FAQs for Students

Updated July 1, 2021

OISS has compiled the most frequently asked questions about coming or returning to Yale for the Fall 2021 semester. We are including links to other relevant pages and will continue to update this page throughout the summer. If you have questions that are not answered by these FAQs, please contact your OISS adviser [1].

Link to the Yale Fall 2021 Full Time Letter [2]

If you are having trouble opening the above letter, please try another web browser. If you are still unable to open the file, please email alina.nevins@yale.edu [3].

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For All Students

How is Yale planning to operate in the fall of 2021? How does this affect me as a new or continuing student?

President Peter Salovey announced on March 29, 2021 [4] that Yale is planning to have a “full residential program for our undergraduates if public health conditions permit. We expect graduate and professional school students to continue their studies in New Haven and faculty members to conduct classes primarily in person.”

Will there be options for remote study in the fall of 2021?

The decision about remote options is made by the dean of each school. At this time, all students are expected to be physically present on campus. If you have a question about your particular situation, please contact your school.

What if I am not able to get to Yale by the start of classes? How will this affect my studies?

Immigration regulations require that F-1 students and J-1 exchange visitors arrive in the U.S. on or before their “program start date” listed on their I-20 or DS-2019. If you cannot arrive by the start date on your I-20 or DS-2019, please notify your OISS adviser. [5] At the present time, we are expecting all students to be on campus for the start of the fall semester. If any accommodations need to be made, your department and school will be in touch with you. OISS can only adjust your I-20 or DS-2019 program start dates based on the guidance and specific accommodations from your school or department.

What if the plan for instruction changes? Is Yale able to offer in-person instruction? Can I still
enter the U.S.?

If the plan for instruction changes after the start of the term to a hybrid or fully online mode, international students will be able to maintain their student status and enroll in a combination of in-person and remote classes.

Do I need proof of a negative COVID-19 test to travel to the U.S.?

Yes, all air passengers arriving to the U.S. from another country are required to get tested for COVID-19 no more than 72 hours before their flight departs and to provide proof of the negative result or documentation of having recovered from COVID-19 to the airline before boarding the flight. This rule applies regardless of vaccination status. For more information on this requirement, see the CDC’s Frequently Asked Questions [6].

For Newly Admitted Students, Students Deferred from Fall 2020 and Students who Studied Remotely for the 20-21 Academic Year

Please see the Getting Started [7] page for information for newly admitted students.

I have not received my I-20 or DS-2019 from Yale. What do I do?

Read the instructions and the Getting Started page. If you have submitted all the required information and still don’t have an I-20 or DS-2019, please send an email to newstudents.oiss@yale.edu [8]. Please note that OISS is preparing hundreds of new student documents and it takes at least a week to process your request after all the information has been received.

Can OISS provide me a letter for my visa appointment and/or entry to the U.S.?

Yes. Please print out the letter at this link. [9]

I have not been able to get a visa appointment. What should I do?

U.S. embassies and consulates are re-opening in many locations around the world and our observation is that in most locations student visas are being prioritized. Please regularly check the website of the U.S. Embassy or Consulate where you wish to apply for your visa. Appointments may open up depending on the public health situation. You can also find the visa appointment wait times here [10].

I have a visa appointment. What is your advice about an expedited appointment?

Some embassies and consulates offer expedited appointment requests, but the protocols will vary at each location. You should first secure a visa appointment for any date (even if it is after the start of classes), and then request an expedited appointment. Normal visa appointment wait times are available on the U.S. Department of State’s visa appointment [10] page, and you should contact your local embassy or consulate [11] for details on requesting an expedited appointment. Please note that some U.S. Embassy/Consulates allow you to request an expedited appointment only once, so make sure you understand the process before you submit a request. The reason for the expedite would be that you need to travel to the U.S. to study and there are no regular visa appointments available before your start date. However, please note that if the U.S. Embassy/Consulate is not ready to resume limited services, it is not unusual for your expedite request to be denied, so you might want to wait until you know that they are resuming visa services for students. In some cases, your program at Yale may be willing to write a statement on your behalf.
Will I be required to have an original I-20 for my visa appointment or to enter the U.S.?

For the duration of the COVID-19 emergency, the Department of State and CBP will allow electronic issuance and signing of I-20 forms. Please print your I-20 prior to your visa application and/or to boarding your flight.

I have been studying at another U.S. school and need to transfer my SEVIS record to Yale. What do I do?

Review the information and follow the instructions on this page [12] and let OISS know that you will need to transfer your SEVIS record.

I transferred or will transfer my I-20/SEVIS record to Yale, but am currently outside the U.S. What do I do to return to the U.S.?

You will need the following documents to enter the US: your Yale I-20, a valid F-1 visa stamp (unless you are Canadian), and a valid passport. You should also review our page for F-1 transfers [13].

If I have a valid F-1 visa from another school or a valid F-1 visa with a different SEVIS ID, can I use that visa to enter the U.S.?

Unfortunately, there is conflicting guidance on this issue. Airport CBP officers have said students may be able to use any valid F-1 visa, even if it is from a different school. However, they have also said they must evaluate “the totality” of each student’s situation, visa history, intentions, etc. So, using the other school’s visa or if your SEVIS ID is different does carry some risk. On the other hand, the vast majority of schools (including Yale) report that they have never seen any problems.

