

ANNEXES

Annexe 1

Expériences administratives d'un post-doctorant américain en France

A brief history of my attempt to secure a residency permit and health insurance in Paris
Post-doctorant américain

This account spans the period of time from summer 2010 to the present. I currently have no health insurance. It will be easy to get lost in the details herein, so I begin by summarizing my two overarching complaints:

(1) This document was written over a period of 10 months; after each ridiculous step, I learned that there was a next ridiculous step. Nobody ever explained to me how the process works, which steps must be gone through, and what the timeframe and requirements are at each step;

(2) There is a complete lack of clarity, systematicity, logic, and adult supervision at every stage of this process. The thing that elevates this experience from merely annoying to pernicious and sinister is the uncertainty: that there is no way to know whether any particular submission, summons, or appointment will go as planned, or whether the rules will change once you show up. The result is that you never know whether you'll be issued a document, denied healthcare, or deported, or whether the whole thing is just a joke that you shouldn't take too seriously.

The timeline

July: Passport, birth certificate, CV, and formulaire de renseignement to IJN (scans); hard copies and scans to CNRS

August: US bank info, PhD diploma, US address, summary of position to CNRS

September 10: Passport, birth certificate, convention d'accueil, letters attesting to employment, summary of position, passport photographs to French consulate in Boston

September 17: Visa and convention d'accueil to IJN, CNRS

September 20-30: sign contract, get bank account, phone number, establish residency, give all this information to IJN and CNRS.

No word for six weeks; email from CNRS on 10/21 urgently requesting a huge number of sometimes hard-to-obtain documents (e.g. certified translations of original American documents) listed below under November 8. After the 6-week wait, apparently these documents are extremely urgent and must be sent as soon as possible.

At this point, I learned about the logically impossible requirements that the French state imposes to obtain a carte de séjour. The supposed 'long-stay' visa actually requires you to apply for a carte de séjour within 2 months of your arrival. That application requires proof of residency in the form of three utility bills. Utility bills in France come once every 2 months.

Three times two equals six, an important fact that the French state apparently fails to appreciate. The way around this is to get a letter from a French person stating that you live with them, and then substitute their residency documents for your own. Put slightly differently, the French state requires you to lie about where you live, and refuses to send you documents or register your address in the place where you actually live. Even then, your chances of having a *récépissé* for the application in hand after two months in the country are effectively null. I lived in France as an illegal immigrant from December to April. Fortunately, border control doesn't pay any attention to American passports.

November 8: Birth certificate, certified translation of birth certificate (50 euros), convention d'accueil, diploma, certified translation of diploma (50 euros), passport, visa (99 euros), entry stamp on passport, passport photos (5 euros), hosts' lease, hosts' insurance policy, hosts' RIB, hosts' letter of hébergement, hosts' electric bill to CNRS (scans)

November 10: Went to Ivry at the CNRS' request so they could examine the originals of all the November 8th documents. After I leave, CNRS contact calls to tell me she forgot to ask me to bring several other necessary documents, requests that I return the next day. I decline and mail the documents instead.

It's unclear why I couldn't have mailed the documents in the first place. And why is it even necessary for a CNRS functionary to attest to having seen the original of my PhD diploma (or any other document)? I've already had it translated by a licensed government translator, sent it to the French government twice, produced a letter from my thesis advisor for the CNRS stating that I've successfully defended, and begun working with professionals who are in a much better position to determine whether I have a doctorate in linguistics than some random functionary looking at a piece of paper I could have forged on my parents' laser printer in 6th grade. This is obviously inefficient and just plain silly, but on a more serious note, it's really rather insulting as well. Nobody told me that this was why I was being called out to the suburbs, and I would have refused to go if I had known. If CNRS researchers are really hiring colleagues who forge documents and pretend to have qualifications they don't, perhaps the organization suffers from problems that go deeper than inadequate document control.

November 10-24: Hosts wrangle with the CNRS over whether their lease/insurance documents are appropriate. My CNRS contact is going into the sub-clauses of their ownership contract and asking questions about the commercial operations at the property. Seriously.

Just complete insanity. Note that this period of back-and-forth spans two weeks.

November-February: No word for three months.

February 25: email telling me that I can pick up my *récépissé* at the Préfecture, but that I must bring passport photos (submitted once to consulate, once to CNRS), my hosts' documents (submitted to CNRS in scanned versions and, where possible, originals), and a summary of my position (submitted once to French consulate, once to CNRS).

