Arriving in the U.S.: Immigration Inspection

Arriving in the U.S. [1]

Important Note:
The White House announced a new travel policy on October 25, 2021, Advancing the Safe Resumption of Global Travel During the Covid-19 Pandemic [2]. This proclamation, which will become effective at 12:01 AM (EST) on November 8, 2021, will revoke the four geographic travel ban restrictions and replace them with a global requirement that “noncitizens who are nonimmigrants” traveling to the U.S. by air from any part of the world establish that they are fully vaccinated, with some exceptions. OISS and other Yale offices are reviewing this proclamation carefully and will post additional clarifications as they become clear. For the time being, you can refer to this Fact Sheet published by the White House [3] and the COVID Vaccine and Test Requirements for U.S. Entry page published by NAFSA [4], the Association of International Educators.

Please note that the information below on this page has not been fully updated considering this recent announcement and still refers to the travel restrictions that remain in effect until November 8th. If you have any questions, please contact your OISS adviser [5].

Negative COVID Test Results
All air passengers arriving to the U.S. from another country are required to get tested no more than 1 day before you travel by air into the United States (U.S.) and show your negative result to the airline before you board your flight, or be prepared to show documentation of recovery (proof of a recent positive viral test and a letter from your healthcare provider or a public health official stating that you were cleared to travel). This rule applies regardless of vaccination status. For more information on this requirement, see the CDC’s Frequently Asked Questions [6].

Upon arrival, you will go through immigration inspection, where your electronic I-94 entry record will be created. Be sure to have your passport, immigration document, and the rest of the recommended items below with you. Do not pack them in your checked luggage.

Documents to Have On-Hand

With all of the COVID-19 related changes to both U.S. immigrations and the operation of U.S. universities, we want you to have all the documents that you may need in coming or returning to the U.S. When you arrive at the U.S. port of entry, the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer will certainly want to see the first three documents but may ask to see other documents on this list. The officer may also ask you to answer additional questions about your study plans. Documents #6-7 on this list relate to the current situation. Please review them.

Important Note:
Carry these documents with you - don't put them in your checked luggage

1. Valid Passport: must be valid at least 6 months into the future at the time of admission.
2. Valid U.S. Visa (Canadian citizens do not need a visa)
3. Your Immigration Document: a DS-2019 for J-1 status, an I-797 approval notice for H-1B holders, etc.
4. Receipt from paying the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) fee: if you are an F or J visa holder.
5. Copy of your hiring letter and proof of funds: while you may not be asked for it, it is advisable for new scholars to carry these documents as well. Proof of funds can include the same documents you submitted to obtain your DS-2019, such as bank statements.
6. Travelers from Schengen Area, United Kingdom, and Ireland: print off this bulletin from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection which notes that F-1 visa holders are able to travel.
7. Negative COVID Test Results: Effective January 26, 2021, all air passengers arriving to the US from another country are required to get tested for COVID-19 no more than 1 day 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.

Traveler Health Form

As of June 25, 2021, the New York State Travel Advisory is no longer in effect. As such, travelers arriving in New York are no longer required to submit traveler health forms. If you are entering the U.S. at other locations, please check the requirements for that state.

What to Expect at the U.S. Port of Entry

Your visa and other immigration documents are evidence of your eligibility to apply for admission in a particular visa status at a U.S. Port of Entry.

Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and is the government agency that controls admission to the United States. The CBP officer makes the final decision on your admission to the U.S. in a particular status and determines how long you may stay based on your documents.

1. Meet the CBP Officer

The officer will review your documents, inspect your bag, and ask you a few questions about the purpose of your travel to the U.S.

If all is in order, the officer will admit you to the U.S. and will stamp your passport with:

- date and place of arrival
- immigration status
- expiration of your stay in status

If the officer has additional questions, please see Secondary Inspection below for more information.

2. Confirm that your visa stamp is accurate

The CBP officer will admit you to the U.S. and stamp your passport with:

- date and place of arrival
- immigration status
- expiration of your stay in status

Before you leave the immigration check point, confirm that your visa information is correct. Make sure you have the small ink entry stamp with your visa classification and expiration date (“D/S” if you are F-1 or J-1) handwritten. The expiration date should match the end of the program (on the I-20 or DS-2019) plus a grace period.

Important Note:
If you do not have a stamp, or see the wrong visa classification written, request that the CBP officer give you a correct stamp. You may need to go to the Differed Inspection section of the airport.

3. Review your 1-94 (after arrival)
As soon as you have access to a computer please look-up your I-94 record [9] to make sure it is accurate. Print or save a copy on your device.

Secondary Inspection
Most Yale students and scholars will clear U.S. immigration after your documents are reviewed by a CBP officer. However, a few may be referred to another officer to verify your student status or for additional questioning. This is referred to as "secondary inspection [10]". Although a referral to secondary inspection can be intimidating and make you feel anxious, there is usually little cause for alarm. Be aware that it can take an hour or two to complete this inspection process.

If the CBP officer has questions that can be answered by OISS, ask the officer if they would like to call OISS for confirmation. During office hours, you can call your adviser directly [5] or the general office number, (203) 432-2305. After hours call the Yale Police Department at (203) 432-4400 who will immediately call the OISS director or associate director.

Get to New Haven
Find out how to get from the airport to your new home! [11]
[4] https://www.nafsa.org/regulatory-information/covid-vaccine-and-test-requirements-us-entry-0
[5] https://oiss.yale.edu/about/connect-with-oiss