

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING THE INVITATION/ OFFER LETTER FOR J-1 SCHOLARS

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

The hosting department must provide the prospective J-1 scholar with an invitation or offer letter. Invitation letters generally follow a similar structure as an offer letter. This letter is needed as a part of the scholar's initial application to request a DS-2019 from ISSS, for the scholar to apply for their visa at a U.S. consulate, and at other stages in the immigration process.

At minimum, a letter needs to contain the following bulleted items. Please see the examples, guidance and Q&A included below where applicable. The examples provided do not cover all situations, so if you need assistance with a unique situation, please contact ISSS.

- **Department Letterhead:** The letter must be printed on the hosting department's letterhead.
- **Program Dates*:** Include the dates during which you expect the scholar to be active in your department. These dates must match what you request in the ISSS Prospective J-1 Scholar Application (which are the dates that will be printed on the DS-2019). Refer to the [Inviting a J-1 Scholar timeline](#) on our website for assistance in choosing realistic dates for the scholar's program.

Q: We're only allowed to provide offer letter dates that fall within fiscal year appointment cycles. How do we invite a scholar for multiple years?

A: Many departments list back to back appointments to meet the requirements of the J Program and HR.

Here's an example of text to include in the letter:

University policy requires formal appointment documents that are aligned with the University fiscal year. Your appointment, covering the period from April 1, 2016 until June 12, 2016, is expected to be followed by an appointment from June 13, 2016 until June 11, 2017, followed by an additional appointment beginning June 12, 2017 and extending until March 31, 2018. In summary, your J Program is expected to begin April 1, 2016 and conclude March 18, 2018.

If, after consulting with your HR representative, you are not able to get a letter that contains wording like this, please remember that a scholar can always file for an extension once they are here.

- **Status:** Include that you are inviting the individual as a J-1 scholar (additional iterations: J-1 research scholar, J-1 visiting scholar, J-1 short-term scholar).

Q: Our scholar is a graduate student in their home country. Should we refer to him/her as a student?

A: Scholar vs. student:** It is very important for you to not refer to the individual as a student. Students are assumed to be admitted to the U of M to take classes and are held to different visa requirements than scholars. Your scholar's primary purpose must be research, observation, and/or teaching.

- **Purpose:** Include the scholar's purpose of visiting the University and what their primary activities will be (i.e. research in...).
- **Faculty Mentor:** Include the name and title of the U of M faculty mentor who will supervise and collaborate with the scholar during their program here.
- **Funding:** Include whether or not your department is providing funding support for the scholar. If you are not providing funding, please state what benefit(s) you are providing to the scholar.

Here are some examples:

(Paid - Yearly Salary and Program Total)

This is a 100% time appointment with an annual base salary of \$40,000. Based on your start date, you will be eligible for an increase in June 2017 and June 2018, in accordance with the University's compensation plan. The initial appointment for this position will be effective from March 21, 2016 to March 20, 2017, a second appointment from March 21, 2017 to March 21, 2018, and third appointment from March 21, 2018 to March 20, 2019, totaling 3 years and a total salary of \$120,000 (plus merit increases). In summary, your J program will begin March 21, 2016 and end March 20, 2019.

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(Paid - Yearly Salary that Accompanies a One Year Program)

This is a 100% time appointment with an annual base salary of \$40,000.

(Unpaid)

My understanding is you have received financial support from your government, as the department is unable to provide you with direct salary, scholarship or stipend. The support you receive should cover all of the expenses of your stay at the U of MN including health insurance, housing, sustenance and transportation. If you have any dependents, you are responsible for all the expenses of their stay at the U of MN. I will be able to provide you access to all open seminars, laboratory equipment, and the department will take care of any associated research expenses.

(Unpaid)

The department will provide you with office space, access to email, the departmental network and the internet, access to libraries, and opportunities to participate in seminars, workshops and other professional and social activities of the department.

- **Health insurance:** Include information about the U of M health insurance requirement

Here are some examples:**(Both benefits eligible and ineligible scholars)**

The University of Minnesota requires all J-1 international scholars and J-2 dependents to purchase U of M health insurance. J-1 scholars and their J-2 dependents are required to have either a U of M Employee Benefits Medical Plan or the U of M Student Health Benefit Plan (SHBP) for International Scholars for the full duration of the J program.

(Benefits eligible scholars only)

As a University of Minnesota employee, you qualify for health, life and dental insurance programs. Specific information about your benefits can be found at <http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/benefits> or by calling the Employee Benefits department at 612-624-8647. Please note that the University of Minnesota requires all J-1 international scholars and J-2 dependents to purchase U of M health insurance and be enrolled for the full duration of the J program.

(Benefits ineligible scholars only)

The University of Minnesota requires all J-1 international scholars and J-2 dependents to purchase U of M health insurance. As you are not eligible for U of M employee benefits, you must purchase the Student Health Benefit Plan (SHBP) for international scholars. Coverage under the SHBP is guaranteed for incoming J-1 scholars and J-2 dependents from the day they arrive at the U of M. Your payment for the SHBP will allow you to be seen at Boynton Health Service for most services at no cost and some services at a reduced cost. Contact the Office of Student Health Benefits for more information about this plan (<https://shb.umn.edu/students-and-scholars/shbp-eligibility>).

* If the program dates change, remember to update the offer/invitation letter for the scholar to match the dates with those on the DS-2019.

** There are specific student visas for individuals seeking to take classes at the University. Taking or auditing classes cannot be the full-time focus for a scholar. Scholars are limited to the equivalent of 5 credits or less per semester when auditing or taking classes. They must maintain full-time focus on their research/teaching activities. Consult with ISSS regarding the proper visa for individuals seeking to take classes at the University.