First couple weeks of March: back and forth with CNRS and my colleagues trying to pinpoint exactly where I need to go, clarifications concerning the documents I need to bring, and whether they're actually going to give me my document in the end. Following an exasperated email from my employer, CNRS contact gets offended, writes snippy email back to this

effect: seeing as I live in Paris, I should go to the prefecture of Paris, at this address (to clarify, a google search turns up at least 5 préfectures in Paris on the first page of results); there is but one entrance and one exit for cartes de séjour; and contact restates the same descriptions of documents that she sent originally with none of the clarifications we asked for.

Last week in March: first visit to the Préfecture. Despite the clear feelings of my CNRS contact to the contrary, this turned out to be less than trivial. The CNRS stated that there is but one entrance and one exit for cartes de séjour; this is, in a technical sense, probably true. There is also only one *office* for cartes de séjour. Unfortunately, this was *not the office that I needed to go to*, as I found out after taking a number and waiting for forty minutes. The correct office was upstairs, with many other offices. I went to one of them that said ‘foreigner affairs’, was sent back downstairs to a different office for North America, where they sent me back to the same office upstairs because I was a scientific researcher, where the original woman who’d sent me downstairs sent me across the hall this time, to an office labelled ‘dépôt groupé’. This, in the end, turned out to be the right office, but it also turned out to close at noon, so I went home.

Comments: while I respect my CNRS contact’s opinion, it seems to me that one could be unaware of these points even if one weren’t a complete idiot. In fact, I think in the end it may have helped if she’d cared to share any of this information with me.

April 13 (before noon): 2nd trip to the prefecture. Showed the man at dépôt groupé my hosts’ property deed and a piece of paper describing my job in French (which had already been sent to the French consulate in Boston and the CNRS twice). Was sent downstairs to get more passport photos; returned with photos and was given récépissé with attached summons to pick up carte de séjour in 11th arrondissement in late May, with instructions to bring more documents. At this point, the man at dépôt groupé mentioned that I shouldn’t leave the country until I had my carte de séjour in hand; this was the first mention I’d heard of such a thing. It was slightly inconvenient, because I already had plane tickets to the US for the next day, Denmark for late May, and Spain for June, all for work-related purposes. I asked him about this. His response: ‘Well, you can see what happens’.

The date on the récépissé was January 10, but I wasn’t informed about it until February 25.

April 13: tried to figure out what the documents listed on the summons were and where I could obtain them. Specifically, there was some form of medical certificate from an organization named ANAEM that I’d never heard of, and a certificate of having paid a tax named OMI/ANAEM, of which nobody had ever informed me. My colleague called the CNRS on my behalf to ask, and was told that I should have received several more forms with the récépissé and summons. After some argument, CNRS agreed to email us the form explaining the OMI/ANAEM tax. Emailed OFII to ask about the medical appointment. This email and several follow-ups never received a response.

April 21: learned by contacting the Bureau d’Accueil de Chercheurs Etrangers that the medical appointment should be scheduled by the OFII, and that they would be in touch with me.

May 10: no word from the OFII. Called their office to find out what’s going on. Was redirected several times to different offices. Finally spoke to someone who confirmed that my name was in the system, and that they would send the CNRS a message when an appointment

was scheduled, who would then get in touch with me. No information available about when that appointment might be scheduled or occur: ‘the doctors are very busy’.

May 25: Letter from the OFII summoning me to their office for an ‘appointment’ June 6 at 8:30. They ask me to bring my passport and several documents that are logically impossible for me to possess: hospitalization records, a carnet de vaccination, recent pulmonary x-rays, etc.

Keep in mind that I’ve been living in France for 8 months at this point with no access to health care. It is thus unclear how I could obtain a recent X-ray, be hospitalized, or possess a French vaccination record.

June 6: I arrive for my ‘appointment’ at 8:30. I find the OFII office still closed, with a line of several hundred immigrants stretching down Rue de la Roquette. At 8:50, they open the office, and process the people waiting at the door one by one before letting them enter. I’m sent upstairs to a large waiting room with the other scientific applicants. I get an X-ray, have a brief conversation with a doctor which I don’t really understand, pay 340 euros, and receive my carte de séjour. It expires in October, 4 months from the time when I’m receiving it.

