



Welcome From McNeese State University's Office of International Programs

McNeese State University's Welcome Guide for J-1 Exchange Visitors

The International Programs Office at McNeese State University wants to congratulate you once more on your acceptance to McNeese!

McNeese is located in sunny Lake Charles, one of the fastest growing cities in Louisiana with a warm climate all year round. Founded in 1939, McNeese is a comprehensive institution that awards bachelor and master degrees. Our approximately 8,000 students can choose from more than 70 degree programs offered by the Colleges of Business, Education, Engineering, Graduate Studies, Liberal Arts, Nursing and Science. With over 500 international students from 45 different countries, we pride ourselves in making excellence affordable, accessible and personalized. Making sure students are well prepared to enter the professional world is a guiding element of McNeese's educational mission. Excellent programs, affordable tuition, hands-on learning with faculty mentors and a warm, sunny environment is what makes McNeese the perfect choice!

This Welcome Guide has been created by the Office of International Programs (OIP) to help our new international students and exchange visitors as they prepare for their studies at McNeese State University. You should have received this Guide with your Acceptance Notice Email and you can view it at any time online on [our website](#).

The Office of International Programs is located in H.C. Drew Center. If you have any questions please email us at: internationaloffice@mcneese.edu or call 337-475-5147. A campus map can be found [here](#), and we are in H.C. Drew Center, #6 on the map.

Our office is open year-round Monday - Friday from 7:45 am to 4:30 pm Central Standard Time. Our preferred method of communication is email, so be sure to email us any questions or concerns at internationaloffice@mcneese.edu.

Please remember that the Office of International Programs is here to assist you as you prepare for your studies at McNeese, during your studies, and if you go out on post-graduation employment through Optional Practical Training.

Some of our services include:

- International student admissions
- Orientation for all new McNeese international students
- Foreign transfer credit evaluation
- Immigration advising (F-1 and J-1)
- OPT/CPT authorization and filing
- Study Abroad opportunities

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The Purpose of the Exchange Visitor Program

The primary purpose of the J-1 exchange visitor program is to foster an exchange of ideas between Americans and foreign nationals, and to stimulate international collaborative teaching and research efforts. The exchange visitor category is an approval to participate in work-and study-based exchange visitor programs; the primary purpose is for “Educational and Cultural Exchange”, not employment. This program enables the Government of the United States to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange; to strengthen the ties which unite us with other nations by demonstrating the educational and cultural interests, developments, and achievements of the people of the United States and other nations, and the contributions being made toward a peaceful and more fruitful life for people throughout the world; to promote international cooperation for educational and cultural advancement; and thus to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic, and peaceful relations between the United States and the other countries of the world.



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J-1 Pre-Arrival: DS-2019 and Visa Process

Mailing the DS-2019: Students need to inform our office of their preferred mailing procedures as soon as possible after admission. Below are the mailing options:

1. **U.S. Postal Service International Air Mail** - documents will be sent at our office's expense with an average delivery time of 4-6 weeks. Packages are often delayed or lost and we are not responsible for lost packages. This option is not reliable and tracking information is NOT available. Please refrain from asking our office about whereabouts as we have no control of delivery times with this option.
2. **Express Mail (DHL, UPS, FedEx)** - documents will be sent at the student's expense. This is the **most reliable** option to have your DS-2019 delivered. We strongly encourage students to use express mailing. To order express shipping, please use this [link](#).

Eshipglobal/UEMS partners with McNeese to easily set up express shipping. Our office will be automatically notified and provided with a shipping label when you've made payment. Students can see options for prices and delivery times once an account has been created.

SEVIS Fee: After receiving the form DS-2019, you must pay a mandatory one-time SEVIS fee of \$180 and obtain a receipt PRIOR to booking your visa appointment at the US Embassy/Consulate. This fee may be paid online at www.fmjfee.com. The Department of Homeland Security will issue you an official paper receipt (Form I-797) acknowledging the payment of your SEVIS fee.

Who must pay the SEVIS fee?

- Persons applying for a J-1 visa at a US Embassy/Consulate abroad for initial participation as an exchange visitor;
- Citizens of Canada or Bermuda who are applying for J-1 admission at a US port-of-entry;
- Persons who are in the US in another nonimmigrant status and who are changing status to J-1.

Who does NOT have to pay the SEVIS fee?

