FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT 2019 NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

STUDENTS: (F-1 AND J-1 VISA HOLDERS)

COVID-19, VISA STATUS, & ONLINE CLASSES:

Since Florida Tech has shifted to all-online instruction for the rest of the spring semester, does that mean I am still in good immigration status?

Yes. If you are enrolled in full-time classes this spring semester then you are still considered in good immigration status. This does not change even though the courses are moved to online. Due to this unprecedented situation, an exception is being made, by immigration, for students to complete their spring courses online.

Please note that you must remain enrolled in your spring semester classes. If you choose to drop any of your classes this could negatively impact your immigration status.

I have a question about COVID-19 that is not related to my immigration status. Who should I talk to?

We encourage you to review the university's official COVID-19 webpage for more information.

COVID-19 AND TRAVEL

**MUST READ** Are you considering traveling home for the rest of the Spring semester?

Questions to Ask Yourself if Returning Home:

- Are you able to access the technology used at Florida Tech for online coursework in your home country (e.g., Canvas, Zoom, etc.)? Will you require a VPN to access it?
- Have you considered the difference in time zones between Florida and your home country?
  - For example, if your professor chooses to use Zoom they may want to keep the same class time and date but will hold the class virtually, and you will still need to participate fully as if you were physically in the classroom. Also, keep in mind the time zone impacts of this. Discuss these concerns directly with your professor, and receive confirmation prior to travel.
  - **PLEASE NOTE:** If you have questions about the time zone differences for online class hours and exams, please contact your instructors or academic advisors and express your concerns.
- Is your passport valid for a return in August? Your passport must be valid for 6 months beyond your return date to the U.S.
- Is your visa still valid for a return in August?
  - Be mindful that some US Embassies and Consulates in some countries are currently CLOSED and that we anticipate significant delays in renewing your visa. Be prepared that more embassies/consulates could shut down during this time in further countries.
- Does your I-20 have a recent travel signature that has been signed AFTER September 1, 2019? If not you need to have a new travel signature from our office.
- Is spring 2020 your last semester? If so, has your petition to graduate and all other necessary tasks been taken care of?
• Does your I-20 expire in May 2020 and you are not graduating? If so, please see the information concerning Program Extensions

• Did you know that the CDC is strongly recommending suspending/cancelling nonessential international and domestic travel?

• Have you discussed the potential risks associated with travel with your family back home?

PLEASE BE AWARE: We do not know how long these travel restrictions will last and what additional countries may be added to the restrictions already in place. If you decide to travel, be prepared, understand the risks, and be advised that you might not be able to return to the U.S. for an unknown period of time, your trip could be disrupted, or you may be quarantined upon your return. If your travel is related to your academic program, please consult your department or academic advisor about your travel plans.

Which countries are impacted by COVID-19 travel restrictions to the U.S.? If I am outside of the U.S., what should I do?

Effective March 18th, the U.S. government has suspended entry for any non-U.S. citizens who were physically present within the following countries during the 14-day period preceding their entry to the U.S.

• Countries in the Schengen Area (beginning Friday, March 13th at midnight), which include: 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, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and Ireland.
• People’s Republic of China (excluding Hong Kong and Macau)
• Islamic Republic of Iran

The university strongly recommends that everyone reconsider travel to any country with a CDC level 3 or State Department level 4 advisory based on the novel coronavirus. Those recommendations change frequently and can be monitored through the State Department and CDC websites.

No other countries are impacted at this time, but the situation is changing daily. Please continue to monitor the news, airline travel information, and the university’s COVID-19 website for the latest updates.

I am currently in the U.S. but was planning to travel outside of the U.S. soon. Should I cancel my trip?

We do not know how long these travel restrictions will last and what additional countries may be added to the restrictions already in place. If you decide to travel, be prepared, understand the risks, and be advised that you might not be able to return to the U.S. for an unknown period of time, your trip could be disrupted, or you may be quarantined upon your return. If your travel is related to your academic program, please consult your department or academic advisor about your travel plans.

I am considering returning home for the remainder of the spring semester and possibly the summer semester as well. What should I do?

We understand your concern and want to reassure you that Florida Tech is taking necessary precautions. University administrators are carefully monitoring the situation to ensure the safety of our students, faculty, and staff.

If you choose to return home while completing your spring semester courses online, then the summer semester will still be considered a semester break. Please note that you must remain enrolled in your spring semester classes. If you choose to drop any of your classes this could impact your immigration status.
You will need to ensure you have a valid travel signature on your I-20 prior to leaving the U.S. Please review your I-20 and if you have received a travel signature AFTER September 1, 2019 then you have a valid travel signature and do NOT need to have us sign your I-20 If you have a travel signature that is BEFORE September 1, 2019 then you DO need to have a new travel signature.

