

TRAVEL GUIDANCE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Last updated: July 2021

This FAQ is for general information purposes only and is subject to change. Please discuss your individual circumstances with Lauren Seo, Senior International Student Advisor, at Lauren.Seo@woodbury.edu or 818-252-5265 if you plan to travel or in advance of any change in the terms of your approved program or practical training.

SEVP GUIDANCE

Last updated: April 26, 2021

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) will extend the guidance originally issued in [March 2020](#) for the 2021-22 academic year. This guidance enables schools and students to engage in distance learning in excess of regulatory limits due to the continuing public health concerns created by COVID-19.

Continuing Students

As stated in the March 2020 guidance, Active F and M students will be permitted to temporarily count online classes toward a full course of study in excess of the regulatory limits stated in 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(6)(i)(G) and 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(m)(9)(v) for the 2021-22 academic year. The March 2020 guidance applies to continuing F and M nonimmigrant students who were in valid F-1 or M-1 nonimmigrant status on March 9, 2020, including those previously enrolled in entirely online classes who are outside of the United States and seeking to re-enter the country for the 2021-22 academic year.

Initial Students

In accordance with the March 2020 guidance, new or Initial F and M students who were not previously enrolled in a program of study on March 9, 2020, will not be able to enter the United States as a nonimmigrant student for the 2021-22 academic year if their course of study is 100 percent online. A new student should be allowed to enter the United States if they are engaged in a hybrid program, with some requirement for in-person learning. Consistent with this restriction, DSOs should not issue a Form I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status," for a student in new or Initial status who is outside of the United States and plans to take classes at an SEVP-certified educational institution that is operating fully online.

TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

Geographic COVID-19 Proclamations Affecting Entry from Certain Countries

Four COVID-19-related presidential proclamations (Proclamations [9984](#), [9992](#), [10143](#), and [Proclamation of April 30, 2021](#)) now limit entry to the United States by individuals who were physically present in a covered country during the 14-day period prior to their planned entry or attempted entry to the United States.

Note that whereas Proclamations 9984, 9992, and 10143 covering travel from China, Iran, Brazil, South Africa, Schengen Area, United Kingdom, and Ireland restrict entry by both "immigrants or nonimmigrants," the April 30, 2021 proclamation covering travel from India restricts only entry by

"nonimmigrants."

The Covered Countries

- Brazil (effective May 26, 2020)
- China (effective February 2, 2020)
- India (effective May 4, 2021)
- Iran (effective March 1, 2020)
- Ireland (effective March 12, 2020)
- Schengen Area: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland (effective March 12, 2020)
- South Africa (effective January 30, 2020)
- United Kingdom (effective March 12, 2020)

Exceptions to the geographic COVID-19 entry restrictions

The geographic COVID-19 travel restriction proclamations do **not** apply to U.S. citizens or nationals, or to any alien (noncitizen) who is:

- a citizen of the United States
- a noncitizen national of the United States
- a lawful permanent resident of the United States
- a noncitizen spouse of a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident
- a noncitizen parent or legal guardian of a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident, provided that the U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident is unmarried and under the age of 21;
- a noncitizen sibling of a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident, provided that both are unmarried and under the age of 21;
- a noncitizen child, foster child, or ward of a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident, or who is a prospective adoptee seeking to enter the United States pursuant to the IR-4 or IH-4 visa classifications;
- a noncitizen traveling at the invitation of the United States Government for a purpose related to containment or mitigation of the virus;
- C-1 (transit) or D-1 (air or sea crewmember) nonimmigrants, or "or any noncitizen otherwise traveling to the United States as air or sea crew"
- a noncitizen seeking entry into or transiting the United States pursuant to an A-1, A-2, C-2, C-3 (as a foreign government official or immediate family member of an official), G-1, G-2, G-3, G-4, NATO-1 through NATO-4, or NATO-6 visa;
- a noncitizen whose travel falls within the scope of section 11 of the United Nations Headquarters Agreement
- a noncitizen who is a member of the U.S. Armed Forces and spouses and children of members of the U.S. Armed Forces
- a noncitizen whose entry would further important United States law enforcement objectives, as determined by the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Homeland Security, or their respective designees based on a recommendation of the Attorney General or his designee; or
- a noncitizen whose entry would be **in the national interest**, as determined by the Secretary of

State, the Secretary of Homeland Security, or their designees. **F-1 STUDENTS: SEE BELOW***

National Interest Exceptions for F-1 students

On April 26, 2021, the Department of State updated its [National Interest Exception \(NIE\) page](#) to expand certain NIE eligibilities to China, Iran, Brazil, South Africa, Schengen Area, United Kingdom, and Ireland. [On April 30, 2021](#), the Department of State included India in its National Interest Exception (NIE) policies.

