Immigration Services COVID FAQ

General

TRAVEL INFORMATION

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

UGA Immigration Services currently does not recommend non-essential international travel due to the rapidly evolving COVID-19 outbreak and impacts to global travel. 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.

When returning from international travel, follow CDC guidance and review UGA Campus guidance on the UGA Coronavirus (COVID-19) Information & Resources site and the University Health Center COVID-19 Information page.

I am traveling over the winter break. What should I consider?

Plan your Winter Break carefully

Beginning now, consider that the break will potentially entail either a round trip to and from campus or a return. In general:

- You are highly encouraged to get a flu shot if you have not yet done so: CDC Flu Shot Finder.
- Review any local public health regulations that might apply where you will be traveling.
- If you are traveling by air, understand the testing requirements that will be required by the airline and/or your destination.
  - We recommend being tested through the UGA surveillance program four days prior to your departure from or return to Athens. Some airlines require testing within 24 hours, so re-check air travel requirements frequently.
- Consider 10 – 14 days of self-quarantine prior to travel to protect those you may come into contact with, particularly those who are ill or vulnerable to COVID-19.
• At the very least, self-quarantine after your COVID-19 test to minimize exposure and the chance of infection. The CDC recently revised the definition of close contact as someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period.

• Travel wisely.
  o Reduce the number of stops on your trip, take a direct flight, and if driving, pack food/snacks for the car.
  o Remain vigilant with social distancing and wear your face covering.
  o Use hand sanitizer liberally on your hands and on touchable surfaces, particularly if you are using any public transit.

**Once you have reached your destination**

Your first 14 days at any new destination are very important. Consider self-quarantine: i.e., use a separate bathroom if possible; do not share utensils, glasses or plates; and, as hard as it may seem, avoid hugging and kissing those close to you, especially those who may have predisposing conditions. Consider using HEPA filter units, and if that’s not feasible, increase the exchange of air by opening windows, weather permitting. Restrict your movement in public spaces that are indoors. This is particularly applicable to large gatherings in confined spaces that are common to holiday celebrations, break periods, and reuniting with campus friends and acquaintances. Remember that the practical guidance of social distancing, face covering, and hand hygiene that has helped to keep us safe remains the most potent form of protection for both yourself and others.

**Where can I find current Travel Restrictions for Student, Scholars, & Non-Immigration Employees?**

A travel restriction currently suspends entry into the United States of most non-immigrants who were physically present within the countries outlined on the COVID-19 Traveler Information resource for a two week period prior to travel to the U.S. You can find the website and contact information for the U.S. Consulate closest to you here: [https://www.usembassy.gov/](https://www.usembassy.gov/)

**As of July 10, 2020, these countries include all Schengen countries, Iran, Brazil, China, United Kingdom, and Ireland.**

*Please review updated information specifically for student and scholar travelers from the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Schengen countries.*

**Update for students and scholars traveling from Schengen countries, UK and Ireland**

Certain business travelers, investors, treaty traders, **academics, and students** may qualify for National Interest Exceptions under Presidential Proclamations (P.P.s) 9993 (Schengen Area) and 9996 (United Kingdom and Ireland).
Students with valid F-1 and M-1 visas and their dependents may travel to the US while these Proclamations are in effect. They do not need to apply for a national interest exception to travel. They do have to have, or apply for and receive, a valid F-1 visa in order to travel to the U.S.

Students or scholars traveling as J-1 exchange visitors may contact the nearest embassy or consulate to initiate an exception request. Travelers who believe they meet a national interest exception may request a visa appointment at the closest Embassy or Consulate and a decision will be made at the time of interview. Travelers are encouraged to refer to the Embassy/Consulate website for detailed instructions on what services are currently available and how to request an appointment. Individuals who already hold a valid travel document or can travel via ESTA may contact the closest Embassy or Consulate to initiate the national interest exception process.

Mexico & Canada Travel Restrictions
Effective through December 21, 2020 according to a U.S.-Canada Border Federal Register Notice (link is external) and a U.S.-Mexico Border Federal Register Notice (link is external), entry is only allowed to the United States through land ports of entry along the U.S.-Canada and U.S. Mexico borders for “essential travel” only. “Essential travel” includes “Individuals traveling to attend educational institutions; Individuals traveling to work in the United States.” A separate order from the CDC (link is external) also suspends “the introduction of persons into the United States” who are traveling from Canada or Mexico who are subjected to entry in a “congregate setting” at a Port of Entry or Border Patrol station. The order states that it is not applicable to “Persons from foreign countries who hold valid travel documents.” It is unclear how this could apply for travelers sent to Secondary Inspection (link is external), because their documents cannot be verified or if they are missing appropriate travel documentation.