July 7: go to the Sécurité Sociale center in the afternoon to register for health insurance, 9 ½ months after arriving in Paris. The office closes at noon on Thursdays. I go home.

July 8: go to the Sécurité Sociale center a second time. The CNRS has sent me a letter much earlier explaining which documents I need to bring in order to register. One of them is my carte de séjour, hence the delay in obtaining health insurance. The unfriendly and unhelpful woman at the desk asks for all of the documents that the CNRS listed, and then keeps asking for more things which the CNRS didn’t mention, until she finds a thing that I don’t have. She finally sends me away without registering me because the CNRS told me to bring one paystub, but the Sécurité Sociale requires the three most recent ones. I go home again, still with no health insurance and no social security number. The documents I was asked to submit include my work contract, three paystubs, a carte de séjour, a birth certificate (submitted once to French consulate, once to IJN, twice to CNRS as scans, as well as brought to the CNRS office to have the original inspected to make sure I wasn’t lying about being born), a certified translation of the birth certificate (submitted once to CNRS and inspected in person once by the CNRS), a RIB (submitted once to IJN, once to CNRS), and passport scans (submitted once to IJN, twice to CNRS, once to French consulate, inspected in person by CNRS functionary to make sure I wasn’t forging the photocopies). Of these, the passport scans and the paystubs were not mentioned in the list of documents sent to me by the CNRS.

Until now, I might have thought that this type of behavior resulted from malice and incompetence on the part of individual employees of the French state; that is, in some sense, the charitable interpretation. I no longer believe that. There simply is no charitable interpretation of this behavior. I won’t even address the absurdity of the missing paystubs; it’s not worth my attention. The relevant point is that the French state is systematically and willfully obstructing me from obtaining the rights and benefits guaranteed by its own laws and by the contract I signed with the CNRS. They are also, for what it’s worth, stealing from me, by deducting money from my pay for services that they clearly don’t intend to provide me with.

July 8: In a fit of pique, I declare that I will not come back to France from my US vacation in July-August if I don't have health insurance. My employer writes to several high-level administrators at the CNRS to complain about my treatment and demand a solution. The CNRS human resources director agrees to send somebody to the social security center the following week to figure out why the two agencies don't agree on the requirements for registration, and to solve my particular case. I send all of the documents above, in scanned form, to the human resources department of the CNRS.

July 12: I receive an email from one of the human resources people at CNRS (assistante de service social) asking if I can drop by the delegation headquarters on a Wednesday morning to deliver an original of my RIB for them to bring to the social security office. Repressing the alternate urge to laugh and cry, I respond that I'm unable to come in Wednesday morning due to the fact that I have a job, and send a clearer scan of the RIB instead. CNRS responds that this should probably suffice.

July 13: CNRS assistante de service social writes to inform me that my situation is regularized and I should receive a registration number soon.

September 7: I receive my provisional registration number, two months later, just shy of my 1st anniversary in France. I am told to expect a Carte Vitale in 'plusieurs mois'.

Early August: preparations begin to go through all of the aforementioned steps again in order to renew my carte de séjour, which expires in October. I receive a new contract and convention d'accueil.

September 16: I go to the CNRS delegation headquarters to, once again, hand them copies of exactly the same documents I handed them last year, so they can send them on to the prefecture, and fill out exactly the same forms I filled out last year.

September 17: I receive an email from (a new) CNRS liaison, explaining that one of the forms I filled out in blue ink was supposed to be filled out in black ink, and I need to come back by the delegation headquarters to remedy this problem before they can submit my dossier.

October 25: my carte de séjour expires, making me technically an illegal immigrant again.

Early February: still no word from the prefecture after 5 months. We realize that, although my wife is technically allowed to work in France, she has no document that proves this, no receipt of her application, and no way of establishing that she's in the country legally. We write to the CNRS to ask for some clarification of her status and some document to prove that she's legally allowed to work. The CNRS contact responds that we might try telling the prefecture that we need to go abroad soon, and if we do that, with an ordre de mission from my institute, they may be able to rush us our récépissés, hopefully by the next week. We do so. On February 29, the prefecture delivers our récépissés to the CNRS; they are dated February 14. My wife's says that she has a medical appointment, but doesn't give a date or time. The CNRS contact can't get through to the OFII to ask about this. The récépissé does at least say that she has the right to work until May.