What Is a Permanent Resident Card?

A Permanent Resident card, or “green card,” is a plastic card with the individual's biographic information, photo, fingerprint, and expiration date issued by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

It authorizes the green card holder the right to live and work in the United States indefinitely.

Because at one time, it was green, it keeps its nickname up to today. It is also known as an “Alien Registration Card” and “Form I-551”.

Currently, the card is yellowish with a magnetic barcode on the back which stores the individual's information.

While the green card has an expiration date (10 years) and has to be renewed, the green card holder’s status as “lawful permanent resident” is still valid unless the status is abandoned or revoked by U.S. government.

What are the benefits of being a permanent resident?

A Permanent Resident enjoys most of the rights of a United States citizen according to the immigration law and regulations.

- To live permanently in the United States provided you do not commit any actions that would make you removable (deportable) under the immigration law (section 237, Immigration and Nationality Act).
- To be employed in the United States at any legal work of your qualification and choosing.
- To be protected by all of the laws of the United States, your state of residence and local jurisdictions.
- To vote in local elections where United States citizenship is not required.

Exceptions

- Some jobs will be limited to United States citizens because of security concerns.
- You may not vote in elections limited to United States citizens.

(Source: UCSF: Student Academic Affairs)