Dear Students:

I just met many of you at one of three new international student orientations sponsored by the ISS and hope you are all progressing smoothly through the first three stages of cultural adjustment: honeymoon, hostility (hope this stage doesn't last too long for you), and humor stages. For our continuing students, I hope you are now finding yourselves in the humor stage, where you have come to realize those things about this culture that you like and those things that you will never like. Most importantly, however, is to be able to laugh at your 'faux pas' and take action to learn more about U.S. culture, resulting in an even higher comfort level for yourself. Remember what I call the Golden Rule for Adjustment: involvement assists with adjustment! So, get involved!

For more information, check out the many cross-cultural activities offered by the International Student Association. Also, check out pages 24-27 in the International Student Handbook that was passed out at orientation or make an appointment to speak with an international student adviser in the ISS.

Each semester, the ISS e-news will offer updates in the following categories: Regulations, ISS Policies & Procedures, Activities & Programs, and Student Insights, which focuses on a particular international student's perspective of studying at UH Mānoa. Our job is to give you information and provide cross-cultural enrichment activities to enable you to meet your educational goals. We take your adjustment to the U.S. and to the University seriously and are here to help.

Upcoming Activities:

• International Movie Night (4/2 - 4/3/04)
• Camping at the Beach (4/16 - 4/17/04)

Contact the president of the International Student Association, Peichin Lee (peichin@hawaii.edu), for more information on how you can participate.

International Night 2004: took place on Friday, March 5, 2004, in the Campus Center Ballroom. This student-sponsored, student-run activity, designed to promote friendship across cultures through international performances and cultural displays, was well-attended and great fun (see photos inside).
Overview of Spring ISS programs:

Employment seminars - OPT workshops are scheduled on a weekly basis throughout the spring semester. We recommend that students allot a minimum of 4 months prior to completion of program to attend an OPT workshop. Sign-ups are required to insure ample meeting space. Read your ISS emails about upcoming workshops.

ISS community meeting - We received such positive feedback at the fall 2003 ISS community meeting, that we plan to offer a community meeting at least once every fall and spring semesters. If you missed the last one, this meeting is designed to give you the latest updates on regulations and policies that affect your student and your dependent's status, with the opportunity to get your questions answered by the ISS staff.

Health insurance coverage - The University of Hawaii requires all international students and their dependents to have adequate health insurance coverage during the students' course of study. Please note the expiration date of your current health insurance coverage and plan to extend coverage for yourself and accompanying dependents in a timely manner.

The importance of communication - With rapid changes being made in U.S. regulations and policies affecting the status of international students, communication between students and the ISS has become paramount. Please read the emails that the ISS sends out over the mandatory list serve for latest updates. Our job is to keep you informed and answer your questions if clarification is needed.

Also - from now on, the ISS will only use your 'hawaii.edu' email address to communicate with you. There are two reasons for moving to 'hawaii.edu' addresses: 1. Because of the many e-viruses going around, ISS staff will respond only to student inquiries using 'hawaii.edu' addresses. 2. For confidentiality purposes, we will only give regulatory or policy advising via email to students using their 'hawaii.edu' address. The ISS cannot be sure of students' identification with yahoo or hotmail addresses.

NOTE: Students who are not checking their "hawaii.edu" emails from the ISS are clogging up the "in box" of ISS staff. We are receiving an email message indicating that your account is "over quota". Therefore, please check your hawaii.edu address on a regular basis.

It takes 10 working days for the ISS to process student requests for the following: certification letters (i.e., invitation of family members, certification of student status, support for visa application abroad, application for social security number, etc.), reduced course load, program extension, CPT, OPT, economic hardship, and reinstatement to student status.
In the 23 years I’ve worked in international student services, I have never seen a regulatory environment so complex, bureaucratic and confusing. The result is that international student advisers are challenged with the task of reviewing a broad array of legal and regulatory information and determining what students really need to know, as well as how to explain it to them. They are also responsible for entering correct information that describes a students’ program of study into SEVIS.

International students are legally responsible for maintaining student status. This means behaving in certain ways, and obtaining SEVIS documentation that supports these behaviors that can be presented to federal agents. We hope the following information to maintain status will be helpful.

New Federal Initiatives:

1. The **US Visit Program** was implemented in January 2004. All persons entering the US with a non-immigrant visa, including a student visa, are now photographed and fingerprinted. Similar procedures, which are done at the time of exit, will be in place at most large airports by December 2004. New and continuing UHM students admitted to the US at the Honolulu Airport reported the new system is fast and the officers friendly. Note: The US Visit procedures are carried out in addition to the usual document presentation and officer’s questions.

