

**November 12, 2014**

### **The J-1 work-study Program**

**Q:** *What can you tell me about the J-1 visa work-study program? Some of my friends said they loved it, but some others said the experience wasn't what they thought it would be.*

**A:** We're glad you're asking about the J-1 program. This is an opportune time as next week is International Education Week. International Education Week is a chance to learn about international education and exchange opportunities such as the J-1 work-study program.

The J-1 program affords full-time university students the opportunity to accept a summer job in the U.S. and participate in cultural exchange. With thousands of J-1 participants from Jamaica, people have had a wide range experiences. We see many repeat participants from Jamaica, with some students going for three summers in a row!

We've found that the applicants who have the best experiences in this program are those students who are well informed and have reasonable expectations. Here are some things that all applicants should keep in mind:

- **The J-1 program does not require or endorse local recruitment agency. Interested students do not have to pay local agency fees.** There are U.S. organizations designated by the State Department as J-1 sponsors. These organizations help students fulfill the J-1 requirements prior to departure. The requirements include finding a job, arranging visa paperwork, and getting U.S. health insurance. All students must have a U.S. sponsor organization before applying for the J-1 visa. Only U.S. organizations can be J-1 sponsors.

The list of approved sponsors can be found here: <http://j1visa.state.gov/participants/how-to-apply/sponsor-search/?program=Summer%20Work%20Travel>. If a company is not on this list, it is not a sponsor. The Jamaican companies who say they can get you a J-1 visa are not sponsors. In the best case, these companies may charge increased fees to do legwork that students can do themselves and in the worst case they are simply frauds.

- **The jobs you get in the J-1 program are typical of the jobs American university students over the summers.** Most participants work in non-skilled service positions at resorts, hotels, restaurants and amusement parks. Some J-1 sponsors offer positions as an au pair or camp counselor. While you won't expect to dress in a suit and tie, these jobs provide valuable professional experience with fair wages – and it is exactly the type of employment that regular American university students have over the summer! If you ask the diplomats working at the U.S. Embassy Kingston right now, you would find that they worked as parking lot attendants, ice cream servers, lifeguards, and waitresses

while in school. This is the American summer experience – learning about another culture is part of what makes exchange great!

- **J-1 students have the same rights U.S. workers enjoy.** This means a J-1 participant has the right to be treated and paid fairly, to report abuse without retaliation, to request help from unions and labor rights groups, and to seek justice in U.S. courts. The interviewing consular officer at the Embassy will review these rights, among others, with you, and provide you with a pamphlet when you come in for your visa interview. In addition to these basic rights, the U.S. Department of State places further regulations on the type and nature of work that students can be asked to undertake to help protect them further. The U.S. government wants to know if any program abuses or mistreats J-1 participants, and maintains a special “hot line” telephone number – 1-866-283-9090 – for reports of abuse. If you are interested in this unique opportunity to live and work in the U.S., we encourage you to talk to as many former J-1 students as you can about their experience – J-1 veterans are among the best information sources for new J-1 participants.

For further information, visit the U.S. Department of State’s J-1 Visa Exchange Visitor Program website at <http://j1visa.state.gov/programs/summer-work-travel/>. Interested students should begin looking into the programs now to get a spot for this summer.

To celebrate International Education Week, the Embassy is also hosting our College Fair 2014. The fair will host over 14 U.S. colleges and universities, including Emporia State University, Johnson and Wales University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Monroe College and Nova Southeastern University, as well as local Jamaican universities. Visit the College Fair here:

- Jamaica Conference Center in Kingston, November 20 from 9 a.m.-12 p.m. and 12 p.m.-5 p.m.
- Jamaica Conference Center in Kingston, November 21 from 9 a.m.-12 p.m. and 12 p.m.-3 p.m.
- Holiday Inn Sunspree in Montego Bay, November 22 from 9 a.m.-12 p.m. and 12 p.m.-5 p.m.

In addition to opportunities to talk with university admissions officers, the College Fair 2014 will host information sessions from 10-11:30 a.m. and 3-4:30 p.m. on applying to universities, funding and financial aid opportunities, and visas. Come see what your college career could look like in the U.S.!

*You can find more information about how to travel to the U.S. on our website, [www.kingston.usembassy.gov](http://www.kingston.usembassy.gov). Keep on top of Embassy news on our Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/US-Embassy-Jamaica> and by following @USEmbassyJA on Twitter. We also answer general visa questions on our Facebook and Twitter pages.*

