Q & A Webinar: COVID-19 
Travel Advisories and U.S. 
Government Policy Updates

SPRING 2020 ENROLLMENT & MAINTAINING STATUS

Due to COVID19, CUNY has transitioned to an online learning environment for the spring 2020 semester and Summer 2020. 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.

REDUCED COURSE LOAD AUTHORIZATIONS:

Medical Reduced Course Load Authorizations: 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.

Other Reduced Course Load Authorizations: If you are unable to maintain your enrollment for spring 2020 for any other reasons, please contact the Office of International students for guidance and to discuss your options.

Maintaining Legal Status: 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 and 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.
CREDIT/NO CREDIT OPTION FOR SPRING 2020 COURSES

As part of the City University of New York’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all students will have the option to convert any or all letter grades (A-F) they earn in their Spring 2020 classes to Credit/No Credit grading. If you select this option and pass the course (C- grade or better) the grade of CR (credit) will be recorded on your transcript. Credit is earned for courses graded CR and the grade is not calculated into the GPA. A grade of NC (no credit) will be recorded if you choose the Credit/No Credit option and fail the course. The NC (no credit) grade does not earn credit nor does it get calculated into your GPA. Students will have up to 20 business days after the University’s final grade submission deadline or the date of actual grade posting, whichever is later, to select this option.

https://www.gc.cuny.edu/News/Student-News/Detail?id=54603

Flexible Grading Policy: https://www.gc.cuny.edu/CUNY_GC/media/CUNY-Graduate-Center/PDF/Policies/General/FlexibleGradingPolicyStudentInformationSheet.pdf

EMPLOYMENT

Curricular Practical Training:

Remote working arrangements: 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.

Remote working arrangement while outside of the U.S.: 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;

• 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.

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 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. As you completed your program of study while abroad, you will also not be eligible to re-enter the US in F-1 status and apply to the USCIS for OPT.

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 deposit date or during the 60 day period following the deposit 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 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.

*For the duration of the COVID-19 emergency SEVP considers students who are working fewer than 20 hours per week as engaged in OPT. SEVP has temporarily suspended the 20 hour per week minimum for OPT employment.*

*The 90 day unemployment limit while authorized for OPT remains unchanged at this time.*

Remote working arrangements: 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.

Remote working arrangement while outside of the U.S.: 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.

**OPT Unemployment:** 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. furloughs, remote working arrangements, change of employment location, working abroad for OPT employer, etc.) should be reported to the Office of International Students at intstu@gc.cuny.edu.

*The 90 day unemployment limit while authorized for OPT remains unchanged at this time.*

**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.

**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.

**Remote working arrangements:** 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.

**Remote working arrangement while outside of the U.S.:** 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.
**STEM OPT Unemployment:** 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](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-extension-overview)

**USCIS Suspension of In-Person Services at Local USCIS Field Offices:** U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) extended its temporary suspension of routine in-person services at local USCIS field offices by 30 days, "through at least June 4." The suspension does not impact electronic filing, filing at USCIS Lockboxes or filing or adjudications at USCIS Service Centers.

**Unemployment Benefits for OPT and STEM OPT Authorized Students:**

If you are authorized by the USCIS for OPT or STEM OPT and you 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.

**New York State Unemployment Benefits:**
[https://labor.ny.gov/ui/claimantinfo/beforeyouapplyfaq.shtm#23](https://labor.ny.gov/ui/claimantinfo/beforeyouapplyfaq.shtm#23)

**CRS Legal Sidebar: Recovery Rebates and Unemployment Compensation under the CARES Act: Immigration-Related Eligibility Criteria:** A "Legal Sidebar" produced by the [Congressional Research Service](https://crsreports.congress.gov/) "reviews the immigration-related eligibility requirements for two types of benefits established by the CARES Act: (1) the recovery rebates under Section 2201; and (2) the various forms of federally funded unemployment insurance (UI) benefits under Title II, Subsection A. Both benefit types are the subject of other CRS products and have other eligibility rules not related to immigration status. This Legal Sidebar focuses only on the extent to which non-U.S. nationals (aliens) may qualify for the benefits." [https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/LSB/LSB10442](https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/LSB/LSB10442)

Unemployment benefits are not normally considered a public charge. It is recommended to consult with an immigration attorney before applying for and receiving any other benefits that are considered a public charge.

