

**United States of America**  
**Social Security Number (SSN) or Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN)**

**INFORMATION SHEET FOR FOREIGN SCHOLARS**  
**COMING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA**  
**USA Office of International Education (8/2010)**

*(This document is meant as informational only. All procedures, eligibility and information referenced should be verified with the appropriate official US federal or State agency indicated herein.)*

**Prior to filing a tax return with the United States Internal Revenue Service (IRS), which is a requirement for any individual who receives payment for services, grants, scholarships and other awards in the United States, you will need either a United States Social Security Administration Number (SSN) or a US Internal Revenue Service Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN). Please carefully consider the following if you do NOT already have one of the above.**

When receiving payments for services, grants, scholarships and other awards in the United States, US citizens, permanent residents and foreign nationals are subject to a range of withholdings from these payments or awards. The amount withheld is based upon the nature of the payment, citizenship of the payment recipient, and local and federal tax regulations. The US has entered into tax treaties with certain countries which provide federal tax relief for citizens of those countries when receiving certain payments in the US and provides similar benefits for US citizens receiving payment in that other country. More information on these tax treaties is available at the following link on the IRS website: (<http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/international/article/0,,id=96434,00.html>).

Foreign scholars should be aware that often the percentage of withholding ranges between 14% and 30% of the total amount of the payment/award. Under the tax treaties referenced above, however, this amount can be minimal to none. When accepting such payments/awards, all scholars also acknowledge that they must comply with US tax regulations and file an income tax return in April of each year and at such time may receive a portion of their withholdings back or be required to pay additional taxes on their earned income.

**In order to file an income tax return, and to be eligible for the tax treaty benefits, the foreign scholar/student must have a US Social Security Number (SSN) or a US IRS Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN).** Generally, a SSN is only issued to US citizens or permanent residents or to those foreign nationals eligible to work in the United States and is issued by the Social Security Administration (SSA). The IRS issues ITINs to foreign nationals and others who have federal tax reporting or filing requirements and do not qualify for SSNs. The University of South Alabama (USA) cannot provide you with advice on which you will be eligible for, as that is a determination made by the US SSA and IRS agencies. Additionally the University of South Alabama is not able to provide scholars with US or State Income Tax eligibility or filing advice, for such you should contact the specific agencies involved.

If the foreign scholar/student does not have a SSN or ITIN number, then such should be applied for upon arrival into the United States. Once an application is submitted, the process can take 10 days to a month depending on the documentation, processing times, etc. Alternatively, the US Social Security Administration and Internal Revenue Service offer the opportunity for foreign scholars to possibly apply for the SSN or ITIN while outside of the US in certain US embassies or consulates. There is no assurance that a SSN or ITIN will be issued and the scholars should contact the respective US office abroad to determine their specific proof of eligibility requirements, processing time, etc.

Until the SSN or ITIN is received, the scholar who is eligible for tax treaty benefits can either accept the payment/award (with proof of having applied for the SSN or ITIN) less the withholding deductions (14-30%), or wait until such time as the SSN or ITIN is received and then have the payment made based on any appropriate tax treaty withholding deductions. USA must have evidence of one of these identification numbers prior to determining the amount of the withholding from such payments.

It should be noted that tax treaty benefits only apply to federal withholdings, and that the scholar may also be subject to withholdings from state and local governments which are not affected by US tax treaties. For specific information on the Alabama Income Tax rules and regulations please go to:

<http://www.revenue.alabama.gov/incometax/itindex2.html>.

In order to appropriately address these issues for foreign scholars and students, universities and other institutions in the US have a non-immigrant tax compliance officer who reviews the tax compliance aspects and makes the necessary determination as to how much of the given payment or award will be withheld and submitted to the US Internal Revenue Service. For the University of South Alabama this person is Ms. Lacy Fetters, Payroll Accountant, USA Financial Affairs, [lsimmons@usouthal.edu](mailto:lsimmons@usouthal.edu), Phone: 1-251-460-6654.

For more information on these procedures please note the following:

<http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/international/article/0,,id=96690,00.html> *Obtaining an ITIN from Abroad - Alien taxpayers who need an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) may be able to secure one from outside the United States. The IRS has permanent staff available which are able to help process Forms W-7, IRS Application Number (PDF) at the following U.S. embassies overseas: Beijing, Frankfurt, London, and Paris. The addresses and phone numbers of these overseas offices may be found at Contact My Local Office Internationally. In addition, there are public accounting firms overseas in certain countries which are Authorized Acceptance Agents for ITIN numbers. You will find their names and addresses at the Acceptance Agent Program page.*  
<http://www.irs.gov/localcontacts/article/0,,id=101292,00.html>

<http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/10096.html> *“Generally, only noncitizens authorized to work in the United States by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) can get a Social Security number. Social Security numbers are used to report an individual’s wages to the government and to determine a person’s eligibility for Social Security benefits. You need a Social Security number to work, collect Social Security benefits and receive some other government services. There are two ways you can apply: You can apply in your home country before you come to the United States when filing an application for an immigrant visa with the U.S. Department of State. In almost all cases, if you apply for a Social Security number and card with your immigrant visa application, you do not have to visit a Social Security office in the United States. (For more information, see [www.socialsecurity.gov/ssnvisa](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/ssnvisa)); or you can visit a Social Security office in person.”* (excerpted from SSA web page).

<http://www.ssa.gov/foreign/> SSA's Office of International Operations (OIO) home page. *“The purpose of this web page is to assist Social Security customers who are outside the U.S. or planning to leave the U.S. OIO is responsible for administering the Social Security program outside the U.S. and for the implementation of the benefit provisions of international agreements. Since SSA has no offices outside the U.S., OIO is assisted by the Department of State's embassies and consulates throughout the world.”* On this page you will find the contact information for the US Embassies/Consulates supporting the SSAOIO. Excerpted from OIO page.

<http://www.ssa.gov/online/ss-5fs.pdf> (SSN application form) *“In most cases, you can take or mail this signed application with your documents to any Social Security office, U.S. Embassy or consulate or VARO. If you are a military dependent or a U.S. citizen working on a U.S. military post, you may also go to the Post Adjutant or Personnel Office. If you do not want to mail your original documents, take them along with this application to one of the offices listed above. The people there will make certified copies of your original documents and mail them to the Social Security Administration along with this application. Do not mail your original documents to the Social Security Administration in Baltimore, Maryland.”* (excerpted from SSN application form)

[http://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/factsheet/SSA\\_J\\_fact\\_sheet\\_final\\_May\\_9%20revised.pdf](http://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/factsheet/SSA_J_fact_sheet_final_May_9%20revised.pdf) (J Nonimmigrants: Getting a Social Security Number – FACT SHEET) *“The Social Security Administration (SSA) uses the Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) Program’s Verification Information System (VIS) of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) as its primary data source to verify legal entry into the United States and, in conjunction with travel documentation, to verify the immigration status of non-citizen Social Security number (SSN) applicants. It may take several days after the arrival of a nonimmigrant for arrival data to upload to VIS.”* (Excerpted from Fact Sheet)