Travel Considerations for International Students
During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Due to the unpredictable nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, travel can present unusual challenges and should be undertaken with caution. Students should evaluate their international travel plans based on their comfort level with the associated risks and any unexpected changes and challenges that may occur. OIS recommends thinking through what alternatives you have if you cannot return to the US as planned. Below are some considerations. This information is current as of the ‘revised date’ at the bottom of this document.

Academic Considerations
The University of Pittsburgh plans to have on-campus courses for the fall 2021 semester.

- **Undergraduate** students must be enrolled full-time in on-campus coursework, or in the Pitt on Location program, to maintain their F-1 status.

- **Graduate** students may be able to enroll remotely if they cannot return to campus, but they must confirm with their academic department whether they can study 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?

Your SEVIS Record
The current flexible policy from the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP), which allows for remote study based on a university’s institutional policy, continues for Fall 2021 term. The policy was last updated on 04/26/2021.

If you cannot return to the US AND you can continue full-time enrollment from abroad, OIS can keep your SEVIS record active during the fall term.

If you cannot make normal progress toward degree completion and/or remain enrolled in a full course load, please notify your Immigration Specialist immediately.

On-Campus Employment/Academic Appointments
If you have on-campus employment, including an academic appointment, please contact your hiring department to confirm whether you can continue working from your home country.

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Traveling to and Transiting through Other Countries
Please review travel restrictions for the countries 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. Also, some countries may have testing requirements in place.

US travel bans remain in place if you have been to certain countries in the previous 14 days before attempting entry to the US. This includes airport layovers. At this point, it is best to avoid transit travel through China, Iran, the European Schengen area, the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, Brazil, South Africa, and India.

F-1 students currently located in countries affected by the travel ban are automatically eligible for a National Interest Exception (NIE). J-1 students must contact their local US embassy or consulate to request the NIE.

Traveling to the US from International Locations
The US 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 US requires 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.

Visa Renewals
For those whose F/J visa will expire before the date they will return to the US, please keep in mind that the visa processing services at US 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.

Practical Training (CPT/OPT) Eligibility
Current SEVP guidance indicates that students must be enrolled full-time and maintaining F-1 status in the US for two academic terms to be eligible for Optional or Curricular Practical Training. Also, students must be physically inside the US 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
- COVID-19 Traveler Information/US Department of State:
- Country-Specific Travel Information from the US DoS
- Travel During the COVID-19 Pandemic/US Center for Disease Control (CDC)
- CDC’s Travel Recommendations by Destination
- World Health Organization

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