Federal and State Taxes

Extension of Tax Filing Deadline: The IRS Federal Income Tax Return Filing Deadline has been extended to July 15, 2020 due to COVID19. New York State has also extended the New York State Income Tax Return Filing Deadline to July 15, 2020. Please note that not all States have extended their state tax filing deadlines. If you are required to file a state tax return in a state other than New York, you will need to check the website for the Department of Taxation for that specific State to determine if the deadline was still April 15, 2020 or if it has been extended to July 15, 2020.

Filing a Non-Resident Tax Return: As a nonresident student in the US, you are legally required to file a Federal and State Tax Return if you received US income during 2019. If you did not work or receive income in the US, you are still obliged to file a Form 8843 with the IRS.

The Graduate Center, CUNY has arranged free access to Sprintax, a Non-Resident Tax Return Preparation system to guide you through the process, prepare your Federal Tax Return and even check if you’re due a refund. You may also use Sprintax to prepare your State Tax Returns for an additional fee. Sprintax was used by over 165,000 international students and scholars last year, and the average Federal refund received by eligible students was over $1,087.

All you need to do is:
1. Register and follow the simple instructions
2. Complete the online questionnaire
3. Enter your unique code SpTx2019CUNYGC501F in the box on the ‘Review your order’ page. This access code will allow you to prepare your Federal Tax Return for free. An additional fee will be charged for preparing State Tax Returns. Please use the code only when you have finished with preparing your tax return and are ready to print it out and mail it. Students may not login to make edits to their tax return forms after they have used the code. The code may only be used once per student.
4. Sprintax will prepare your tax return forms

As a reminder, you must print, sign and mail your documents once you complete the preparation process in Sprintax. If you have any questions, please use the live chat function in Sprintax and the team will be happy to help.

Resident for Tax Purposes: If Sprintax determines you are a resident for tax purposes, you may not use Sprintax to prepare your tax returns as it is a non-resident tax preparation software. If
you are a resident for tax purposes, you may use a resident tax preparation service of your choice. Some students who are residents for tax purposes have used TurboTax, H&R Block, IRS Free File (if eligible), VITA Free Tax Preparation (if eligible), or a tax accountant.

Social Security Number (SSN):

A Social Security Number (SSN) is a unique, 9-digit number used for taxpayer identification, income reporting, and record-keeping purposes. Once issued, the number is valid for a lifetime. You should keep it safe and provide only as needed to US government agencies or credible financial institutions. F-1 and J-1 students who are authorized for employment can apply for an SSN.

**How Do I Apply?** The Social Security Administration has suspended face-to-face service nationwide until further notice due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. This means that at this time students applying for a Social Security Number due to Curricular Practical Training or on-campus employment cannot apply for a Social Security Number at this time. Students applying for Optional Practical Training can still apply for a Social Security Number by completing the relevant questions on their form I-765. We do NOT recommend applying through the SSA using the "mail-in" option.

Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN)

The Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) is a tax processing number used by the US government’s tax division, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). You need an ITIN if you are not eligible for a Social Security Number so that you can meet your tax filing obligations. An ITIN is used primarily for tax filing purposes and is not a form of work authorization.

**Who needs an ITIN?** An ITIN is required for international students who are receiving non-employment based income (such as non-service fellowships, scholarships, etc.) and do not have a Social Security Number.