Other Countries
Additionally, many other countries may have travel restrictions of their own (link is external), which could impact your ability to enter those countries or move freely.

Can I apply for a U.S. visa right now? Are consulates and embassies open for applications?

Global travel conditions are highly impacted (link is external) by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Department of State has suspended routine U.S. visa services in most countries worldwide (link is external).

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.

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.
What does UGA Immigration Services mean when they say non-essential international travel is not recommended? What if I want to go home?

From an immigration perspective, international travel currently can be unpredictable. If you are currently maintaining a student, scholar or employee immigration status in the U.S. and you depart, it may prove difficult to return to the U.S. in a timely manner, which could have an impact on your U.S. visa status if you are unable to resume your stay in the U.S. as a student, scholar or employee.

Immigration Services understands that you may have serious personal or health concerns which require you to depart, or that you may feel more comfortable with your family or in your home country. We want to make sure that as you make these important decisions, you understand the possible risks involved — including the fact that you may not be able to re-enter the U.S. at the time you intend. Additionally, many other countries have travel restrictions of their own, which could impact your ability to enter those countries or move freely.

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.

Can I travel within the U.S.?

Even within the U.S., different regions are experiencing travel impacts and restrictions. The [CDC: COVID-19 Cases in the U.S. website (link is external)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-in-the-us.html) has updated numbers per state, but this is changing quickly. If you choose to travel domestically, please be sure to consider your own health and safety. We encourage you to follow the CDC and local recommendations for travel. Aside from any risk from COVID-19 itself, be prepared for possible localized shelter in place orders, transportation restrictions or infrastructure disruption which may impact your travel plans.

I need to leave the U.S. and Immigration Services has not signed my I-20 or DS-2019 document. Is that OK? How can I get an I-20 or DS-2019 signature?

Yes, it’s OK. Please know that you do not need a travel signature on your I-20 or DS-2019 document to depart the U.S. You DO need a valid travel signature to return to the U.S. in F-1 or J-1 status. A valid travel signature must be no more than twelve months old on the date that you return to the U.S. (For F-1 students on post-completion Optional Practical Training or STEM OPT Extension, travel endorsements are only valid for 6 months.) You will need a valid signature to apply for a new visa if the F-1 or J-1 visa stamp in your passport is expired and/or for your reentry into the U.S.

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. Please log into compass.uga.edu. Select F-1 Student Services or J-1 Student Services, then select “Replace I-20 or DS-2019 Document”. You may choose the delivery method within the request form.
My visa is expiring soon. Do I need to return home to extend the visa stamp in my passport? I fear that I will not be able to return. What should I do?

Please note that it is always important to make sure that your I-20 or DS-2019 has a future date on it to maintain its validity. So long as you remain in the U.S. with a valid I-20 or DS-2019 you are not required to extend the visa stamp in your passport. The visa in the passport only needs to be extended when you have departed and need to reenter the U.S. Accordingly, if you are presently in the U.S., your I-20 or DS-2019 is still valid, and your visa in your passport is expired, there is no need for you to make a trip just to extend the visa. If you must return home, and you do not have a valid visa, you will need to make a visa application appointment, and receive the new visa prior to returning to the U.S.

What if I was in a U.S. travel restriction-impacted country more than 14 days ago, and wish to re-enter the U.S.?

You should try to have clear documentation about how long you have been outside that travel-restricted country. The current COVID-19 situation is rapidly evolving and unpredictable. It’s unclear how long the travel restrictions may remain in effect for re-entry to the U.S. and how entry could be impacted for travelers even after the 14-day window. Currently, Immigration Services does not have access to clear guidance on what documentation travelers may use to prove they were not present in travel restriction impacted areas within the indicated time period. Do you have access to immigration, residence documents, or other documentation which can officially confirm your location? Are you currently employed? Does your passport accurately reflect your entries and exits?

My program is ending and I can’t find a departing flight! How will this impact my immigration status?

