



Frequently Asked Questions for Spring 2021
As of October 1, 2020

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The International Services Office

Communicating with International Services:

International Services continues to work remotely during fall 2020, however, we are available to assist you. To contact our office, you can:

- Email is@clemsom.edu;
Call 864-656-3614 and leave a voicemail including your name, CUID, and return phone number. The voicemails will be answered via email or with a return phone call.
Virtual advising is available from International Services main website.
If this is an after-hours emergency, please contact Clemson University Police at 864-656-2222 for assistance.
All forms can be accessed through the iStart Portal.

Mailing and Retrieval of Documents:

At this time, International Services is providing the following options to receive mail from USCIS or updated immigration documents:

- All shipping to international destinations must be requested using Express Mail Instructions.
OPT EAD cards will only be mailed using Express Mail Instructions.
If you need your immigration documents or USCIS mail sent to you quickly and with tracking details, request shipping using Express Mail Instructions.
International Services can send your documents to you, at no cost to you, through the U.S. Postal Service (USPS). This shipping method does not allow tracking and may be slower than other shipping methods. To request that IS ship your document to you via this method, please complete the Shipping Request Form here.

Travel

International Travel and U.S. Entry Restrictions:

- For personal travel, you must communicate your plans with both your **academic department**, **International Services**, and potentially **Human Resources** if you are employed by the University. To receive a travel signature, International Services requires you to complete the **Travel Information Form** found in the [iStart Portal](#) (under the International Services tab). Please note: International Services is better able to advise and assist you if we have up-to-date information on your travel plans.
- At this time, International Services does not recommend non-essential travel due to the impact of COVID-19. International travel can be unpredictable and pose some risk in the current environment. If you make the personal decision to travel internationally, please contact [International Services](#) for general information regarding travel and required re-entry documents. If the current visa stamp in your passport has expired, you will be required to apply for a valid visa stamp to re-enter the U.S. Applying for a new visa could delay your return to the U.S. To monitor U.S. Embassy closings or limited access please refer to information provided by the [U.S. State Department](#).
- If you are entering the U.S. from abroad, you must follow the [Center for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) guidance on travel and [Clemson University's Guidance on COVID-19](#).

Current Travel Restrictions for Students, Scholars, & Non-Immigrant Employees:

- Travel restrictions currently suspend entry into the U.S. for most non-immigrants who were physically present within the countries outlined by the [CDC](#) for a 14-day period prior to travel to the U.S. As of July 12, 2020, these countries include China, Iran, and Brazil. Recently, [Department of State](#) confirmed that students traveling from the Schengen Area, the UK, and Ireland with valid F-1 visas are eligible to enter the U.S. without having to seek an individual national interest exception to travel.

Outside of a Country with Travel Restrictions for more than 14 Days:

- It is important to have clear documentation as to how long you have been outside the travel-restricted country. The current COVID-19 situation is rapidly evolving and unpredictable. It is unclear how long the travel restrictions may remain in effect for entry into the U.S. and how entry could be impacted for travelers even after the 14-day window. Currently, International Services does not have access to clear guidance on what documentation travelers may use to prove they were not present in travel restricted areas with the indicated time period.

Mexico & Canada Travel Restrictions:

- On March 21, 2020, the U.S., Canada, and Mexico announced a [mutual agreement on temporary restrictions on non-essential travel](#) across the U.S., Canadian, and Mexican border. These temporary restrictions have been **renewed until October 21, 2020**. Entry is only allowed to the U.S. through land ports of entry along the U.S.-Canada and U.S.-Mexico borders for “essential travel” only. Essential travel includes **“individuals travelling to attend educational institutions and individuals traveling to work in the U.S.”** Essential travel does not include traveling for tourism purposes.

Other Countries:

- Many other countries have imposed [country-specific travel restrictions](#) that could impact one’s ability to enter or depart those countries due to COVID-19. Please review this information for the most up-to-date travel restrictions.

Recommendation against Non-Essential Travel:

- Currently, Clemson University has suspended all **University-related** international travel and continues to discourage any non-essential travel within the U.S.
- Due to COVID-19, travel restrictions, U.S. embassy/consulate closures and delays, and various border restrictions will make international travel unpredictable. International Services cannot predict how the restrictions and closures will evolve over time, nor what kind of scrutiny will be in place at the U.S. Ports of Entry. Your ability to return to the U.S. will be determined by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials at the U.S. Ports of Entry, not International Services.
- International Services understands you may want to return home due to health concerns or other personal reasons. However, we want to make sure that as you make these important decisions, you understand the possible risks involved, including the fact that you may not be able to re-enter the U.S. at the time you intend.
- The length of time you are outside of the U.S. may impact your ability to return to the U.S. Currently, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's [Guidance on F-1 Travel and Re-entry](#) defines five months as maximum period of temporary absence from the U.S. for returning F-1 visa holders. Any questions on F-1 travel and re-entry should be directed to an [International Student Advisor](#).
- In spring 2020, USCIS provided guidance indicating that students may re-enter the U.S. if they have been outside the U.S. for more than five months if they have maintained their status while in the U.S., continued to enroll full-time while outside the U.S., and are in possession of a valid, unexpired visa in their passport. Be sure to properly maintain your student visa status while abroad and have all the required documents for re-entry.
- For personal travel, you should communicate your plans with both your **academic department** and **International Services**. International Services highly requires you to complete the **Travel Information Form** found in the [iStart Portal](#) (under the International Services tab). Please note: International Services is better able to advise and assist you if we have up-to-date information on your travel plans.

