Immigration Services Travel FAQ

TRAVEL INFORMATION

Can I travel internationally? Are there any entry restrictions to the U.S.?

International travel can be unpredictable and pose some risk in the current environment. If you make the personal decision to travel internationally, please carefully review the Immigration Services Travel & Re-Entry page for general information regarding travel and required re-entry documents. If your U.S. entry visa is expired, be aware that applying for a visa could be unpredictable and subject to further delays if U.S. Consulates are not open or backlogged.

It is important to keep in mind that if your flight connects in any other country, you are subject to their travel requirements/restrictions as well.

Depending on the country you are travelling, masks may be required to be worn in airports, on commercial aircraft and trains, along with all forms of public transportation.

The U.S. has rescinded the travel restrictions imposed last year and is now requiring vaccines for all travelers – with a few exceptions.

- Exceptions to the vaccine requirement will apply to children under 18 and to most nationals of countries with less than a 10 percent total vaccination rate, among others.
- Existing COVID test requirements will remain the same for all fully vaccinated air travelers. The new policy requires that all unvaccinated travelers – including U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, and nonimmigrants eligible for exceptions to the vaccine requirement – will be subject to stricter pre-travel COVID testing protocols.

These policy changes are expected to ease travel for many foreign nationals, but processing backlogs at U.S. consulates – already lengthy – are expected to increase further, which will impede travel for those who need a U.S. visa.

Additional information regarding air travel from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (link is external) should be reviewed before any travel.

Am I required to present a negative COVID-19 Test result before entering the United States?

As of 12:01AM ET on June 12, 2022, CDC will no longer require air passengers traveling from a foreign country to the United States to show a negative COVID-19 viral test or documentation of recovery from COVID-19 before they board their flight. For more information, see Rescission: Requirement for Negative Pre-Departure COVID-19 Test.
Can I apply for a U.S. visa right now? Are consulates and embassies open for applications?

Visit your local U.S. embassy or consulate website (link is external) to confirm operating status and find information about appointment rescheduling and/or emergency services.

Expansion of Interview Waiver Eligibility:
On September 14, the Department of State announced that U.S. consulates may expand the categories of F, M, and academic J visa applicants eligible for the waiver of the in-person interview to include those who were previously issued any type of visa (formerly, the waiver was limited to renewals in the same visa classification and category), or who are applying for the first time from a Visa Waiver Program country.

If you do make the personal decision to travel internationally, please carefully review the Immigration Services travel page for general information regarding travel and required re-entry documents. If your U.S. entry visa is expired, be aware that applying for a visa for entry could be unpredictable and could cause you to face further delays.

If you are considering a short trip to a country which is not your home, you may also want to consider the risk that you could remain stuck there if the travel situation changes while you are away, possibly limiting your ability to enter to the U.S. (or any other country). Are you prepared to be delayed for a while in the country you are visiting? You'll have to decide for yourself how comfortable you feel with that risk. It might be important for you to rethink your travel dates and make adjustments later in the year.

Do I need a paper copy of my I-20 to enter the United States?

Yes, you do. On November 1, 2021, the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) updated its COVID-19 FAQ guidance to reflect the new policy permanently allowing the use of electronic signatures and transmission of the Form I-20. Student may receive an emailed version of the original I-20 through the email address listed in SEVIS. F-1 students may request an emailed or printed version of the Form I-20. Both should be accepted at the Port of Entry and by other U.S. Government agencies.

Immigration Services will provide the delivery options in each request e-form in compass.uga.edu. Students must print out and then sign in ink any electronically signed and transmitted I-20.

The DS-2019 for J-1 students is not eligible for electronic signature and transmission.

All students should have paper copies of the documents to present to U.S. customs officers.

What can I do to receive a travel signature for my travel and re-entry?

If you would like a travel signature, our office can print a new I-20 or DS-2019 with travel signature to be mailed out to you.
1. Please log into compass.uga.edu.
2. Select F-1 or J-1 Student Services, then select “Replace I-20 Document” or “Replace DS-2019 Document.”

You will be asked why you are requesting a new I-20 form. For this, you should select “Updated”, then in the subsequent question, select “Travel signature”.

J-1 Students: If you are still inside the US, we will be able to provide an electronic copy or mail this document to you. If you are outside the US, we will be able to provide an electronic copy or you will follow the instructions we will send to you on ordering shipment delivery.