Please consider these factors before making your decision:

• Are you completing spring semester or withdrawing from spring semester?
• Are you graduating in May 2020? Do you plan to apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT)? You will not be able to apply for OPT while outside the United States.

My F-1 visa has expired. Do I need to renew my F-1 visa?

If you leave the U.S. and then plan to reenter, you will need to renew your F-1 visa. If you plan to remain in the US, then you do not need to renew your F-1 visa.

Is summer still a vacation semester?

Yes, summer will still be considered a vacation semester if you are a “continuing” student; you are not required to be registered for the summer, but are allowed to register if you wish. It is important to note that “new” students (first time on Florida Tech campus with an “initial attendance” or “transfer pending” I-20 are required by immigration to take 6 credits in order to be in compliance with immigration regulations.

I am currently on Post-Completion or STEM OPT. Do I need a new travel signature?

Students on Post-Completion or STEM OPT will need to ensure you have a valid travel signature on your I-20 prior to leaving the U.S. Please review your I-20 and if you have received a travel signature AFTER September 1, 2019 then you have a valid travel signature and do NOT need to have us sign your I-20 If you have a travel signature that is BEFORE September 1, 2019 then you DO need to have a new travel signature. Remember, you must have a valid visa and passport in order to return. We also recommend that you carry a letter from your employer which indicates that you are returning to the US to “resume” employment.

Spring 2020 is my last semester. Can I depart U.S. now, finish my online classes and return to U.S. after the program end date to apply for Post-Completion OPT?

No, ISSS does not recommend returning home if you plan to apply for Post-Completion OPT. You will not be able to return to U.S. past the date of graduation if you have not applied for Post-Completion OPT. If you have questions, please request an appointment with ISSS advisor.

I am currently in a country impacted by the travel restrictions. Can I return to the US?

The U.S. government is not allowing exceptions at this time. Continue to monitor the news or this web page for updates. If you have not yet been in touch with an international student advisor or your academic department, then please email or call us to inform us of your situation.

I live in the dorms and would like to move out now and return home. What should I do?

Please contact Residence Life at 321-674-8080 or 321-674-7742.
EMPLOYMENT: ON-CAMPUS, OPT, & CPT

Can I continue to work on campus? Will I still get paid?

Yes, students are still eligible to work on campus, but please contact your supervisor with any questions or concerns. Please remember students are still restricted to 20 hours per week for on-campus work during the fall and spring semester, even if classes have been moved online.

I am enrolled in a course that counts for Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and my employer has closed their office or is requiring me to work from home. Will this impact me and my approved CPT?

This depends, and may vary depending on completion of your course work and if you have met the curricular objective of your CPT. Please contact our office to schedule a phone appointment with an international student advisor to discuss your situation if there is any change to your authorized CPT dates or location of your work.

I am enrolled in a course that counts for Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and my employer still wants me to come to work. Am I okay to do this?

Yes, you are okay to continue to complete your CPT. Please work directly with your employer if you have questions or concerns in regards to your health and safety. You must still abide by the policies outlined by your approved CPT. Moving classes to online does not permit you to now work full-time on an approved part-time CPT authorization. Please reference the policy guide for further questions.

I’ve applied for OPT. What should I do?

Please review the following scenarios:

- **I’ve applied for OPT and my application is pending:** you are allowed to stay in the United States while your application is pending. Please note that with the current COVID-19 situation, adjudications may take longer than usual.
- **I’ve applied for OPT, received my EAD, and will start to work soon. My employer still wants me to come in. Am I okay to do so?** Please work directly with your employer if you have questions or concerns.
- **I’m on OPT but my place of work is closed. What should I do?** As long as you are still employed with your employer, and the closure is temporary, you are still in compliance with immigration regulations regarding employment.
- **I applied for Post-Completion OPT and used my dorm address as the mailing address. What do I do if I move off campus?** On campus housing will still be open. If you move, you will need to change your address with USCIS; you can contact USCIS at 1-800-375-5283 to report a change of address. Please make sure to follow up with them afterwards to confirm that your address has been updated in their system to ensure your EAD card is delivered to the new address.

ISSS does not recommend students to travel internationally when their Post-Completion application is pending with USCIS. We always recommend students to remain in U.S. as they are required to show their EAD card when returning to U.S. **With the current COVID-19 outbreak, we are unsure what it may look like when you are planning to return.** If you are considering returning home and this is your last semester, please speak with an ISSS advisor.

**This is my last semester and I am not returning home. Can I still apply for Post-Completion OPT?**

If you are remaining in the U.S. to finish your last semester, you may be eligible to apply for Post-Completion OPT.
I-20 PROCESSING, PICK-UP, MAILING

I need to pick up my I-20 at the ISSS office. How can I pick it up? Will you still be shipping my I-20?

