

International Postdocs and Scholars-Visa, Tax, and Health Care Questions

13 Aug 2024

Summary of session

The session was organized by the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs aimed at supporting international postdocs and scholars. The event included presentations from experts, Robin Catmur-Smith, UGA's Director of Immigration Services, and Linden Dudley, Director of International Student Life.

Robin discussed various aspects of immigration services, including visa sponsorship, health insurance requirements for J-1 scholars, employment options for J-2 dependents, remote work regulations, and the possibility of extending J-1 visas or transferring to other institutions. She also touched on the home residence requirement for J-1 scholars, the process for applying for waivers, and the implications for switching to H-1B work visas or applying for U.S. permanent residency (green cards).

Linden focused on the international tax assistance available at UGA, explaining the complexities of the U.S. tax system for international individuals. She outlined the filing requirements, the difference between resident and non-resident tax statuses, and provided guidance on avoiding tax-related scams. Linden emphasized that all international individuals present in the U.S. during the tax year must fulfill their tax obligations, regardless of income.

The session concluded with a Q&A, addressing specific concerns about visa renewals, health insurance, and the process of shifting from J-1 to H-1B status. Both Robin and Linden highlighted the importance of utilizing available resources and staying vigilant against scams.

Topics Covered in Discussion:

- **Immigration Services Overview (Robin Catmur-Smith)**
 - Visa sponsorship for international students, scholars, faculty, and staff at UGA.
 - Importance of maintaining health insurance for J-1 scholars and their dependents.
 - J-2 dependents can work in the U.S. but must apply for a work card and cannot fund the J-1 scholar.
 - J-1 scholars can work remotely for a maximum of two days per week; J-2 dependents have no such restriction.
 - Extension of J-1 visas is possible, with a maximum duration of 5 years for scholars.
 - Importance of the cultural exchange component for J-1 programs.
 - Transfer of J-1 programs to other U.S. institutions is generally allowed.
 - Home residence requirement (212(e)) and the process for applying for waivers.

- o Possibility of switching from J-1 to H-1B work visas and the benefits of H-1B status.
 - o Green card (U.S. permanent residency) options, including employment-based and self-petition categories.
- **International Tax Assistance Overview (Linden Dudley)**
 - o Importance of tax filing for all international individuals present in the U.S., regardless of income.
 - o Overview of the U.S. tax system and filing requirements.
 - o Introduction to tax forms 8843 (for those without income) and 1040NR (for those with income).
 - o Substantial Presence Test to determine resident or non-resident tax status.
 - o Importance of filing taxes by the April 15th deadline.
 - o Awareness of tax-related scams and how to avoid them.
 - o Support resources available through the International Student Life office.
- **Q&A Highlights**
 - o Clarification on the timing for extending J-1 visas and applying for H-1B visas.
 - o Guidance on handling visa renewals and dealing with reciprocity issues.
 - o Importance of verifying the legitimacy of any communication requesting personal or financial information to avoid scams.
- **Closing Remarks**
 - o Emphasis on utilizing available resources for immigration and tax-related questions.
 - o Importance of staying informed and reaching out to the appropriate offices for assistance.
 - o Importance of verifying the legitimacy of any communication requesting personal or financial information to avoid scams.