INTERNATIONAL STUDENT FAQs FALL 2021

TRAVEL & VISAS
I understand travel to the US is currently restricted from multiple countries. How will I know if travel is restricted to the US from my country when fall semester begins?
Check this CDC website for up-to-date guidance on current travel restrictions in place. Currently, travel is restricted for people who have been in Brazil, China, India, Iran, Ireland, the Schengen area, South Africa, and the United Kingdom. However, certain F-1 students may automatically qualify for a National Interest Exception (NIE) to the travel restrictions.

- Continuing F-1 students from Ireland, U.K, and the Schengen region may qualify for an NIE and enter the U.S. at any time prior to the start of fall classes.
- F-1 students from Brazil, China, India, Iran, or South Africa, and new students from Ireland, U.S., and the Schengen region will only qualify for an automatic NIE for programs starting or continuing after August 1, 2021, and you can arrive no earlier than 30 days before your program start date.

Will I be required to obtain a National Interest Exception (NIE) prior to traveling to the U.S?
A National Interest Exception is only necessary if you are from the countries with current travel restrictions in place. For complete information about the NIE, please see this document.

Will I be able to travel to the US for fall 2021?
If you already have an F-1 or J-1 visa to enter the US that has not expired, you should be able to travel to the U.S. for Fall 2021 semester. Pitt is currently planning to reopen for in-person classes during fall semester. If you currently have a visa that has expired, please see the US Department of State website for more information on when the US Consulate and Embassies will resume visa appointments. Also check the CDC website for updated information on any travel restrictions in place.

What is the earliest date I can arrive to campus?
If you were a student in Spring 2020 and have remained enrolled full-time since then you can arrive at any time. If you are a new student or you are returning with a new I-20 after a leave of absence, you will not be able to arrive earlier than July 27, 2021, 30 days before the beginning of classes.

I heard that U.S. visas are now being issued. Is this true? U.S. Embassies around the world are opening to the extent they are safely able to do so. You can search specific embassy information at the US Department of State’s Visa Appointment Wait Times and you will be able to see if the embassy is open for emergency appointments only or if they are currently adjudicating student visas normally.
I am able to travel to the US, but I will not be able to arrive on time for the fall semester. Can I arrive late?
If travel is not restricted, and you have a valid visa, please plan to arrive before the first day of classes, August 27, 2021. Please remember to travel with the appropriate travel documents. Graduate students may be able to start their programs remotely and enter the U.S. mid-term, with permission of the Dean. Undergraduate students who cannot arrive by September 10 will NOT be able to enter the U.S. mid-term and must instead plan to arrive for the start of the Spring 2022 term.

Do I need to bring anything with me to prove my eligibility to come to the US, other than my immigration documents?
You should carry all appropriate travel documents. If you obtained an NIE from the Consulate and they gave you a specific approval for the NIE, you should bring that document as well. If you were not required to obtain a new visa, or if the Consulate only stamped your visa approved and did not give you a separate document, then the travel documents are all you should need.

Can I get a letter from OIS to carry with me to help facilitate my entry into the U.S?
OIS has created this letter for your use while you travel.

I received a visa appointment that is later than the start date of classes. Can OIS help me to secure an earlier date?
Most embassies have procedures in place for securing emergency appointments, and some will consider a school start date an emergency. Each embassy's procedures are different but they will likely require you to secure a normally scheduled visa appointment first and then request the emergency appointment. If you have secured a visa appointment but it is later than the program start date on your I-20, you will need to check your embassy's website to determine their emergency request procedures and follow those instructions. Contact information for embassies and consulates worldwide is available at usembassy.gov.

Do I have to travel to Pittsburgh for fall semester? What if I am unable to travel or I want to stay at home?
International students should plan for a return to in-person instruction on the Pitt campus in the Fall. In line with Pitt’s plans for a full return to campus and in-person instruction in August, we are strongly advising all international students to make the necessary preparations for the resumption of their studies in Pittsburgh this Fall. If you are unable to secure a visa to travel to Pittsburgh no later than August 27th, please contact your academic program to determine whether they will be able to accommodate remote classes for the fall semester or, if you are a qualified undergraduate student, you may choose to take advantage of the Pitt on Location offerings.
I am a continuing student and have been enrolled at Pitt since spring 2020. Do I need a new I-20 or DS-2109 in order to return to the US?

If you have been enrolled full-time while outside the U.S., you should not need a new I-20 or DS-2019. However, please check to be sure you have a valid travel signature (Page 2 of I-20; bottom right corner of DS-2019). Travel signatures are valid for one year from the date they are signed. If you need a travel signature, please submit a ‘Shipment Request’ e-form, located in the Biographical Information section of MyOIS. We will email a new I-20/DS-2019 to you with the current travel signature. The document will have the same SEVIS ID, and you will need to print and sign it before you return to the US.

I am planning to return from a Leave of Absence (LOA). Do I need a new visa before I return?

You may use a previously issued F-1 or J-1 visa if it is not expired. If you are returning from a LOA, you will need a new I-20 or DS-2019 with a new SEVIS ID to return to the US. Please note the Program Start Date and the Earliest Date of Admission on your I-20. It is important to keep that date in mind as you make your flight arrangements. If you need to apply for a new visa, please see the US Department of State website for more information on when the US Consulate and Embassies will resume visa appointments. More information about Leaves of Absence can be found here.