Immigration Services is aware that many flights to impacted regions have been canceled, and that travel may not be available at this time. If your program is ending soon and you are unable to depart the United States, 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.

We urge you to also contact your home country’s local consulate or embassy in the U.S. for support and information regarding travel home. We will work with our clients on a case-by-case basis to determine the best path forward.

I am arriving to the U.S. from another country. Will I have to quarantine when I get to Athens?

Students arriving from international travel should take extra steps to monitor their health for 14 days after returning from travel. Please visit the CDC’s travel website for post-international travel guidance. Check your symptoms each day through DawgCheck before coming to campus. If you are experiencing symptoms associated with COVID contact the University Health Center by calling 706-542-1162.
Visit [coronavirus.uga.edu](https://coronavirus.uga.edu) for the latest campus messages and information on COVID-19.

International students may contact International Student Life at [isl@uga.edu](mailto:isl@uga.edu) for guidance and assistance and [immigration@uga.edu](mailto:immigration@uga.edu) for assistance with immigration questions.

### HEALTH AND SUPPORT

**I’m worried and stressed. Where can I find support?**

With the ongoing concerns around COVID-19, Immigration Services understands that there may be concerned and anxiety about family around the world. In addition, with the increasing level of news coverage and concerns about the spread of the virus locally, some of you may be experiencing anxiety or stress. Please know that these reactions are normal and there are ways in which you can take care of yourself during these stressful times.

The university has many resources available to help you cope with these situations. At the following links you can access various resources that you may find useful about how to take care of yourself.

*Resources available for students, scholars and employees:*
  - [University Health Center](https://www.uga.edu/healthcenter)

*Counseling resources just for students:*
  - [Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)](https://www.uga.edu/counseling) (link is external)
  - [BeWellUGA - Manage Stress and Depression](https://www.uga.edu/bewelluga) (link is external)

*Counseling resources just for scholars and employees:*
  - [UGA Well Being- Employee Assistance](https://www.uga.edu/wellbeing) (link is external)

Immigration Services advisers are always ready and willing to be of assistance in any way we can. Please [Contact Us](mailto:Contact Us) or the [Department of International Student Life](https://www.uga.edu/international) for support or resources.

**I am experiencing xenophobia, racism, harassment, or bullying. What can I do and where can I find support?**

Please [notify International Student Life](mailto:notify International Student Life) and [Immigration Services](mailto:Immigration Services) so that we are aware of your situation and can assist with connecting you to support.

UGA is committed to upholding the [mission and goals](https://www.uga.edu/mission) of diversity, to ensure that all members of our campus community, regardless of race or country of origin, feel welcome, safe, and respected.

Please know that these behaviors have no place in the UGA community. UGA prohibits discrimination and harassment on the basis of categories including race, color, national origin, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation/identity and/or sexual violence status. If
you have experienced physical assaults, hate crimes, and/or threats of violence, you have the right to report them to UGA PD (link is external).

Students can seek counseling support at Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) (link is external), Student Care and Outreach (link is external) and the Equal Opportunity Office (link is external) will also be valuable resources. Scholars and employees can access counseling services through BeWellUGA (link is external).

F-1 and J-1 Enrolled Degree-Seeking Students

IMMIGRATION INFORMATION

I am an F-1 or J-1 enrolled degree-seeking student and I need to submit a request to Immigration Services for my I-20 or DS-2019 form. When will you process my new I-20/DS-2019? How can I receive it?

Immigration Services will continue processing all e-forms submitted through compass.uga.edu (formerly iStart). All initial I-20s and DS-2019s will be processed and mailed to the student via express mail.

If you are a student who deferred their admission from Fall 2020 to Spring 2021, our office sent an email to you in late September with specific instructions on how to obtain your new I-20 or DS-2019. If you did not receive this email, or still have questions about this, please email immigration@uga.edu.

Current students and those approved for OPT or STEM OPT may choose from two mailing options: Immigration Services Document Retrieval.

What can I do to receive a travel signature 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 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”.

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

If you are outside the US, you will follow the instructions we will send to you on ordering shipment delivery.
My I-20 or DS-2019 is expiring, but I need more time to complete my degree. What should I do?

Please submit a request to extend your I-20 or DS-2019 through compass.uga.edu. If you will not be enrolled full-time, also submit a request to reduce your course load through compass.uga.edu.