2. **Travel Re-Entry Signatures**: A travel re-entry signature, which is given on the same day an I-20 is issued, may not be accepted as valid by a DHS admission officer. The officer may want to ascertain that a student is enrolled in the University in the current or past term and is eligible to enroll in the next term. We, therefore, recommend that students request a new travel signature prior to travel each semester. Form **I-515A form** may be given to students/exchange visitors at entry who have SEVIS-related “deficiencies.” The I 515A instructs recipients to send certain documentation to Washington, DC within 30 days of entry. The most common reason for issuing the I-515A relates to a missing, invalid or improper re-entry signature.

3. The “**Mantis Program**” of the Department of State now requires security checks prior to student visa issuance when the student’s major is one that appears on a Technology Alert List ([www.travel.state.gov/state.147566.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/state.147566.html)). Although the “average” Mantis check processing period is reported as 30 days in most countries, the Chronicle of Higher Education recently reported that Chinese students may not be cleared for visa issuance for as long as a year. Requests by school officials, faculty members, and US Congressional representatives for expedited processing in these cases have largely failed. The bottom line: Students whose fields of study are on the TAL are advised to carefully weigh their need to travel abroad against their desire to make normal progress in their research and study objectives.

4. **The 5-month rule**: Student must be aware that staying outside the US for more than 5 months disrupts the “F-1 clock” with respect to off-campus employment benefits. Off
campus employment is not available to students entering the US after more than 5 months absence—until after two full semesters. Thus, it is important that students discuss their situations with advisers if they feel there may be a chance they will be outside the US for more than 5 months, whether the absence is for study abroad, leave of absence, or any other reason.

5. The California Service Center (CSC) of the USCIS, which processes all student applications for Optional Practical Training (OPT) and Change of Status (COS), has become stricter and slower in processing applications. Many “requests for further evidence (RFEs)” are being sent to students for relatively insignificant information that would not have been needed in the past to adjudicate an application. The processing time frame for OPT and COS applications is currently 4-5 months. While the CSC is non-committal about its own processing time frame, applications must be timely. For example, to be timely, the OPT application must be received at the CSC BEFORE the academic program completion date noted on the SEVIS I-20. According to CSC supervisors, OPT applications that are postmarked before the completion date, but not delivered to CSC until after the completion date, will be denied.

6. **F-2 to F-1 COS applicant issues:** Although, in the past, F-2s could be changed to F-1s with few problems and delays, current regulations and practices prohibit F-2s from beginning an academic degree program before the Change of Status (COS) has been approved. Because COS is taking approximately 5 months for processing, F-2s admitted to a program for Fall 2004 admission should apply for a COS by mid-March, 2004. Note: in general, F-2s will find it faster to leave the US and apply for the F-1 visa in their home country. ISS advisers understand that F-2s do not want to leave the US, due to disruptions in family life. Additionally, some F-2s fear they will not be successful in their home countries in obtaining F-1 visas. It is, therefore, extremely important for F-2s planning to remain in the US to file the COS application as soon as possible and to avoid starting a degree program until the change of status is approved. Note: F-1s should inform their F-2 spouses of this information if they are planning to apply for degree study.

7. **Reminder on Reduced Course Load (RCL):** Students who do not enroll full-time must be approved in advance for a reduced course load for one of the following reasons: academic difficulties, medical reason, or student in the last term. The ISS Request for Reduced Course Load (RCL) form is available at ISS and on the ISS website: [http://www.hawaii.edu/issmanoa/ReducedCL.pdf](http://www.hawaii.edu/issmanoa/ReducedCL.pdf)
   For those students with reduced course loads because they’ve claimed spring 2004 as their last term, please note that the I-20 end date will reflect graduation on May 16, 2004. Summer graduates may NOT claim RCL for spring 2004, since they will not graduate in May. All part-time students who did not file the RCL request form at ISS should immediately schedule an appointment with an adviser at ISS.

