

Participant Newsletter November 2010



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This newsletter is sent to all active participants in the American Immigration Council J-1 Training Program. Please review the information below and remember to always contact the Council if you have questions or concerns about your training program or non-immigrant status. If you are no longer participating in our program, please notify us. If you have a question for the Council, please do not reply to this message, but instead send your question to J1program@immcouncil.org.

facebook

The International Exchange Center is on Facebook!

If you are already on Facebook, look up our page “**International Exchange Center**” and Like it.

The IEC page is updated frequently with interesting information including a city spotlight every other week and video tips and information. You can also use this space to connect with other trainees and interns in your area!

Find us at www.facebook.com. It's free and easy to join. Plus you will never know who you might meet or the experiences you could share.

Travel Validation

With the upcoming holiday season, many of you will be traveling outside the U.S. Before you travel be sure to check your DS-2019 form to see if the box in the lower right corner is validated for travel. If you see a signature and a date that is less than a year old, you're all set!

If there is no signature or the date will be more than a year old by the time your trip will be over, you need to send us your DS-2019 for validation. Please send us your DS-2019 about two weeks before you want to travel. We will validate the document and send it back to you at your host site address.

You will need this validated form to re-enter the U.S. at the end of your trip so be sure to pack it in your carry on luggage.

If you have a question about the validation process, feel free to contact us at 202-507-7513 or J1Program@immcouncil.org.

EXCHANGE VISITOR OF THE MONTH

America Through Sonja's Lense



Sonja's winning photo

The International Exchange Center is proud to announce Sonja Haenzelmann as this month's Exchange Visitor of the Month. Each month, we select an exchange visitor who has made an effort to get involved in his/her community and explore American culture. Sonja is also the winner of last month's photo contest on our Facebook page!

Sonja came to the United States from Spain, but is originally from Germany. She is doing her training in the field of bioinformatics at Sage Bio-networks in Seattle, WA. Sonja came to the U.S. with an open mind. "I had this America from the movies in my head but really didn't want to think of it and just see what I find." Not believing in stereotypes, Sonja

was ready to explore all of the different aspects of her new home which, she says, is not as sunny as Spain, but greener!

She has found everyone to be very welcoming and has been able to make friends and settle into her new life quickly. She especially appreciates her new professional colleagues who have helped her to understand particularly challenging aspects of her training. She also has formed a future collaboration with a visiting scientist. Sonja has been able to share aspects of both Spanish and German culture with her colleagues including delicious German cookies. At the same time she has learned a lot about the history of the Seattle area and, of course, its coffee culture.

Outside of her training, Sonja

has taken advantage of Seattle's many outdoor activities such as rock climbing and kayaking. It was on one such kayaking trip that she took her contest winning photo. "Me and a friend from Italy who I met here, were doing the sunset tour of the Northwest Kayak Center here in Seattle. I have done a white-water kayak course with them before and they were great, so we decided to do the sunset tour. When we dragged the kayaks out of the water after about 2.5 hours of paddling into the sunset I made that snapshot. It was the last day of my friend's stay so it was the last thing we did together here and I wanted a memory of this." Before she finishes her program at the end of December, Sonja plans to go on a snowboarding/skiing weekend with some of her new friends and colleagues.

When asked what makes a successful J-1 Exchange Visitor, Sonja replied "Listen to the people, they love to tell you about their country and they are also curious about yours, which leads to nice exchanges." This is great advice for all of our other trainees and interns!

Would you like to be featured as our next Exchange Visitor of the Month? Let us know what you are doing -- send us an email with your story and a picture to J1Program@immcouncil.org.

Thanksgiving in America



What better way to understand American Culture than to experience a traditional American Thanksgiving meal? Wherever you are in the U.S., Thanksgiving is one of the most celebrated non-religious holidays of the year and is not to be missed! People from all creeds, customs and countries come together to share in the spirit of community, goodwill and thankfulness for all the things the year has brought. Thanksgiving is a secular holiday of inclusiveness — one in which we celebrate our shared experiences rather than our dif-

ferences. So be brave and be sure to ask a co-worker or friend if you can take part in a Thanksgiving meal on Thursday, November 25.

The story of Thanksgiving is a story of immigrants. Beyond the historically convenient tale of Pilgrims and Indians eating and sharing, there is a lesson of “thanks” and “giving” to be learned. Fleeing religious persecution in England, the Pilgrims landed on the rocky shores of New England in 1620 ill-equipped to farm the foreign soil. With little to no harvest, nearly

half the village starved during the harsh winter and many others died of disease. Enter Patuxet Indian, Squanto. A former British slave sold to the Spanish in the Caribbean Islands, Squanto returned to find the Pilgrims beleaguered.

Through Squanto’s native Patuxet custom, visitors were to be treated with kindness and courtesy. He brought the weary Pilgrims deer meat and beaver skins, taught them how to cultivate corn and other new vegetables and showed them which plants were poisonous and which

medicinal. Through Squanto’s kindness, the Pilgrims were able to survive. And as the story goes, the following fall the thriving Pilgrims held a Thanksgiving meal to celebrate their good fortune.

Today, families and friends gather from near and far to spend time together, eat a lavish meal, watch the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City and later, the Thanksgiving Day Football Game. Families celebrate what each member is thankful around the Thanksgiving table.

No Thanksgiving table is complete without a spread of turkey, stuffing, mashed/sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, corn, turnips, yams and pumpkin pie. Guests are often obliged to help in the kitchen or bring a food item to add to the communal meal. In the spirit of giving, we suggest you bring dessert to Thanksgiving.

The 30 Day Grace Period

J-1 exchange visitors have a wide variety of experiences while in the United States. From learning to manage a recycling faculty to learning how to build a better automobile, no two training plans provide exactly the same opportunities.

Before you know it, the last month of your J-1 program arrives. There just isn’t enough time to finish your training projects, write your final reports, close up your apartment, and say goodbye to dear friends. Now is the time to remember, you have a 30-day grace period.

The 30-day grace period begins the day after your program end date on your DS-2019 form. You cannot continue as an intern or trainee at your host site during the grace period, but you can remain in the United States to travel, close your affairs, wait for an affordable flight home, and take a much needed break.

Many J-1 exchange visitors sponsored by the American Immigration Council use the 30-day period to visit regions of the United States they did not get to see during their intern or training programs. Others focus on the local places and activities they most enjoyed in their host communities. Still others decide that they need to forego the grace period and hurry home.

There are four things to remember if you are going to stay in the U.S. during your 30-day grace period:

- 1.) You must extend your sickness and accident insurance coverage for the 30 days.
- 2.) The grace period is 30 days, not one month. This is important if you begin your grace period in the months that have more or less than 30 days.
- 3.) If you leave the United States during the 30 days after your J-1 status ends and you

wish to reenter the United States, you would need a new visa status.

4.) You cannot continue to intern or train during the 30 days. (Go have fun.)

Note the last piece of advice – go have fun! Enjoy the last few days of what we hope has been a wonderful experience.

Contact Information

The best way to contact us with address changes, questions or suggestions is via email. Please send your message to J1program@immcouncil.org. We welcome any and all newsletter suggestions or comments.

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