FAQs for Current Students

Dear Students,

Yale University and all of us at the OISS are committed to supporting you during this global health crisis. We are truly in uncharted territory, but we will navigate through this together.

As you well know, the guidance on COVID-19 and how to best diminish its impact is dynamic and fast-moving. Since we are in an environment of evolving information, please make sure to regularly check Yale COVID-19 Information page [1] and refer back to our FAQs below.

Now more than ever, we need to watch out for each other and treat each other with respect. That is why, it is vital that we all act proactively and follow all health guidelines and observe social distancing to safeguard our own health and the well-being of those with whom we come in contact.

Best wishes to you and your families.

OISS Staff

Please find below answers to immigration related questions regarding the move to virtual instruction through the end of the semester, including final exams. We will keep updating this page with new information or guidance when they become available, so please keep regularly referring to this page.

If you have other questions and concerns, please email your designated OISS adviser [2]. 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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Immigration Status

1. How does switching to online instruction affect my immigration status?

We know that you are worried about how the recent changes in the mode of education, as well as the location of your participation in online learning, will affect your immigration status. U.S. universities received guidance from the Department of Homeland Security that allows students to continue this semester’s courses online without jeopardizing their immigration status. The Student and Visitor Exchange Program (SEVP) has confirmed that “If a school closes temporarily but offers online instruction or another alternative learning procedure, nonimmigrant students should participate in online or other alternate learning procedures and remain in active status in SEVIS.” Furthermore, SEVP confirmed that international students may take full-time courses online either from within the US or from abroad. This means that to maintain your immigration status 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.

2. If I vacate my current on or off campus residence and relocate to a new U.S. address, do I need to report it within 10 days? Where do I report?

Yes, you need to report any change of residential address in the U.S. to the federal government, within 10 days. Please report address changes [3] to OISS within 10 days via SIS (Please follow the instructions under “Continuing
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Travel and Visa

3. Will the five-month rule apply to my visa if I go back home and stay away from Yale until the Fall semester?

If you are maintaining full-time status until the end of the Spring Semester, then you are entitled to your annual summer vacation. According to the immigration regulations, an F-1 or J-1 student is in status during the annual (or summer) vacation if the student is eligible and intends to register for the next term. If you maintain your immigration status, the 5-month rule does not come into effect. Remember that when classes resume in person, you must return to campus to maintain your immigration status.

4. Will I be able to come back to the U.S.?

As you all know, we are in uncharted territory regarding international mobility. It is impossible to predict if and when further restrictions will be put in place by the U.S. Administration for travelers returning from high risk countries.

You 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 you continue to monitor travel updates by CDC [4] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). As of March 18, 2020 routine U.S. visa issuance has been suspended worldwide [5] and daily restrictions on travel are being implemented. 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 [6].

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

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.)

6. My visa is expiring/has expired. If I leave the U.S. now, but must come back after the expiration date of my visa, will I need a new visa, or can I re-enter on an expired visa?

If you leave the U.S. and 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. (Canadian citizens do not need a visa to enter the U.S.) The U.S. State Department announced on March 18th that routine U.S. visa issuance has been suspended indefinitely worldwide. [5]

If you will be travelling to Canada, Mexico, or adjacent islands, please read here [7] to see if you can benefit from automatic revalidation.

7. I am an international student currently studying abroad, and I have concerns about my visa status. What should I do?

If you are an international student studying abroad this spring semester and have concerns, please contact your OISS adviser [2] to discuss how a decision to remain or depart early may affect your U.S. immigration status.

8. 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.

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 applying for OPT and OPT processing by USCIS.

9. 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 [8] (especially submit the OPT request in OISS Connect [9] 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 [2] after the processing of your I-20.

10. 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 [10].

11. Will the suspension of U.S. visa issuance (announced on March 18th) affect the processing of OPT?

A citizen of a foreign country who seeks to enter the United States generally must first obtain a U.S. visa, which is placed in the traveler’s passport and is issued by the U.S. Department of State (DoS) via U.S. Embassies and Consulates around the world. Optional Practical Training (OPT), on the other hand, is a temporary work authorization for employment that is directly related to an F-1 student's major area of study. OPT is adjudicated by USCIS (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services), which is an agency of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

As a result, U.S. visa issuance and OPT adjudication are undertaken by different agencies and are not directly related. So, DoS’s announcement on March 18th of temporary suspension of U.S. visa issuance worldwide will not affect the adjudication of your OPT application. As of this date, USCIS continues to process certain applications, including OPT.

