COVID-19: Frequently Asked Questions by F-1 Students

1. How does switching to online instruction affect my immigration status?

U.S. universities received guidance from the Department of Homeland Security that allows students to continue this semester’s courses online without jeopardizing their immigration status. This means that you must continue to be enrolled full-time and be making normal progress toward the degree. Regardless of where you are participating in online classes, your immigration status will remain active. Please note that this is a temporary accommodation in place until this health crisis ends and in-person classes resume.

2. Will I be able to maintain my immigration status if I go back home and stay away from TAMUC until the Fall semester, which is nearly five months?

Remember that classes are only moved to online instruction until further notice. If classes resume in person at any time, you will be required to be on campus to maintain your immigration status. However, in the case that classes do not resume in person until the Fall semester, then yes: You are considered full-time enrolled until the end of the Spring semester and then you are entitled to your annual vacation. According to the immigration regulations, an F-1 or J-1 student is in status during the annual (or summer) vacation if the student is eligible and intends to register for the next term.

3. Will I be able to come back to the U.S. next month, in May, or later this summer?

As you all know, we are in uncharted territory regarding international mobility. As of today, only foreign nationals who have visited China or Iran in the past 14 days may not enter the United States as announced in the Presidential Proclamation on Novel Coronavirus and Presidential Proclamation on Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting Coronavirus. Additionally, effective as of 11:59 pm on March 13, 2020 all foreign nationals who were physically within the 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, and Switzerland) during the 14-day period preceding their entry or attempted entry into the U.S.
may not enter the U.S. for 30 days as announced in the Presidential Proclamation on Certain Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting Coronavirus. Then on Saturday, March 14th, the U.S. Administration imposed travel restrictions on United Kingdom and Ireland beginning midnight today, Monday, March 16th - [https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/14/politics/uk-ireland-travel-restrictions-coronavirus/index.html](https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/14/politics/uk-ireland-travel-restrictions-coronavirus/index.html). It is impossible to predict if and when further restrictions will be put in place by the U.S. Administration for travelers returning from high risk countries. If you are currently outside the U.S. or plan to travel outside the U.S., we recommend that you continue to monitor travel updates by CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

4. I still need to apply for OPT. Can I do this remotely from elsewhere in the U.S.? Can I do it from outside the U.S.?

You must be physically in the U.S. at the time you submit your Optional Practical Training (OPT) application. OIP will continue to process OPT applications as soon as we receive your submitted request and will communicate with you about how to pick up your OPT I-20. If you have not applied for OPT yet, but plan to do so, we strongly encourage you to submit your application as soon as possible without delay.

5. If I vacate my current on or off campus residence and relocate to a new address, do I need to report it within 10 days? Where do I report?

Yes, the Immigration & Nationality Act (INA § 265, 8 U.S.C. 1305) requires all nonimmigrants and permanent residents, including international students, scholars, and their families, to report any change of residential address in the U.S. to the federal government, within 10 days. Please report address changes to OIP within 10 days.

6. I will graduate in May 2020, and my plan was to return to my home country. After I graduate, I would prefer to stay in the United States for now. What are my options?

You have three options:

a. Remain in the U.S. and apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT) (for F-1 students).

b. Remain in the U.S. during the grace period after your program end date (which you can find on your I-20). The grace period is 60 days for F-1 students. Depart from the U.S. to your home country before grace period runs out.
c. Pursue another degree in the United States at TAMUC or transfer (if eligible) your SEVIS record to another institution.

7. My visa is expiring, and I am unable to travel to my home country currently. What should I do?

You may stay in the U.S. on an expired F-1 visa as long as you maintain your immigration status by being in possession of a valid I-20 and by meeting normal enrollment requirements. (Canadian citizens do not need a visa to enter the U.S.)

8. My visa is expiring/has expired. If I leave the U.S. now, but must come back after the expiration date of my visa, will I need a new visa, or can I re-enter on an expired visa?

If you leave the U.S. and your visa will have expired by the date you wish to re-enter the U.S., then you will need to obtain a new visa at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate before you can re-enter the U.S. (Canadian citizens do not need a visa to enter the U.S.)

If you will be travelling to Canada, Mexico, or adjacent islands, please read: https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/visa-expiration-date/auto-revalidate.html to see if you can benefit from automatic revalidation.

10. My employer registered me for H-1B lottery. Can I leave the U.S. now?

If your employer is planning to register or has already registered you for the H-1B lottery, please consult your employer and their immigration counsel before you make any international travel plans. OIP advisors cannot answer travel related questions regarding your H-1B petition sponsored by your employer.

10. I applied for U.S. Permanent Residency. Can I leave the country now?

If you applied to become Lawful permanent resident (LPR) status in the United States, consult an immigration attorney regarding international travel, which is generally not recommended.