Travel Considerations for International Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic

In light of the unpredictable nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, travel can present unusual challenges, and should be made with caution. Students should evaluate their international travel plans based on their comfort level with the risks associated with travel and any unexpected changes and challenges that may occur. OIS recommends considering what alternatives are available if you cannot return to the U.S. as planned. Below are some things to consider. This information is current as of the ‘revised date’ at the bottom of this document.

Academic Considerations
Prior to arranging for departure from the U.S., students should confirm with their academic department whether they will be able to study with Flex@Pitt from abroad, or not.

Questions to help you think this through:
- Do you have a stable Internet connection at home?
- Are you prepared and able to be awake on a different time zone for your courses?
- Do you have sufficient study space in your home?

On-Campus Employment/Academic Appointments
If you have on-campus employment, including an academic appointment, please contact your hiring department to confirm whether or not you will be able to continue working from your home country.

Traveling to, and Transiting through, Other Countries
Please be sure to review travel restrictions for the places where you may be traveling to, and transiting through. You may need to build in quarantine time on either end of your trip, depending on the containment measures in place at those locations. In addition, some countries might have testing requirements in place, similar to China.
https://www.embassy.org/embassies/

Travel bans remain in place if you are attempting to travel to the U.S. if you have been in certain countries in the previous 14 days. This can include transit travel through those airports. At this point, it is best to avoid transit travel through: Brazil, China, Iran, Ireland, the U.K. and the entire Schengen Region.

Traveling back to the US from International Locations
The U.S. has travel restrictions in place for several countries. For a current list of countries affected, see the COVID-19 Traveler Information at the link below. Effective January 26, 2021, the U.S. will require all air passengers to present a negative COVID-19 test, taken within three calendar days of departure, or proof of recovery from the virus within the last 90 days.
Policies for Returning to the Pitt Campus
Current information about traveling to Pitt from an international location is on the Pitt coronavirus website: https://www.coronavirus.pitt.edu/healthy-community/safe-travel-and-requirements

Visa Renewals
For those whose F/J visa will expire prior to the date they will return to the U.S., please keep in mind that the visa processing services at U.S. consulates/embassies may be limited or interrupted at any time. Be sure to review the most up-to-date information provided on the consulate/embassy website where you would be applying for a new visa. https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/list-of-posts.html

Your SEVIS Record
OIS expects and hopes that the current flexible policy from the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP), which allows for remote study, will continue for Spring 2021 term. The current policy was last updated on 8/7/2020. If the current policy does continue, then OIS will be able to keep SEVIS records active during the spring term, as long as the student is enrolled full-time. In the event you are not able to make normal progress toward degree completion, and/or remain enrolled in a full course load, please notify your Immigration Specialist immediately.

Practical Training (CPT or OPT) Eligibility
Current SEVP guidance indicates that students must be enrolled full-time and maintaining F-1 status in the U.S. for two academic terms in order to be eligible for Optional or Curricular Practical Training. Additionally, students must be physically inside the U.S. in order to apply for OPT. Please discuss with your Immigration Specialist how potential travel may affect your eligibility to apply for CPT or OPT.

Helpful Websites
- CHINA: Testing requirements for travel to China, which go into effect on November 6, 2020: http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/visas/zyxx/t1828184.htm

Communication with OIS
It is very important that OIS staff know where students are in the world. If you decide to depart the U.S., please complete a ‘Departure Notification’ e-form in My OIS. Please also comply with requests to let us know your current location. Thank you!