Travel within the U.S.:

- Even within the U.S., different regions are experiencing travel impacts and restrictions. The [CDC has updated numbers per state](#), but this is changing quickly. If you choose to travel domestically, please be sure to consider your health and safety. We encourage you to follow the CDC and local recommendations for travel. Aside from any risk from COVID-19 itself, be prepared for localized shelter in place orders, transportation restrictions, or infrastructure disruptions that may impact your travel plans.

Travel Signature for I-20 (F-1) or DS-2019 (J-1):

- You do not need a travel signature on your I-20 or DS-2019 to **depart** the U.S. You **do** need a valid travel signature to return to the U.S. in F-1 or J-1 status. A valid travel signature must be no more than twelve months old on the date that you return to the U.S. Travel signatures for F-1 students on post-completion OPT or STEM OPT are only valid for 6 months. You will need a valid signature to apply for a new visa if the F-1/J-1 visa stamp in your passport is expired and for your re-entry into the U.S.
- If you need a travel signature, International Services requires you to complete the **Travel Information Form** found in the [iStart Portal](#) (under the International Services tab). Once we receive the completed Travel Information Form, our office can print a new I-20 or DS-2019, sign, and mail it to you.

Visa Applications

Visa Applications and Embassies & Consulate Closures:

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. Department of State (USDOS) had [suspended routine U.S. visa services](#) in most countries worldwide. However, the USDOS is now allowing U.S. Embassies and Consulates to enter a phased resumption of visa services. Visit your local [U.S. embassy/consulate website](#) to confirm operating status, find information on scheduling an appointment for a visa stamp, and inquire as to the availability of expedited emergency appointments.

Visa Expiration & Returning Home for Updated Visa Stamp:

- It is very important that your I-20 or DS-2019 remain valid throughout your time in the U.S.
- If your I-20 or DS-2019 are valid, you are **not** required to depart the U.S. to request a new visa stamp in your passport. The visa stamp in the passport only needs to be extended when you have departed the U.S. and request re-entry in F-1 or J-1 status.
- If you are physically present in the U.S., your I-20 or DS-2019 is valid, but your visa has expired, you are **not** required to leave the U.S. just to renew your visa stamp.
- If you depart the U.S. and your current visa stamp has expired, you must make an appointment at the U.S. embassy or consulate to renew your visa prior to returning to the U.S.

Maintaining Status

Program Extension or Request for Reduced Course Load:

- If your program is expiring and you need additional time to complete your degree, you can request an extension of your I-20 or DS-2019 through the Clemson [iStart Portal](#).
- If you will not be enrolled full-time, you must submit a request to take a reduced course load, you can request an "RCL" through the Clemson [iStart Portal](#).
- If you have any questions concerning a program extension or reduced course load, please contact [International Services](#) to speak with an International Student Advisor.

Program Ended but Unable to Depart the U.S.:

- International Services is aware that flight availability to international destinations may be unavailable or very limited at this time. If your program is ending soon and you are unable to depart the U.S., please notify [International Services](#) to let us know about your situation. We will work with students on a case-by-case basis to determine the best path forward. We urge you to also contact your [home-country's local embassy or consulate in the U.S.](#) for support and information regarding travel home.
- Here are several options to discuss with [International Services](#):
 - Consider applying for post-completion employment - OPT for F-1 visa holders and Academic Training for J-1 visa holders.
 - Consider continuing your academic program if further enrollment is appropriate for you in your degree program.
 - Consider applying for a [change of status through USCIS to a B-1/B-2 tourist visa](#). The USCIS website contains instructions, checklists, and filing fee tips. If you need further guidance on this option, you should contact a qualified immigration attorney.

Spring 2021 Guidance

International Services is awaiting guidance from ICE and SEVP on spring 2021. International Services will update students as we receive this updated guidance.

Students Currently Inside the U.S.:

- International students who are physically present in the U.S. should plan to return to campus and enroll in a full course of study to continue making normal progress in their program of study.