Key eligibilities for travelers who were present in China, Iran, Brazil, South Africa, the Schengen Area countries, the United Kingdom, Ireland, or India include:

- F-1 students subject to these geographic COVID proclamations due to their presence in India, China, Iran, Brazil, or South Africa, may qualify for a National Interest Exception only if their academic program begins August 1, 2021 or later.
- Students with a valid F-1 visa intending to begin or continue an academic program commencing August 1, 2021 or later DO NOT need to contact an embassy or consulate to seek an individual NIE to travel. They may enter the United States no earlier than 30 days before the start of their academic studies.
- Students seeking to apply for a new F-1 visa should check the status of visa services at the U.S. embassy or consulate website. To find embassy or consulate websites, go to <https://ustraveldocs.com/>. Those applicants who are found to be qualified for an F-1 or M-1 visa will automatically be considered for an NIE to travel.

Canada-Mexico "Essential Travel" Restrictions

Two Federal Register notices published on March 24, 2020 announced the decision to temporarily allow entry to the United States through land ports of entry along the U.S.-Canada and U.S. Mexico borders for "essential travel" only. The restrictions have been consistently extended on a monthly basis, and will be in effect until 11:59 p.m. EDT on May 21, 2021.

Canada Notices

- [U.S.-Canada Border Federal Register Notice](#) (original, published on March 24, 2020)
- [30-Day Extension Notice 16](#) (published on July 22, 2021) extends restrictions at the U.S.-Canada land border through **August 21, 2021**.

Mexico Notices

- [U.S.-Mexico Border Federal Register Notice](#) (original, published on March 24, 2020)
- [30-Day Extension Notice 16](#) (published on July 22, 2021) extends restrictions at the U.S.-Mexico land border through **August 21, 2021**.

Land Ports of Entry on Canadian and Mexican Borders

Travel through the land ports of entry and ferry terminals along the United States-Canada and United States-Mexico borders shall be limited to "essential travel," which includes, but is not limited to:

- U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents returning to the United States;
- Individuals traveling for medical purposes (e.g., to receive medical treatment in the United States);
- **Individuals traveling to attend educational institutions;**
- Individuals traveling to work in the United States (e.g., individuals working in the farming or agriculture industry who must travel between the United States and Canada in furtherance of such work);
- Individuals traveling for emergency response and public health purposes (e.g., government officials or emergency responders entering the United States to support Federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial government efforts to respond to COVID-19 or other emergencies);
- Individuals engaged in lawful cross-border trade (e.g., truck drivers supporting the movement of cargo between the United States and Canada);
- Individuals engaged in official government travel or diplomatic travel;
- Members of the U.S. Armed Forces, and the spouses and children of members of the U.S. Armed Forces, returning to the United States; and
- Individuals engaged in military-related travel or operations.

The following travel does not fall within the definition of "essential travel":

- Individuals traveling for tourism purposes (e.g., sightseeing, recreation, gambling, or attending cultural events).

U.S. CONSULAR AND VISA SERVICES

Phased Resumption of Routine Visa Services

[Department of State Visa Services Operating Status Update](#)

Last Updated: April 6, 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to severely affect the ability of embassies and consulates around the world to be able to resume routine visa services. The particular constraints vary based on local conditions and restrictions, but include local and national lockdowns; travel restrictions; host country quarantine regulations; and measures taken by our embassies and consulates to contain the spread of COVID-19. Combined, these restrictions have reduced appointment capacity during the pandemic, which has created a significant backlog of both immigrant and nonimmigrant visa applicants awaiting a visa interview. The State Department is working to reduce this backlog while ensuring the safety of our staff and applicants and protecting our national security.

In an [April 30, 2021 news alert](#), the Department of State announced the following prioritization within immigrant visa (IV) processing:

U.S. embassies and consulates are using a tiered approach to triage immigrant visa applications based on the category of immigrant visa as they resume and expand processing. While our consular sections, where possible, are scheduling some appointments within all four priority tiers every month, the following lists the main categories of immigrant visas in priority order:

- Tier One: Immediate relative intercountry adoption visas, age-out cases (cases where the

applicant will soon no longer qualify due to their age), and certain Special Immigrant Visas (SQ and SI for Afghan and Iraqi nationals working with the U.S. government)

- Tier Two: Immediate relative visas; fiancé(e) visas; and returning resident visas
- Tier Three: Family preference immigrant visas and SE Special Immigrant Visas for certain employees of the U.S. government abroad
- Tier Four: All other immigrant visas, including employment preference and diversity visas, including F-1 student visas. F-1 students may qualify for an emergency visa appointment if the U.S. embassy or consulates in their country have appointment capacity, but with no guarantee of success.

