to enter the U.S.
- The dates during which you can enter the U.S.
- The number of times you may enter the U.S.
- Your sponsoring institution
- Any applicable restrictions or conditions

After you pay the SEVIS fee, go to the U.S. Department of State website [https://ceac.state.gov/genniv/](https://ceac.state.gov/genniv/) to fill out an Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application Form DS-160 and to pay the visa application fee of $160. Consult the website of the U.S. embassy or consulate where you plan to apply for instructions on how to pay.

After paying the visa application fee, schedule your interview – the earlier the better! Consult the website of the U.S. embassy or consulate where you plan to apply for instructions on how to schedule it.

You will need to provide the following documents to the U.S. Consulate:

- DS-2019 Form
- I-901 SEVIS fee payment receipt
- Form DS-160 confirmation page
- Visa application page fee receipt
- Passport that is valid for at least six months beyond your period of stay in the United States.
- Acceptance letter from Rensselaer’s Office of International Programs
- Proof of financial support in the form of original documents for your entire course of study

You should also consult the website of the U.S. embassy or consulate where you plan to apply to check whether additional documents are needed.

Wait times for interview appointments vary by location, season, and visa category, so you should apply for your visa early. Review the interview wait time for the location where you will apply [here](https://ceac.state.gov/genniv/).

Be sure to check with the U.S. Consulate in your home country for additional information and further details: [http://www.usembassy.gov/](http://www.usembassy.gov/)

**Note:** Canadian citizens do not require a J-1 visa to enter the US in J-1 status, and can enter the US with a DS-2019 form. They will also need to show evidence of financial support and proof of the I-901 SEVIS payment.

**Arriving in the U.S.**

You may enter the United States up to 30 days prior to the start date on your DS-2019 Form. At the U.S. port of entry, you will be
asked to present your DS-2019 Form, passport, SEVIS I-901 fee payment receipt, and visa to the U.S. Immigration Inspector. **Carry these documents in your carry-on bag, and not in your checked luggage.** Be sure to examine the stamp in your passport before leaving the Immigration Inspector’s desk to verify that it has been marked “J-1” and “D/S.” These markings indicate that you have entered in J-1 immigration status for the duration of your status (“D/S”).

**I-94 Record**
The I-94 is a form issued by the U.S. government which keeps track of your arrival to and departure from the United States. The I-94 is an electronic form and your records can be obtained at the following website after you have arrived in the U.S.: [www.cbp.gov/I94](http://www.cbp.gov/I94).

When you arrive in the U.S., this arrival will be documented on your I-94. It is important to make sure that the information regarding your arrival is correct. If not, it will need to be corrected as soon as possible.

**Instructions for Electronic Check-In with the OIP**
In order to complete your electronic check-in you will need electronic copies of all of the following documents:

1) DS-2019 (after entering the U.S.)
2) Visa & visa stamp
3) Passport information page
4) I-94: [https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home](https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home) and click on “Get Most Recent I-94” (Please note that you will not be able to access your I-94 until after you arrive in the U.S.)

You will need to upload these documents to the ISSS Terra Dotta portal which will be discussed at the arrival orientation.

**Course Registration**

**Registration Dates**
As an incoming exchange student you will be able to register on-line for undergraduate courses beginning on **June 27th at 10:00am EST and ending on July 10th at midnight EST**. Registration will reopen once you have arrived on campus and additional changes can be made to your schedule during the first two weeks of the semester. A registration session is also scheduled for **Friday, August 26th**. At the session, a staff member from the Registrar’s Office will be present to assist you and to answer any registration questions that you may have. You will be able to make changes to your schedule at that time, as well as any time during the first two weeks of classes.

**How to Register**
Detailed registration instructions can be found [here](#). You should have received your Rensselaer Identification Number, (RIN) in a separate e-mail. Please be sure to review Rensselaer’s Academic Deadlines listed in the Rensselaer calendar: [https://info.rpi.edu/registrar/academic-calendar](https://info.rpi.edu/registrar/academic-calendar) so that you are aware of ADD and DROP deadlines.
Academic Terminology and Assessment
Please note that the terms “class” and “course” are used interchangeably and refer to an individual unit of study. Class format may be a lecture, discussion, group work or a combination. Assessment normally takes place throughout the semester by means of tests, quizzes and other assignments.

Credits and Courseload
A normal full-time course load for undergraduates is between 14-18 credit hours per semester; a minimum of 12 credit hours is required to maintain full-time status. Although you may enroll in a maximum of 21 credits, you are discouraged from taking more than 17. Most classes carry 4 credits. The number of credits attached to a class/course is approximately the same as the number of hours per week that the class will meet. For example, a 16-credit course load will mean approximately 16 hours of class time each week.

