Guidelines for Sponsoring Pre-Doctoral Student Visitors

Occasionally a member of our faculty will receive a request from a student working on his/her PhD at another institution, or from the student’s advisor, to allow the student to visit Northwestern for a period of time to attend seminars, audit classes, and participate in other ways in the intellectual life of the department. Although students from other institutions in the United States sometimes informally visit for short periods of time with no official status, a foreign student will generally need to receive official status as a “visiting pre-doctoral student” in order to obtain a visa. This document briefly describes the practices followed by the department for inviting and accommodating visiting pre-doctoral students and the steps that a faculty member will need to take in order to sponsor such a visit.

Some General Points

1. As a leading department of economics, we expect to be a hub for intellectual exchange between scholars from all over the world, and as part of this exchange, we both expect and welcome our faculty to invite pre-doctoral students to visit when they have a strong interest in working with such students. However, the paperwork and procedures involved in issuing official invitations and arranging insurance and visas is very time consuming for the department staff. Furthermore, inviting students to visit who then feel largely ignored or neglected may well detract from, rather than enhance the department’s and your own international professional standing. Therefore we urge you to please only sponsor a visiting pre-doctoral student when you have a strong interest in working with the student and believe that the visit will be of significant benefit to both the student and the department.

2. In our new building, we will have some carrels for such pre-doctoral visitors in the short run (the medium run situation will depend on changes in the size of our graduate program).

3. Be aware that the University requires that visitors either demonstrate that they have health insurance that meets a certain set of minimum requirements or that they purchase health insurance through Northwestern that meets these requirements. The University also requires that visitors have sufficient funding to support themselves while they are here.

4. For foreign visitors it takes approximately 2 months for all of the internal paperwork at Northwestern to be accomplished. Then the person has to make an appointment at the American embassy in his/her country of residence in order to obtain a visa stamp.
Therefore it is essential that you initiate the process of requesting official visitor status for a student at least 3 months before the proposed start date of the visit. Ideally, you should initiate the process of requesting visitor status a full two quarters before the start date of the intended visit. For example, for a visit beginning in the fall quarter you should ideally initiate the process of requesting visitor status by the beginning of the preceding spring quarter.

5. If a visa is necessary, the NU International Office will charge a fee ($185 in FY16) to issue the forms to obtain a visa. Partially to help screen out less serious requests and partially because the department has very limited funds, the sponsoring faculty member will be required to pay for this charge using his/her own discretionary funds or the funds of a research center willing to sponsor the visit.

Steps in Sponsoring a Visiting Pre-Doctoral Student

1. Once you have determined that you would like to sponsor a visiting pre-doctoral student, you should write a brief memo to the Chair providing details about the prospective visitor, when he/she would like to visit, and a brief explanation of why you believe the visit would be of value to both the department and the prospective visitor.

2. The Chair should give permission before proceeding.

3. Once the Chair has approved the visit, inform the Department’s Business Administrator who will begin the process of contacting the scholar for information, checking for or obtaining health insurance, requesting approval from the Vice President for Research and a letter of invitation from WCAS. She will also file to obtain any payroll forms, an employee ID, a NetID and initiate all required U.S. visa documents.

4. If a visa is necessary, the NU International Office visa fee (currently $185) will be charged to either your discretionary fund or the funds of a research center willing to sponsor the visit.

5. Remember that it is essential that you begin the process of requesting official visitor status for a proposed visitor at least 3 months before the proposed start date of the visit and preferably even sooner. Ideally, you should initiate the process of requesting visitor status two quarters before the intended start date of the visit.