8. **Social Security Letter information and procedures:** It has become increasingly bureaucratic to obtain an SSN. Due to the additional burdens on the ISS, a 10-day processing timeframe has been implemented, replacing 24-hour service. ISS now requires that students bring copies of their current class schedules with their NAMES ON IT when you ask for the SS certification letter. To print a class schedule with a name on it, do the following: Go to [http://myuhportal.hawaii.edu/cp/home/loginf](http://myuhportal.hawaii.edu/cp/home/loginf) Type in your UH username and password and click on Academic Services. A new
How to Subscribe ISS Optional Mailing List

* Useful information such as social and cultural activities, scholarship, and job opportunity goes to ISS ListProc members
* Send an email message to: listproc@hawaii.edu

And type the following into the body of your message:

SUBSCRIBE ISS-L FIRST-NAME LAST-NAME

9. SEVIS and DHS application fees:
The SEVIS fee of $100, proposed last year, is still pending, awaiting final enactment. If enacted, this new one-time fee will be paid by student visa applicants prior to applying for their first student visa, or prior to the first renewal of a student visa after the fee is enacted. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has recently proposed raising the fees for many non-immigrant applications, with increases of $55-60 per application. If the proposal is adopted and enacted, students will pay considerably more for F-1 reinstatements, Change of Status, and applications for Optional Practical Training.

10. Tax Information: International students who were in the US during 2003 are required to file certain tax forms. Students who were not employed need to file only a form 8843. Students with US source income from employment, scholarships, fellowships or grants have additional requirements. Students who were employed in 2003 should have received a W-2 form at the end of January. This form provides basic earnings and tax withholding information these students need in filing tax returns and determining whether they paid too much or too little in federal and state tax withholdings. By early March, additional tax information will be available from the ISS.
The sphere and the triangle are two important shapes in the life of Maja Gustin. The sphere, in the form of a volleyball, is what she’s been hitting for some ten years, both in Slovenia, her home country, and in Hawai’i, her current home. The triangle, the ideal shape of human relationships because it includes a third person, brings balance, in Maja’s view, in terms of how individuals relate to each other. Both shapes represent two important aspects of this scholar/athlete: competitive sports and world peace. These two aspects are a big part of Maja’s current activities and future goals while attending the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

Born in Maribar, a city of 200,000, in Slovenia, Maja begin playing volleyball at about fifteen years old. In 1998, a friend from her area in Slovenia, who played basketball for UH Mānoa, asked her if she wanted to play volleyball for the Wahine in Hawai‘i. She said, “Yes,” and sent a video to the UHM coaching staff, who then invited her to come to the university and join the team. She is now a member of UHM’s Wahine’s volleyball team.

Maja has been in Hawai‘i for about three and a half years and finds the Islands “impressive.” Hawaiians, in her view, have an “aloha spirit,” in that they are connected to the land, honor their families, and are very giving. Her mom, she relates, when visiting her in Hawai‘i, was very accepted and made to feel comfortable in the community, especially when she was referred to as “Auntie.”

Having grown up in war, world peace is an important issue for Maja. Her studies focus on understanding the definition of peace. An obstacle to peace, she says, is the fear that people have that there isn’t enough [resources] to go around. In order to overcome this obstacle and create peace we need to let people know there is enough for everyone. If people understood this, in Maja’s view, there would no longer be any wars. She acknowledges this sounds idealistic but still believes understanding this truth can create peace.

Maja, in her scholarly and athletic work at UH Mānoa, is bringing together the sphere (volleyball), and triangle (balanced human relationships). From competition on the court to cooperation on the planet, she is determined to do what she could to both protect nature and to create peace. “Essential in this process, she says, is for each person to “learn more about life and grow as a person,” two things Maja Gustin is doing on a daily basis.

Name the Newsletter Contest

If you have a suggestion for the name of the ISS newsletter, please send it rallen@hawaii.edu by May 1, 2004.
We appreciate your patience regarding the many changes in the recent U.S. regulations. To assist you better at ISS, please follow the procedures and policies listed below when requesting the indicated forms and/or services.

To obtain a Social Security Card, provide the following to ISS:

- Printout of permanent residence and U.S. mailing address from My UH Website
- Full-time course schedule
- Social Security form obtained and completed at ISS
- ISS Clearance Card

😊 SS request letter ready in 10 working days

For a Reduced Course Load

- Submission of ISS Reduce Course Load form completed by student and department advisor.
- ISS Clearance Card

😊 New I-20 ready in 10 working days

For a Leave Of Absence/Complete Withdrawal/Add or Drop Form

- Appointment with ISS Advisor
- Appropriate form must be brought to ISS appointment
- Form will be signed at the time of appointment only

Processing Time For Other ISS Services

- Reviewing alternative health insurance completed in 10 workings days.
- Transfer documents and other certification forms ready in 10 working days

To prevent any delays in processing requests, the ISS Clearance Card must be updated each semester. In spite of the adjustments ISS is currently experiencing, we will continue to do our best to serve you at the University of Hawaii at Mānoa.