In the end you will need to make an informed decision you are comfortable with: (1) request a new F-1 visa from a US embassy, or (2) present the valid visa from another school or with a different SEVIS ID knowing there is some risk. If you chose the second option, we recommend carrying with you a printout of reference materials (see below.) To help you make your decision you may want to:

- Contact your local US embassy and ask their advice.
- Read about this topic in the Foreign Affairs Manual 9 FAM 402.5-5(P)(2) (U) [14]
- Read about this topic on the SEVP website [15]

I am in the U.S. and need to file a Change of Status request with USCIS. I see that the processing time may take many months, will I be able to enroll in classes?

This is a complex issue and you need to speak with let your OISS adviser [5] before taking any action. A pending Change of Status request can sometimes permit enrollment in classes, but it is crucial that you are able to maintain your underlying (most recent) status until the request is approved. Some students in the change of status process have an interim status of B1/B2 (tourist), which if approved means that you are unable to enroll / continue to enroll in classes. You will find additional details on this page [16].

I was admitted in Fall 2020 and studied remotely for the 2020-2021 academic year. When can I come to the U.S.?

Your process for coming to the U.S. will be the same as the students admitted in Fall 2021. You will receive an I-20 which states the date by which you must arrive. You cannot arrive more than 30 days before that date.
What do I do if I want to defer my admissions?

If you decide to defer your enrollment, please let both your school’s admissions office and OISS know so we can be informed of your enrollment plans. Depending on the length of your deferral, OISS will either issue an I-20 for the new date or cancel your current SEVIS record and issue you a new I-20 for the Fall 2022.

Yale’s Vaccine Requirement

Yale will require all students to be fully vaccinated for COVID-19 by the start of classes for the Fall 2021 semester. We urge anyone who can get a vaccine to do so before departing for the U.S. but Yale recognizes that some international students will not have the opportunity to do so. Those students who are not able to access a vaccine or can only receive one dose of a vaccine should plan to arrive early and Yale will administer the vaccine upon arrival. Yale Health has posted a helpful COVID-19 Vaccination FAQ for International Students and Scholars and updates this site regularly. On July 1st, a chart was added to the FAQs with recommendations for international students who have been unable to access or receive a vaccine or who have received a non-U.S. vaccine. Please review this chart and all the FAQs and if you have a question please email yhvaccine@yale.edu.

On August 2nd, Yale Health sent an email to all graduate and professional students outlining important testing requirements, issues for international students, and vaccinations. Please review this email carefully to ensure a smooth arrival to Yale this fall.

If you have already received your full vaccination (both doses in a 2-dose series or one dose of a single-dose vaccine) upload your vaccination record to the Yale Student Vaccine Portal.

For Continuing Students

I am thinking about traveling outside the U.S. this summer. Will I be able to return to Yale?

Traveling internationally continues to pose some risk, especially if you are from a country where there are travel restrictions. And unfortunately, we are not able to predict travel conditions in the coming months with certainty. Existing travel bans might become more restrictive and new ones may be put into place. If you intend to leave campus, review the requirement documents for your return here.

Is a continuing student (currently enrolled or on OPT/STEM OPT) who has a program start date prior to August 1, 2021 eligible for the National Interest Exception to travel from Brazil, China, India, Iran, or South Africa?

Our current understanding is that students whose program start date is before August 1, 2021 are not eligible for NIE either to apply for a new visa (if their current visa is expired) at the U.S. Embassies and Consulates in Brazil, China, India, Iran, or South Africa, or to travel directly from these countries to the U.S. even if they hold a valid visa. We are receiving reports that students with program start dates prior to August 1, 2021 are either not granted a visa interview or unable to obtain new visas at the U.S. Embassies and Consulates in these countries. We are advocating through our professional networks, requesting that the Department of State provide further and clear guidance on this; but if your program start date on your I-20 is prior to August 1, 2021, we recommend that you reconsider your travel plans to these five countries as you might not be able to get a new visa (if your current one is expired) or travel directly from these countries to the U.S. even if you have a valid visa. If you must travel at this point and don’t need a new U.S. visa, your only option for return is to spend 14 days in a non-travel restricted country before returning to the U.S.
Is a continuing student (currently enrolled or on OPT/STEM OPT) who has a program start date prior to August 1, 2021 eligible for the National Interest Exception (NIE) to travel from the Schengen region, the United Kingdom, or Ireland?

Students with a valid F-1 visa should check the website of the U.S. embassy or consulate, but it does appear that if you have a valid visa you may travel directly to the United States without getting an NIE from the US consulate. If you need a new F-1 visa, please consult the consulate’s website for instructions. Students in J-1 status, even with a valid visa, must apply for the U.S. Consulate for an NIE.

I am an enrolled student and will travel outside the U.S. during the summer. How do I get a travel signature and what documents do I need to return to the U.S.?

You should request a travel signature from your OISS adviser. Your adviser will issue a new I-20 and email it to you as DHS continues to permit electronically issued I-20s. J-1 students will need to get a new original DS-2019 issued for travel.