Course Descriptions and Availability
Course descriptions can be found in the Rensselaer catalogue: [http://www.rpi.edu/academics/catalog/](http://www.rpi.edu/academics/catalog/). Not all courses listed in the on-line catalogue are offered each semester. The actual semester class schedule can be accessed by visiting the Rensselaer Student Information System website, [http://sis.rpi.edu/](http://sis.rpi.edu/) and clicking on the class hour schedule link. You will need to log in to SIS to be able to see this information. Instructions on how to log in to SIS for the first time can be found [here](http://www.rpi.edu/dept/srfs/AuthorizationFrm.pdf).

Restrictions
Exchange students should note that they are not permitted to register for: MTLE 6300, MGMT 2300, MGMT 1240, MGMT 1250, MGMT 1260 or MGMT 2510. Additionally, exchange students who want to register for ECSE 4900, MTLK 4920, MANE 4260 or ISYE 4270 will need to wait until they arrive on campus and request permission from the instructor. Permission is also needed for enrollment in courses offered by the School of Architecture. Students who want to register for one of these courses are advised to choose an alternate course in the event that they do not receive permission.

Exchange students are restricted from all design studio courses. Exception: Students from DTU who are enrolled in the Design and Innovation program may register for Studio B (STSO 4605) or Studio C (STSO 4610). If you wish to register for this course, please contact Jamie Obst at [violaj2@rpi.edu](mailto:violaj2@rpi.edu).

If the course you would like to register for is already full, you will need to obtain permission from the instructor in order to be added to the course. To do this you will need to submit the following completed form to the Registrar’s Office during the first two weeks of class: [http://www.rpi.edu/dept/srfs/AuthorizationFrm.pdf](http://www.rpi.edu/dept/srfs/AuthorizationFrm.pdf). This will require that you contact the course instructor once you are on campus. Please remember that permission may not be granted for closed courses, and it is strongly suggested that students choose an alternate course to take in the event that their request is denied.

It is your responsibility to make sure that you have the appropriate academic background for any course you register for. You are expected to check the prerequisites in the Rensselaer catalogue and to make sure that you have adequate preparation.

Graduate-Level Courses (6000 or above)
Please note that unless you are at Rensselaer with graduate status (please see below), you will need to obtain permission to enroll in any graduate level class (6000 level and above). Permission must be granted by the class instructor, the Graduate Program Director of the department in which you wish to take the course, and the Office of Graduate Education. To request permission complete the top portion of the [Approval Form for an Undergraduate to take a Graduate Course](http://www.rpi.edu/dept/srfs/AuthorizationFrm.pdf). In the space for the Undergraduate Academic Advisor’s signature, simply indicate that you are an exchange student. Submit the form to Jamie Obst in the Office of International Programs at [violaj2@rpi.edu](mailto:violaj2@rpi.edu) by July 10th. The OIP
will forward the form and your transcript to the appropriate departments for signature. If you are approved for a graduate course, you will automatically be registered for it. While students will be notified if they do not receive approval, it is suggested that an alternate course is chosen as a back-up. Please make a note on the form if you are doing this so that total course load can be evaluated properly.

**Incoming exchange students who are only in their second year of their undergraduate degree should note that they are not eligible to register for graduate level courses (6000 and above).**

**Research**
The Office of International Programs cannot set up research projects on your behalf. If you would like to undertake an Undergraduate Research Project (URP), you will need to make arrangements directly with the professor with whom you wish to work. Contact those professors whose research interests are in line with your own and send a short CV and summary of any previous research experience or relevant academic work. Arrangements for the specific type of research and the number of credits offered would be made directly with the professor, but you can earn up to 4 credits per semester. Please understand that you cannot receive compensation for your research project, only academic credits. Unfortunately, research placement cannot be guaranteed, as it is dependent upon the needs of our professors. Please visit the [Office of Undergraduate Education](#) website for additional details.

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**Information for Students with Graduate Status at Rensselaer**

While most incoming exchange students are brought in to Rensselaer with undergraduate status (often when they are graduates at their home institutions), there is a small number of students that are brought in with graduate student status. This is dependent upon the exchange agreement that Rensselaer has with the host institution and is primarily administrative in nature. Current graduate exchanges exist only with the Lally School of Management. If you are unsure as to if you have undergraduate or graduate student status at Rensselaer, please refer to your acceptance letter.

If you are coming to Rensselaer with graduate student status, please be aware of the following:

- Graduate students are limited to a maximum enrollment of 15 credits per semester (undergraduates are allowed to take up to 21)
- Graduate students are required to have dental insurance at a current cost of $88.50 per semester
- The current Student Activity Fee for graduate students is $280 per semester (versus $377 for undergraduates).
- Graduate exchange students are affiliated with the Lally School of Management and are restricted to graduate classes in management only. If you wish to take graduate level courses in another school at Rensselaer, you will need to obtain permission.
- You may register for any undergraduate level course for which you meet the necessary prerequisites, with the exception of courses offered by the School of Architecture.
- There is no on-campus housing for graduate students. However, as a graduate student you are eligible to live in City Station which is adjacent to campus and has campus shuttle service.
Please be aware that City Station does not offer monthly/short-term leases, only full-year. Alternatively, graduate students can find off-campus housing. Information on off-campus housing can be found here.

