GUIDE TO WORKING IN MINNESOTA

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ISSS

International Student & Scholar Services

University of Minnesota
WORKING AT THE U of M:
LOGISTICS AND OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION

Following are some information that might help you adjust to your new work environment.

The Academic Year

For most colleges and universities, the academic year begins in late August or early September and ends in May or June. The “semester” system divides the academic year into two equal terms of approximately 16 weeks each. Many students take the summer off. Therefore, fewer support/academic/enrichment programs and services are offered during the summer months. However, all University of Minnesota offices and facilities are open the whole year (including summer).

Office and Work Hours

Regular office hours at the University are Monday through Friday 8am to 4:30(or 5) pm and include a 1 hour lunch break (generally from 12pm to 1pm – the lunch hour is not considered work time and is therefore not compensated). During the lunch hour many offices are closed to the public. The University is closed during the following National Holidays:

- New Year’s Day – January 1
- Martin Luther King Day – the third Monday in January
- Presidents’ Day – the third Monday in February (not observed at the UMN)
- Memorial Day – the fourth Monday in May
- Independence Day – July 4
- Labor Day – the first Monday in September
- Columbus Day – the second Monday in October (not observed at the UMN)
- Veteran’s Day – November 11 (not observed at the UMN)
- Thanksgiving Day – the fourth Thursday in November
- Christmas Day – December 25

If you have been offered (or are holding) a Full-time position, this means that you are required to work at least 40 hours per week, or 100% appointment time. Your appointment could also be less than 100%. Remember that the workload varies and that you might be asked or expected to work additional hours (or during the weekend) to complete tasks. Before you start working, talk to your supervisor and get clarifications on what your work hours are going to be and what his/her expectations are regarding details of your employment (including: what you should do if you are running late; if you are sick; or if you need time off).

Also, remember that, depending on the type of work you do or the type of appointment, there might be some flexibility. So, for example, if you want to take a class during your work day, talk to your supervisor and ask whether you can make work arrangements that will allow you to do it. You could offer to work later in the evening to make up for the time you took off during the day.
Your Faculty Mentor

When you arrive at the University, you will be assigned a faculty mentor. Your faculty mentor will help you plan your program, and he or she will also monitor your progress. Before you meet with your faculty mentor, however, it may be helpful to design a tentative program plan based on your own needs and desires. If you are a student in your home country and are here to participate in research activities (or fill in other activities) that are part of an academic exchange, know what the requirements are or, if you are not certain, prepare a list of questions. At the first meeting with your faculty mentor, you may wish to discuss both your short-term and long-range professional plans—that is, what you hope to do during your program and after you finish. You should discuss the tentative program plan that you have drawn up for and possible adjustments to it. You may also wish to discuss opportunities for other academic activities that might enrich your exchange experience. If you do not speak up, you will not benefit as much as you could from the knowledge and experience of your faculty mentor.

Many international scholars think they should not express their opinion to their faculty mentor, since this may be perceived as inappropriate behavior or a sign of disrespect in their own cultures. However, in American culture, it is considered appropriate behavior to politely voice your opinion (see "Working the American Way" section). The role of the faculty mentor is to help you make your own decisions, not to make decisions for you.

In case you are planning to take classes, remember that the University of Minnesota does allow you to only take classes part-time (usually 3 credit hours for graduates) and that classes in general should not interfere with your primary objective (researching, training, teaching, etc.) in order for your nonimmigrant student visa to remain valid. Using your personal plan, your faculty mentor might help you decide upon an academic plan based upon your goals. During your J program, you should make appointments with your faculty mentor at regular intervals in order to review your progress.

ISSS, Department and New Employees Orientations

ISSS offers an orientation program for new scholars. The purpose is to ease your transition to a new place and to provide you with information and resources you may need during your stay. Sometimes there will be a department orientation program. The University also offers an orientation program for new employees (new employees are people that are going to be on UMN payroll). Orientations are important and valuable opportunities for you, even if this is not your first visit to the United States. Frequently, orientation programs provide information that won’t be as easily obtained later on. ISSS orientation provides information regarding: important U.S. immigration regulations with which you must comply; Housing, Transportation, Identification Cards, Money and Banking, Resources on Campus, Health Care and Insurance, U.S. Cultural Norms, Child Care and Schools, English Classes, Sports and Recreation, etc. Department orientation may provide information on people’s roles, department resources, scholars’ privileges, work hours and expectations, etc. Finally, UMN Orientation for New Employees will highlight University culture, values and goals and explain how the UMN employee benefit system works.

Communicating with Professors/Faculty Mentors

The social code of behavior between students and professors/faculty mentors is not as precisely defined in the United States as it might be in other countries. While some professors/faculty mentors adhere to more traditional methods, others will come to class wearing jeans and sports shirts and
insist that you call them by their first names. Here are a few pointers to help you deal with professors/faculty mentors:

- Always address teachers as "Professor" or "Doctor" unless instructed otherwise. If the teacher desires to be called something else, he or she will usually tell you. Do not be shocked to hear students calling teachers by their first names. This is especially common among graduate students, since they develop a closer professional relationship with their teachers than undergraduate students do.

- Professors/Faculty mentors in the United States hold office hours, usually several times a week, when they are available for consultation. It is an opportunity used by many students to discuss projects, to review material covered in class, or simply to exchange ideas on a given topic. Most professors/faculty mentors are willing to meet students for these purposes, and they can be very helpful. Take advantage of the availability of office hours. These informal meetings could prove to be a turning point in your understanding of a subject and in your relationship with a professor/faculty mentor. If you cannot be available during a certain professor’s/faculty mentor’s office hours, he or she will generally give you the chance to schedule meetings at other times.

- Be prepared for each meeting. Before the meeting, make an agenda for the meeting and write down important things you want to talk about or questions you would like to have answered. Also, if some of the information you need requires the professor/faculty mentor time to prepare in advance, email him/her first with your agenda, so that s/he has the opportunity to prepare for the meeting. During the meeting, try to be clear and concise about what you are trying to convey or ask, demonstrate interest, listen, ask questions, express your opinion politely, and respond to comments. Make sure your participation contributes constructively and positively. Finally, if you are planning to meet again in the future regarding the same subject, but either or both of you has “homework” to do before that happens, inquire about or suggest deadlines to guide you through the process.

- After the meeting is over, it is often helpful to email your professor/faculty mentor thanking them for their time and offering a recap of the main points that were discussed and the plan of action that was agreed upon. This will help make sure you both share the same understanding on what the outcome of the meeting was.

**Academic Dishonesty and the University’s Code of Conduct**

The University of Minnesota has established honor codes or statements of rules students and scholars are expected to follow in their academic work. These rules relate primarily to academic honesty and originality as they are defined by U.S. educational institutions. U.S. educational institutions take these rules very seriously, and ignorance of the rules usually is not accepted as an excuse for breaking them. Even if a particular academic practice is accepted in your country or is part of your culture, it will not be an acceptable explanation for violating the rules at a U.S. college or university. Information about the university code of conduct and implications for breaking the rules can be viewed at the following website:

http://wwwpolicy.umn.edu/groups/ppd/documents/Policy/AcademicMisconduct_pol.cfm#100
If you have any questions about what to do regarding any of these issues, talk to your faculty mentor. There is a U.S. idiom that applies here: “It is better to be safe than sorry.” If you will be teaching classes, you can find helpful Teaching Tips and Policies on the following website:
http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/resources/jit/index.html