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.

A presidential proclamation (link is external) issued on November 26, 2021 suspends entry or immigrants or nonimmigrants from certain countries in southern Africa during the 14-day period preceding their entry to the U.S. These counties include: Republic of Botswana, Kingdom of Eswatini, Kingdom of Lesotho, Republic of Malawi, Republic of Mozambique, Republic of Namibia, Republic of South Africa, and the Republic of Zimbabwe.

The U.S. has rescinded the travel restrictions imposed last year, other than the most recent restriction for southern Africa, and is now requiring vaccines for all travelers – with a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 December 2, 2021: This Amended Order is effective for flights departing to the US from a foreign country at or after 12:01am EST (5:01am GMT) on December 6, 2021.

If you plan to travel internationally, you will need to get a COVID-19 viral test (regardless of vaccination status or citizenship) no more than 1 day before you travel by air into the United States. You must show your negative result to the airline before you board your flight. This requirement is for all air passengers two years of age or older boarding a flight from a foreign country to the United States.

For more details and exceptions, please review the CDC website here:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (link is external)

Please review the Test and Vaccination Documentation Requirements section of the link provided for specific information a traveler must show when returning to the United States.

This new order is in addition to the proof of full vaccination requirement published last month.

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 (link is external) 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 (link is external). 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.

**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 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.

If you receive an electronic copy, you must print it out and sign it.

**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

Do students have to receive the COVID-19 vaccine to attend spring 2022 semester?

It is not required to receive the COVID-19 vaccine to attend spring 2022 semester. The UGA Health Center’s requirements for newly admitted students can be found here: Required Health Center Forms. Additional vaccination information can be reviewed: COVID-19 Vaccine Information - University Health Center (uga.edu).

F-1/J-1 EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

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.
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.

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
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.