- J-2 dependents;
- A person who paid an initial SEVIS fee when seeking a J-1 visa from a US Embassy/Consulate, was denied a visa and is applying again for a visa in the same J-1 exchange visitor category within 12 months of the visa denial
- A J-1 exchange visitor applying for a visa to return to the US as a continuing participant of an exchange visitor program (this applies only to J-1's returning to the US to resume participation in a program that began previously, in which s/he has maintained status, and which has not been completed)
- A J-1 exchange visitor transferring to MSU in the same exchange visitor category
- A J-1 exchange visitor applying for an extension of stay in the same program

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Apply for a J-1 Visa at a US Embassy/Consulate:

Schedule an appointment for a visa interview at an Embassy/Consulate in your home country. An in-person interview is usually required. You will be asked to present your DS-2019 document, SEVIS fee receipt and proof of funding. Other specific documentation may vary depending on your home country, so please check with your particular Embassy/Consulate prior to your interview to make certain you have all necessary documentation. As all visa applications undergo a security background check, it may take some time to process your application. Therefore, you should apply as soon as possible.

Documents needed at time of visa interview:

- A valid, unexpired passport (must be valid for at least 6 months beyond intended stay)
- DS-2019 issued by MSU
- Form I-797 SEVIS fee receipt
- Department of State Form DS-160 Nonimmigrant Visa Application. Online visa application can be found here: http://travel.state.gov/visa/forms/forms_4230.html
- Original financial documentation
- One passport-style photograph
- Nonimmigrant Visa Processing Fee of \$160. Depending upon the arrangement between your country and the US, you may also need to pay an additional visa issuance fee. Please check with your Embassy/Consulate for details.

Citizens of Canada and Bermuda do not need to apply for an entry visa.

One of the main concerns that the officer may have is your intention to be an exchange visitor in the U.S. and your intention to return home upon completion of your exchange. Any information that proves that you will return to your home country after finishing your studies in the U.S. will be useful. This may include proof of property, family, or other ties to your community.

Remember, remain calm and answer all the Visa Officer's questions to you openly and honestly.



Two-Year Home Residency Requirement

J-1 exchange visitors who are subject to the 212(e) rule must return to their home country and reside in that country for two years before they are eligible for H, L, or Permanent Resident status. If subject to 212(e), exchange visitors are not permitted to change their nonimmigrant status within the US from J to any other nonimmigrant category (except for A Diplomat and G International Organization statuses).

Who may be subject to this requirement? Are there any exceptions?

- Exchange visitors with a skill category that appears on the applicable country's "list of skills" that are in critical demand. (see link below for Department of State Skills list)
 - <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2009/04/30/E9-9657/2009-revised-exchange-visitor-skills-list>
- Exchange visitors whose program is supported financially by a government or international agency.
- US Embassy/Consulate General visa officers determine if an exchange visitor is subject to 212(e).
- A waiver of rule 212(e) is possible by filing an I-612.

12 & 24 Month Bar Definitions:

12 month bar: Foreign national cannot have participated in a J program (as J-1 or J-2) for all or part of the 12 month period immediately preceding the start date on the Form DS-2019, unless s/he is transferring to SIU's program, prior physical presence in J status in the US was less than 6 months, or was a Short-Term Scholar.

24 month bar: Foreign national cannot have participated in a J program as a J-1 or J-2 Research Scholar or Professor within the 24 months preceding the start date of the new J-1 Research Scholar or Professor program. Foreign national will be ineligible to participate as a J-1 Research Scholar or Professor for two years following the end date of this program.

Traveling to the U.S.

All J-1 students are required to report to the Office of International Programs (OIP) no later than the start date indicated in Section 3 of your DS-2019. Arriving earlier is recommended, but not required. J-1 students are allowed to begin entering the U.S. 30 days prior to their DS-2019 start date.

We recommend that you fly into the [Lake Charles Airport \(LCH\)](#), which is served by United Airlines and American Airlines. You can take a taxi from the Lake Charles Airport to McNeese. It is a 10 minute drive from the airport to the university. If you fly into Houston (3 hours away) or New Orleans (3 hours away), you must be prepared to spend a significant amount of money getting to Lake Charles. See the list of local (Lake Charles) taxi companies below for phone numbers or ask at the airport. If you take a taxi, be sure to verify the price before getting in.

- **Big Red Taxi: (337) 439-9061**
- **Checker Yellow Cab Co: (337) 433-8282**
- **Lake City Taxi: (337) 474-0101**

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Port of Entry: U.S Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has provided a video for information about what to expect at port of entry. Click [here](#) for more information. Please see below for more information about navigating through port of entry (customs) once you arrive in the U.S.

Be sure to keep the following documents with you when you travel to the U.S. **Do not put these documents in your checked luggage:**

- **DS-2019**
- **Passport and visa**
- **Financial documents**
- **Acceptance letter**

U.S. Customs Interview: At the US port-of-entry you will be interviewed briefly by a port-of-entry officer.

