Traveling to the U.S.

There are many issues that will affect your decision and ability to travel to the U.S., and unfortunately with the ongoing global pandemic it is important to stay informed with up-to-date information. In addition to the information below you should also review the detailed information provided by NAFSA: Association of International Educators[1] regarding COVID-19 restrictions on U.S. visas and entry.

Whether you are traveling to the U.S. for the first time or re-entering, please review the information below carefully. At a minimum, you will need a valid passport, valid visa (except Canadian citizens) and a valid immigration document. Click the box below for details about your specific immigration status. If you have questions or concerns, check with your OISS adviser[2] before you make travel plans. If you had a difficult time entering or re-entering the U.S., please let us know.[3]

You can find detailed information below regarding what documents you need to carry with you, what you need to be aware of when entering the U.S., and what the I-94 record is and why it is important.

Information Specific to Visa Category

F-1 Students

F-1 Travel Document Checklist

- Valid, unexpired (Section #5) Form I-20 - also referred to as “Certificate of Eligibility for Non-Immigrant Student Status” - with an OISS travel signature on the bottom of page 2. This OISS travel signature should not be older than 12 months, and can be used for multiple entries. See note below for how to obtain a new travel signature.
- F-2 dependents must have their own I-20 forms meeting the same criteria above
- Valid passport (see note below)
- Valid F-1 or F-2 visa from a U.S. embassy (except for Canadian citizens who are not required to have a visa)
- There are additional documents needed to travel after graduation using F-1 OPT[4].

Obtaining a New Travel Signature

- F-1 Students: please contact your designated OISS adviser and they will electronically send you a new I-20 with a travel signature.
- J-1 Students: please bring your DS-2019 to the OISS office (421 Temple Street) during drop-in hours[5].

Passports

All international students, scholars and family members planning to depart from the U.S. and return after a temporary absence must have a valid passport in order to exit the U.S. The passport must also be valid for a minimum of six months into the future at the time of re-entry to the U.S. Some countries have an agreement with the U.S. that automatically extends passport validity for 6 months[6], for U.S. entry purposes only.

Visas

Except for Canadian citizens, all international students will also need to have a valid F-1 visa in their passport issued by a U.S. embassy or consulate. F-1 visas cannot be obtained or renewed inside the U.S.
J-1 Students

J-1 Travel Document Checklist

- Valid DS-2019 (not expired in Section #3) with an OISS travel signature in the Travel Validation section at bottom. The OISS signature should not be older than 12 months and is valid for multiple entries to the U.S. See note below for how to obtain a new travel signature.
- J-2 dependents must have their own valid DS-2019 forms
- Valid J-1 or J-2 visa from a U.S. embassy (except for Canadian citizens who are not required to have a visa)
- Valid passport (see note below)
- If graduated and authorized for Academic Training [7], a copy of the OISS authorization letter
- If Yale University is not your J-1 program sponsor, please contact them directly (e.g. Fulbright)

Obtaining a New Travel Signature

- F-1 Students: please contact your designated OISS adviser and they will electronically send you a new I-20 with a travel signature.
- J-1 Students: please bring your DS-2019 to the OISS office (421 Temple Street) during drop-in hours [5].

Passports

All international students and family members planning to depart from the U.S. and return after a temporary absence must have a valid passport in order to exit the U.S. The passport must also be valid for a minimum of six months into the future at the time of re-entry to the U.S. Some countries have an agreement with the U.S. that automatically extends passport validity for 6 months [6], for U.S. entry purposes only.

Visas

Except for Canadian citizens, all international students will also need to have a valid J-1 visa in their passport issued by a U.S. embassy or consulate. J-1 visa cannot be obtained or renewed inside the U.S.

Transit Visas When Changing Planes

If your travel plans require a change of planes in a third country, you must check to see if you need a transit visa. Some countries (including the U.S.) required an entry or transit visa, even if you are only changing planes and resuming your travels during a short time frame. Before purchasing your ticket, make certain you are aware of any travel requirements or restrictions.
Arriving in the U.S.: Immigration Inspection

What to expect during U.S. immigration inspection, and documents to have with you.
I-94 Record

What is the I-94 record and why it is important?

Current Travel Guidance and Restrictions

Advice for traveling in COVID times, such as preparing for your travel, restrictions, and possible issues.

Source URL: https://oiss.yale.edu/travel-visas/for-students/traveling-to-the-us

Links
[1] https://www.nafsa.org/regulatory-information/covid-19_restrictions_us_visas_and_entry
[2] https://oiss.yale.edu/about/contact-oiss
[3] https://oiss.yale.edu/about/connect-with-oiss
[4] https://oiss.yale.edu/immigration/f-1_students/employment/optional_practical_training/traveling_on_opt_after_graduation
[5] https://oiss.yale.edu/about/hours-directions-parking
[7] https://oiss.yale.edu/immigration/j-1_students/employment