FAQs for Current Students

Last Updated July 6, 2020

At around 2:00 pm on July 6th, 2020, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued immigration guidance[1] on in-person and on-line study for Fall 2020.

Previously, as many of you know the agency issued exemptions of certain F-1 regulations only for the Spring and Summer of 2020. This new DHS guidance would affect both new and continuing F-1 students during Fall 2020 only. Applying this guidance to the new Yale Fall 2020 plan requires detailed analysis. At present OISS is coordinating with our national associations and peer schools. In addition, OISS and University leadership are focused on providing timely and accurate information as soon as possible. FAQ answers will be updated below as soon as we know the details.

Updates from July 1, 2020

With the recent communication about the Fall semester[2] from President Salovey and Provost Strobel, and your Dean, you may have questions about your status as an international student.

Please find below answers to immigration related questions regarding Fall 2020. We are still waiting on guidance from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) for the fall semester so we will keep updating this page with new information or guidance when they become available. Please keep regularly referring to this page.

If you have other questions and concerns, please email your OISS adviser[3]. We might not be able to respond to every individual email immediately, but we will continue to compile all the questions and provide answers here.

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Getting Help from OISS

Is OISS open?

OISS staff have been working remotely since Yale closed in March, and indeed the door to our building at 421 Temple St remains locked and closed. Advisers remain available by email and Zoom appointment to answer your questions, and our visa sponsorship work has continued uninterrupted.

Can I pick up my documents at OISS?

While OISS is not currently open for pick-up services, we are working on a process to restore this service in a way that would meet Yale and public health and safety guidelines later this summer. If you have an urgent need, please let us know. We will update this section when a process has been set up.
I requested that my OPT EAD (or other mail) be sent to OISS, will you still be receiving mail?

USPS is holding our mail and we are picking it up once a week. We are taking all necessary precautions to ensure the safety of our colleagues before they handle mail. So, in short, despite closed doors and slower processing to ensure safety, we are still able to receive mail. When OISS receives your EAD card you will receive an email from us about how to get your EAD card.

Immigration Status Questions

How does residential/remote instruction affect my immigration status?

We know that you are concerned about how the Fall 2020 plans for course delivery will affect your immigration status. Yale students are expected to return to New Haven to participate in residential remote instruction, but the university understands that not all students will be able to return to campus. U.S. universities have yet to receive guidance from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) to confirm that students can take a full course load of online courses during the fall semester without jeopardizing their immigration status. However, we do expect that last spring’s policy allowing international students to take full-time courses online either from within the U.S. or from abroad will be extended to the fall semester. This means that to maintain your immigration status in Fall 2020 you need to participate in online learning, continue to be enrolled full-time, and make normal progress toward your degree. Regardless of where you are participating in online classes, your immigration status will remain active. When the guidance is released we will update this page and post the information.

If I decide to remain abroad for the fall semester, do I still need to report a U.S. address?

Yes, you need to keep a U.S. address in your SIS and SEVIS records to maintain status. If you are not residing at the address currently listed as your “OISS U.S. Address” in your SIS account, please update this address to one where you can receive mail, such as a friend or Yale School address within 10 days. (Please follow the instructions under “Continuing Students” and report using “OISS U.S. Address”).

I am a J-1 student, does the June 22 Presidential Proclamation banning J-1 visa holders apply to me?

The Proclamation “suspends the entry into the United States” of individuals who do not yet have a valid visa stamp and does not apply to J-1 Exchange Visitors in the student category. If you are in the U.S. you can extend your J-1 stay if you meet all other requirements. If you are not in the U.S. this proclamation does not prevent you from applying for a J-1 visa once the U.S. consulates re-open.

Travel and Visa Questions

Will I be able to come back to the U.S. if I am abroad or will be leaving soon?

Current travel bans, consulate closures and flight cancellations are severely disrupting international mobility. You will need to check the travel and visa restrictions that may be in place at the time you are planning to travel as the situation is changing daily. If you are currently outside the U.S. or plan to travel outside the U.S., we recommend that you continue to monitor travel updates by the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). You can also find a summary of all the travel bans on the International Travel Section of the COVID-19 Information pages on our website.
If your visa is expired or will expire before your planned return to the U.S., please be aware that consulate closures and appointments cancellations continue in most countries worldwide. Students in need of a new visa should contact their embassy or consulate directly and in advance to receive updates on visa services. Contact information for embassies and consulates worldwide is available at usembassy.gov [8].

OISS is carefully monitoring updates from the CDC, SEVP, USCIS, and the US Department of State, as well as updates from NAFSA: Association of International Educators, the leading professional organization dedicated to international education and exchange, which is providing comprehensive and up-to-date information relevant to travel, consulates, and visas [9].

**My travel signature is expiring, how do I get a new travel signature?**

OISS can reprint your I-20 with a new travel signature and mail it to you. Please set up a courier label [10] to the address you need it delivered to, and then contact your OISS adviser [3] by email to request the reprint.

**Can I re-enter the U.S. on an expired visa?**

No. If your visa will have expired by the date you wish to re-enter the U.S., then you will need to obtain a new visa at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate before you can re-enter the U.S. Due to current disruptions in visa services at consulates and embassies worldwide, OISS discourages travel abroad for students with an expired/expiring visa, if you are planning to return to campus in the fall.

**My visa is expiring, and I am unable to travel to my home country currently. What should I do to renew it?**

You may stay in the U.S. on an expired F-1 or J-1 visa as long as you maintain your immigration status by being in possession of a valid I-20 or DS-2019 and by meeting normal enrollment requirements. (Canadian citizens do not need a visa to enter the U.S.).

