



Department of  
International Student  
and Scholar Services



# FAQ

REGARDING COVID-19

## **I cannot or will not return to school when in-person instruction resumes, what happens to my SEVIS?**

Once CCNY returns to normal operations, if you cannot or choose not to return to the United States to study your record will be terminated.

## **How long will electronic I-20'S be valid for? Will I need another I-20 once this is all over?**

Forms I-20 issued electronically or with electronic signatures—as permitted during the COVID-19 emergency—will remain valid until students have a need for an updated Form I-20. An electronic or digital travel signature will be valid for the same duration as an ink signature.

## **Can I get a medical RCL due to the impact of COVID-19?**

A medical reduced course load may be appropriate for students who contract an illness due to COVID-19 or another condition and cannot maintain a full course load. Students may also choose to take a temporary absence if they do not want to participate in their school's alternative educational plans as provided in the school's operational change plan.

## **Can students with proper authorization participate in curricular practical training (CPT) while they are abroad?**

Students may engage in CPT during their time abroad, provided they are: Enrolled in a program of study in which CPT is integral to the program of study; Their DSO authorized CPT in advance of the CPT start date; and Either the employer has an office outside the United States or the employer can assess student engagement and attainment of learning objectives electronically.

## **Must I cease engaging in OPT if I am now working fewer than 20 hours a week due to the economic impacts of COVID?**

No, you can continue to work under OPT. For the duration of the COVID-19 emergency, SEVP considers students who are working in their OPT opportunities fewer than 20 hours a week as engaged in OPT.

## **Will there be an extension or suspension of the 90-day/150-day allowed period of unemployment for OPT and STEM OPT during the COVID-19 emergency?**

DHS is evaluating this issue but has not yet determined whether to implement a specific exemption for exceeding the regulatory limits for unemployment of 90 days for OPT and 150 days for STEM OPT.

## **I want to volunteer in COVID-19 relief efforts, do I need employment authorization?**

No, if you work without wages, taxable compensation or other monetary compensation this is considered volunteer work and you are not required to obtain an employment authorization document in order to participate.

## **Does time spent studying outside of the United States during the pandemic count toward the one-year requirement for CPT and OPT?**

An F-1 student accrues eligibility for practical training whether they are inside or outside of the United States during the COVID-19 emergency if the student is in Active status in SEVIS.

## How does CCNY switching to online remote learning affect my immigration status?

The Student and Visitor Exchange Program (SEVP) has confirmed that "If a school closes temporarily but offers online instruction or another alternative learning procedure, nonimmigrant students should participate in online or other alternate learning procedures and remain in active status in SEVIS." Furthermore, SEVP confirmed that international students may take full-time courses online either from within the US or from abroad.

This means that to maintain your immigration status you need to:

- Participate in online learning
- Continue to be enrolled full-time
- Make normal progress toward your degree

Regardless of where you are participating in online classes, your immigration status will remain active.

## Can I receive a signed I-20 while the campus is closed due to COVID-19?

Yes, due to COVID-19, DSOs will electronically send Forms I-20 to student email addresses listed in SEVIS. In the case of minor students, the email address may belong to their parent or legal guardian.

## My visa will expire soon/has already expired. If I leave the U.S. can I come back to the U.S. with my expired visa?

No, if you leave the U.S. and your visa expires by the time you want to return to the U.S. you must renew your visa at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate before you can return to the country. However, as of March 20, 2020, U.S. visa issuance has been suspended indefinitely due to COVID-19.

## If I am forced to leave my current residence (on-campus/off-campus) for another U.S. address, how can I notify the department?

During this time you will still need to report any change of residential address in the U.S. to the federal government, within 10 days. Please contact OISSS within 10 days via email at [OISSS@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:OISSS@ccny.cuny.edu) with the subject line: Reporting Change of Address

## My visa will expire soon but I am currently unable to return to my home country. What can I do?

Unlike your passport, your visa CAN expire while you are in the U.S. as long as your passport, I-94, and I-20 are valid. As long as your status is still valid and you continue to follow all immigration regulations, you can continue to remain in the U.S. even if your visa has expired.

## If I travel outside the U.S. during the COVID-19 pandemic, will I be able to return?

It is impossible to predict if and when further restrictions will be put in place by the U.S. Administration for travelers returning from high-risk countries.

You need to check the travel and visa restrictions that may be in place at the time you are planning to travel as this is still an emerging issue and the situation is consistently changing. If you are currently outside the U.S. or plan to travel outside the U.S., we recommend that you continue to monitor travel updates by the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).



Have more questions?  
Please e-mail us at  
[oisss@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:oisss@ccny.cuny.edu)

## I was conducting on-campus work before the pandemic, as an international student am I allowed to work remotely?

Yes, F-1's who have been authorized on-campus employment should email OISSS and indicate their SEVIS number and EMPL and whether they are working remotely if so, they should provide a brief description of work, the number of hours they will work a week and name of the student's supervisor. If they are not working, they should also indicate that. Please contact OISSS via email at [OISSS@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:OISSS@ccny.cuny.edu) with the subject:

*F-1 certified On-Campus employment Spring '20.*

## I want to apply to OPT. Can I do this from outside the U.S.?

You cannot submit your OPT application from aboard. **You must be physically in the U.S.** at the time you submit your Optional Practical Training (OPT) application. OISSS 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 contact us by email with any questions or concerns.

While we are no longer having in-person advising, we will still be holding online advising sessions. You can email your OPT application materials to OISSS and we will notify you if revisions should be made and how to proceed with the process. If you have not yet, please review the OISSS OPT instruction manual sent to you by the department, there you can find most of the instructions on how to proceed with the OPT process.