If you have already applied for F-1 OPT employment or J-1 Academic Training OR if you are eligible to apply now, please contact an Immigration Services advisor regarding your situation, so that we can determine your next steps.

If you are OUTSIDE of the U.S. or you are departing the U.S. before the end of your grace period and 1) you WILL NOT return to the U.S. and 2) you do NOT intend to apply for post-completion F-1 OPT employment or J-1 Academic Training: You can choose to allow your I-20 or DS-2019 to expire, but you will need to work with your academic department and advisers to be sure you can complete your requirements from abroad.

My I-20 or DS-2019 is expiring and I can’t leave the U.S. due to flight issues. What can I do?

If your program is ending soon and you are unable to depart the United States, please notify Immigration Services to let us know about your situation. We urge you to also contact your home country’s local consulate or embassy in the U.S. for support and information regarding travel home. We will work with you to determine the best path forward. Some options include:

- Consider applying for post-completion employment: F-1 OPT employment or J-1 Academic Training.
- Consider continuing your academic degree program into the summer if further enrollment is appropriate for you in your degree program. If you think it would be better for you to continue your degree program at this time, please contact Immigration Services regarding your situation, so that we can determine your next steps.
- Consider applying for a change of status through USCIS to that of a tourist (B1/B2) visa. The USCIS website (link is external) contains instructions, checklists, and filing tips. If you need further guidance then you may consider hiring an immigration attorney.

I will be outside of the U.S. for more than 5 months. Will I need a new visa? Will I have any problems re-entering the U.S. again as a student?

The Department of Homeland Security provided guidance in Spring 2020 indicating that students may enter the U.S. if they have departed the country for more than 5 months, so long as they have maintained their status while they were in the U.S., continued to enroll full time while outside the U.S., and they are in possession of a valid, unexpired visa in the passport. Be sure to properly maintain your student visa status while abroad and have all required travel documents for re-entry when you return.

If you are currently outside of the U.S. and are unable to return to the United States to resume classes or your UGA employment, please notify Immigration Services to let us
What details can you provide regarding spring 2021 Instruction? How will that impact my visa status?

UGA is continuing to offer a hybrid mode of instruction, with a mix of in-person, hybrid and online course offerings. There will be an increased emphasis on offering more in-person options, as the University has in place continued plans for social distancing, required use of masks, and other processes to ensure a safe environment. Please review updates regarding spring instruction at coronavirus.uga.edu.

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) has not issued updated guidance regarding enrollment options for the spring 2021 term. When new guidance has been issued, we will update this document and inform students of their enrollment options.

What will happen if I am unable to return and I withdraw or cancel my enrollment at UGA?

If you are on a student visa status and you withdraw or cancel your enrollment, this will have a direct impact on your F-1 or J-1 student visa status. Please contact an Immigration Services advisor before you take any steps to officially withdraw or cancel future semesters. If you withdraw without communicating with Immigration Services, this may result in a negative termination of your student visa record.

Students who have deferred their admission and/or SEVIS record:

Deferrals
We understand the difficulties many students face with attending UGA during the spring 2021 semester. There are a few options for students who are unable to attend in-person. Based on your situation, our office will work with you to appropriately adjust your I-20 or DS-2019 start date to the future term.

SEVIS fees and Deferrals
If a student who has already paid a SEVIS fee and requested this deferral from our office by September 19, they will not need to pay their SEVIS fee again.
For students who have not yet paid for their SEVIS fee: the fee will only need to be paid before the student goes to the visa interview at a United States embassy or consulate. The I-901 SEVIS Fee payment does not have to be completed until the student appears for the visa interview. Students can schedule an interview before they make the I-901 SEVIS Fee payment. Allow at least three business days for the payment to be received and verified.
For more information regarding this fee, please follow this link: https://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/faq

Graduate Student Deferrals
If you were accepted to begin your academic program spring 2021 but wish to defer your program start date to a later semester, please follow the steps below.
3. Contact your academic department about your options for deferring to a later semester. If the deferral is approved by your academic department, your department will place a request for your deferral with the Graduate School.

4. Obtain documentation from both your academic department and the Graduate School confirming the approval of your deferral. Please complete the Deferral E-form sent to you by email to confirm your deferral. This form can be found in the General tab of compass.uga.edu.

