Dear International Students,

The Office of International Students is reaching out to our international student community during this difficult time to provide you with important updates and guidance from US Government Agencies and to provide answers to some of your frequently asked questions.

The Office of International Students physical office at the Graduate Center is temporarily closed. However, we are still open virtually and are working remotely Monday through Friday from 9:00 am to 5:00 PM. We are providing all advising services and issuing I-20 and DS-2019 forms to students while working remotely. If you have any questions or need to request any services from our office, please email intstu@gc.cuny.edu. We are here to support you.

**Coronavirus Reporting:**
International Students who believe that they may have been exposed to coronavirus or who are diagnosed with COVID-19, please notify us.

Students should contact Matthew Schoengood, Vice President for Students Affairs, at mschoengood@gc.cuny.edu.

The following information should be included in the email:

- Name and Graduate Center affiliation
- Current symptoms and date they appeared
- Date and location you were last on campus
- How you believe you may have been infected

https://www.gc.cuny.edu/News/Coronavirus-Guidance-and-Updates

If you are unable to attend your courses online for the spring 2020 semester due to COVID-19 related issues, please contact the Office of International Students at intstu@gc.cuny.edu to discuss your options for a reduced course load authorization or leave of absence depending on your situation.

The Office of International Students has been monitoring the COVID19 related travel restrictions and the updated policies and guidance from US Government Agencies related to F-1 and J-1 international students. Please find below important information and updates for international F-1 and J-1 students.

**SPRING 2020 Enrollment and Maintaining Status:**

Due to COVID19, CUNY has transitioned to an online learning environment for the spring 2020 semester. SEVP has permitted F-1 and J-1 students to maintain their legal status while they are enrolled full-time in online courses/credits for the spring 2020 semester. Students may be inside the US or outside of the US during this time and their SEVIS record will remain in active status.

If due to medical reasons, you are unable to maintain your full-time enrollment for spring 2020, please contact the Office of International Students at intstu@gc.cuny.edu. SEVP will allow a student to apply for a medical reduced course load authorization or a medical leave of absence with a letter from either a Licensed Physician (MD), Doctor of Osteopathy (DO), or a Licensed Clinical Psychologist. The request must be approved by the Office of International Students, authorized in SEVIS and issued on your I-20 form before dropping below full-time enrollment. Please contact our office for further details.
It is important that F-1 and J-1 students maintain their nonimmigrant student status, even during emergency events. This means you must continue to take all the necessary actions to remain in status, to the extent possible under the circumstances. You must also communicate with the Office of International Students if you will be abroad for the spring 2020 semester. If you have moved, even temporarily, you must report any changes to your US address or home country address within 10 days of the change. You may submit the address change form to our office at intstu@gc.cuny.edu.

**EMPLOYMENT**

**Curricular Practical Training:**

If you have remained in the United States and are participating in Curricular Practical Training (CPT) for the spring 2020 semester, SEVP recommends students to communicate and work with your employer to maintain practical training agreements. If changes have been made to your workplace environment, SEVP encourages you to consult with your employer to seek alternative ways to maintain training agreements, such as teleworking or other arrangements. The employer must be able to assess student engagement and attainment of learning objectives electronically. You will need to remain enrolled in the CPT course/credits for spring 2020 which supports the CPT authorization.

If you have departed the United States and are authorized for Curricular Practical Training (CPT) Off-Campus Employment Authorization, SEVP has clarified that you may continue to work for the CPT employer while abroad if you are:

- Enrolled in a program of study in which CPT is integral to the program of study;
- The 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.

You will need to remain enrolled in the CPT course/credits for spring 2020 which supports the CPT authorization.

**CPT Unemployment:** If you lost your CPT employment due to COVID19, please email the Office of International Students at intstu@gc.cuny.edu to inform us. Please provide us with the name of the employer and the date your CPT employment ended. The Office of International Students is required to shorten the CPT authorization in your SEVIS record and on your I-20 form to the new CPT end date. It is also important to notify your academic department of when your CPT employment ended as the employment was directly related to the curriculum of your program of study and is linked to your registration in a course or credits for spring 2020.

**Optional Practical Training**

Applying for OPT: If you departed the United States and will deposit your dissertation/thesis/capstone to complete all of your degree requirements for your program of study while you are abroad, you will not be eligible to apply to the USCIS for Post-Completion OPT. F-1 students are not eligible to apply to the USCIS for Post-Completion from outside of the United States. If you wish to apply for Post-Completion OPT, you would need to return to the US in F-1 status and once you were back in the US in F-1 status, you would be able to complete the remaining degree requirements for your program of study (e.g. deposit).
You may apply to the USCIS for OPT 90 days prior to the degree requirements completion date (e.g. deposit date) or during the 60 day period following the degree requirements completion date. USCIS processing times for OPT applications are normally 90 to 120 days. The USCIS processing times could increase due to COVID-19. Information regarding the OPT application process, the forms to apply, and our OPT calculators are available on our website.

Currently Authorized for OPT: Students who are authorized for Post-Completion OPT must continue to work 20 hours or more per week and may not exceed 90 days of unemployment. OPT employment must be directly related to your field of study and may be paid or unpaid. Due to COVID19, SEVP recommends students to communicate and work with their OPT employer to maintain practical training agreements. If changes have been made to your workplace environment, SEVP encourages you to consult with your employer to seek alternative ways to maintain training agreements, such as teleworking or other arrangements.

Students who are authorized for OPT and have departed the United States may continue to work for their OPT employer remotely while they are abroad. The employer must be able to assess student engagement and attainment of learning objectives electronically. It is recommended to obtain a letter from the OPT employer which indicates the job description, outlines the remote working arrangement, describes how the training will be provided and supervised electronically, the number of hours per week, and the salary amount, if applicable. Please keep this letter for your records.

If you have lost your OPT employment due to COVID19, to avoid or limit the accrual of unemployment days, students have the option of engaging in unpaid volunteer positions in the US that are directly related to their field of study and provide a practical training experience.

Please report all OPT employment information to the Office of International Students within 10 days of the change (e.g. starting a new job, ending a job) using the OPT Reporting Form. Any changes that have been made to your OPT employment due to COVID19 (e.g. unemployment, remote working arrangements, change of employment location, working abroad for OPT employer, etc.) should be reported to the Office of International Students by emailing the OPT reporting form to intstu@gc.cuny.edu.

STEM Optional Practical Training

Applying for STEM OPT: If you are in a STEM eligible degree and meet all the eligibility criteria to apply for a STEM OPT extension, your application must be received by the USCIS before your current OPT authorization and EAD Card expires. You must be in the United States to apply to the USCIS for STEM OPT. If you are interested in applying for STEM OPT, please email the Office of International Students at intstu@gc.cuny.edu for assistance with the process.

Currently Authorized for STEM OPT: Students who are authorized for STEM OPT must work 20 hours or more per week for their STEM OPT employer. STEM OPT employment must be directly related to your field of study and must be a paid position. Due to COVID19, SEVP recommends students to communicate and work with their STEM OPT employer to maintain practical training agreements. If changes have been made to your workplace environment, SEVP encourages you to consult with your employer to seek alternative ways to maintain training agreements, such as teleworking or other arrangements. Please submit a STEM OPT reporting form and an updated I-983 form for any material changes to your STEM OPT employment to the Office of International Students.

Students who are authorized for STEM OPT and have departed the United States may continue to work for their STEM OPT employer remotely while they are abroad. The employer must be able to assess student engagement and attainment of learning objectives electronically. Please submit to our office a STEM OPT Reporting form and an updated I-983 form for any material changes to your STEM OPT employment. It is recommended to obtain a letter from the STEM OPT employer which indicates the job description, outlines the remote working arrangement, describes how the training will be provided and supervised electronically, the number of hours per week, and the salary amount, if applicable. Please keep this letter for your records.
If due to COVID19 you lose your STEM OPT employment, please submit a completed I-983 final evaluation form and a completed STEM OPT reporting form to the Office of International Students within 10 days of ending the STEM OPT employment. Our office will update your STEM OPT employer information in your SEVIS record and provide you with an updated I-20 form. DHS allows STEM OPT students an additional 60 days of unemployment during the 24-month STEM OPT extension period. This is in addition to the 90-day maximum period of unemployment that students are allowed during the initial period of post-completion OPT. Students who obtain a 24-month STEM OPT extension are therefore allowed a maximum of 150 days of unemployment. https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-extension-overview

Unemployment Benefits for OPT and STEM OPT Authorized Students:

If you are authorized by the USCIS for OPT or STEM OPT with an unexpired EAD card and lost your job due to COVID19, you might be eligible to file for unemployment benefits. Eligibility for unemployment benefits vary by state. You will need to check eligibility requirements with the appropriate state unemployment office. Please contact the appropriate state unemployment office with any questions you may have regarding eligibility for unemployment benefits and application procedures.

