FAQs for Current Students

Last Updated July 24, 2020

On July 24th ICE/DHS released Clarifying Questions for Fall 2020 [1] with a focus on how new/initial F-1 students could obtain a visa and study in the U.S. While OISS needs to complete a full analysis and get input from Yale’s leadership and our associations, the clarifications seem to bring good news for incoming international students at Yale.

The Department of Homeland Security announced on July 14th that the agency would be rescinding the July 6, 2020 ICE guidance, as well as the July 7, 2020 Frequently Asked Questions and all implementing guidance. In doing so, the agency reverts to the March 9th and 13th guidance that was announced as schools closed in the middle of the spring semester.

Continuing Yale F-1 students who will be physically in the United States for the fall semester can enroll in full-time study regardless of the modality of instruction (online, in-person, or hybrid). Based on the pre-July 6th guidance, we anticipate that the same will be true should continuing students decide to study remotely from outside the U.S.

OISS is working with Yale’s Office of General Counsel, Federal Relations and national associations to seek further clarification regarding Fall 2020 guidance. OISS will communicate any new official guidance regarding Fall 2020 as soon as it is available.

In addition to the FAQs below please continue to monitor university, and school specific policy regarding the fall semester including the recent communication about the Fall semester [2] from President Salovey and Provost Strobel.

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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 e-mailing any necessary I-20 updates directly to F-1 students, and making arrangements with any J-1 students as well.
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Published on Office of International Students & Scholars (https://oiss.yale.edu)

Immigration Status Questions

What does the rescission of July 6th guidance mean for method of study, either inside the U.S. or outside the U.S.?

According to the pre-July 6th Student Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) guidance, continuing F-1 students may study in-person or remotely, from inside the U.S. or while outside the U.S. If you are a returning F-1 student, your SEVIS record will remain active as long as you are enrolled full-time and make normal progress towards your degree. You may have a course load that is entirely online, or a combination of online, hybrid, or in-person classes. When classes resume fully in person, you must return to campus to maintain your immigration status.

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 Yale 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”[3] and report using “OISS U.S. Address”).

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

The Proclamation “suspends the entry into the United States” of some categories of J-1 visas. It does not affect the J-1 student category.

Are J-1 students allowed to study online?

On June 25th the U.S. State Department distributed an e-mail stating that J-1 visa sponsors could “….find alternative ways to maintain program objectives, including online classes or other arrangements, while preventing unnecessary exposure to COVID-19.” At present this appears to permit continuing students to study in-person or remotely, from inside the U.S. or while outside the U.S. If you are a returning J-1 student, your SEVIS record will remain active as long as you are enrolled full-time and make normal progress towards your degree.

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 International Travel Section[4] of the OISS web page. We also recommend that you continue to monitor travel updates by the CDC[5] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). If you need to apply for a new visa, it may be helpful to download and print this OISS letter[6] which addresses the Fall 2020 semester.

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[7] to the address you need it delivered to, and then contact your OISS adviser[8] 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?

In most cases yes. Yale is following public health guidelines and you will be asked to follow all instructions laid out on the Yale Health and Safety website [9].

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 [10] to SEVIS in order to stop the unemployment clock. Reporting tools are on the OPT Reporting Requirements webpage [11], 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](https://oiss.yale.edu) 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](https://oiss.yale.edu).

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](https://oiss.yale.edu) [11] 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 any 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 3-5 months, according to the [USCIS website](https://oiss.yale.edu). 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. There have been some reports of the OPT production systems slowing down, no further details are available at this time.

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) [13] (especially [submit the OPT request in OISS Connect](https://oiss.yale.edu) [14] 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) [8] 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 [15].

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 [16] 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.

Source URL: https://oiss.yale.edu/reopening-fall-2020/for-students/faqs-for-current-students

Links:
[1] https://nam05.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ice.gov%2Fdoclib%2Fsevis%2Fpdf%2Ffall2020faq.pdf&amp;data=02%7C01%7Cparker.emerson%40yale.edu%7Cfcbdb783cd1454260762008d830021800%7Cddd8cbebb21394d884114e3e87abeb5c%7C0%7C0%7C0%7C637312323835812093&amp;sdata=w0fV%2FgpusKJml%2BmHTaklMZSThzuerQcmV3BCWR%2Bo2I%3D&amp;reserved=0
[3] https://oiss.yale.edu/immigration/report-your-address/f-1-j-1-students
[7] https://oiss.yale.edu/about/courier-shipping
[8] https://oiss.yale.edu/about/contact-oiss