



To: All Vietnam Education Foundation (VEF) Fellows

Cc: VEF Staff

From: Lynne McNamara, Ph.D., Acting Executive Director

Date: September 3, 2009

**Subject: Policy on Academic Training**

This is to inform you about the revised VEF policy on Academic Training. This memorandum supersedes all previous written or oral communication from VEF on the subject and is effective immediately as of the date of this memorandum.

VEF encourages its Fellows to develop their professional skills beyond the academic degree program and to expand ties to U.S. experts in their field. Therefore, VEF recommends that Fellows consider pursuing work opportunities available through the J-1 employment benefit of Academic Training before returning to Vietnam.

**Description**

Academic Training (AT) is an employment benefit offered under the J-1 Student regulations in order to gain practical experience and training working in the Exchange Visitor's major field of study. Academic Training can be full-time or part-time, paid or unpaid work or training that is directly related to a J-1 student's major field of study.

**Eligibility criteria**

The following minimum conditions are applicable for all Fellows, who apply to VEF for authorization of Academic Training:

1. *All VEF Fellows are eligible for Academic Training only if they are in J status and once they have been in J status for one academic year.*
2. *The student is primarily in the United States to study rather than engage in Academic Training.*
3. *The student is participating in Academic Training that is directly related to his or her major field of study at the post-secondary accredited academic institution listed on his or her Form DS-2019.*

4. *The student is in good academic standing with his/her University.*
5. *The Fellow receives written approval in advance from the VEF Responsible Officer for the duration and type of Academic Training.*
6. *The J-1 Fellow and all accompanying J-2 dependents are required to maintain the U.S. Federal government required health insurance coverage for J Exchange Visitors throughout the Academic Training period. If the Fellow's employer provides health insurance for the individual and the dependents, but the policy does not fulfill J health insurance requirements, the Fellow must purchase supplemental coverage to meet the minimum coverage required by law for international exchange visitors.*

### **AT Program**

AT may be undertaken either before the Fellow completes his/her degree or afterwards, as defined below:

1. Pre-Completion AT occurs during one's program of study.
2. Post-Completion AT commences not later than 30 days after completion of one's degree program.

VEF Fellows are strongly urged to do Academic Training after the completion of their degree so that the primary focus of their efforts is to complete the degree first.

VEF will consider approval of Pre-Completion Academic Training in the following situations:

1. Part-time (Maximum 20 hours per week): VEF Fellows may complete part-time AT only while enrolled for a full course of study and the AT cannot be combined with any on-campus employment, unless the cumulative hours of AT as well as on-campus employment does not exceed the 20 hours maximum permitted.
2. Full-time: During the summer, but not during the academic year.

Exception: VEF will consider approval of full-time Pre-Completion AT during the academic year if all of the following conditions are met:

- a. The Fellow has completed all course work.
- b. The Pre-Completion AT is integral to the thesis/dissertation research of the Fellow.
- c. The Pre-Completion AT is essential for the Fellow to be able to complete his/her dissertation.
- d. The Fellow must be continuously enrolled.
- e. Substantial documentation is provided to VEF to demonstrate the critical need to do such specific full-time Pre-Completion AT during the academic year.

AT work is usually performed *off-campus*, that is, not on one's own University campus. AT may involve sequential or simultaneous activities with more than one employer, provided that all of the following conditions are met:

1. The AT does not exceed the number of hours permissible.
2. For Pre-Completion AT, the AT meets the VEF policy on part-time and full-time training as described above.
3. Appropriate authorization for each employment situation is granted by VEF.

The Fellow seeking AT is required to do the following:

1. Obtain a job offer first.
2. Obtain verification from the academic program (department chairperson or research advisor) that the job is related to the Fellow's major field of study.
3. Complete the VEF online application for AT.
4. Receive written authorization from VEF.

AT authorization is job-specific and all academic training MUST be approved by VEF PRIOR to the employment start date.

VEF continues visa sponsorship throughout the AT period. The Fellow will continue to be bound by all J-visa regulations during the period of Academic Training.

### **Time limits**

Academic Training may be done full-time (as per the guidelines described above) or part-time. However, in accordance with U.S. Immigration regulations, please note that part-time academic training is always counted as if it has been full-time when determining the allowable AT time periods described below. For example, 2 months of part-time AT at 20 hours per week will be deemed by immigration regulations to be a full two months of AT.

For master's degree Fellows, AT is limited to a maximum total of 18 months, inclusive of any prior AT in the United States, or the period of the full course of study in the United States, whichever is less. For example, if one completes the degree in 12 months, one will only be eligible for a maximum of 12 months of AT.