In New York State, your EAD card must still be valid for at least 60 days into the future to be eligible. Information regarding New York State Unemployment Benefits is available at: https://labor.ny.gov/ui/claimantinfo/beforeyouapplyfaq.shtm#23

According to the Federal Register and USCIS, receiving unemployment benefits will not be considered a public charge.

Information regarding public charge and COVID19 exceptions is available at https://www.uscis.gov/greencard/public-charge

Information regarding public charge policies is available at: https://www.uscis.gov/news/fact-sheets/public-charge-fact-sheet

According to the Federal Register (Page 41,390):

Response: While the proposed rule included state and local and tribal cash benefits for income maintenance, DHS excluded state, local, and tribal non-cash benefits from consideration in the public charge inadmissibility determination because of the number of public benefits that exist and the administrative burden such a rule would have imposed on DHS and the state and local public benefit granting agencies. In addition, including all state and local benefits would add vagueness and confusion as to what public benefits would be considered. Consistent with the proposed rule, DHS will continue to exclude state, local, and tribal benefits that are not cash-benefits for these reasons. Further, DHS would not consider federal and state retirement, Social Security retirement benefits, Social Security Disability, postsecondary education, or unemployment benefits as public benefits under the public charge inadmissibility determination as these are considered to be earned benefits through the person’s employment and specific tax deductions. https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/08/14/2019-17142/inadmissibility-on-public-charge-grounds

International Travel: If you have travelled or will travel outside of the US, please contact the Office of International Students at instu@gc.cuny.edu and provide us with your travel dates, your US mailing address, and copies of your I-20 or DS-2019 form, F-1 or J-1 visa, and the biographical page of your passport. We will review your documents and if required provide you with an updated I-20 with travel signature for your return to the US.
A valid F-1 or J-1 visa is required for all international students (except Citizens of Canada) for their re-entry to the United States in F-1 or J-1 status. If you will need to apply for a visa for your re-entry to the US, please contact the Office of International Students at intstu@gc.cuny.edu as you will need to apply for an updated I-20 or DS-2019 form for your visa appointment at the US Consulate.

Please be cautious traveling and refer to guidance from the CDC, U.S. Department of State, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for specific port-of-entry screening processes, as well as any travel restrictions.

Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, quarantines, visa processing suspensions, and cancellations of flights we recommend contacting your academic department to discuss your options if you are delayed with your reentry to the United States. Please also inform the Office of International Students if your entry will be delayed beyond the fall 2020 semester start date (August 26, 2020).

U.S. Canada and U.S. Mexico Borders: 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. Individuals traveling to attend educational institutions (F-1 and J-1 students) are considered as essential travel and will be allowed entry.

Visa Processing Suspensions: The Department of State temporarily suspended all visa application processing at all US Consulates worldwide. It is not yet known when visa processing services will resume. [https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/ea/routine-visa-services-suspended-worldwide.html](https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/ea/routine-visa-services-suspended-worldwide.html)

Travel Restrictions: The President has issued four COVID-19-related proclamations to limit travel to the United States:

1. **China Travel Proclamation.** January 31, 2020 - [Proclamation 9984 of January 31, 2020](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/01/31/2020-03929/proclamation-on-suspension-of-entry-as-immigrants-and-nonimmigrants-of-persons-who-pose-a-risk-of-transmitting-2019-novel-coronavirus), published at 85 FR 6709, titled *Proclamation on Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Nonimmigrants of Persons who Pose a Risk of Transmitting 2019 Novel Coronavirus*. The proclamation cites INA 212(f) to suspend entry into the United States of all aliens (immigrants, nonimmigrants, and other non-U.S. citizens) who were physically present within the People’s Republic of China, excluding the Special Autonomous Regions of Hong Kong and Macau, during the 14-day period preceding their entry or attempted entry into the United States. This coronavirus travel ban is effective starting 5 p.m. on Sunday, February 2, 2020.