12. Will the temporary closure of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) field offices and suspension of USCIS in-person services affect my OPT application?

As of March 18th, USCIS temporarily closed its domestic field offices [11] and suspended routine in-person services to help slow the spread of COVID-19. However, USCIS staff will continue to perform duties that do not involve contact with the public. OPT applications are adjudicated at the USCIS Service Centers (specifically at the Potomac Service Center in VA) and not at the field offices. In addition, OPT adjudications do not involve any contact with the public. For these reasons, we do not anticipate your OPT application being affected by this recent closure of USCIS field offices.

Using the OISS Mailing Address for OPT

The following questions are aimed to address your concerns if you used (or plan to use) the OISS address (421 Temple St) as the mailing address on the I-765 Form when you applied (or will apply) for OPT.
13. Is OISS closed? If OISS is closed, how will you receive mail?

OISS is not “closed” in the sense that we continue to work remotely. However, the door to our building at 421 Temple St is indeed locked and closed. But, fear not, 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.

14. How do I get my OPT receipt notice from OISS?

As described above, we are still getting mail, albeit not on a daily basis. Once we receive your OPT receipt notice we will scan it and send you an electronic copy of it in an email. At this time, we will not mail your original receipt notice, because although we are able to receive mail, outgoing mail remains challenging. We will keep your receipt notice until we receive your approval notice and EAD card, and until we return to 421 Temple.

15. I checked USCIS Case Status online and found out that my OPT is approved, but OISS is closed. Should I update my mailing address with USCIS?

Currently, we do not recommend that you update your mailing address with USCIS. As described above, although our doors are closed, we are still working, and we are able collect mail once a week from the local USPS office. From previous experience we know that updating mailing address for filed applications through the USCIS online portal, or by filing AR-11 form, or by calling the USCIS Contact Center is not always reliable and might create delivery issues. If the situation changes and we are unable to receive mail, we will provide further guidance here.

16. I checked USCIS Case Status online and found out that my EAD card has been shipped, how will I get my EAD card from OISS?

Just like your OPT receipt and approval notices, we will be able to collect your EAD card when it arrives at the local USPS office. Once we receive your EAD card we will scan it and send you an electronic copy of it in an email. When you receive the email copy of your EAD you will be asked to create a courier label to ship the original, that you will need for travel and work permission. Please note when you choose your shipping destination that there are disruptions to courier service to some parts of the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We will keep your EAD card together with your receipt and approval notice until you have created the shipping label using instructions sent at the time of your EAD arrival.

17. I checked the USPS tracking number provided on the USCIS Case Status that indicated that they shipped my EAD card. USPS tracking shows that the post office attempted delivery of my EAD card but could not deliver and will try again. Should I contact the post office or go there to pick it up myself?

USPS tracking shows this message automatically for any mail that cannot be delivered as usual at the expected date of delivery. We kindly ask you not to be alarmed by this automatic message in USPS tracking, and not to contact or go to the local post office. We will collect your EAD card, scan it, and email it to you.

Other Employment (F-1 CPT, H-1B)

18. Can I apply for CPT (Curricular Practical Training) for my summer internship from outside the U.S.?

Yes, at this time, if you are eligible for CPT[12], OISS will continue to process your request as normal until we hear otherwise. Please refer to our answer above regarding your ability to travel back to the U.S. if you are currently outside the U.S. or plan to leave soon.

19. I do not have the SSN yet and need one for my internship, 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[13] for updates on when you can apply. We also recommend that you speak with your employer about options for starting without the SSN.
20. My employer registered me for H-1B lottery. Can I leave the U.S. now?

If your employer has already registered you for the H-1B lottery, please consult your employer and their immigration counsel before you make any international travel plans. OISS advisers cannot answer travel related questions regarding your H-1B petition sponsored by your employer.

Post Graduation Options

21. I will graduate in May 2020, and my plan was to return to my home country. After I graduate, I would prefer to stay in the United States for now. What are my options?

You have three options:

a. Remain in the U.S. and apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT) [14] (for F-1 students) or Academic Training [15] (for J-1 students).

b. Remain in the U.S. during the grace period after your program end date (which you can find on your I-20 or DS-2019). The grace period is 60 days for F-1 students and 30 days for J-1 students.

c. Pursue another degree in the United States and transfer (if eligible) your SEVIS record to another institution. See here [16] for F-1 Transfer, and here [17] for J-1 Transfer.

d. Change to another nonimmigrant classification (H-1B for example)