Current Travel Guidance and Restrictions

May 27, 2021

There are many issues that will affect your decision to travel internationally or your ability to enter the U.S. Unfortunately what was true last week might be different tomorrow, so it’s critically important to stay informed with up-to-date information. OISS does not recommend international travel if you are in the U.S. currently, and would need to apply for a new visa to return. Even if you have a valid visa, COVID-19 restrictions (below) could prevent you from departing from certain countries to the U.S. For a comprehensive list of travel restrictions and exceptions visit NAFSA COVID-19 Restrictions on U.S. Visas and Entry [1], or the U.S. State Department [2] website. If you are still unsure which policies apply to your situation please contact the U.S. consulate or embassy in your area.

Preparing for Travel to the U.S.

Obtain Your U.S. Visa

You must (except Canadian citizens) have a valid visa to enter the U.S. Many U.S. consulates have not yet resumed normal operations, causing delays and limited access. The State Department announced that consulates can waive the interview requirement [3] 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.

COVID-19 Related Travel Restrictions

Several COVID-19-related Presidential Proclamations limit entry to the United States by individuals who were physically present in one of the countries listed below during the 14-day period prior to their planned entry to the United States.

- Brazil
- Canada
- China
- India
- Iran
- Ireland
- Mexico
- Schengen Area
- United Kingdom
- South Africa

National Interest Exception (NIE)

F-1 Visa Holders

Students with valid F-1 visas may travel directly from Brazil, China, Iran and South Africa to the U.S. to begin an academic program of study that commences August 1, 2021 or later. There is no requirement to contact a U.S. consulate or embassy.

Students with valid F-1 visas may travel directly from Ireland, the Schengen area and the United Kingdom at any time, even prior to August 1st. There is no requirement to contact a U.S. consulate or embassy.

F-1 Visa Applicants
When you apply for a new F-1 visa, the U.S. consulate process will also consider if you qualify for an NIE. According to the Department of State, “Students seeking to apply for new F-1 or M-1 visas should check the status of visa services at the nearest embassy or consulate; those applicants who are found to be otherwise qualified for an F-1 or M-1 visa will automatically be considered for an NIE to travel.”

New F-1 Students

Students coming to Yale for the first time may enter the U.S. no earlier than 30 days before the start of their academic program as noted on the form I-20.

J-1 Students and Scholars

Students and scholars residing in any of the countries listed above must request an NIE from a U.S. embassy or consulate in order to qualify for direct travel to the U.S. This policy may apply even if you currently hold a valid J-1 visa, please check with your local U.S. consulate or embassy.

Canada and Mexico

Students and scholars residing in Canada or Mexico should review the updated information from U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP.) These policies are updated frequently. Also note that land travel and air travel may have different policies.

All Other Visa Categories

The “exceptions” listed above are for specific visa categories. All other visa categories (including H-1B) are subject to the Presidential Proclamations, which prohibit travel from the countries listed above to the U.S.

Additional Travel Issues

Chinese Institutions and Funding

Presidential Proclamation 10043[5] effects “entry into the United States as a nonimmigrant of any national of the PRC seeking to enter the United States pursuant to an F or J visa…” who “…receives funding from or who currently is employed by, studies at, or conducts research at or on behalf of… an entity in the PRC that implements or supports the PRC’s ‘military-civil fusion strategy” or in the past “has been employed by, studied at, or conducted research at or on behalf of… an entity in the PRC that implements or supports the PRC’s ‘military-civil fusion strategy” There is a lot that is unknown about this policy. Please contact your OISS adviser[6] if you have questions.

U.S. Embassy in Russia

On May 12th the U.S. embassy in Moscow issued a statement that many visa services will be temporarily cut or very limited[7]. Please review their website for any updates.

Summary

The policies listed above are complex and at times vague. You should seek guidance from several different sources before making your travel plans. For a comprehensive list of restrictions and exceptions visit NAFSA COVID-19 Restrictions on U.S. Visas and Entry[1]. If you are still unsure which policies apply to your situation please contact the U.S. consulate or embassy in your area.

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Links:
[1] https://www.nafsa.org/regulatory-information/covid-19-restrictions-us-visas-and-entry
[6] https://oiss.yale.edu/about/connect-with-oiss