## How can I contact an advisor?

Due to COVID-19 and the closure of on-campus functions DSOs will electronically interact with students through phone at (212) 650-8106 and email at [OISSS@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:OISSS@ccny.cuny.edu) and the department is arranging methods to meet through video conferences.

## Can I travel after submitting my OPT application but before receiving my EAD card?

There is a higher risk associated with travel and return while your OPT is pending after the program completion date of your OPT EAD. If there are any problems with your application, you may not be able to respond to USCIS promptly, which could delay the processing of your EAD. If your OPT application is denied while outside the U.S., you will not be able to re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status and will not be able to reapply.

If you choose to travel with the OPT Pending, please carry the following:

- Valid F-1 visa
- Passport valid for at least more 6 months
- OPT Requested I-20 with the travel signature
- I-797A Notice of Action

## I am a J-1 student who's had my campus research functions hindered, what should I do?

J-1 students should contact OISSS and let the department know if they are still in the U.S. and how they are conducting the research remotely. They need to include the SEVIS number, address where they are working remotely from, name supervisor, a brief explanation of the work they are doing and the number of hours per week spent conducting research. Please contact OISSS via email at [OISSS@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:OISSS@ccny.cuny.edu) with the subject line: J-1 Scholar conducting research remotely.

## Can I apply for CPT from outside the U.S.?

Yes, if you qualify for CPT, you are still able to apply for CPT remotely. However, please beware of the current travel restrictions in place at the time of your return to the U.S. and how that will affect your participation at your internship.

## I do not have adequate internet access to participate in my online courses. What can I do?

If you are unable to complete normal progress on your degree because of inadequate internet access or because the university is not providing enough online courses for you to do so, you may be eligible for a reduced course load. To find out if you are eligible please contact the OISSS department via email at [OISSS@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:OISSS@ccny.cuny.edu) with the subject line: Reduced Course Load Eligibility and detail the reason why you are unable to continue making normal progress towards your degree.

## Due to COVID-19, what is the requirement for Initial status students who have not arrived in the United States yet?

As detailed by SEVP, Initial students currently in the United States that have reported to their school will be made active in SEVIS as long as they follow the guidelines the school provides to students related to COVID-19. If Initial students have not arrived in the United States, they should remain in their home country.

## I have a general question that I want answered immediately, how can I speak to someone at OISSS right now?

Due to COVID-19 and the closure of on-campus functions OISSS is hosting a virtual front desk open to international students Monday-Friday from 10AM-4PM. To gain access to the virtual front desk please email OISSS at [OISSS@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:OISSS@ccny.cuny.edu) and we will forward the virtual front desk contact information to you.

Please note that email replies will take longer than usual due to the sheer volume and frequency at which the department is receiving emails. We apologize for this inconvenience.

## I am unable to enroll for next semester. Can I transfer my I-901 SEVIS Fee payment to the following semester?

As long as you maintain the same SEVIS record, you do not need to transfer your I-901 SEVIS Fee payment. If you are unable to enroll for the upcoming semester (i.e. Fall 2020) you may defer your enrollment to the next available session (i.e. Spring 2021).

Fee transfers are only available to F & M students who already paid the I-901 SEVIS Fee and 1) Reapply for a visa within 12 months of the date of their initial I-901 SEVIS Fee payment or 2) Are from a Visa Waiver Program country and reapply for status as a student at the port of entry within 12 months of the date of their initial I-901 SEVIS Fee payment.

## When will students be able to return to campus as usual?

Dependent on their school's return to normal operations and any continuing travel restrictions, students should seek to return to the United States within 30 days of the next available session start date. SEVP also anticipates providing additional guidance after the COVID-19 emergency ends regarding a school's return to normal operations.

These provisions are currently *temporary* and are only in effect for the duration of the emergency. These provisions are *subject to change* with time and are under review by United States Department of Homeland Security.

Please check our site [www.ccny.cuny.edu/iss](http://www.ccny.cuny.edu/iss) for the most updated version of this document.

## If students remain in the United States due to COVID-19 and their passport expires, what do they need to do?

Students in this situation should contact their country's embassy or consulate to identify options for passport extension or renewal. If students decide to depart the United States, they will not be eligible to apply for admission until they renew their passport.

## I need to return home within 60 days after completing my program of study, but my travel plans are complicated by a lack of commercially available flights or my country currently prohibits all inbound travel?

SEVP recognizes that some students may find it difficult to return home during the COVID-19 emergency because of diminished travel options. Students in this situation are encouraged to communicate with their DSO for guidance and to assess options for alternative study arrangements such as online classes during this time.

These provisions are currently *temporary* and are only in effect for the duration of the emergency. These provisions are *subject to change* with time and are under review by United States Department of Homeland Security.

Please check our site [www.ccnycuny.edu/issv](http://www.ccnycuny.edu/issv) for the most updated version of this document.

## As a result of COVID-19, our school changed its grading policy for this term to pass/fail. Does this change affect my status?

No, this change should have no impact. Schools may change their grading policies as a direct result of COVID-19. As long as a student continues to make normal academic progress their status should not be affected.

## Where can I find COVID-19 related updates & information for J-1 exchange visitors?

Guidance for J exchange visitors is available on the Department of State's website,

## Where can I find more recent updates and information regarding COVID-19?

Please refer to official U.S. government sources such as the Center for Disease Control (CDC.gov), Department of Homeland Security (ICE.gov/COVID19), and Internationally accredited sources such as The World Health Organization (who.int)

## I traveled to my home country during spring break and my classes are now online but I have a return flight to the U.S.

SEVP advises students currently outside of the United States and looking to enter the country to check on any travel restrictions their country might have regarding international travel, including restrictions applicable to countries they may travel through. You can review travel restrictions to the U.S. through the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).



**CCNY**