Upon receipt of all required documentation, Immigration Services will adjust your I-20 or DS-2019 start date to the future term.

**Undergraduate New Student Deferrals**

If you were accepted to begin your academic program spring 2021 but wish to defer your program start date to a later semester, please follow the steps below:

Contact undergraduate admissions about your options for deferring to a later semester: [global@uga.edu](mailto:global@uga.edu). Typically, students do not need to pay any additional fees to UGA to defer. If the deferral is approved by admissions, please complete the Deferral E-form sent to you by email to confirm your deferral. This form can be found in the General tab of [compass.uga.edu](http://compass.uga.edu).

Upon receipt of this required documentation, Immigration Services will adjust your I-20 or DS-2019 start date to the future term.

**Undergraduate Transfer Student Deferrals**

If you were accepted to begin your academic program spring 2021 but wish to defer your program start date to a later semester, please follow the steps below:

Contact undergraduate admissions about your options for deferring to a later semester: [global@uga.edu](mailto:global@uga.edu). Transfer students can just reapply for the next available term if they meet the minimum transfer requirements. Typically, students do not need to pay any additional fees to UGA to defer. If the deferral is approved by admissions, please complete the Deferral E-form sent to you by email to confirm your deferral. This form can be found in the General tab of [compass.uga.edu](http://compass.uga.edu).

Upon receipt of this required documentation, Immigration Services will adjust your I-20 or DS-2019 start date to the future term.

**How do I notify Immigration Services of my enrollment plans?**

**International students who cannot enroll in person at UGA:**

International students who **cannot** travel to the U.S. for fall term 2020 are permitted to enroll remotely or access in-person classes from outside the U.S. if they are offered by the U.S. school. International students who are planning either to enroll remotely from outside the U.S., or to defer their enrollment until Summer or Fall term 2021, should first discuss remote learning options with their academic departments.
Once they are approved by their academic departments for remote classes, or remote access to in-person classes, the student must access the UGA Immigration Service’s “Compass” portal to report their spring term plans. After the student submits the form in Compass, the academic department will receive an email from Immigration Services, asking for approval confirmation through a brief “second approver” e-form. Once approved by the department, Immigration Services will manage the student’s immigration SEVIS record, to allow the planned enrollment or deferral.

International students approved by their departments for remote enrollment or remote access to in-person classes must take the following steps:

1. Consult with the appropriate academic department or Admissions office and get approval for their specific fall term plans
2. Login in to UGA Immigration Services “Compass” portal
3. Under the “General” category, Click on the link for “Spring 2021 Deferral/Cancellation/Remote Enrollment Confirmation”
4. Complete and submit the e-form, entering the correct department or Admissions office contact email address

Eligible students may have their student fees and health insurance requirement waived if you are unable to return to UGA for spring term. You must submit this form again to have these waivers applied to your student account. Waivers applied for fall 2020 will not automatically roll forward to the spring 2021 term.

Important: All international students who received a fee waiver due to being unable to enter the United States due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic must contact the Office of Global Engagement at immigration@uga.edu to certify that they still meet the criteria to receive the fee waiver for the spring 2021 semester. A timely response is critical to ensure accurate tuition/fee assessment.

International students who will enroll full-time in person at UGA:

Students enrolling full-time on campus SHOULD NOT submit the Spring 2021 Deferral/Cancellation/Remote Enrollment Confirmation.

Under current U.S. regulations and policies for fall term 2020, international students inside the U.S. are allowed to enroll in a mix of in-person and online classes as needed. Under the fall term guidance from the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP), at least one class of the full-time course load must be in-person. International students who plan to enroll on campus should consult with the appropriate academic department or advisor for academic advising. On-campus International students should enroll full-time: Graduate Students - 9 hours; Undergraduate Students - 12 hours.

If you are currently outside the United States and have submitted your Spring 2021 Enrollment plan e-form, no action is necessary at this time.

If you can safely travel to the U.S., we look forward to welcoming you to campus. If you are already here on campus, we hope you will have a productive and healthy term. If you
cannot travel to the U.S. for in-person studies, we are still here to assist you with your future plans.

I am a new student who decided to take all remote/online classes from home with UGA for the fall, but I plan on coming in-person for the spring. What do I need to do?

Please report your plans in compass.uga.edu. Choose the General tab, then select Spring 2021 Deferral/Cancellation/Remote Enrollment Confirmation. Immigration Services will update your I-20 or DS-2019 in September/October. We will contact you with instructions.

I am a new student who has decided I will not attend UGA. What do I need to do?

If you withdraw or cancel your admission or enrollment with UGA, Immigration Services will need to cancel your current I-20 or DS-2019. Please report your plans in compass.uga.edu. Choose the General tab, then select Spring 2021 Deferral/Cancellation/Remote Enrollment Confirmation.

I am a new or continuing student and have been offered an assistantship for spring 2021. I will not be able to return to U.S. due to travel restrictions or embassy closures.

If you have been offered an assistantship for spring 2021, please contact your Academic Department and The Graduate School for more information.

F-1/J-1 EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

I am a NEW student. If I can't enter the U.S. to begin my new degree program in fall 2020, will this impact my qualification for F-1 CPT (or internships), post-completion OPT, or J-1 Academic Training?

F-1 Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is used for internships during the degree program, and F-1 Optional Practical Training can be used for post-completion employment. J-1 Academic Training is used for internships during the degree and post-completion employment.

Yes, if you are unable to enter the U.S. to begin your degree program in spring 2021, it could have an impact on your F-1 CPT or OPT employment eligibility, or impact the duration of J-1 Academic Training available. Please be advised that this information is based on current Department of Homeland Security guidance and current F-1/J-1 regulations, and is subject to change.

I am a CONTINUING student with an ACTIVE F-1 or J-1 record. Does attending classes remotely impact my eligibility for F-1 CPT or OPT/STEM or J-1 AT?

If you have entered the U.S. and you are a continuing F-1 or J-1 student in Active F-1/J-1 status, or if you are outside the U.S. and maintaining your record by enrolling full time...
online, then any current remote instruction for spring, summer, and spring term 2021 is counted towards your qualifications for F-1 OPT or J-1 AT. Your OPT/CPT or AT qualification period began at the start of your I-20/DS-2019, when you first entered the U.S. in F-1 or J-1 status.

I am outside of the U.S. and unable to enter to start or continue my F-1 student OPT or apply for OPT. What should I do?

The current COVID-19 situation is rapidly evolving and unpredictable. It's unclear how long the travel restrictions or other global travel restrictions 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 unable to return, please notify Immigration Services to let us know about your situation. We will work with our F-1 OPT students on a case-by-case basis to determine the best path forward. Be sure to review OPT information on the Immigration Services website, including the OPT workshop, application instructions, employment/address reporting, and required travel documents.

Be aware that you may not exceed 90 days of unemployment during OPT. If you are currently approved for OPT, you may need to determine if you can work remotely for your employer. If you do not have an employer, it’s possible that you might exceed the 90 days of unemployment if you are unable to begin employment. Current guidance DOES allow less-than-full-time employment (meaning less than 20 hours per week) if the change is due to the COVID-19 emergency.

If you are currently outside of the U.S. and have not yet applied for OPT, you must re-enter prior to your program completion date in order to qualify to apply for OPT. Please contact Immigration Services as soon as possible for advising, which might include planning to extend your program of study.

Has anything changed with regard to OPT processes in light of COVID-19? What if I cannot find an employer within 90 days of the start date of my OPT?

Please be advised that this information is based on current Department of Homeland Security guidance and current F-1/J-1 regulations, and is subject to change. There have been no changes to the application process for OPT or to OPT itself. We have not received any guidance regarding the possibility of extending the period of time when someone is not engaged in employment while under OPT or OPT STEM Extensions. Current guidance DOES allow less-than-full-time employment (meaning less than 20 hours per week) if the change is due to the COVID-19 emergency.

Please continue to check the USCIS website (link is external) for updates or visit the USCIS COVID-19 response page (link is external) regarding any changes to USCIS processing of requests.

If you are still finishing your degree and have concerns about your post-completion employment, you could also consider continuing your academic degree program, if further enrollment is appropriate for you in your degree program at this time. If you think it would be better for you to continue your degree program at this time, rather than continue with your OPT application, please contact an Immigration Services advisor regarding your situation, so that we can determine your next steps.