There are two primary categories of housing that are available to exchange students: Rensselaer campus housing, or private, off campus housing. Please read the following information carefully as you make a decision about the type of housing that is best for you. Please don’t hesitate to contact the Office of International Programs or the Office of Student Living and Learning with any questions.

**Rensselaer Campus Housing – Please note, on-campus housing is not guaranteed**

- Campus housing is managed by the Office of Student Living and Learning. Living and Learning staff facilitate housing placements and provide programs related to living and dining at Rensselaer.
- A variety of campus housing options exist, including apartment style accommodations and studios. While all offer basic amenities and are clean and well maintained, others are new or newly renovated and offer more modern amenities. These differences will be reflected in the cost of accommodation. Visit the Student Living and Learning Halls and Apartments webpage to review types of available housing and amenities.
- Campus housing is located throughout the Rensselaer property, and some residences may be as far as a 30 minute walk from the main part of campus. Free, regular shuttle service is provided between residences halls and campus. Please review the campus map before making your housing selections.
- All first year (freshmen) and second year (sophomore) students at Rensselaer are required to live in campus housing. Campus housing is optional for 3rd and 4th year students (juniors and seniors), many of whom choose to live off campus. First and second year students (underclassmen) are typically between 18-20 years of age, while juniors and seniors (upperclassmen) are generally in their early 20’s. Please consider these age ranges when requesting specific housing facility.
- There is no on-campus housing for graduate students. However, as a graduate student you are eligible to live in City Station which is adjacent to campus and has campus shuttle service. Please be aware that City Station does not offer monthly/short-term leases, only full-year. Alternatively, graduate students can find off-campus housing. Information on off-campus housing can be found here.
Rensselaer is a tobacco-free campus. Using tobacco products in any Institute facility or outdoor area, including campus housing, is prohibited. If you smoke, please take this into consideration. Additional information on Rensselaer’s tobacco policy can be found here.

**Off-Campus Housing**

- "Off-campus" refers to apartments and other dwellings for Rensselaer students not directly managed by Rensselaer. Instead, a landlord manages each rental property, and is required to follow state and local laws and guidelines regarding safety, maintenance, leases and other matters.
- Off-campus housing is generally less expensive than campus housing. It also may provide greater flexibility in terms of move-in dates and independence. MOST exchange students choose to live in off-campus housing.
- The Rensselaer Off Campus Commons is an office that serves Rensselaer students by providing information and support to students who live in private housing. Their goal is to educate students on how to find a safe, secure, and affordable place to live while studying at Rensselaer.
- The Off-Campus Commons maintains a space where students who live off campus can come to study and to meet with other students, staff and faculty. Details can be found here.
- From time to time, the OIP receives information from Rensselaer students who wish to sublet their apartments to exchange students. We will forward this information to you, but are unable to play a role in the placement process.
- For additional off campus housing options, please follow the links to Off Campus Housing found at the Office of Student Living & Learning. You are strongly encouraged to review the resources of this office prior to signing a lease.

**Application Process for Campus Housing & Meal Plans**

On-campus housing is extremely limited and is not guaranteed. If space becomes available, you will receive additional information regarding the application process for on-campus housing. Exchange students are encouraged to begin looking into off-campus housing options at this time.

Additional housing information is available online on the Student Living & Learning website.

**Temporary Accommodation**

If you need to make arrangements for temporary accommodations upon arrival, the following hotels are closest to campus:

- [Best Western Plus Franklin Square Inn](https://www.bestwestern.com/hotel/A250), One Fourth Street, Troy, NY 12180 – 518.274.8800
- [Hilton Garden Inn](https://www.hotelsbyhilton.com/hotels/2511), 235 Hoosick Street, Troy, NY 12180 – 518.272.1700
- [Courtyard Albany/Troy Waterfront](https://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/cgghy-courtyard-albany-troy-waterfront/), 515 River Street, Troy, NY 12180 – 518.240.1000
Required Health Forms & Immunizations
Incoming exchange students should be sure to follow the requirements for new students found on the Students Health Center website. Exchange students should be sure to submit the following directly to the Student Health Center:

Complete the five forms on the online Health Portal
- Patient Information-Medical History
- Notice of Privacy Practices
- Tuberculosis Screening
- Health Insurance Waiver-Enrollment.
- Immunization Form - Student

Immunizations are entered by the student via the Immunization Verification form (on-line portal). Then the immunization report provided by the student's physician's office must be uploaded to the on-line portal. **Immunizations should be officially translated in English.**

Please register for the Student Health Center Web Portal. It is highly recommended that you use your RPI email account when registering. Other email providers may block messages from the portal. You must use Internet Explorer or Mozilla Firefox as your browser.

