

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA: INS interviews students

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Body

International students at the University of Minnesota are among foreign visitors who soon must register under a nationwide tracking system launched in response to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

For now, those who must register are men ages 16 and over who are here on temporary visas from 18 foreign countries, including Somalia. In three years, the system will expand to track all of the estimated 35 million foreign visitors to the country each year.

Most temporary foreign visitors are students, business travelers on extended trips and tourists visiting family members for long periods. They must report to the Immigration and Naturalization Service office in Bloomington to speak to agents and have their photographs and fingerprints taken.

Students and others already have been making their way to the local immigration office to register as part of the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System, INS spokesman Tim Counts said. INS officials also have worked with international student advisers at the U to arrange times for students to register, including Friday. A typical interview lasts 15 minutes to half an hour.

University of Minnesota students already interviewed have told Luis Bartolomei, the immigration attorney for the University Student Legal Service, that "the process is relatively smooth. There's not a lot of friction between the officers and interviewees."

Students who have maintained their status and enrolled for the required number of credits should not be apprehensive about going, though Bartolomei said those who have not maintained their status should first consult an immigration attorney.

And, although the interviews seem to be going smoothly, Bartolomei said he was concerned by some questions, including requests for students' credit card numbers.

"They are asking for information that allows the INS to really peer over your shoulder," he said. "Who knows who will have access to it?"

Counts said interviewers are asking students to present a number of identification documents, which can include credit cards.

The Department of Justice announced plans to create the system in June, saying it would help expand scrutiny of foreign visitors who may pose a national security concern.

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Attorney General John Ashcroft called it "a vital line of defense in our war against terrorism." The system will help identify wanted criminals and known terrorists, notify the INS when foreign visitors overstay their visas and verify that foreign visitors are doing what they said they would and living where they said they would.

Temporary foreign visitors who are citizens or nationals of Iran, Iraq Libya, Sudan or Syria who were admitted before last Sept. 10 and who plan to stay in the United States past Monday must register by Monday.

Those from Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Eritrea, Lebanon, Morocco, North Korea, Oman, Qatar, Somalia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates or Yemen who were in the United States before Oct. 1 and who plan to stay at least until Jan. 10 must register by Jan. 10.

The registrants must provide detailed information about their background and the purpose of the visit. They also must verify their address periodically and must confirm their departure when they leave the country. Failure to register is a criminal violation of the Immigration and Nationality Act and could lead to deportation.

The registration requirement does not apply to citizens; permanent residents, or green card holders; asylum applicants, grantees or diplomats.

To learn more about new regulations for immigrants, check:

* INS Service Center: (800) 375-5283

* INS on the Web: www.ins.usdoj.gov

* University of Minnesota students: www.isss.umn.edu

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