Visa applicants should check the website of the [nearest Embassy or Consulate](#) for the current operating status. Information about nonimmigrant visa wait times are available on the visa wait time tool at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/wait-times.html>.

Visa Interview Waiver Program

Some visa applicants may not need a visa interview if they qualify for the Interview Waiver Program. Note that the Visa Interview Waiver Program is different from the [Visa Waiver Program \(VWP\)](#). The VWP facilitates travel without the requirement of a visa by nationals of certain countries.

To be eligible for a potential interview waiver, the F, M, or J visa applicant's application must have been filed within 48 months of the expiration of his or her prior visa in the same category.

Please refer to the [U.S. Visa Guidelines](#) for more information about the visa interview waiver program eligibility and requirements or contact Lauren Seo, Senior International Student Advisor, at Lauren.Seo@woodbury.edu or 818-252-5265

Visa-Related Questions

What about the visa application fee that expired while routine services were suspended?

The Machine Readable Visa (MRV) fee is valid within one year of the date of payment and may be used to schedule a visa appointment in the country where it was purchased. The Department extended the validity of MRV fees until September 30, 2022, to allow all visa applicants who were unable to schedule a visa appointment due to the suspension of routine consular operations an opportunity to schedule and/or attend a visa appointment with the fee they already paid.

Will there be refunds available for the visa applicants if they cannot attend because the US Embassies and Consulates are not open?

No visa fee refunds are available at this time for those applicants who have not been able to schedule or cannot attend a visa interview due to a COVID-19-related closure.

Once nonimmigrant visa interviews start happening again, will priority be given to those whose visa eligibility deadline would be coming up soon in terms of an interview slot?

Most visa sections worldwide schedule visa interviews for students and exchange visitors separately from regular B1/B2 visa applicants (visitors for business and tourism). Therefore, the wait time for a

student or exchange visitor is generally much shorter than the wait time for a B1/B2 applicant. In addition, the visa sections worldwide routinely expedite visa interviews for students and exchange visitors upon request if there is a compelling need to expedite visa processing.

Is the Department considering a visa application process that substitutes video interviews for in-person interviews in order to expedite the process when consular sections reopen?

The Department of State has no plans to substitute video interviews for the in-person visa interview.

Could the Consulates and Embassies especially in China and India where we have high student populations consider issuing student and scholar visas (F & J) via mail in documents and interviews via skype or face time, instead of in person?

The Department of State has no plans to substitute video interviews for the in-person visa interview. Consular officers may grant interview waivers for those renewing a visa in the same visa classification. To be eligible for a potential interview waiver, the F, M, or J visa applicant's application must have been filed within 12 months of the expiration of his or her prior visa in the same category.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Can I travel with an electronic Form I-20?

Yes, both the Department of State and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection allow all electronic issuance and signing of Forms I-20 for the duration of the COVID19 emergency.

What if I need to travel internationally while the restrictions are in place?

CDC has issued several travel advisories concerning coronavirus (COVID-19). For more information, visit the [COVID-19 Travel Recommendations by Destination](#) website.

You are strongly encouraged to reconsider any nonessential international travel plans. A decision to cancel traveling should be based on [advice](#) and [situation reports](#) from the World Health Organization, [advisories](#) from the U.S. State Department, and [notices](#) from CDC. You can search for official updates on the country where you intend to travel on the CDC's [Travel Health Notice page](#) and monitor airline service and immigration policy updates to consider alternative plans, if warranted.

If you are not able to cancel your travel plans and are not considered to be at high risk for severe illness, keep in mind that there is a possibility you may get stuck in a foreign country. This may be due to a country's restriction on where individuals can visit or whether anyone is allowed to enter from affected areas.

If you do decide to still travel to an impacted area:

- Thoroughly wipe down surfaces you come into contact with
- Wash your hands frequently
- Avoid sick people
- Transit quickly through airports
- Purchase a medical insurance policy for your trip

- Build redundancy into your plans and add time for delays
- Create a detailed itinerary of where you will be and when and give it to someone you trust
- Bring a 30 day supply of your medication including the original prescription should you need a refill
- Pack extra batteries, communication devices, food/water, eyeglasses, financial tools, lodging, airfare, passport, proof of health insurance, etc.,
- Bring work or school materials in case you get stuck
- Ensure you have all required documents for reentry to the U.S. (passport, valid visa, an I-20 with a valid travel signature, and EAD-*for students on OPT/STEM OPT extension only*).
- Expect possible secondary inspection upon reentry to the U.S., as well as possible delays for health screenings in third countries, all requiring extra time and delaying travel.