Rensselaer Health Insurance
All incoming exchange students will be required to enroll in the Rensselaer Student Health Plan, known as the RPI/CDPHP plan. Exchange students planning to study at RPI should not purchase or renew a Travel Insurance Plan. Exceptions will be considered only for students who have comparable health insurance from a U.S.-based insurance company.

All full-time students are enrolled in the RPI sponsored health insurance plan via the health insurance fee on the e-bill. Students then must either:

1. Waive the coverage if they have existing comparable coverage that is accepted in Troy, NY. **OR**
2. Affirm the enrollment if they need the RPI student health insurance plan.
The Waiver/Enrollment form is accessed via the Student Health Center on-line Health Portal under “My Forms.” Additional Rensselaer Health Insurance information can be found on the Student Health Center website.

On-Campus Health Care Services

Student Health Center
Academy Hall, Suite 3200
http://studenthealth.rpi.edu

The Student Health Center provides comprehensive service including medical, gynecology, allergy clinics, counseling services, health education, and wellness programs. Specialty consultations and referrals are also available.

Students may make an appointment via the online health portal, phone, or in person. Exchange students may visit the Student Health Center without incurring any additional fees as this is covered by the Student Health Center Fee that is paid for the semester. However, students may be responsible for any services or devices that they receive or are prescribed. A more detailed fee schedule can be found here: http://studenthealth.rpi.edu/resources#FeeSchedule

The Cost of U.S. Health Care

Premium
The amount you pay to your insurance company for your insurance policy. This is paid on a monthly or a yearly basis, depending upon your insurance plan.

Co-Pay
The co-pay, or co-payment, is the amount you are expected to pay directly to the health care provider at the time you receive medical treatment. This is usually a small amount and varies depending on your insurance plan.

Deductible
The deductible is a part of the medical bill that you are expected to pay in addition to the co-pay. Insurance plans usually specify the amount of a medical bill they cover and the amount you must pay. The deductible is usually described as a flat amount or as a percentage, depending upon the policy. Generally, higher premiums have lower deductibles while lower premiums have higher deductibles.

In many cases, the doctor’s office or hospital where you seek treatment may not bill your insurance directly. They may require you to pay them directly and be reimbursed by your health insurance company.

Emergency Rooms (ER)
The ER provides care to individuals needing immediate, urgent medical attention that cannot wait for a doctor’s appointment. They are open 24 hours a day. Visits to the ER are expensive and will have higher costs than a regular visit to your doctor. There are several hospitals near Rensselaer’s campus:

Samaritan Hospital
2215 Burdett Ave Troy, NY
(518) 271-3300
Emergency (911)
https://www.sphp.com/location/samaritan-hospital
ER Directions:
From the Academy Hall: Head north (towards the Union) on 15th St.
Turn right at Eagle St. The ER is on right.

**St. Mary’s Hospital**
1300 Massachusetts Ave Troy, NY
(518) 268-5000
Emergency (911)
Directions: From Academy Hall head north (towards the Union) on 15th St.
Continue on 15th St, over Hoosick St. Turn left on to Massachusetts Ave,
St. Mary’s is straight ahead.

**Albany Medical Center**
47 New Scotland Avenue Albany, NY
(518) 262-6008
Emergency (911)
http://www.amc.edu/

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**Getting to Campus**

You are responsible for making all of your travel arrangements. Rensselaer is unable to provide airport pickup services to students. We recommend you make your arrangements in advance to find the most affordable prices. **Please be sure to review baggage regulations before travelling.**

**Airports:** The nearest airport to Rensselaer is the **Albany International Airport** (ALB), which is approximately 10 miles/16 km from campus and a 15 minute car ride.

Major airports in the New York City area are **John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK)** and **LaGuardia Airport (LGA)** in New York State and **Newark Liberty International Airport (EWR)** in the state of New Jersey. All three are within a three hour drive of Albany/Troy in light traffic. If arriving at any of these airports, daily ground shuttle service to Albany is available through the company **Premiere Transportation**. A one-way ride costs between $60-$65 USD, and reservations are required. Information is available on the **Premier Transportation** website.

Boston Logan International Airport is also within a three hour drive of Albany.

**Bus Service:** There are a number of coach bus services from New York City and Boston to Albany, including **Greyhound**, **Megabus**, **Trailways**, and **Peter Pan** bus lines.

**Train:** **Amtrak** is the U.S. national train service. The nearest station is the Albany-Rensselaer Train Station, approximately 10 miles/16km and a 15 minute car ride from campus.
**Taxi Service:** Local taxi fares are based on zones and the number of riders. Always make sure to agree on the fare before accepting a ride. A list of taxi companies that operate in the Capital District can be viewed [here](#).