F-1 Students: After receiving the electronic copy of your I-20, you must print it out and sign it.

**Can I travel within the U.S.?**

Immigration Services recommends that international students traveling inside the U.S. still carry a valid passport, I-94 printout, and I-20 with them. Special permission to travel throughout the U.S. is not required.

**Can I travel to U.S. Territories in the Caribbean?**

International students can travel directly to and from U.S. territories (i.e. Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands) located in the Caribbean without the requirement of a valid U.S. visa. However, if at any time during your trip to these U.S. territories, you enter another country, you will need to make sure you have all your valid immigration documents in order to re-enter the U.S. As such, we recommend that students carry their immigration documents with them even if they only plan to travel between the U.S. territory and the U.S. mainland.

**Should I make copies of my Immigration Documents?**

It is recommended that photocopies of your Immigration Documents be made before international trips. Photocopies should be kept in a secure location, whether it be in a secondary physical location or in a password protected drive. While these photocopies cannot take the place of required physical immigration documents at ports of entry, they may ease the replacement process should you experience an emergency situation.
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J-1 VISITING SCHOLARS AND INTERNATIONAL FACULTY & STAFF

What are Immigration Services’ current procedures for J Scholar and Employment-based operations?

Immigration Services staff on the J scholar and employment-based teams continue to issue DS-2019 forms and file employment-based petitions. During this time, we are processing cases, and departments may submit cases as usual through our Compass portal.

Are exchange visitors, where possible, permitted to conduct their research program online or in virtual environments?

Yes. Temporary modification of current, active-status exchange visitor’s program is allowed. Immigration Services has the discretion to determine, on a case-by-case basis, whether J-1 exchange visitors may be eligible to participate provided they still can successfully achieve the objectives of their exchange programs and meet the purpose of the Fulbright Hays Act of 1961 to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries.

Program Sponsors may pursue ways to maintain program objectives, including a limited hybrid option, of one to two telework days per week, for one more academic year, not to exceed June 30, 2023, while preventing unnecessary exposure to COVID-19. The limited hybrid option is available for the following five exchange categories’ host organizations that have instituted telework policies: College/University Student (Academic Training and Student Intern), Research Scholar, Short Term Scholar, Intern, and Trainee. A fully or predominantly virtual exchange program is not permitted.

I am an existing scholar and my program end date is shortened due to the pandemic. What can I do if I am unable to get a flight back to my home country?

Please reach out to your J-1 advisor. She/he is the best point of contact to address this matter.

Are exchange visitors allowed to travel during the 30-day period after their program end dates or when shortening their exchange programs due to COVID?

Yes. All exchange visitors are entitled to 30-day grace period following their program end dates and domestic travel is allowed. If exchange visitors leave the US during their grace period, they will not be re-admitted. We highly recommend exchange visitors to follow guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and consider health, safety, and welfare implications for travel. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/international-travel-during-covid19.html
What can I do to receive a travel endorsement for my re-entry if I am unable to visit Immigration Services in person?

If you would like a travel signature, our office can print a new DS-2019 with travel signature to be mailed out to you.

1. Please log into compass.uga.edu.
2. Select J-1 Scholar Services, then select “Replace DS-2019 Document”.

You will be asked why you are requesting a new DS-2019 form. For this, you should select “Updated”, then in the subsequent question, select “Travel signature”.

If you are still inside the U.S., we will be able to mail this document to you.

If you are outside the U.S., you will follow the instructions we send to you on ordering shipment delivery.

I am a new visiting scholar or employee currently outside of the U.S. and I can't enter to start my program. Or, I am a continuing scholar employee, and I cannot enter to resume my appointment. What can I do?

The current COVID-19 situation is rapidly evolving and unpredictable. It's unclear how long travel restrictions or consular delays may remain in effect for re-entry to the U.S. and how your entry could be impacted. If you are currently outside of the United States and are planning to enter the country, please notify Immigration Services to let us know about your situation. We will work with our clients on a case-by-case basis to determine the best path forward, and (for new scholars or employees) if your start date and documents can be adjusted. Consult with your UGA faculty sponsor, human resources representative, or department administrator, and contact Immigration Services if there will be any changes to your program dates or affiliation.

