Current Travel Guidance and Restrictions

May 20, 2021

There are many issues that will affect your decision and ability to travel to the U.S., and unfortunately with the ongoing global pandemic and changes in the U.S. administration, what was true last week might be different tomorrow so it’s important to stay informed with up-to-date information. You may want to review the frequently asked questions (FAQ) page which includes international travel issues. In addition to the information below you should also review the detailed information provided by NAFSA: Association of International Educators [1]

Preparing for Travel to the U.S.

Obtain Your U.S. Visa

Many U.S. consulates have not yet resumed normal operations so visa services are still delayed or limited. Check with your local U.S. embassy to see if they have resumed issuing visa appointments. The State Department announced that consulates can waive the interview requirement [2] for those who have a visa that has been expired by 48 months or less. This provision is now set to expire on 12/31/2021.

Be Aware of Current U.S. Travel Restrictions

State Department Updates

On April 26th the U.S. State Department announced an expansion of the travel ban exemptions [3] to Presidential Proclamations (PPs) 9984, 9992, and 10143 related to the spread of COVID-19. This means that F-1 students and some academics on J-1 visas from China, Iran, Brazil, and South Africa, now qualify to apply for a National Interest Waiver (NIE) similar to students and scholars from the Schengen area, the United Kingdom, and Ireland.

In other news, late Friday afternoon, April 30, 2021, the Department of State announced [4] the suspension of entry into the United States, of physically present within the Republic of India, effective May 4, 2021 (see details in above announcement.) However a second announcement, “Uniform Global National Interest Exceptions to COVID-19 Travel Restrictions: India [5],” explained that students in India applying for student and academic visas would be eligible for a National Interest Exception (NIE).

There is still some confusion about what these announcements mean for new and continuing students from the travel restricted countries. Please read the details in the links above and check the website of the U.S. overseas consulate where you are applying for details. OISS is continuing to seek clarifications on these three new announcements, but for now the general understanding is as follows:

Students and scholars from Brazil, China, India, Iran, and South Africa

- If you are a student, have a valid F-1 visa and intend to begin or continue an academic program commencing on or after August 1, 2021, you do not need to contact an embassy or consulate to seek an individual NIE to travel. You may enter the United States no earlier than 30 days before the start of your academic studies, as noted on the form I-20. OISS is seeking clarification on continuing students and students with OPT authorization and will provide updates.
- If you need to apply for a new F-1 visa, check with the nearest embassy or consulate. Those who are issued an F-1 visa will automatically be considered for an NIE to travel. Note: new students may enter the U.S. no earlier than 30 days before the start of their academic program as noted on the form I-20. We are seeking clarification for returning and continuing students.
- If you hold a valid J-1 visa you need to contact the U.S. consulate or embassy and obtain an NIE before you travel. There are no automatic exemptions.
- If you need to apply for new J-1 visa, check the status of visa services at the nearest embassy or consulate.
F-1 and J-1 (students and scholars) from the Schengen region, U.K. and Ireland

- If you hold a current F1 visa and a valid I-20 form, contact the embassy before traveling. You may be able to continue to travel to the United States under the earlier NIE provisions.
- If you need to apply for a new F-1 visa, check the status of visa services at the nearest embassy or consulate; if you are issued an F-1 visa you will automatically be considered for an NIE to travel. Students beginning their studies in Fall 2021, cannot enter the United States earlier than 30 days before the start of your academic studies, as noted on the form I-20.
- If you hold a valid J-1 visa you need to contact the U.S. consulate or embassy and obtain an NIE before you travel. There are no automatic exemptions.
- Other visa holders need to qualify for a NIE and should contact embassy before traveling.

For a comprehensive updated list visit NAFSA COVID-19 Restrictions on U.S. Visas and Entry [6].

Other resources: Yale COVID-19 Guidance [7] and OISS’s COVID-19 Resources [8].

If you have additional questions, please get in touch with your OISS adviser [9].