**Car Service - Ride Share Apps:** The two major rideshare services in the Troy area are Uber and Lyft. You will need to download the Uber/Lyft app to your smartphone in order to use these services. Both allow you to request a ride, agree on a price, view details of the driver and car and track the car’s location on a map.

**Arriving to Campus**

**Upon Arrival:** If you are living in on-campus housing, you will receive an email from the Office of Student Living and Learning with check-in information. Please be sure to contact the Office of Student Living & Learning directly at ResLife@rpi.edu if you have any questions regarding on-campus housing.

If you are living off-campus, please be sure to make the necessary arrangements with your landlord/roommates so that you are able to get your keys and move in upon arrival.

**Getting Around Campus**

**Red Hawk Shuttle Service**

The Red Hawk is Rensselaer’s shuttle service that operates on campus when classes are in session. Additional information and schedules can be found [here](#).

**Capital District Transit Authority (CDTA)**

The Capital District Transportation Authority, (CDTA) is the area’s public bus system. The service area includes the counties of Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga and Schenectady. The buses travel along 60 or so bus routes which go to just about every major employment center, shopping area and recreational site in the Capital Region. The CDTA bus is free to ride with your student ID card. More information about CDTA can be found [here](#). You can also download an app [here](#) to make planning your trips easier.

**CDPHP Cycle**

The CDPHP bike-share program provides students and visitors with an alternative form of transportation that supports healthy, active lifestyles while also offering a fun and easy way to get around and explore our communities. Membership information can be found [here](#).
Cost of Living
Exchange students are required to pay for their own living expenses, including accommodation, meals, books and supplies, Institute fees, medical insurance, travel and other personal expenses. Expenses are estimated and vary depending on lifestyle. Estimated expenses do not include recreational travel. University fees are subject to change.

Semester Fees Billed to Your Rensselaer Account
Health Center Fee: $360/semester
Rensselaer Health Insurance: $642*
Student Activities Fee: Undergraduate: $377/semester; Graduate: $280/semester
*These are estimates and subject to change

Other Estimated Expenses
Room and Board: $7,315** (campus housing/meals)
Books, Supplies and Personal Expenses: $1,400**
**These are estimates and vary according to individual lifestyle

SEFCU Bank
Rensselaer Union, 1st floor
https://www.sefcu.com/RPI
Rensselaer has a bank on campus. This bank is called SEFCU. International students are welcome to open bank accounts in the United States. Please note, SEFCU, as well as many other banks, charge fees for the transfer of funds. They are often based on how much money you are transferring and are usually charged each time you transfer money.

Office of International Programs (Primary Contact Office for Exchange Students)
Academy Hall, suite 4226
http://info.rpi.edu/international-programs
The Office of International Programs (OIP) is responsible for domestic and international exchange students. The OIP can help facilitate class registration and assists with academic and non-academic matters for exchange students.
**Advising Learning Assistance Center (ALAC)**
Academy Hall, suite 4226
Find information about tutoring services, supplemental instruction, advisor listings, and where/how to get answers for specific academic questions.

**Center for Global Communication + Design**
Folsom Library, first floor
Comm+D offers support for oral and written communication and assignments, including services specifically designed for non-native speakers of English. Workshops and events are held regularly.

**Bursar (Payment of fees to Rensselaer)**
Academy Hall, 2000 level
The main activities of the Office of the Bursar include student billing and collections for all graduate and undergraduate students at the Institute. Rensselaer fees will be charged to your student account via the Bursar’s Office. These fees include the Health Center, Health Insurance and Student Activities Fees, as well as printing and other miscellaneous fees.

Students must enroll in eBill to receive an electronic bill from the Bursar’s Office. An Introduction to eBills can be found here. An email notification is sent to each student’s Rensselaer email address with instructions on how to enroll in the eBill program. Once enrolled, the student may designate additional users, usually a parent or guardian, to enroll and also have access to their bills. Since eBills are the only way to receive your bill, keep in mind that you must enroll in the program.

International students are encouraged to enroll in flywire. This service will allow you to make payments to your student account (ebill) through your home bank account. Please see the Student Payment Options page of the Bursar’s website for more information.

**Campus Card Office**
2144 Burdett Ave.
The Campus Card Office can help students, staff and faculty to obtain a Campus ID Card, help with lost/stolen cards, and assist Rensselaer students and staff with Rensselaer Advantage Dollar (RAD) accounts. Once exchange students have their RCS ID (this is your Rensselaer email without the '@rpi.edu') and password, they will be able to submit a photo online and can pick up their campus ID cards once they arrive on campus.