If you made plans to travel to the U.S. to begin an upcoming UGA program or appointment, there are several factors to consider. More information is available on the UGA Coronavirus (COVID-19) Resources & Information (link is external) and the University Health Center COVID-19 Information (link is external) page.

How can a new Visiting Scholar apply for a Social Security Number?

If your visa status permits you to work in the United States and you decide to pursue employment you will be required to obtain a U.S. social security number. You can find information on our website here: https://globalengagement.uga.edu/images/documents/immigration/student/Obtaining_a_Social_Security_Number.pdf

For additional information you may visit the Social Security Administration’s (SSA) https://www.ssa.gov/ or call 800-772-1213.
What will happen if I end my UGA appointment early and/or I depart the United States and do not intend to return to the U.S. for my J program?

If you are a scholar and you depart the U.S. early (more than 15 days before your DS-2019 end date) and you do not intend to return to the U.S. for the remainder of your J program, please discuss this with your faculty sponsor and human resources representative. Please also email immigration@uga.edu so that we can advise you on the steps and the visa implications of ending your program early.

Our Department is inviting a Visiting Scholar who is currently overseas to join our department. When will they be able to start?

Routine visa services may vary by country. Therefore, even after J-1 scholars receive their Forms DS-2019, it may take several months before they are able to secure visas and arrive on campus. Please contact immigration@uga.edu so that we can advise you on next steps. Also, please refer to our J-1 Exchange Visitor Sponsorship Process guide.

My visa (inside passport) has expired. I want to renew it. Must I appear in person at the U.S. Consulate for the visa application interview?

Not necessarily. If you are applying for a visa in the same nonimmigrant visa classification and category, Department of State (DOS) announced expansion of statutory and regulatory Provisions that allow consular officers to waive the in-person interview requirement for individuals applying to renew a visa in the same nonimmigrant visa classification and category if it hasn’t been more than 48 months since the prior visa expired. The expansion of this authority is valid through the end of 2022. To qualify, for the visa renewal interview waiver, please contact the consulate or embassy where you will apply to confirm steps for renewing the visa.

As a J-1 exchange visitor, if I have an urgent problem and my sponsor at UGA cannot help me, can I contact the Exchange Visitor Program in the U.S. Department of State directly? What emergency hotline or other resources are available through the Office of Private Sector Exchange?

Yes, there is an emergency contact at the U.S. State Department. Please do contact your J-1 immigration advisor first at UGA, to see if they can help you.

J Visa Emergency Hotline
J-1 Visa Emergency Hotline: 1-866-283-9090. This line is for use by exchange visitors and third parties in the case of urgent situations. A Department of State representative is available 24 hours a day

Report Abuse, Exploitation or Other Issues
If you are mistreated or your rights are violated, call these toll-free numbers:
- National Human Trafficking Resource Center: 1-888-373-7888
- Trafficking in Persons and Worker Exploitation Task Force: 1-888-428-7581
If you are in immediate physical danger, call 911.

Know your rights: Report Abuse, Exploitation or Other Issues (PDF)
Is evidence of full COVID-19 vaccination required for entry via a land port of entry or ferry terminal?

Yes. Effective January 22, 2022, all non-U.S. individuals entering the U.S. via land ports of entry and ferry terminals at the U.S. Mexico and U.S. Canada borders must be fully vaccinated for COVID-19 and must provide related proof of vaccination. These new restrictions will apply to non-U.S. individuals who are traveling for both essential and non-essential reasons. These restrictions will not apply to U.S. citizens, Lawful Permanent Residents or U.S. nationals.

Is COVID-19 testing required for entry via a land port of entry or ferry terminal?

No. A COVID-19 test is not required to enter via a land port or entry or ferry terminal.

What traveling documents are required for non-U.S. individuals entering the U.S. via a land port of entry or ferry terminal?

Non-U.S. individuals traveling to the U.S. via land ports of entry or ferry terminals, whether for essential or non-essential reasons, must:

- verbally attest to their COVID-19 vaccination status;
- provide proof of a CDC-approved COVID-19 vaccination, as outlined on the CDC website;
- present a valid Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI)-compliant document, such as a valid passport, Trusted Traveler Program card, or Enhanced Tribal Card; and,
- be prepared to present any other relevant documents requested by a U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer during a border inspection.

Find more information here: