Immigration Services COVID 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.

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.

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The U.S. has rescinded the travel restrictions imposed last year, and is now requiring vaccines for all travelers – with a few exceptions.

- A presidential proclamation (link is external) effective November 8, 2021, rescinds the current regional COVID-19 travel bans and imposes a COVID-19 vaccination requirement on nonimmigrants traveling by air from any country to the United States.
- 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?

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in the U.S. published a notice on January 12, 2021:

Air passengers are required to get a viral test (a test for current infection) within the 3 days (72 hours) before their flight to the U.S. departs, and provide written documentation of their laboratory test result (paper or electronic copy) to the airline or provide documentation of having recovered from COVID-19. Airlines must confirm the negative test result for all passengers or documentation of recovery before they board. If a passenger does not provide documentation of a negative test or recovery, or chooses not to take a test, the airline must deny boarding to the passenger. This order was signed by the CDC Director on January 12, 2021 and will become effective on January 26, 2021.

For up to date information regarding this new testing requirement, please visit CDC Expands Negative COVID-19 Test Requirement to All Air Passengers Entering the United States | CDC Online Newsroom | CDC (link is external)

What should I consider upon arriving at UGA after travel?

We encourage you to visit UGA’s Coronavirus Information and Resource page for the latest campus messages and information on COVID-19. Additional information regarding vaccines, testing, and other health services provided to students can be found at the University Health Center’s Coronavirus resource page. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (link is external) also provides updated guidance for air travelers.

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.
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 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 domestic 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.

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

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 should print and sign with ink any electronically signed and transmitted I-20.

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

Counseling resources just for students:
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
- BeWellUGA - Manage Stress and Depression

Counseling resources just for scholars and employees:
- UGA Well Being- Employee Assistance

Immigration Services advisers are always ready and willing to be of assistance in any way we can. Please Contact Us or the Department of International Student Life 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 and 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 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.

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

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. Students may choose from 3 options for document retrieval: Express Shipping, USPS, or by email. For more information, please review: Immigration Services Document Retrieval.

If you are a student who deferred their admission from Spring 2021 to Summer or Fall 2021, specific instructions were sent to you 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.

What can I do to receive a travel signature for my travel and 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.

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 know about your situation. We will work with you on a case-by-case basis to determine the best path forward. Please also notify your academic advisor and instructors.
On March 11th, the U.S. Department of State and Department of Homeland Security temporarily expanded the ability of consular officers to waive the in-person interview requirement for individuals applying for a nonimmigrant visa in the same classification. Travelers are encouraged to review the website of the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate for detailed information on what services are currently available as well as eligibility information and instructions on applying for a visa without an interview.

What details can you provide regarding fall 2021 Instruction? How will that impact my visa status?

Please review updates regarding [fall instruction at coronavirus.uga.edu](https://coronavirus.uga.edu).

Do students have to receive the COVID-19 vaccine to attend fall 2021 semester?

It is not required to receive the COVID-19 vaccine to attend fall 2021 semester. The UGA Health Center’s requirements for newly admitted students can be found here: [Required Health Center Forms](https://uga.edu/). Additional vaccination information can be reviewed: [COVID-19 Vaccine Information - University Health Center (uga.edu)](https://uga.edu/).

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](https://uga.edu/) 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 Fall 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. Please notify Immigration Services to let us know about your situation. We will work with you on a case-by-case basis to determine the best path forward. Please also notify your academic advisor and instructors.

**SEVIS fees and Deferrals**

The SEVIS I-901 fee is valid for 12 months.

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: I-901 FAQ (link is external)

**Graduate Student Deferrals**

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

1. 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.

2. 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 Fall 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. 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.

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 Summer or Fall 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. 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.

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 2021 may be permitted to enroll remotely or access in-person classes from outside the U.S. if they are offered by the U.S. school. Due to current restrictions imposed by U.S. Department of Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control, remote enrollment delivery cannot be provided to the following countries: Cuba, Iran, Sudan, North Korea, Syria, Crimea Region of the Ukraine.

International students who are planning either to enroll remotely from outside the U.S., or to defer their enrollment until Spring term 2022, 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 summer or fall 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 term plans
2. Login in to UGA Immigration Services “Compass” portal
3. Under the “General” category, Click on the link for “Fall 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 summer or fall term. You must submit this form again to have these waivers applied to your student account. **Waivers applied for spring 2021 will not automatically roll forward to the fall 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 fall 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 *Fall 2021 Deferral/Cancellation/Remote Enrollment Confirmation.*
Under current U.S. regulations and policies, international students inside the U.S. are allowed to enroll in a mix of in-person and online classes as needed. Under the 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 Fall 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 spring, but I plan on coming in-person for the fall 2021. What do I need to do?

Please report your plans in compass.uga.edu. Choose the General tab, then select Fall 2021 Deferral/Cancellation/Remote Enrollment Confirmation. Immigration Services will accordingly update your I-20 or DS-2019. We will contact you with instructions at a later date on how to obtain your updated I-20.

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 Fall 2021 Deferral/Cancellation/Remote Enrollment Confirmation.

I am a new or continuing student and have been offered an assistantship for fall 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 fall 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 2021, 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 fall 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 fall 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.

**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?**

Immigration Services will continue to process all requests for OPT. Please continue to check the [USCIS website](https://www.uscis.gov) for updates or visit the [USCIS COVID-19 response page](https://www.uscis.gov/coronavirus) regarding any changes to USCIS processing of requests.

**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](https://compass.uga.edu).

**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 time, we continue to process cases and departments can continue to submit cases as usual through [the Compass portal](https://compass.uga.edu).
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.

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. For additional information you may visit the Social Security Administration’s (SSA) website at 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?

Many 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. 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 for the interview?

No. 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 until December 31, 2021. To qualify, for the visa renewal interview waiver (link is external), please contact the consulate or embassy where you will apply to confirm steps for renewing the visa.