**Folsom Library**
Rensselaer’s main campus library.

**International Services for Students and Scholars (ISSS)**
1528 15th Street
The International Services for Students and Scholars (ISSS) oversees all immigration matters at Rensselaer. The ISSS offers periodic workshops that are also open to exchange students.

**Mueller Center**
The Mueller Center is the hub of personal fitness and wellness on campus. The Mueller Center's facilities, fitness classes, wellness programs foster a friendly, judgment free environment.

This building offers many club sports, Intramural teams, and varsity athletes a space to practice. It is also houses racquetball courts, a rock wall, and many club equipment spaces. Building hours are Sunday - Thursday 11 a.m. - 11:30 p.m., Friday 11 a.m. - 7 p.m., and Saturday 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. during the academic year. Special hours will be posted during holiday breaks and the summer session.
Registrar
Academy Hall, 2000 level
The Office of the Registrar maintains student academic records and issues academic transcripts. Class registration and add/drop are managed by this office. A representative from the Registrar’s Office will also be available during a registration session prior to the start of classes. They will be able to assist you in making minor changes to your class schedule before the semester begins.

Department of Public Safety
Provides 24 hour campus security, campus escort service, special programs and other services designed to maintain the safety of the campus community.

Computing Requirements
All entering students are required to have a laptop computer which meets the of Rensselaer’s Mobile Computing Program. Please note that exchange students are not eligible to purchase a computer under the Mobile Computing Program, but may do so in the Campus Computer Store. Most exchange students bring their own laptops with them.

Cell Phones

Comparison of Service Contract vs. Pre-Paid Phones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Service Contracts</th>
<th>Pre-Paid Plans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How It Works</td>
<td>Sign a contract for service with a call/text/data package that suits your anticipated need. Pay at the end of each month. Check with your provider to understand how you are charged for calls. For some, calls on weekends and evenings are free.</td>
<td>Purchase a phone and service or a SIM card and service, – either a specific amount of money or a number of minutes. As you use the phone, the used minutes are deducted. When your balance reaches zero, your phone stops working additional time is purchased.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs</td>
<td>Initial: Purchase of phone; activation fee; deposit (discussed below).</td>
<td>Initial: Purchase of phone; initial purchase of access package.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Ongoing:</strong> Monthly costs can vary. If you go over your limit, you will be assessed “overage” charges which can become costly.</td>
<td><strong>Ongoing:</strong> Costs vary greatly, depending on the package purchased and the provider.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deposit Required?</td>
<td>If you do not have a Social Security</td>
<td>No. Since you pay in advance, you do not</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Number or credit history in the United States, you may be required to pay a deposit. This deposit is returned to you at the end of the contract term. Some providers, such as AT&T, do not require a deposit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International Calling</th>
<th>Check to make sure international calling is included in your plan.</th>
<th>Check with the company to see if this is possible and what rates apply.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Length of Contract</td>
<td>Typically 1 – 2 years; penalties are assessed if you break the contract early.</td>
<td>There is no contract. You pay up front for your service. You can discontinue service at any time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phones</td>
<td>Not all cell phone models work with all providers. Check with providers to see what models are compatible with their service.</td>
<td>They range from inexpensive to costly depending on phone features and capabilities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Driver’s License**

Automobiles are expensive to buy, insure, and maintain. However, if you decide that you need your own transportation and purchase a vehicle, you will need to register it with New York State and you must have a New York State driver's license in order to do this.

You can drive in New York State with a valid driver license from another state or country. You don’t need to apply for a New York State driver’s license unless you become a New York State resident. Students from other states or from other nations who attend school in New York State are normally not considered New York State residents.

If you have a driver’s license from another country you do not need to have an International Driving Permit, but it is helpful. The permit verifies in several languages that you have a valid driver license. Police officers who can’t read the language on your foreign driver license will be able to read the permit. Contact the authorities in your home country to get an International Driving Permit.

Having an international driver’s license or a driver’s license from your home country allows you to drive in the New York State. However, you cannot use this card to register a vehicle within New York. If you are planning to buy, register, and drive a vehicle, you must obtain a New York State driver’s license from the Department of Motor Vehicles.

Motor Vehicle requires a Social Security number to apply. If you do not have a Social Security number, you must get a letter from the Social Security Office in Troy stating that you are not eligible for a Social Security number.

For more information, please contact the Department of Motor Vehicles:
Rensselaer County Office Building
1600 Seventh Avenue
Troy, NY 12180
Phone: (518) 270-2600
[https://dmv.ny.gov/](https://dmv.ny.gov/)
Maintaining your status can be a simple matter if you understand the governing regulations. You bear the sole responsibility for maintaining your legal status. Failure to comply with these regulations could jeopardize your legal status and have long reaching consequences for future U.S. immigration related applications.

**Active Participation & Reasonable Progress in Program**
You are required to be actively engaged in the program described on your immigration document. You are expected to make normal progress and to complete your program within the time frame indicated on the form.