I am a current WU student and cannot return for classes due to the travel restrictions. What does that mean for me?

If you may need remote access to your classes, please complete and submit the [Fall 2021 Remote Class Access Accommodation Form](#). For all questions, please contact Disability Services at disabilities@woodbury.edu. Any accommodations granted for remote access to courses are for all courses and students cannot access campus facilities.

Another option may include requesting a leave of absence (LOA). Please contact Lauren Seo, Senior International Student Advisor, at Lauren.Seo@woodbury.edu or 818-252-5265 immediately to discuss the immigration implications and procedures.

What if I am currently in the U.S. but am self-quarantined at home?

You may submit a request to Lauren Seo, Senior International Student Advisor, at Lauren.Seo@woodbury.edu or 818-252-5265 for consideration of a reduced course load for medical reasons. This is an exception to the normal full-time enrollment requirements for students who are unable to maintain their full-time studies for a medical reason. Currently, there is no new regulatory relief under U.S. immigration law or regulations in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

I am completing my degree program this fall but will continue my studies in a new degree program at WU or after transferring to another U.S. university in the fall. Must I leave the country?

Generally no, but discuss your specific situation with the Senior International Services Advisor. International students on an F-1 visa are generally permitted to remain in the U.S. during the *transfer pending* period, including the summer between completion of one program and the start of a new program, if the following criteria are met:

- The student must maintain status at the current school.
- The student has been admitted to the transfer-in school/program.
- A new program must begin at the next available term or session, which must be no more than 5 months from the end of the program at the current school.
- The student must be eligible for an I-20 at the transfer-in school/program.

What if my program has ended and I am currently in my grace period?

Unfortunately, there is no regulatory relief available to students in this situation, and such individuals are expected to depart the U.S. by the end of the grace period. Discuss your options with Lauren Seo, Senior International Student Advisor immediately, which may include:

- Gaining admission to a new degree program at WU or another U.S. school and transferring your I-20;
- Requesting a change of status with USCIS, applying for Optional Practical Training (OPT);
- If available, seeking admission to another country other than your home country; OR
- Returning to your home country.

Final semester at WU	Last day of 60-day grace period
Fall 2021	February 13, 2022
Spring 2022	July 14, 2022
Summer 2022	October 18, 2022

My visa is expiring, and I am unable to travel to my home country at this time. What should I do?

You may stay in the U.S. on an expired F-1 visa as long as you maintain the immigration status by having a valid passport and active I-20. A valid visa stamp is only needed at the time of entry into the U.S., with very limited exceptions.

Please contact Lauren Seo, Senior International Student Advisor, at lauren.seo@woodbury.edu or 818-252-5265 if you have questions regarding your visa or immigration status.

How would a temporary move to online classes impact international students with F-1 visas whose instruction must occur in person?

WU adheres to the guidance from the Student Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP), which is a unit within the Department of Homeland Security that oversees the F-1 international student visa program. Due to the rapidly evolving COVID-19 situation, SEVP recently issued guidance to universities that allows for increased flexibility to ensure international students can continue their academic progress. Universities can implement temporary adjustments such as moving to online instruction without negatively impacting the immigration status of enrolled international students.

SUPPORT

We recognize that the situation with COVID-19 may be stressful for members of our community, especially those with family and friends in other areas of the world. The Woodbury University community is here to support you. International students can find resources at woodbury.edu/student-life/living/safety-security or get in contact with the Senior International Student Advisor, at Lauren.Seo@woodbury.edu or 818-252-5265, or email HelpDeskCampusSecurity@woodbury.edu

RESOURCES

Woodbury University Coronavirus Updates <https://woodbury.edu/student-life/living/safety-security/>

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Coronavirus Disease 2019 Information for Travel

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>

U.S. Department of State Travel Advisories

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories.html/>

U.S. Department of State COVID-19 Country Specific Information_

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/COVID-19-Country-Specific-Information.html>

NAFSA Coronavirus Critical Resources

<https://www.nafsa.org/regulatory-information/coronavirus-critical-resources>

County of Los Angeles County Public Health

<http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/>

State of California-California Coronavirus (COVID-19) Response

<https://covid19.ca.gov/>