Immigration Services will continue to process all requests for OPT.
**I am an F-1 student and I have already applied for my post-completion OPT. Will my OPT processing be delayed due to COVID-19 impacts to USCIS?**

Immigration Services is not currently able to predict how this may impact USCIS services. We have heard that due to funding issues with USCIS, receipt notice and work card issuance has slowed. Please continue to check the USCIS website (link is external) for updates or visit the USCIS COVID-19 response page. (link is external)

**I am on F-1 OPT or OPT STEM Extension and I am working remotely. Is that OK? Do I need to report my remote work?**

Remote work is OK. DHS has indicated that you DO NOT need to update the employer address information in SEVIS nor on the Form I-983 for students working remotely. Students on OPT should be sure that the work continues to meet OPT requirements or STEM requirements for eligible employment. Make sure to continue to report any OPT/STEM changes in living address, employment, or unemployment via compass.uga.edu.

**I am on F-1 OPT or STEM OPT Extension and I have been furloughed or laid off. What’s the difference? How does this impact my OPT or STEM Extension unemployment days?**

Furlough, leave of absence, laid-off and termination have different meanings. You should confirm in writing with your employer exactly what your employment status is.

A furlough or paid or unpaid approved leave of absence may still be considered employment for OPT/STEM OPT purposes. F-1 regulations allow for “time off taken consistent with leave-related policies applicable to the employer’s similarly situated U.S. workers in the area of employment.” If this is your situation, request documentation from your employer (usually your supervisor or HR) confirming that your period of furlough or official leave of absence.

A termination or lay-off would be an ending of the employment, and would result in the beginning of days of OPT or STEM OPT unemployment. You’ll need to report your employer end date via the compass.uga.edu.

**I am on F-1 OPT or STEM OPT Extension and I have been furloughed or laid off. Am I eligible for unemployment benefits?**

Immigration Services is unable to answer questions about eligibility for unemployment benefits. There is information here (link is external) about state unemployment programs. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has confirmed (link is external) that unemployment benefits are not considered “public benefits” that would violate the public charge rule. However, it is unclear whether use of unemployment benefits could make a student likely to seen as someone who could become a public charge in the future. Being seen as a potential public charge could negatively impact applications for future visas or immigration benefits.
I am a J-1 student and my Academic Training employment has been terminated due to COVID-19. What can I do?

Please contact Immigration Services as soon as possible so that we can advise you on your available options.

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 are continuing to issue DS-2019s and filing employment based petitions. During this period we continue to process cases and departments can continue to submit cases as usual through https://compass.uga.edu.

Update for J1 Visiting Scholars traveling from Schengen countries, the United Kingdom, and Ireland:

The State Department has announced that: “Certain business travelers, investors, treaty traders, academics, and scholars may qualify for National Interest Exceptions under Presidential Proclamations (PPs) 9993 (Schengen Area) and 9996 (United Kingdom and Ireland).”

J-1 Scholars in any of the above countries may apply for a national interest exception to the travel restriction at the local U.S. Consulate where they will apply for their J visas. Scholars who already have the J visa may still apply for the exception at the U.S. Consulate. Please refer to the specific Consulate for their procedures and requirements for this application. If a support letter is needed, you can apply for one by accessing our Compass portal at https://compass.uga.edu, and submitting the e-form: Program Verification Letter Request (found in the General category).

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 the travel restrictions or other global travel restrictions 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 should 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.

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@uge.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?

U.S. embassies overseas remain closed for routine visa services, and we anticipate a backlog once operations resume. 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.

Are there any current travel restrictions for Permanent Residents?

On Wednesday, April 22, 2020 the President issued a proclamation (link is external) suspending the entry of certain new immigrants. Nonimmigrant visa holders including F-1 students, J-1 Exchange Visitors, H-1B, TN and O-1 workers are NOT impacted. The proclamation DOES NOT impact F-1 or J-1 Student employment options.

The proclamation DOES NOT affect U.S. green card holders, spouses and children of U.S. citizens, and EB-5 investor immigrants all of whom are exempt from the order, which is set to take effect at 11:59pm on April 23, 2020. Applications for permanent residence filed in the U.S. (adjustment of status applications) are also not affected. The proclamation ONLY impacts pending immigrant visa applications.
(applications for permanent residency) for persons who: were outside the U.S. on the effective date of the proclamation (04/23/2020); and who do not have an approved immigrant visa or some other already issued official travel document (such as an advance parole document).