**Request Timely Extensions**
Extensions of your stay must be requested at least 30 days before your document expires. You must document compelling academic reasons or a medical illness. Contact the OIP at least 30 days before your DS-2019 expires to discuss the extension process.

**Changes to Your Program**
Your educational or professional objectives may change while you are at Rensselaer. In order to keep your SEVIS record accurate, you must inform the OIP if there are any changes to your program.

**Name and Address Reporting**
Your home address in the United States and telephone number must be reflected in SEVIS at all times. You are required to notify the OIP of any changes in your address within 10 days. Please contact the OIP with an updated passport if you legally change your name so that your immigration records may be updated.

**Medical Insurance**
All J-1 exchange students are required to have and maintain medical insurance. All incoming exchange students will be required to enroll in the Rensselaer Student Health Plan, known as the RPI/CDPHP plan. Exchange students planning to study at RPI should not purchase or renew a Travel Insurance Plan. Exceptions will be considered only for students who have comparable health insurance from a U.S.-based insurance company that meets the following requirements:

- The J-1 Exchange Visitor must have health insurance for the entire period of stay;
- The minimum requirement for health insurance coverage is $100,000 as per accident or illness;
- Insurance coverage for medical evacuation is required at a minimum of $50,000. This is used in the unlikely event that you or your family member must be evacuated to your home country for medical treatment;
- Insurance coverage for repatriation of remains is required at a $25,000 minimum. This is used in the unlikely event that you or a family member should die in the United States and the remains must be returned to your home country;
- The maximum deductible on the health insurance may not exceed $500 per accident or illness.
**Student Enrollment Requirements**
Exchange students must be enrolled full time each semester and make reasonable progress towards their degree and are required to take at least 12 credits per semester but no more than 21.

**Exceptions to Full Course Load Requirement**
Under certain circumstances, J-1 students may be authorized by the OIP to enroll for less than a full course of study and still be considered in valid status. Authorization for a reduced course load must be obtained **in advance**. Requests for an authorized reduced course load must be submitted to the OIP with appropriate documentation explaining the academic or medical reason before the request will be considered.

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**Travel & Immigration Requirements**

**Travel Within the United States**
J-1 students may travel freely within the United States. No special permission is required. However, it is recommended that all exchange students travel with their original passport, as it remains the primary source of identification while residing in the United States.

**International Travel**
When travelling outside the United States, the documents listed below will be needed to re-enter the United States and may be requested by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Officer at the port of entry. Students may be asked to verify that they are making normal progress in the program of study.

Before travelling, you should gather these documents:
- Valid passport
- Unexpired J-1 visa
- Valid DS-2019
- Current travel signature on your DS-2019 (these are valid for 1 year)
- Recommended - Financial documents and copy of Rensselaer acceptance letter

**Travel Signatures**
Your DS-2019 must contain a travel signature that is less than 12 months old at the time of reentry to the United States. The OIP staff will sign the DS-2019’s for travel after students have completed their electronic check-in and have been updated in SEVIS. Students are responsible for making sure that they have this signature prior to travelling. Students working with Academic Training must renew the travel signature every 6 months.

**Grace Period**
At the successful conclusion of your program, you may remain in the United States for an additional 30 days in order to prepare for your departure. You cannot leave the U.S. during this 30 day grace period and re-enter in J-1 status.
**Visas to Enter Foreign Countries**
We recommend that you determine whether you need to get a visa to enter the country you plan to visit. Check with the consulate of the country you wish to visit.

**Renewing the Visa**
You must have an unexpired visa to enter the United States (refer to the section on Travel to Canada and Mexico for the exception to this rule). U.S. visas cannot be renewed in the United States (although they can expire while you are here). Citizens of all countries except Canada and Bermuda are required to have an unexpired and appropriate visa stamp in their passport to enter the United States. We advise you to contact the consulate where you will submit your visa application for the most recent application procedures (scheduling an appointment, submitting required forms and supporting documents, paying all fees, etc.).

You may travel to either Canada or Mexico to apply to renew your expired visa. HOWEVER, if you have successfully changed your non-immigrant status while in the United States and you wish to apply for a new visa stamp in your passport, you may ONLY apply to do this in Canada NOT in Mexico.

Since Canadian citizens do not need a visa stamp in their passport to enter the United States, Canadians should carry copies of their financial documentation to support the information on their DS-2019.

Please Note: You may need a special entry visa to enter Mexico, Canada or the adjacent islands. Check online before making travel plans.

**Automatic Revalidation**
If you have an expired J-1 visa in your passport, you may travel to Canada or Mexico for less than 30 days and reenter the United States without applying for a visa renewal. This provision is known as “automatic revalidation” of the visa. For individuals in J-1 status, this benefit also applies to travel to adjacent islands with the exception of Cuba.