The ISSS Office will continue to process documents as usual. We will work to expedite documents as quickly as possible during this time, but our processing times will now be 7-10 business days. Please plan accordingly.

Our office will remain open for students to pick-up your documents Monday through Friday, 10am – 1pm. When your document is ready for pick up, you will be sent an email to your fit.edu email address. Remember, only you can pick up your documents, per immigration regulations; you will need to show your student ID in order to retrieve your documents.

To request express mail service, go to the eShipGlobal website at https://www.fit.edu/international-student-and-scholar-services/resources/

It is important that you choose “International Student and Scholar Services” as the sender when completing your request.

eShipGlobal will send you an email that includes a tracking number for your shipment. If you experience any problems when using the online service, please use the help feature on their website.

How can I do my packet check with ISSS? (Post-Completion OPT, STEM OPT)

The ISSS Office has produced checklists for both OPT and STEM OPT. If you follow the checklist exactly (put your documents in the order that they appear on the checklist), your packet will be perfect!

OTHER QUESTIONS & RESOURCES

Classes have been moved online and I live in on-campus housing, what should I do?

The residence halls and dining facilities will remain open.

I am having difficulty receiving documentation of finances to extend my I-20 due to related bank closures in my country. What should I do?

Please contact our office and schedule a phone appointment with an international student advisor to discuss your specific situation.

I received a call, text message, and/or email in regards to COVID-19 that is asking for my personal information or bank account details. Is this a scam?

Please be aware of scam texts, calls, and/or emails in relation to COVID-19. Florida Tech, government agencies, CDC, and local health departments will NOT ask you to confirm your bank account, or detailed immigration information. Do not give out this information!

Some students report they have received a text message from the CDC about COVID-19. This is a hoax and not from the CDC.

I am going to move to a new place and will have a new address. Do you need anything?

Please update your address changes through your PAWS account.
I am feeling very anxious about the COVID-19. What should I do?

If you are experiencing stress or anxiety about this situation, we encourage you to reach out to counselors, advisers, or friends to talk about your feelings. Resources on campus that are here for you and can be of support:

- University Counseling Center: [www.fit.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services](http://www.fit.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services)
- Student Health Center: [www.fit.edu/health](http://www.fit.edu/health)
- ISSS Office: [www.fit.edu/isss](http://www.fit.edu/isss)

J-1 EXCHANGE VISITORS

(J-1 VISA HOLDERS IN THE RESEARCH SCHOLAR, PROFESSOR, AND SHORT-TERM SCHOLAR CATEGORIES)

If my lab closes, and I stay in the U.S., what happens to my status?

If you are able to continue to collaborate with your PI/supervisor and make progress in your goals, you will be able to maintain your status, even if you are located off-campus.

If my lab closes and I leave the US temporarily, is it possible to return at a later time?

We do not know how long these travel restrictions will last and what additional countries may be added to the restrictions already in place. If you decide to travel, be prepared, understand the risks, and be advised that you might not be able to return to the U.S. for an unknown period of time, your trip could be disrupted, or you may be quarantined upon your return.

- If you depart the US and are still able to collaborate with your PI/supervisor and make progress in your goals, you will be able to maintain your status. If you will be outside of the US for more than 30 days and are eligible for a Temporary Absence, you will be able to maintain your status. This would be considered a continuation of your program activities. Please note: You must have a valid J-1 visa to re-enter the US after a temporary absence.

- If your program activities (such as research, observation, teaching, and/or collaboration) are suspended, your program will be considered complete, and you will not be able to re-enter the US on your current J-1 visa. Upon return for a new J-1 exchange program, you may be subject to a 12 or 24-month bar. Some exchange visitors will also be subject to the 212(e) home residency requirement, which would impact anyone interested in an H-1b visa or legal permanent residence (green card).

If I leave the US permanently, but will still collaborate with my department while abroad, what should I do?

If you leave permanently without an intent to return, but still plan to collaborate with your department while abroad, please submit a “shorten Program Request” e-form through iStart. Although you can still pursue your program objective while abroad, you will not be able to return to the US on your current J-1 visa.

Am I still eligible for an extension of my program if my current DS-2019 is expiring?

Extensions will be considered as usual, and as long as the eligibility requirements are met, extension will be granted. If an exchange visitor currently abroad was issued a DS-2019 and still plans to visit, is that permissible at this time?
Yes, as long as the invitation from the University host department is still valid. Visitors must follow all general University procedures for travelers, including submitting the Returning Travelers Self-Reporting Form.

At this time, the University is not restricting visits to campus from foreign nationals.

We encourage you to remain informed about these travel restrictions. Please check the university’s COVID-19 website for the latest updates.