J-1 EXCHANGE VISITOR FAQs

1. How does an international researcher come to work at UAB as a postdoctoral fellow?
The quickest and easiest way to become a postdoctoral fellow in the US is via the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program in the Research Scholar category. As a Research Scholar, you can remain in the US up to 5 years while conducting research.

2. How many steps are there until I can have full access to UAB systems once I’m on campus?
You must first attend a J-1 Orientation in the international center, where we will collect your documents and complete your Form I-9 (if you will be employed by UAB). Then, your department is responsible for processing the “ACT” document that must be approved before you can create a BlazerID and have computer and lab access.

3. How do I create a BlazerID?
Once your ACT document is complete, it will generate an employee ID number, which you can use to create your BlazerID [here].

4. Can a J-1 Research Scholar enroll in classes at UAB?
Yes, but only as a part-time student.

5. Can a J-1 exchange visitor on a UAB DS-2019 engage in graduate medical education/training (i.e., residency or clinical fellowship)?
No. Only ECFMG can sponsor foreign medical graduates to pursue graduate medical education/training under a J-1 program.

6. Will I be subject to the two-year home residency requirement, also known as the rule/Section 212(e)?
The Consular Officer/Department of State will determine if you are subject to this rule if you meet any of the following criteria:
   A. You received any funding from a foreign or US government.
   B. Your skill is listed on the Department of State’s current Exchange Visitor Skills List.
   C. You are in the US for the purpose of graduate medical education/training (i.e., you are an ECFMG-sponsored medical resident or clinical fellow).

   NOTE: If you are subject to the two-year home residency requirement, then your J-2 dependents are as well.

7. How do I obtain a waiver of the two-year home residency requirement?
Waivers are available in very few situations. For detailed information, please refer to the Department of State website.

8. How do I obtain a US Social Security number?
Please follow the instructions from our form “Applying for a Social Security Number – J-1 Scholars”
9. Do I have to pay taxes in the US?
Possibly. Prior to receiving your first payment from UAB, you must attend a personal tax analysis appointment with ISSS to determine which taxes are required to be withheld. During the tax analysis, we will also determine if you are exempt from federal income tax withholding based on a tax treaty benefit.

10. Do I have to file a federal income tax return?
If you are classified as a “non-resident alien for tax purposes” and earn US-sourced income, you must file a Form 1040NR and Form 8843 with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). If you are classified as a “non-resident alien for tax purposes,” you (and your dependents) must file a Form 8843 each year even if you did not receive any US-sourced income.

11. Can I hire an outside attorney to assist me with immigration issues?
Yes, but only for non-employment-based immigration processes. The attorney can represent only you — not UAB. All paperwork filed with a federal agency based on an employment-based petition must be reviewed by ISSS and receive the required signatures through routing.

12. What happens if my child is born in the US?
Your child will be a US citizen and receive all benefits and privileges afforded to US citizens.

13. What visa should my relatives obtain to visit me in the US? Do they need any documentation from me? How long can they stay?
Your relatives can apply for a B-2 visitor visa to enter the US. Or, if you are from a Visa Waiver country, they can come on an ESTA.

14. Does the visa stamp in my passport need to be valid during my stay in the US?
No, the visa stamp in your passport is only your permission to enter the US. Your non-immigrant documents (i.e., DS-2019) and most recent Form I-94 are your permission to remain in the US.

15. Can I travel to Canada or Mexico to obtain a new visa?
Yes, if you have maintained your status while in the US. Citizens of countries other than Canada or Mexico must make an appointment with US consulates/embassies in Canada and Mexico. Please consult ISSS prior to traveling abroad and visit our travel page here.