**How Do I Apply?** The ITIN application requires a certification letter from the Office of International Students. Due to COVID-19 and remote advising, the Office of International Students is unable to verify immigration documents in person as required by the IRS. It is not possible to apply for an ITIN at this time.
COVID-19 CARES Act Stimulus Payments

What nonresident aliens should know about the CARES Act Stimulus Payments Webinar:
https://youtu.be/tsKoE4j_Y34

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the US government has introduced the CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security) Act. In short, the CARES Act is a stimulus package which aims to support workers (earning less than $75,000 per year) with a one-time payment of $1,200. Married couples (who file jointly and earn less than $150,000) will receive $2,400 and families will also get $500 per child.

International Travel and Returning to the United States:

Travel Signatures: 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 needed provide you with an updated travel signature for your return to the US. We will mail the I-20 or DS-2019 with travel signature to you.

Passport: At the time you enter the US, your passport must be valid for a minimum of 6 months into the future. If your passport will expire in less than 6 months from the time you plan to enter the US, our office recommends renewing the passport prior to entering the US.

F-1 or J-1 Visa: A valid F-1 or J-1 visa in your passport is required for re-entry to the United States in F-1 or J-1 status (except Citizens of Canada). If you will need to apply for a visa for your re-entry to the US, please contact the Office of International Students at instu@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.

Travel Advisories

Visa Processing Suspensions: The Department of State temporarily suspended all visa application processing at all US Consulates world-wide. 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

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

*Foreign nationals who have visited one of these countries in the past 14 days may not enter the United States:*

- **China**
- **Iran**
- **European 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, Switzerland)
- **United Kingdom** (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland)
- **Republic of Ireland**

1. **China Travel Proclamation**. January 31, 2020 - [Proclamation 9984 of January 31, 2020](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/01/31/20-0014/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/2020/02/29/20-0028/proclamation-on-the-suspension-of-entry-as-immigrants-and-nonimmigrants-of-certain-additional-persons-who-pose-a-risk-of-transmitting-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/2020/03/11/20-0047/proclamation-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 2019 Novel 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, 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.

**Coronavirus Proclamation of April 22, 2020 Limits Entry of Certain Immigrants.** (April 22, 2020) President Trump issued a Presidential Proclamation that suspends entry of certain new immigrants who do not already have an approved immigrant visa. The proclamation does not currently impact applicants for adjustment of status or nonimmigrants such as students, exchange visitors, H-1B workers, visitors for business or pleasure, etc.

CDC Travel Advisories:


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)
Resources for International Students:

The Graduate Center Student Emergency Fund: https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Prospective-Current-Students/Current-Students/Fellowships-and-Financial-Aid/Student-Emergency-Grants

CUNY USS Scholarship Fall 2020: https://www.usscuny.org/uss-scholarship

The Graduate Center Coronavirus Guidance and Updates: https://www.gc.cuny.edu/News/Coronavirus-Guidance-and-Updates?utm_source=gcsite&utm_medium=news&utm_campaign=hpfeature

CUNY Coronavirus Update and Resources: https://www.cuny.edu/coronavirus/

CUNY USS COVID-19 Resources: https://www.usscuny.org/covid-19-resources

Student Counseling Services: https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Prospective-Current-Students/Student-Life/Health-Wellness/Student-Counseling-Services

NAFSA COVID-19 critical resources: https://www.nafsa.org/regulatory-information/coronavirus-critical-resources

NAFSA COVID-19 Restrictions on US Visas and Entry: https://www.nafsa.org/regulatory-information/covid-19-restrictions-us-visas-and-entry


DOS travel.state.gov COVID-19-related news alerts: https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news.html


Study in the States Response to COVID-19: https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/2020/05/dsos-read-these-tips-for-managing-student-records


CDC: https://www.cdc.gov/
Office of International Students

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, etc.). **We encourage you to follow us on Twitter and Facebook to keep informed.**

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 via email, our social media sites and on our website.

**OIS Website:** [https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Prospective-Current-Students/Current-Students/International-Students](https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Prospective-Current-Students/Current-Students/International-Students)

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.