The following people are not eligible for automatic visa revalidation:
- Anyone who has overstayed a previous visa
- Citizens of Iran, Syria, Sudan, and Cuba
- Anyone who will apply for a U.S. entry visa while in Canada, Mexico or the adjacent islands
**Work Authorization**

Your ability to intern/work legally in the United States is determined by your immigration status. **It is your responsibility to know the limits of your ability to work**, what you must do to obtain work permission and what form that work permission takes. Additionally, if you are being paid for services, you are responsible for understanding the tax regulations that apply to you.

A J-1 exchange student may engage in part-time employment when certain criteria and conditions are met.

J student employment can be authorized by the OIP for the following types of employment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Permission</th>
<th>Manner Obtained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>J-1 Exchange Student</strong>&lt;br&gt;<em>Limited to 20 hours per week while school is in session</em></td>
<td><strong>On Campus</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Provide offer letter from employer to the OIP&lt;br&gt;• OIP will authorize status in SEVIS and provide an authorization letter&lt;br&gt;• Use authorization letter to obtain a Social Security Number (SSN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Training</strong>&lt;br&gt;(related to major)</td>
<td><strong>Must have position with employer/company prior to applying&lt;br&gt;Must be related to field of study&lt;br&gt;OIP will provide authorization in SEVIS</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Volunteering**

Volunteering labor, knowledge, or skill is a time honored tradition in the United States and a way that many nonprofit charitable institutions accomplish their work. As international students and exchange visitors, you may engage in volunteer activities. However, it is important to know that the label of “volunteer” is sometimes incorrectly used for any situation in which someone is not paid for services they have provided. U.S. labor law, not immigration law, determines whether the U.S. Government would classify a situation as “employment” rather than “volunteer.” Generally speaking, any situation in which an employer normally pays someone to do the proposed duties is an employment situation and you should not “volunteer” for it.

**What You Need to Know if You Work While in J-1 Status**

When you begin legal employment you should be aware of the following:

- You will be required to prove your legal ability to work.
- You will be required to obtain a Social Security Number.
- Special tax rules may apply to you.
- If you are eligible for tax treaty benefits, or to claim exemption from certain taxes, you must complete specific tax forms at the time of hire.
A Social Security Number (SSN) is a unique number assigned by the Social Security Administration (SSA). It is used to report income to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and to track eligibility for government benefits such as government-run retirement and medical programs. It is given to U.S. citizens at birth and to internationals that are authorized to work in the United States. Anyone who receives payment for services must apply for a SSN.

**Application Procedure & Timing**

In order to apply for a SSN, you must:

- Have been in the United States for at least 10 days.
- Have an “active” SEVIS record
- Be legally eligible to work in the United States at the time of application (see section on Employment).
- Apply in person at the Social Security Administration (SSA).

**Required Documents**

If your passport is less than a year old, you will need to bring an additional form of identification. **Students in J-1 Status**

- Form SS-5
- Passport
- I-94 record
- Form I-20 or DS-2019
- Proof of current work authorization
- For on-campus employment:
  - Proof of job and eligibility/authorization

**U.S. Social Security Administration Office**

[www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov)

**Address:** 500 Federal St #101, Troy, NY 12180  
**Phone:** (866) 770-2662

**Processing**

The SSA should mail the Social Security Card to the address on the SS-5 application within approximately two weeks. You can begin working before you receive the Social Security Number (SSN). However, you must be able to show that you have applied for a SSN. The SSA office that accepted your application will issue you a receipt. Once you receive your SSN, you must update your number with your employer as they must use it to report your earnings to the U.S. Government.

Be sure to keep your SSN in a safe place and never send the number by e-mail or provide it to an unknown caller - even if they represent themselves as U.S. government officials. Once you receive your SSN, it is your number for life so you can use it in future visits to the United States.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Office of International Programs, (OIP)** | Karen Dvorak  
Program Manager  
Academy Hall, Suite 4226  
Dvorak2@rpi.edu  
Jamie Obst  
Sr. Program Administrator  
Academy Hall, Suite 4226  
Violaj2@rpi.edu | The OIP manages most of Rensselaer’s exchange programs and can assist with the application process, registration and other academic matters. The OIP also handles immigration check-in. |
| **Office of Student Living and Learning** | Michael Sitterley  
Assistant Dean Student Living & Learning  
sittem@rpi.edu | This office assigns and manages housing for those students who wish to live on-campus. |
| **Office of Residential Education Off-Campus Housing** | Samantha Tymchyn  
Associate Dean, Off-Campus Commons  
tymchs@rpi.edu | Provides guidance to students who wish to live off-campus and maintains an office campus housing database. |
| **Emergency Numbers** | RPI Public Safety  
Medical or Fire Emergency  
518-276-6611  
911 | |