Students Outside the U.S.:

- U.S. Embassies and Consulates had suspended visa issuance due to COVID-19. However, some U.S. Embassies and Consulates abroad have begun a phased resumption of visa services. Students needing a visa should apply for a visa appointment, when possible.
- If you need, but have not secured an F-1/J-1 visa for spring 2021, you can request a letter of support from International Services to assist in scheduling an **Emergency Expedited Visa Appointment** at a U.S. Embassy/Consulate in your home country. To request this letter, please submit the **Emergency Visa Appointment Support Letter Request e-form** located under the “Pre-Arrival” tab within the [iStart Portal](#). [International Services](#) can provide you with a letter of support for the emergency appointment at the U.S. embassy or consulate.
- Students will need to be traveling from a country that is not under a travel restriction to the U.S. It may be possible for a student in a travel restricted country (China, Iran, and Brazil) to travel to a third country that is not travel restricted, spend 14 days in that country, and then apply to enter the U.S. International Services cannot state that attempting to enter the U.S. in this manner will be successful. If a student chooses to attempt to enter the U.S. in this manner, it is at the student’s own risk. Recently, the [U.S. Department of State](#) confirmed that students traveling from the Schengen Area, the UK, and Ireland with valid F-1 visas are eligible to enter the U.S. without having to seek an individual national interest exception to travel.
- It is important to have clear documentation as to how long you have been outside the travel-restricted country. The current COVID-19 situation is rapidly evolving and unpredictable. It is unclear how long the travel restrictions may remain in effect for entry into the U.S. and how entry could be impacted for travelers even after the 14-day window. Currently, International Services does not have access to clear guidance on what documentation travelers may use to prove they were not present in travel restricted areas with the indicated time period.

New Students Beginning in Spring 2021

- All new international students enrolling in the spring 2021 semester, are required to attend Clemson’s International [Orientation](#). For spring 2021, International Services will be offering virtual orientations. Please continue to check your email for information on upcoming orientations.
- If you are an undergraduate student who is unable to arrive for the start of the spring 2021 semester, contact [Undergraduate Studies](#) for assistance in exploring online-learning options for spring 2021.

- If you are a graduate student who is unable to arrive for the start of the spring 2021 term, contact the [Graduate School and your academic department](#) for assistance in exploring online-learning options for spring 2021.
- As an international student, you must notify [International Services](#) of your plans for spring 2021 so that we can advise you appropriately on your immigration status moving forward.

Late Arrivals:

- If you may be arriving late, you must confirm with your academic department and instructors that your arrival date is acceptable. You must also notify International Services to arrange adjustments to your I-20 or DS-2019 start date.

Deferrals:

- If you have been approved for a deferral of your admission to a future semester, please notify [Undergraduate Admissions](#) or the [Graduate School](#) and [International Services](#) to update your academic and immigration record.

Admission Withdrawal:

- If you decide to withdraw your admission to Clemson University, International Services will need to cancel your current I-20 or DS-2019. If you have decided to cancel or withdraw your enrollment for a future term, please notify [International Services](#) and either [Undergraduate Admissions](#) or the [Graduate School](#) to update your academic and immigration record.

Health and Support

- International Services supports all international faculty, scholars, and students and we understand this is very trying time for everyone. It is very likely that you may be experiencing stress and anxiety. Please understand that these reactions are normal, and Clemson University offers help in addressing these feelings.
- Below are many resources available to help students, scholars, and staff.
 - Resources available for students:
 - [Clemson Health and Wellness](#)
 - [Student Health Services](#)
 - [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#)
 - [Healthy Campus](#)
 - Resources available for scholars and employees:
 - [Clemson Health and Wellness](#)
 - [Joseph F. Sullivan Center](#)
- International Services is available to assist all international students, scholars, and staff. If you have a question or need additional support, please contact [our office](#).

Harassment and Bullying

- Clemson University is committed to ensuring that all members of our campus community, regardless of race or country of origin, feel welcome, safe, and respected.
- If you are mistreated by anyone through harassment, racism, or bullying, please contact [International Services](#) so we can assist you and connect you with support services.
- Please understand that these behaviors have no place in the Clemson community. Clemson prohibits discrimination and harassment on the basis of categories including race, color, national origin, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation/identity, and/or sexual violence status. If you have experienced any type of harassment, bullying, etc. you can and should report them.
- You can complete an [online bias incident report](#) with Clemson's Office of Community and Ethical Standards or file an in-person report at one of the following offices:
 - [Office of Access and Equity Office](#), 223 Holtzendorff Hall;
 - [Student Affairs: Community and Ethical Standards](#), 912 University Union;
 - [Student Affairs: Advocacy and Success](#), 202 Hendrix Center;
 - [International Services](#), 864-656-3614 or 108 Long Hall;
 - [Clemson University Police](#), 864-656-2222 or 124 Ravenel Center Place.

International Services is available to assist all international students, scholars, and employees. If you have a question, need additional support, or need to be put in contact with others who can assist you, please contact [our office](#).

Due to COVID-19, there will be many questions concerning the spring 2021 semester. International Services will continue to monitor guidance from the U.S. government and update this document as needed.



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