

Updated as of March 31, 2020

Dear Students,

The University of Louisville and the ISSS staff are committed to supporting you during this global health crisis. We are truly in uncharted territory, but we will navigate through this together. Please don't hesitate to reach out to us during this difficult time, but please be aware that changes are occurring often.

As you well know, the guidance on COVID-19 is dynamic and fast-moving. Due to this, we are asking that you make sure to regularly check [the UofL COVID-19 Information page](#) and refer back to our FAQs below.

Now more than ever, we need to watch out for each other and treat each other with respect. That is why, it is vital that we all act proactively and follow all health guidelines and observe social distancing to safeguard our own health and the well-being of those with whom we come in contact.

Take care to you and your families.

ISSS Staff

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If you have other questions and concerns, please email [iss@louisville.edu](mailto:iss@louisville.edu). We might not be able to respond to every individual email immediately, but we will continue to compile all the questions and provide answers here.

## **Immigration Status**

### **1. How does switching to online instruction affect my immigration status?**

We know that you are worried about how the recent changes in the mode of education, as well as the location of your participation in online learning, will affect your immigration status. U.S. universities received guidance from the Department of Homeland Security that allows students to continue this semester's courses online without jeopardizing their 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, and make normal progress toward your degree. Regardless of where you are participating in online classes, your immigration status will remain active.

### **2. If I vacate my current on or off campus residence and relocate to a new U.S. address, do I need to report it within 10 days? Where do I report?**

Yes, you need to report any change of residential address in the U.S. to the federal government, within 10 days. Please report address changes to the ISSS office within 10 days via email to [iss@louisville.edu](mailto:iss@louisville.edu).

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## Travel

### **3. Will the five-month rule apply to my visa if I go back home and stay away from UofL until the Fall semester?**

If you are maintaining full-time status until the end of the Spring Semester, then you are entitled to your annual summer vacation. According to the immigration regulations, an F-1 or J-1 student is in status during the annual (or summer) vacation if the student is eligible and intends to register for the next term. If you maintain your immigration status, the 5-month rule does not come into effect. Remember that when classes resume in person, you must return to campus to maintain your immigration status.

### **4. Will I be able to come back to the U.S.?**

As you all know, we are in uncharted territory regarding international mobility. It is impossible to predict if and when further restrictions will be put in place by the U.S. or your home countries. You need to check the travel and visa restrictions that may be in place at the time you are planning to travel as the situation is changing daily. 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 CDC](#)** (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). As of March 18, 2020 [routine U.S. visa issuance has been suspended worldwide](#) and daily restrictions on travel are being implemented. ISSS is carefully monitoring updates from the CDC, SEVP, USCIS, and the US Department of State, as well as updates from NAFSA: Association of International Educators, the leading professional organization dedicated to international education and exchange, which is providing comprehensive and up-to-date [information relevant to travel, consulates, and visas](#).

### **5. I am having trouble securing a flight back home, what should I do?**

There are no issues if you need to remain in the US. The ISSS office will work with you to keep you in status; please see the information at the bottom of how to maintain your status if you are completing soon. If you are a continuing student then you will remain in-status, but if you have any concerns contact us at [iss@louisville.edu](mailto:iss@louisville.edu). The University of Louisville is committed to staying open during this time and will have housing available for students in need. However, if you are trying to travel, it is advised that you contact your embassy or consulate in the US to determine the best course of action for your specific case. This also allows for you to get the most up to date information that is being posted by your country. You can find a list of the embassies within the US at <https://embassy.goabroad.com/embassies-in/united-states>.

### **6. My visa is expiring, and I am unable to travel to my home country currently. What should I do?**

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.)

### **7. My visa is expiring/has expired. If I leave the U.S. now, but must come back after the expiration date of my visa, will I need a new visa, or can I re-enter on an expired visa?**

If you leave the U.S. and 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. (Canadian citizens do not need a visa to enter the U.S.) The U.S. State Department announced on March 18<sup>th</sup> that [routine U.S. visa issuance has been suspended indefinitely worldwide.](#)

**8. I am an international student currently studying abroad, and I have concerns about my visa status. What should I do?**

If you are an international student studying abroad this spring semester and have concerns, please contact the ISSS office to discuss how a decision to remain or depart early may affect your U.S. immigration status.

**9. 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.

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## Employment

**9. 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. The ISSS is still assisting students in applying for OPT and will either take appointments, virtual advising, phone advising, or through mail. Contact ISSS if you have any questions.

**10. 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 the ISSS 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.

**11. Will the suspension of U.S. visa issuance (announced on March 18<sup>th</sup>) affect the processing of OPT?**

A citizen of a foreign country who seeks to enter the United States generally must first obtain a U.S. visa, which is placed in the traveler's passport and is issued by the U.S. Department of State (DoS) via U.S. Embassies and Consulates around the world. Optional Practical Training (OPT), on the other hand, is a temporary work authorization for employment that is directly related to an F-1 student's major area of study. OPT is adjudicated by USCIS (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services), which is an agency of the

U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). As a result, U.S. visa issuance and OPT adjudication are undertaken by different agencies and are not directly related. So, DoS's announcement on March 18<sup>th</sup> of temporary suspension of U.S. visa issuance worldwide will not affect the adjudication of your OPT application. As of this date, USCIS continues to process certain applications, including OPT.

**12. Will the temporary closure of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) field offices and suspension of USCIS in-person services affect my OPT application?**

As of March 18<sup>th</sup>, [USCIS temporarily closed its domestic field offices](#) and has suspended routine in-person services until at least April 1<sup>st</sup> to help slow the spread of COVID-19. However, USCIS staff will continue to perform duties that do not involve contact with the public. OPT applications are adjudicated at the USCIS Service Centers (specifically at the Potomac Service Center in VA) and not at the field offices. In addition, OPT adjudications do not involve any contact with the public. For these reasons, we do not anticipate your OPT application being affected by this recent closure of USCIS field offices.

**13. Can I apply for CPT (Curricular Practical Training) for my summer internship from outside the U.S.?**

Yes, at this time, if you are eligible for CPT, ISSS will continue to process your request as normal until we hear otherwise. Please refer to our answer above regarding your ability to travel back to the U.S. if you are currently outside the U.S. or plan to leave soon.

**14. My employer registered me for H-1B lottery. Can I leave the U.S. now?**

If your employer has already registered you for the H-1B lottery, please consult your employer and their immigration counsel before you make any international travel plans. ISSS advisers cannot answer travel related questions regarding your H-1B petition sponsored by your employer.

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## **Post-Graduation Options to Remain in the U.S.**

**15. I will graduate in May 2020, and my plan was to return to my home country. After I graduate, I would prefer to stay in the United States for now. What are my options?**

You have three options:

Remain in the U.S. and apply for [Optional Practical Training \(OPT\)](#) (for F-1 students) or [Academic Training](#) (for J-1 students).

Remain in the U.S. during the grace period after your program end date (which you can find on your I-20 or DS-2019). The grace period is 60 days for F-1 students and 30 days for J-1 students.

Pursue another degree in the United States (either at UofL) or transfer (if eligible) your SEVIS record to another institution. See [here](#) for F-1 Transfer, and [here](#) for J-1 Transfer.

Change to another nonimmigrant classification (H-1B for example)