- Have all the documents listed above ready to present to the officer.
- The officer will scan your fingerprints and take your picture.
- Any J-2 dependents accompanying you should also present their DS-2019's and passports.
- The officer will review the documents and may ask you questions about your stay in the US. **These officers can refer you to a more detailed secondary inspection at their discretion.**
- Your DS-2019 should be returned to you and an entry date will be stamped in your passport.
- You will also submit a CBP Customs Declaration form once you have arrived in the U.S. Usually these forms are distributed in-flight prior to arrival. You should complete it prior to your landing.
- Once you have passed through customs you may collect your luggage and exit customs for transportation to your final destination.



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I-94 Arrival/Departure record: The I-94 is proof of your admission to the US and evidence of your legal immigration status. It is very important that you keep a copy of this I-94 information with your immigration paperwork. Students entering the U.S. through an air or sea port of entry will have an electronic record I-94 Arrival/Departure created. You should be able to access your electronic I-94 record within 2 days of entering the U.S. Students who enter the U.S. through a land port of entry (example: U.S./Mexico border) will be issued a paper copy I-94.

What Items to Not Bring?

- A large amount of cash. Students and exchange visitors are strongly discouraged from carrying a large amount of cash due to possible questions with customs and also due to safety concerns.
- Any prohibited or restricted items listed here.

Arrival at MSU

You must enter the US and check-in at OIP within 30 days **PRIOR** to the start date of your DS-2019. If you cannot enter the US by the DS-2019 start date, notify the IOP immediately so that you can be issued a new DS-2019 with corrected dates. If you are unable to come to MSU for any reason, you must return the DS-2019 to OIP immediately.

You should be in contact with your faculty sponsor to make arrangements to meet them once you arrive on the MSU campus. You **MUST** also check in with the Office of International Programs (OIP). Please make an appointment with Floyd Coghlan at intinfo@mcneese.edu to schedule this check in.

Bring the following items with you when you check in:

- **DS-2019 for you and any J-2 dependents**
- **Passport**
- **I-94 information**
- **Proof of health insurance**
- **Information about local address (housing or hotel) and phone number**

You may be asked to schedule another appointment time if you arrive without this information.



Employment at MSU

You are entitled to the following Wilberforce Pamphlet on the Rights and Protections for Temporary Workers.

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/temporary-workers.html>

Even if you are not being paid by MSU, your host in your department will need to complete a contract for you so that you can get an MSU ID number. This contract will serve as your official affiliation with MSU. Contact them for more information.

Exchange Visitor Fees and Costs

Fees Payable to the Sponsor:

Fees will vary depending on your J-1 category. All Exchange Visitors will be assessed an orientation fee (one time) as well as International Student/Exchange Visitor Fee (each session). These fees defray the costs of services provided to you.

For participants in a degree-granting academic program, a complete listing of tuition and fees is posted online at: <http://catalog.mcneese.edu/content.php?catoid=12&navoid=745>

Other Exchange Visitor Costs:

Costs that the exchange visitor will likely incur (e.g. living expenses) while in U.S. can vary greatly from person to person, depending on your needs, tastes and habits. In general the southern region, where McNeese is located, is considered to have an affordable cost of living. The following web site offers an overview of basic costs in the Lake Charles, Louisiana area:

<https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/in/Lake-Charles>

Exchange Visitors who live modestly are typically able to live within the estimated cost of living of \$8,000 per year. Additional costs may include travel, unexpected medical expenses (i.e. co-pays or deductibles not covered by insurance) or personal expenses including cell phones, laptops, etc.



Healthcare and Insurance

J-1/J-2 Health Insurance Requirements:

If you are traveling to the US on a J1 or J2 visa, you will be required to carry compliant medical health insurance for the full duration of your program. **McNeese State University offers a compliant group plan in which J-1/J-2 Visa holders may enroll. Contact our office for more details.**

The U.S. Department of State has minimum J-1 health insurance requirements that your insurance plan must meet (which apply to J2 visa holders as well):

- Medical Benefits of at least \$100,000 per accident or illness
- Repatriation of Remains in the amount of \$25,000
- Expenses associated with the medical evacuation of the exchange visitor to his or her home country in the amount of \$50,000
- A deductible not to exceed \$500 per accident or illness
- A policy underwritten by an insurance carrier with:
 - an A.M. Best rating of “A-” or above;
 - a McGraw Hill Financial/Standard & Poor’s Claims paying Ability rating of “A-” or above;
 - a Weiss Research, Inc. rating of “B+” or above;
 - a Fitch Ratings, Inc. rating of “A-” or above;
 - a Moody’s Investor Services rating of “A3” or above;

When choosing an insurance plan it is vital that you specify that you want a J-1 compliant policy. Your policy should be in force upon arrival to the United States. You should submit proof of insurance to the Office of International Programs when you check-in and must carry a copy with you at all times.