VEF Fellows in a doctoral program are eligible for 18 months of AT, inclusive of any prior AT in the United States, and an additional 18 months of post-doctoral AT upon completion of the doctoral degree. Thus, a doctoral student is eligible for a total of 36 months, granted for a maximum interval of 18-months, with the possibility of renewal, less any prior academic training in the United States as an exchange visitor, or the period of the full course of study in the United States, whichever is less.

Any AT time used prior to completion of one's degree (for both master's and doctoral programs) is deducted from the length of time available for AT after completion of the degree program. For example, if a Fellow already used 10 months of AT during doctoral study, upon completion of the doctoral degree, the Fellow would be able to apply for an AT period of 18 months. At the end of that 18-month period, the Fellow must re-apply for AT in order to receive the remaining 8 months, for a total of 36 months. Please note, due to J-1 visa requirements and pre-completion and post-completion eligibility criteria,

VEF will make the determination of the time available for AT and the sequence of authorization based on the individual circumstances of each Fellow and the applicable immigration regulations.

**Please note: All VEF Fellows from Cohort 2010 onwards, are only eligible for a total of 18 months of AT (for both master's and doctoral level study).**

### **Financial support**

VEF expects the host organization for the AT to provide the Fellow with financial and/or in-kind support. VEF does not provide financial support for AT. The Fellow must demonstrate financial sufficiency for himself/herself as well as for all accompanying dependents. Fellows pursuing AT are also not eligible for the VEF Professional Development Grant.

VEF does, however, provide Fellows, who are pursuing AT, with funding to attend the VEF Annual Fellows and Scholars Conference at the same level as all Fellows. VEF also provides the return air ticket to Vietnam at the end of Post-Completion Academic Training.

### **Authorization procedures**

To request authorization for AT, VEF Fellows must complete and submit the VEF online “Application for Authorization of Academic Training” at [www.vef.gov/veffellows](http://www.vef.gov/veffellows) at least 2 months prior to the start date of the AT. Within one month, VEF will review and inform you about the status of your application. If approved, you will receive an authorization letter and an updated DS-2019 with information related to your AT. If you have any questions/clarifications about AT prior to completing the online VEF application, you may contact the VEF Program Officer, Sandarshi Gunawardena, at [sandarshigunawardena@vef.gov](mailto:sandarshigunawardena@vef.gov) or (703) 351-5053. **IMPORTANT. You cannot begin any employment until you have received authorization from VEF for Academic Training.**

You will need to complete the VEF online application form fully with all the required fields and information. Please note that, if the application information is incomplete, VEF will not be able to proceed with the review of authorization, which will result in delays. Please be aware that you will also need to upload the following documents for the AT application:

1. Job offer letter from your prospective employer on company/institution letterhead providing the following:
  - a. Description of the position and your title
  - b. Start date and end date of your employment, specifying month, day, and year
  - c. Number of work hours per week
  - d. Amount of financial compensation
  - e. Location of the employment, including the company or institution name, street address, city, state, and zip code

- f. Full name, title, and contact information of your job supervisor
2. Letter from your Academic Advisor that:
- a. Explains how the proposed Academic Training relates to your major field of study and why it is an integral or critical part of your academic program.
  - b. Sets forth the goals and objectives of your Academic Training program.
  - c. Describes your Academic Training program, including the location of the training, the name and address of your training supervisor, your number of working hours per week, and the dates of the training period.

For Fellows requesting Pre-Completion Academic Training, the following must also be included in your advisor's letter:

- i. Indicate the classes and number of credits you will be taking each semester while engaged in Academic Training.
  - ii. Indicate the date you will complete all degree requirements and the degree you will receive. (NOTE: The completion date for your academic degree program is not the date of the graduation ceremony, but the date that the requirements for the program have been satisfied.)
3. Transcript from the previous term, providing both the overall Grade Point Average (GPA) and the GPA for that term.
4. Enrollment Verification Form for the CURRENT TERM. An Enrollment Verification Form can be requested from the Registrar's Office or the International Office at your university.
- a. For Pre-Completion part-time AT: Fellows enrolled for a full course load must provide verification of enrollment for the current term and then for future term(s) during the period of time requested for AT. This Enrollment Verification must contain an annotation indicating **full-time** enrollment, as defined by your university's graduate school.
  - b. For Pre-Completion full-time AT: Fellows must provide verification of enrollment for the current term and then for future term(s) during the period of AT authorization requested. You must maintain continuous or part-time enrollment. This is an exception, only applicable to special cases, as described above.

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