



The University of New Mexico

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INFORMATION FOR SPOUSES AND FAMILIES OF UNM INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS

There are many resources available for international spouses and families in Albuquerque both on and off the UNM campus. Some of these resources are listed below. For more information about resources or other issues that affect spouses and families, please speak with an international advisor in the Office of International Programs and Studies (OIPS) or attend a UNM International Couple's Organization (ICO) event.

- **Immigration Regulations affecting Spouses and Children of International Students and Scholars**

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) prohibits those in F-2 status from studying full-time at the post-secondary level. Regulations for F-2s do allow part-time study that is "avocational or recreational in nature." Those in J-2 status are not prohibited from full-time study at the post-secondary level. Please check with OIPS if you are considering enrolling in classes as a spouse or child of an international student or scholar. F-2 and H-4 status holders are not permitted to work in the US under any circumstances. Those in J-2 status may apply to USCIS for limited work permission, but processing times may be lengthy and permission is not guaranteed. Please speak with an advisor in OIPS or pick up our handout for information on applying for J-2 work permission.

- **UNM Recreational Services Passport/ LOBO Card**

This sponsored LOBO ID card, allows spouses and partners to access UNM recreational services (pool, gym, and recreational non-credit classes). To obtain the card for a spouse or a partner, a student must be enrolled for the current academic term. Students who are not in full-time degree programs or exchanges must ask their department about getting a sponsored card for their spouse. Spouses of scholars who are not being paid by UNM may not qualify, please check with recreational services about your situation.

Both the student/scholar and the spouse must be present to apply for the card. You must show proof of partnership in the form of a marriage certificate, shared bank account (both names on the check), shared utility bill, rental lease, or a driver's license showing the same address. The cost is \$40.00 per semester (recreational non-credit classes, such as aerobics, are additional). To obtain the card you must first go to the Recreational Services office at the front entrance of the Johnson Gym, fill out an application, show proof of partnership, and pay the \$40 fee. Then go to the LOBO Card Office in the Student Union building, Lower Level (Tel: 277-9970), to obtain the card. If you have questions call Recreational Services at 277-0178.

- **English as a Second Language (ESL) Resources**

The *Center for English Language and American Culture (CELAC)* at UNM offers college preparatory language training at approximately \$3,600 per semester for full-time study. For more information look at the CELAC website at www.unm.edu/~celac or inquire in OIPS (2111 Mesa Vista Hall). If you are interested in basic English, the local community college (Central New Mexico Community College) offers low to intermediate level English classes free of charge. Call them at 224-4282 or go online at: <http://www.cnm.edu/depts/eca/ABE.php> for more information. A local community group also offers free English conversation classes every semester at the Baptist Student Union, 401 University Blvd. For more information email Karen Zondlo at kzondlo@gmail.com.

- **Organizations for Spouses**

The UNM International Couples Organization (ICO) provides opportunities for spouses and partners from different cultural backgrounds to share cultures, learn cooking, enjoy games, potluck dinners and make friends. For more information call Linda Melville at 277-4032 or email her at lindamelville@yahoo.com.

- **Volunteer Opportunities**

Spouses of international students on F-2 and H-4 visas do not have permission to work in the US, however many spouses on F-2, J-2 and H-4 visas find opportunities to enhance their career or personal objectives through volunteer work. If you are interested in volunteering in a specific field, you should research organizations in Albuquerque that provide services in that field and approach the organization(s) to ask if you can volunteer. If you would like to speak with someone about looking for volunteer work, you are welcome to speak with Linda Melville in OIPS at 277-4032.

- Getting a Social Security Number (SSN) or ITIN Number for Your Spouse**

Social Security numbers are not required for spouses living in the US unless they are given work permission (available for J-2s only). SSNs can only be issued to non-immigrants (those who are not citizens or permanent residents of the US) who have an official "need" for such numbers. Spouses on J-2 visas can only prove the need for a SSN if they have received work authorization from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). Since F-2 spouses are never permitted to work, they cannot receive a Social Security Number. See the Social Security Worksheet for more information.
- Getting a Driver's License or State ID**

To apply for a driver's license, a spouse must take his/her I-94 card, passport, I-20 or DS-2019 copy and Social Security Card (if available) to the Motor Vehicle's Division (MVD) office. In addition, take two documents as proof of residence in New Mexico. You should also take a translated and notarized version of your home country driver's license if you have one (when applying for a NM license, not the ID). He/she will need to study the New Mexico Driver's Manual, pass the written or computerized portion of the driver's exam, take a vision screening test, and pass a road test. Once the individual has successfully completed all these steps, he/she will be granted the driver's license. Note that MVD personnel are not well informed about requirements for non-immigrants who want to obtain their license. OIPS has a handout that lists the requirements and other details. It may help you to bring that handout with you and to ask for a supervisor if you have difficulty with the MVD staff person.
- Health Insurance**

Due to the high cost of health care in the US, health insurance is an absolute necessity for the whole family! International students, scholars, spouses and children cannot accept any public benefits such as health benefits without risk of exclusion from the US. International students are required by the university to have health insurance, but it is important to understand that you must purchase additional insurance to cover the health needs of your family. UNM does offer health insurance for spouses and children of international students and scholars at additional cost. You should check the UNM plan coverage and compare it to other plans in order to select the best option for your family's needs. If you select the UNM plan, spouse's can be seen at the health center for a \$10 fee but children cannot be seen at the health center under any circumstances, so you must select an outside physician for their needs. OIPS has information on other health insurance plans and the Albuquerque Public Schools offer special plans for school age children. Spouses who take at least 6 units of non-degree classes can pay the student health insurance rates. If your spouse plans to take non-degree classes, this option will be cheaper for your family. However, be sure to check OIPS for current immigration regulations to be sure that you are legally permitted to take classes as an international spouse.
- Enrolling Your Child in Public School**

In the City of Albuquerque, children begin public school at the age of 5 and are assigned to schools according to their home address. To find out which school your child should attend, or for additional information, call Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) at 880-3700 or check the website at: <http://ww2.aps.edu/>. Parents should speak to APS if they want their child to attend a different school.

In order to enroll your child in an Albuquerque Public School, you will need the following documents:

 - 1) Passport or Birth Certificate (the child must be 5 years old before September 1st in order to enroll for kindergarten)
 - 2) Current immunization record (a waiver can be obtained if you do not want your child to receive certain immunizations)
 - 3) Proof of residency (e.g., utility bill or a copy of a rental lease)

You may also need to show proof of your identity and the current visa status of you and your child. This would include your passport (as well as that of the child) and immigration documents (I-20/DS-2019, visa and I-94 card). One parent may also need to provide a US social security number.
- Childcare Options for Younger Children**

Finding good care for younger children in the US can be difficult and expensive. While UNM does have a childcare center that is very high quality, the waiting list is extremely long and many families never get into the program. Those who meet income requirements may be able to get children ages 3 to 5 into "Head Start," a publicly funded early childhood education program (there are a few Head Start programs for even younger children, but the waiting lists are extremely long). For more information about Head Start, call their administrative offices at 268-0024 to find out about a center near you. NM Kids Childcare Resource and Referral at 277-7900 helps families locate childcare centers and in-home childcare near their place of residence. You should think carefully about the kind of care you would like for your child and call them for a list of names and numbers in your area. Be sure to investigate the home or center carefully. The New Mexico Children Youth and Families Department keeps records on and evaluations of licensed centers and home daycares that you can review upon request. In the near future, New Mexico will begin state-funded early childhood care. Check with APS about the status of these programs.