2. **Iran Travel Proclamation.** February 29, 2020 - [Proclamation 9992 of February 29, 2020](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/02/29/2020-05242/proclamation-on-the-suspension-of-entry-as-immigrants-and-nonimmigrants-of-certain-additional-persons-who-pose-a-risk-of-transmitting-2019-novel-coronavirus), published at 85 FR 12855, titled *Proclamation on the Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Nonimmigrants of Certain Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting Coronavirus*. The proclamation cites INA 212(f) to suspend entry into the United States of all aliens (immigrants, nonimmigrants, and other non-U.S. citizens) who were physically present within the Islamic Republic of Iran during the 14-day period preceding their entry or attempted entry into the United States. This coronavirus travel ban is effective starting 5:00 p.m. eastern standard time on March 2, 2020.

3. **European Schengen Area Proclamation.** March 11, 2020 - [Proclamation 9993 of March 11, 2020](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/03/11/2020-05868/proclamation-on-suspension-of-entry-as-immigrants-and-nonimmigrants-of-certain-additional-persons-who-pose-a-risk-of-transmitting-2019-novel-coronavirus), titled *[Proclamation - Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Nonimmigrants of Certain Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting Coronavirus]*. "The entry into the United States, as immigrants or nonimmigrants, of all aliens who were physically present within the Schengen Area during the 14-day period preceding their entry or attempted entry into the United States is hereby suspended and limited subject to section 2 of this proclamation... This proclamation is effective at 11:59 p.m. eastern daylight time on March 13, 2020. Although in his address President Trump reportedly said the ban would last 30 days, the proclamation language itself states that it “shall remain in effect until terminated by the President.”
Note: the European Schengen area includes: 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.

4. **Ireland and United Kingdom Proclamation.** March 14, 2020 - [Presidential Proclamation of March 14, 2020](https://www.whitehouse.gov), titled *Proclamation on the Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Nonimmigrants of Certain Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting Coronavirus*. "The entry into the United States, as immigrants or nonimmigrants, of all aliens who were physically present within the United Kingdom, excluding overseas territories outside of Europe, or the Republic of Ireland during the 14-day period preceding their entry or attempted entry into the United States is hereby suspended and limited ... This proclamation is effective at 11:59 p.m. eastern daylight time on March 16, 2020.

**CDC Domestic Travel Advisory:** Due to extensive community transmission of COVID-19 in the area, CDC urges residents of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut to refrain from non-essential domestic travel for 14 days effective Saturday, March 28, 2020. [https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s038-travel-advisory.html](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s038-travel-advisory.html)

**Additional Resources:**

- Student Counseling Services: [https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Prospective-Current-Students/Student-Life/Health-Wellness/Student-Counseling-Services](https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Prospective-Current-Students/Student-Life/Health-Wellness/Student-Counseling-Services)
- CUNY International Students and Scholars: [https://www.cuny.edu/academics/international-education/isss/](https://www.cuny.edu/academics/international-education/isss/)
- CUNY Coronavirus Update: [https://www.cuny.edu/coronavirus/](https://www.cuny.edu/coronavirus/)
- NAFSA: Association of International Educators COVID-19 critical resources: [https://www.nafsa.org/regulatory-information/coronavirus-critical-resources](https://www.nafsa.org/regulatory-information/coronavirus-critical-resources)
- CDC: [https://www.cdc.gov/](https://www.cdc.gov/)

The Office of International Students will continue to monitor COVID-19 developments and any updates to US Government Agencies regulations, policies and guidance as they pertain to F-1 and J-1 international students and their dependents. We will continue to keep you informed.

The Office of International Students frequently shares important regulatory and policy updates on our social media pages as they are released by Government agencies (e.g. SEVP, USCIS, DOS, ICE, CBP, etc.). We encourage you to follow us on [Twitter](https://twitter.com) and [Facebook](https://facebook.com) to keep informed.
Please contact the Office of International Students at intstu@gc.cuny.edu if you have any questions. We are here to support our international student community during these difficult times. We hope that you and your families remain healthy and safe.

Best,

Linda Asaro

Director

Office of International Students

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