**Will the five-month visa expiration rule apply to my visa if I stay abroad during the fall semester?**

The five-months rule applies only to students that interrupt their studies. If you are maintaining full-time status until the end of the fall semester and intend to register as usual for the spring semester, this rule will not affect you. Remember that when classes resume fully in person, you must return to campus to maintain your immigration status.

**I applied for U.S. Permanent Residency. Can I leave the country now?**

If you applied to become Lawful permanent resident (LPR) status in the United States, consult an immigration attorney regarding international travel, which is generally not recommended.

**When I return to the U.S. will I need to quarantine?**

Yale is following public health guidelines and you will be asked to follow all instructions laid out on the Yale Health and Safety website [11].
F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT)

The following questions are aimed to address your concerns regarding effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the logistics of maintaining OPT status, and OPT processing by USCIS.

My OPT is approved and I have the EAD, how do I stop the unemployment clock? Do I need to do anything to start my OPT?

Once you have your EAD and have reached the start date, you will need to report your eligible employment activity [12] to SEVIS in order to stop the unemployment clock. Reporting tools are on the OPT Reporting Requirements webpage [13], and once submitted will generate a new I-20 with updated travel signature.

Many of you will also have received an email from SEVP inviting you to create a portal account. This is optional if you wish to view your SEVIS record, but we do not recommend making changes there that are not also reported to OISS above. Note that you cannot reprint your I-20 from your SEVP portal.

My OPT is approved but my job offer has been pushed back to later this year (or next year). What can I do to keep my OPT valid?

There are many types of training activity that can count toward using your OPT. The OISS website on OPT Employment Options [12] lists those activities, which must all be related to your field of study. If you have questions about the types of employment you can take, please contact your OISS adviser [3].

My OPT is approved but I am currently not in the U.S. Can I start work for a U.S. company while I am still abroad?

Based on SEVP guidance that was updated on May 14, 2020, if your employer either has an office outside of the United States, or your employer can assess your engagement using electronic means, you can work remotely from outside the U.S. You will still need to report your employment [13] and maintain a US address; if not yours, then a friend where you can receive mail.

Note that this guidance is only temporary and could change so you will need to check this page regularly for anyy changes.

Note also that if you are abroad and a travel ban is instituted that bars you from re-entry, you may not be able to work the full 12 months outside the U.S. You’ll need to watch developments and be in touch with your employer about a Plan B before making any decisions.

My OPT has been pending over 90 days, which is much longer than my friends who applied at the same time, is something wrong with my application?

The normal processing time for OPT is 1.5 to 5 months, according to the USCIS website [14]. While it is clear that many OPT applications were approved with a shorter processing time, we have noticed an increase in cases now pending over 90 days. This is not signal that there is something wrong with your application, and there is no proven process to expedite OPT until it has been pending for longer than the stated normal processing time (5 months). However, if you have been waiting more than 90 days you can notify your OISS adviser [3] so that we are aware of your case.

I still need to apply for OPT. Can I do this remotely from elsewhere in the U.S.? Can I do it from
outside the U.S.?

You must be physically in the U.S. at the time you submit your Optional Practical Training (OPT) application. OISS will continue to process OPT applications as soon as we receive your submitted request. If you have not applied for OPT yet, but plan to do so, we strongly encourage you to [submit your application as soon as possible](https://oiss.yale.edu) [15] (especially [submit the OPT request in OISS Connect](https://oiss.yale.edu) [16] without any delay).

Per university guidance OISS has temporarily suspended in-person advising. This means that we will not be able to arrange an in-person review of your OPT materials, but will instead process your new I-20 recommending for OPT and then communicate with you regarding next steps, including any possible revisions you need to make, how to compile your complete OPT package, and mailing options. If needed, you will also be able to schedule a virtual OPT review with [your designated OISS adviser](https://oiss.yale.edu) [3] after the processing of your I-20.

Can I leave the U.S. and go home after I mail my OPT application to USCIS? Will I be allowed to re-enter the U.S. to start working once my application is approved?

Yes, you can leave the U.S. when an OPT application is pending at USCIS, but there has always been an element of uncertainty. The basic risk factor is that if you receive correspondence from USCIS in the mail, you would not be there to respond. That has always been true and in these extraordinary times it remains to be true.

In the best case scenario, if your application goes through smoothly, your EAD is delivered to a valid U.S. address, and someone arranges for your EAD to be sent to you (if you used OISS address as your mailing address, we will email you once it arrives and arrange mailing with you), and you may be able to enter the U.S. with your travel documents [17].

Other Employment Questions

If I plan to be abroad for the fall semester, can I keep or start a Yale on-campus job?

If you are assigned to teach, have an RA position, or another on campus job in the fall semester you should reach out to your school for more information.

I do not have the SSN yet and need one, when can I apply?

Please note that currently the Social Security Administration (SSA) is closed and not accepting applications for new Social Security Numbers (SSN). You can start employment without the SSN but must apply, and must be in the U.S. when you submit the application. We recommend that you regularly check the SSA website [18] for updates on when you can apply. We also recommend that you speak with your employer about options for starting without the SSN.

It is important for F-1 students to remember that when your employment ends, you are no longer eligible to apply for the SSN and must start new employment, such as an on-campus job, to regain your eligibility.

Does the recent Presidential Proclamation suspending H-1B visas impact me?

If you are here in the U.S. and your employer filed an H-1B petition on your behalf through the USICS lottery, you are not subject to the proclamation and should reach out to your employer for updates. The proclamation only “suspends the entry into the United States” of individuals who do not yet have a valid visa stamp and who are seeking entry to the U.S. in H-1B (or H-4 dependent) status.