I left the United States during spring 2020 due to COVID-19, and my visa expired. What should I do if I am unable to get a new visa in time? Can I return to Pittsburgh after the start of the term?

If you are unable to secure a visa to travel to Pittsburgh by August 27th, please contact your academic program to determine whether they will be able to accommodate online classes for the fall semester. Graduate students may be able to start their programs remotely and enter the U.S. mid-term, with permission of the Dean. Undergraduate students who cannot arrive by August 27 will NOT be able to enter the U.S. mid-term and must instead plan to arrive for the start of the Spring 2022 term.

I’ve remained in the United States since spring 2020 due to COVID-19 and my passport expired, what do I need to do to renew it?

Contact your country’s embassy or consulate to identify options for passport extension or renewal. If you decide to depart the United States, you will not be eligible to return until you renew your passport.

VACCINATIONS AND QUARANTINE

Will I be required to be vaccinated before I arrive at the Pitt campus? If not, will I be able to get a vaccination at Pitt?

At this time, students are not required to be vaccinated to enter the U.S. or Pitt’s campus. However, there is CDC guidance on international travel for individuals who have not been fully vaccinated. Once you arrive in Pittsburgh you will be eligible to secure a vaccine, either through a community or university vaccine program.
Should I obtain a vaccine in my home country prior to coming to the U.S? The University urges you to obtain a vaccination as soon as you are able to do so. We anticipate that there will also be vaccinations available in Pittsburgh for anyone who is not yet vaccinated by the time they arrive to campus.

Will I need to quarantine when I arrive in the US?
Pitt’s Office of Residence Life will share information about what procedures to follow for students who will be living on campus. If you are not living on campus, please see CDC travel guidelines to determine if and how long you should quarantine after your arrival to the US. The latest Pitt guidance can be found at www.coronavirus.pitt.edu

ENROLLMENT

May I enroll in classes at Pitt while I am outside of the US?
International students should plan for a return to in-person instruction on the Pitt campus in Fall 2021. In line with Pitt’s plans for a full return to campus and in-person instruction in August, we are strongly advising all international students to make the necessary preparations for the resumption of their studies in Pittsburgh this Fall if at all possible. If you are unable to secure a visa to travel to Pittsburgh by August 27th, please contact your academic program to determine whether they will be able to accommodate remote classes for the fall semester. If your academic program is unable to offer remote courses that you require, you may need to consider taking a leave of absence or deferring your attendance until you are able to safely arrive in Pittsburgh.

Can I keep my SEVIS record Active if I am enrolled in thesis, dissertation, or research credits but outside the United States?
Yes, as long as you remain enrolled in full-time credits and your program has approved your work, your SEVIS record will remain active.

Do I have any options besides online classes if I am unable to come to Pittsburgh?
If you are an undergraduate student from China, you have the option of taking courses through Pitt on Location.

I have been enrolled part-time while I was outside of the U.S. May I continue to study part-time?
Students studying inside the U.S. are generally required to be enrolled full-time. Only those students who are approved for a Reduced Course Load authorization (either Medical or Final Term) may be approved by OIS to be enrolled part-time.
I am planning to take a Leave of Absence during fall 2021. If you take a Leave of Absence during Fall 2021, your I-20 will be terminated at the beginning of the semester, and you will be expected to depart the U.S. within 15 days. Please see OIS Leave of Absence handout for more information.

What is the current SEVP policy regarding international education? SEVP has announced that it will continue to abide by the guidance issued in March 2020. However, because Pitt expects to hold in-person classes in Fall 2021, students who are in the U.S. are expected to take in-person classes. It will no longer be acceptable to live outside of Pittsburgh and take classes remotely while inside the U.S. If Pitt reverts back to a hybrid or on-line posture sometime during the Fall semester, international students will be permitted to take online courses along with the rest of the student population.

EMPLOYMENT

May I enroll in an off-campus internship in Fall 2021 if it is my first semester in the U.S.? Off-campus internships require work authorization called Curricular Practical Training (CPT). You must be enrolled full-time for two consecutive semesters as an F-1 student in order to apply for CPT. If you began your academic program from outside the U.S., you will not be eligible for CPT until you have been enrolled full-time in the U.S. for two consecutive academic terms.

If I am returning to Pitt after being enrolled from outside of the US, will I still be able to apply for OPT or Academic Training when I graduate? If your SEVIS record remains Active because you were a student at Pitt in Spring 2020 and you continued full-time enrollment during your time outside the U.S., you may apply for OPT or AT. Please check with your Immigration Specialist if you are unsure about the status of your SEVIS record. If you were enrolled part-time while outside the U.S., your SEVIS record should be closed, and you will need a new I-20 or DS-2019 in order to return to Pitt. In this scenario, you will need to be enrolled full-time for at least two consecutive semesters in order to be eligible for OPT. Similarly, if you are returning to Pitt from a leave of absence from your academic program, you will need to be enrolled full-time for at least two consecutive semesters in order to be eligible for OPT. If you will return in Fall 2021, and will finish your program in Spring 2022, but will only require part-time enrollment in Spring 2022 because you only need a part-time schedule to fulfill graduation requirements, you will be required to obtain form OIS authorization for a Reduced Course Load, and will then be eligible for OPT in Summer 2022.