Immigration Services Travel FAQ

TRAVEL INFORMATION FOR F-1 & J-1 STUDENTS

International travel can be unpredictable and pose some degree of risk. Travelers should review the information provided here so they can be as prepared as possible for their re-entry into the U.S. For initial entry please review the pre-arrival information specified for students and scholars we have available on our website.

How can I prepare to travel internationally?

If you 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, Automatic Revalidation of your visa, and travel after program completion/graduation.

In general, you will need the following in order to return to the U.S.:

- Unexpired passport
- Unexpired U.S. visa (except for Canadian citizens)
- Unexpired immigration document (Form DS-2019, I-20)
- Updated travel signature on Form I-20 or DS-2019
- EAD (if you are on OPT)

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.

How can I renew a U.S. visa?

If a student is maintaining their status in the United States they do not need to renew their visa stamp to stay in the U.S. This means you may remain even after your visa stamp expiration date if you are maintaining your status.

If your visa stamp has expired and you travel outside of the U.S. you will need to renew your visa to re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status. You may only renew your F-1 visa at a U.S. embassy or consular office outside of the United States. Visit your local U.S. embassy or consulate website to confirm operating status and find information about appointment rescheduling and/or emergency services.

You can check estimated visa appointment wait times by country on Travel.State.Gov.
Expansion of Interview Waiver Eligibility:

On September 14, 2022, 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. The Secretary of State has made a determination extending the authority of consular officers to waive in-person interviews for certain nonimmigrant visa categories (on a case-by-case basis) through December 31, 2023.

The authorization to waive the in-person interview for applicants renewing a visa in the same classification within 48 months of the prior visa’s expiration was previously authorized to remain in place until further notice.

Applying for a Visa in a Third Country:

Applying for visa in a country which is not your home country or the U.S., called a “third” country, can be more difficult than applying at home. You should have a valid reason for applying in the country where the consulate is located.

Additionally, you may need to prove that you have continuously maintained lawful non-immigrant status during your time in the U.S. or you may be sent to your home country to apply for the visa. Refusal in a third country is more likely than at home, so you should plan well in advance of your date of travel.

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. Students 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.

Students must print and then sign in ink any electronically signed and transmitted I-20.

All students should have paper copies of the documents to present to U.S. customs officers. Please travel with immigration documents in your carry-on luggage.

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”.

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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".

After receiving the electronic copy of your I-20 or DS-2019, you must print it out and sign it.

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

Yes. 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. Make sure you are carrying all your valid immigration documents. 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 you will be subject to an immigration inspection. 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.

**Can a transfer student or a student who has changed their program level travel between programs?**

Yes, if you have transferred schools or changed your program level, you may travel in between programs, but you must have the new I-20 to re-enter the U.S. If you do travel, you are not subject to the 30-day entry restriction (entering no earlier than 30 days before your program starts) and can enter the U.S. at any point before your program. Be aware that CBP may have additional questions for you regarding this. If you are transferring out of UGA, contact your new school for additional travel guidance.

*If a J-1 student transfers to another school, they should reapply for a new visa even if their current visa is unexpired. The J visa should match the DS-2019’s school name and school code upon re-entry.*

**How could my travel be impacted by a Change of Status application?**

If you leave the U.S. while your Change of Status application is *pending* with USCIS, it will be considered abandoned and you’ll need to obtain a new initial entry I-20 form from Immigration Services. You will then need to apply for an F-1 visa at a U.S. consulate to return.

If you travel after your change of status is *approved*, you’ll need to apply for an F-1 visa at a U.S. consulate to return. Please consult an Immigration Advisor before your travel.
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.

Are there any COVID restrictions, test results, or COVID Vaccine requirements to enter the United States?

The U.S. Administration ended the COVID-19 vaccine requirements for international air travelers at midnight on May 11, 2023, the same day that the COVID-19 public health emergency ended. This means starting May 12, 2023, noncitizen nonimmigrant air passengers no longer need to show proof of being fully vaccinated with an accepted COVID-19 vaccine to board a flight to the United States.
TRAVEL INFORMATION FOR J-1 VISITING SCHOLARS AND INTERNATIONAL FACULTY & STAFF

Are exchange visitors allowed to travel during the 30-day period after their program end dates?
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.

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 scanned to you.

1. Please log into compass.uga.edu.
2. Select J-1 Scholar Services, then select “Replace DS-2019 Document”.
3. 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”.
   a. If you are still inside the U.S., we will be able to mail this document to you.
   b. If you are outside the U.S., you will follow the instructions we send to you on ordering shipment delivery.

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 2023. 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.