Additional Healthcare Information:

Exchange Visitors who are enrolled as students (and have been issued a student ID) are eligible to use the [Student Health Services Center](#) on campus, which is open Monday-Friday, 7:00 am to 3:00 pm. The Student Health Services Center provides acute care medical services to all enrolled McNeese students. Student Health Services Center staff includes registered nurses, and doctors maintain daily clinic hours on the premises. Emergencies and after-hour care must be sought at local Urgent Care Centers or hospital emergency rooms (see list below). Please be aware that emergency room visits in the United States are very expensive and the Student Health Services Center or Urgent Care facilities should be used when possible.

Enrolled Exchange Visitors in need of counseling are also eligible to seek out the services of the [McNeese Counseling Center](#), which provides individual mental health counseling sessions, learning assessments, career assessments, and access to a medical psychologist for medication management (screening with a counselor required first).

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Urgent Care Centers near McNeese State University:

- Lake Charles Urgent Care
2400 Ryan St. (337) 990-8001
- Urgent Care Center of the Clinic
4201 Nelson Rd. (337) 310-2273
- Moss Memorial Urgent Care
1000 Walters St. (337) 480-8100
- Calcasieu Urgent Care
2640 Country Club Rd #400 (337) 426-0919

Hospitals/Emergency Rooms near McNeese State University:

In the case of a true emergency please call 9-1-1

- Lake Charles Memorial Hospital
1701 Oak Park Blvd (337) 494-3000
- CHRISTUS St. Patrick Hospital
524 Dr. Michael Debaquey Dr. (337) 436-2511



Other Information:

Tourism:

Your stay in the United States, specifically in the Lake Charles area, should be educational as well as enjoyable and adventurous. Most cities have organized offices to assist visitors in becoming acquainted with the surrounding areas and promote tourism. To learn more about living and exploring the Lake Charles area, as well as to view a calendar of local events, please visit the following web site for the Convention and Visitors Bureau for Southwest Louisiana:

<http://www.visitlakecharles.org>

Weather/Local Climate:

With a warm and sunny climate, Lake Charles is an ideal place to live and learn all year round, boasting average winter temperatures in the mid to upper 60's. Summers can be hot and humid, but the surrounding inter-coastal waterways that encompass Lake Charles help to provide a cooling breeze. Exchange Visitors should prepare to dress lightly for majority of the year. A light jacket will suffice the infrequent, "chilly" winter and early spring days. At times, freezing temperatures do arise in the event of a cold front; a heavy jacket may be needed for a few days.

Parks & Recreation:

The city of Lake Charles and surrounding areas of Southwest Louisiana offer public access to several parks and recreational areas where residents and visitors can congregate to enjoy a variety of activities and connect with nature. Many local parks and recreation zones are not just great sites for relaxing, playing sports, camping, exercising and having a picnic, but provide access to unique activities such as fishing, crabbing, kayaking, boating and bird and alligator watching. Public beaches along the Gulf of Mexico are also just a short drive away. A variety of public athletic complexes are also available for the sports enthusiast and are where community members and visitors can join in city teams such as adult softball and soccer. See the list below of some of the most frequented outdoor parks and recreational areas.

- Lakefront Promenade
900 Lakeshore Dr.
- Calcasieu Point Landing
3955 Henry Pugh Rd.
- Prien Lake Park
3700 West Prien Lake Rd.
- Sam Houston Jones State Park
107 Sutherland Rd.
- Creole Nature Trail
 - Alligators, over 400 bird species, marshlands teeming with life, 26 miles of natural Gulf of Mexico beaches, fishing, crabbing, Cajun culture and more can be experienced as you travel the more than 180-mile Creole Nature Trail All-American Road.

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Public Transportation:

Lake Charles currently offers five fixed public transport routes. Bus service is provided Monday through Friday from 5:45 A.M. through 5:45 P.M. (except on City holidays). All routes depart the Transit Customer Service Center located at 1155 Ryan Street, every 45 minutes after the hour. Public transportation is still developing in Lake Charles and can be very limited. Exchange Visitors are encouraged to purchase a used vehicle for transportation needs depending on the length of their program. Please visit the webpage below for detailed information on public transit, routes and stops.

<http://www.cityoflakecharles.com/departments/division.php?structureid=194>

Department of State Exchange Visitor Program Welcome Brochure

Following is a link to the official Exchange Visitor Program Welcome Brochure. It may provide you with additional information as you prepare for your trip to the U.S.

<http://j1visa.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Brochure-The-Exchange-Visitor-Program.pdf>

