

Frequently Asked Questions for International Students and Scholars

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THIS DOCUMENT IS NO LONGER BEING UPDATED. FOR FALL 2020 INFORMATION, GO TO ISSS'S INFORMATION FOR [NEW \(INCOMING\) STUDENTS](#) OR [CONTINUING STUDENTS](#)



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Dear International Students and Scholars,

This Frequently Asked Questions document contains information for continuing international students and scholars. Please be aware that, as this situation continues to evolve, we will continue to update this document as more information becomes available. If you have questions that are not addressed in this FAQ, please use the options listed below to contact ISSS.

Click on the links below regarding questions by area:

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Attention New Students Starting in the Summer/Fall: This document was made primarily for current and departing international students and scholars. We are working on creating additional information for incoming students and their families. Please refer to the [ISSS New Student website](#), the [International Student Preparation Course](#), and our [Virtual Forums for Incoming Students](#) for updates.

ISSS Services

[ISSS Main Page](#)

Q. *How can I access ISSS services?*

A. ISSS advisors and counselors are available to discuss your questions and concerns. We are working remotely this summer. To contact ISSS:

- **Phone:** To make an appointment to talk to an ISSS staff member over the phone, please go to z.umn.edu/issssphone and fill out the phone request form. Our staff will then call you, and, when they do, you can request to change to a Google Hangout or Zoom meeting. Please do not email ISSS after submitting the form as this will lead to a duplication of efforts and confusion.
- **Email:** Send an inquiry to iss@umn.edu.

Q. *I'm looking for help with my academics and would like to meet with an ISSS Academic Counselor. How can I do that?*

A. ISSS offers Academic Counseling for international students looking for academic support and experiencing academic difficulties. ISSS Academic Counseling is currently being offered through Zoom and phone calls. You can request an ISSS Academic Counseling Appointment by submitting our [Academic Counseling Appointment Request Form](#).

Q. *I'm having financial challenges. What financial support is available for international students?*

International students who have financial need may apply for financial help through the [ISSS Funding Program](#). All ISSS funds are limited. Applications will only be considered until funds are allocated. You can review information about ISSS's Funding Program, including eligibility requirements and information about how to apply here [on the ISSS website](#).

International students can also [apply for Emergency Funds through One Stop](#).

General Questions

Q. *What are the state of Minnesota's current health guidelines and restrictions?*

A. The state of Minnesota has a detailed list of [questions and answers](#) regarding what you can and cannot do during this time. You can continue to leave your residence within the guidelines by the State of Minnesota.

We know this can be very isolating, and we encourage you to reach out to others via phone and social media to stay connected. We in ISSS are working on ways to host virtual events; further information will be announced in the [ISSS Weekly Update](#) and the [ISSS Events Calendar](#).

ISSS staff continue to be available to talk to students; please [contact us](#) if you have questions or wish to discuss how this situation is impacting you.

Q. Do international students and/or scholars qualify for recovery Rebates (Stimulus payments)?

A. Please review the information in the [Taxes section](#) of the ISSS website.

Q. Was the International Student Fee for Spring 2020 refunded?

A. President Gabel presented a proposal that was approved by the Board of Regents in early April to refund specific fees for which services are not available due to COVID-19. These fees are described here in [this FAQ](#), and include items like the Recreation and Wellness Fee and Dining Services and Residential Life (for those who are no longer in on-campus housing).

ISSS continues to offer our services remotely and continues to work to help students and scholars maintain their status by keeping their SEVIS record up-to-date. As such, the ISSS fee was exempted from the refund given to students at the May Board of Regents meeting.

Departing the U.S.

General Information

Q. Can I go home?

A. The University and ISSS support you in making the decision that is best for you in regard to returning to your home country for the summer. Please review the information below if you make the decision to return home.

Q. I want to go home but cannot find an available flight. What should I do?

A. You should continue to check flight availability daily. We recommend that you check with your embassy to see if your country is offering assistance for individuals who are trying to return home.

The U.S. Department of State has compiled information from some embassies regarding how to find flights home. To access it, [go to this website](#) and click on Embassy Contacts followed by Repatriation Assistance. (**Please Note:** This information was made for Exchange Visitors, but we believe it may be helpful for all international students and scholars. ISSS does not have additional information.)

If, after taking these steps, you are still unable to arrange for a flight and your grace period is about to or has run out, keep copies of the documentation showing the efforts you made and contact ISSS so we can make a record of your efforts to depart the U.S. in a timely manner.

Permanent Departures (Not Planning to Return to UMN or U.S.)

Q. I want to go home, and I do not plan to come back to the University of Minnesota. What should I do before I depart?

A. If you will not return to the University of Minnesota during a future term:

- **For F-1 students:** If you are not applying for OPT, you need to report to ISSS regarding your degree completion and/or departure from the U of M. Please download, complete, and submit the [ISSS Departure Form](#) via email. You may also email or request a [phone advising session](#) if

you want to speak to an F-1 adviser before submitting the form. We will be getting busier due to the end of the semester, so plan accordingly to avoid long wait times

- **For J-1 students and scholars:** We will need to shorten your program if you are ending your J program more than 15 days before your current DS-2019 end date. For J students, you should be aware that you will not be eligible for applying for Academic Training.

We ask that you notify our office once you have arrived in your home country by completing the J-1 Student or J-1 Scholar departure form in [MyISSS](#). If you have difficulty accessing the form, you may send an email to ISSSjast@umn.edu stating 1) that you have departed, 2) when your J program ended, and 3) when you departed the U.S.

Temporary Departures (Planning to Return to UMN)

Q. *I want to go home now, but I plan to return in the fall or at some other point. What should I do?*

A. You should check the Travel Signature on your document to ensure it will be valid after **the date you will return** to the United States. If not, you should submit a request for a Travel I-20/DS-2019 through MyISSS. You should also review the following questions for additional visa-related items.

Q. *I want to go home, but my visa will expire. Will I have any trouble returning to the U.S.?*

A. To be transparent, this is a risk, based on current information. Many U.S. Embassies are not currently taking visa appointments. We are uncertain when they will resume, and there will likely be a backlog for visa appointments when they begin taking new appointments. Please keep this in mind when making your decision. If you go home, check the Embassy/Consulate website regularly.

Q. *If I am outside of the U.S. for 5 months or more, will my student visa and I-20 expire or be invalid? Would I need to apply/pay for a new SEVIS number?*

A. The 5-month rule only takes effect after a student's SEVIS record is terminated. SEVP has published guidance that a student's F-1 record will not be terminated for students who complete their school term even if they go home and finish out the remainder of the term as long as they continue their studies at the same school in the fall. As such, students who complete this semester of school will have SEVIS records that stay active and, therefore, they may return on an unexpired visa and I-20 with a valid travel signature.

If a student remains outside of the U.S. for more than five months and their record has been terminated, they will need to return on a new SEVIS record and an initial I-20.

Immigration Information

Work Authorization (OPT/CPT/AT)

Q. *If I go home for the remainder of the term and graduate, can I apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT, F-1 visa) or Academic Training (AT, J-1 visa)?*

A. At this time:

- **Optional Practical Training (OPT, F-1 visa):** Students who apply for OPT are expected to be physically present inside the United States. If you apply from outside the U.S., USCIS may not accept your application.

However, if you do not submit the OPT application in a timely manner, you will definitely not be able to do so later. If you are interested in OPT, you should apply, knowing it is possible the application will be denied due to being submitted while being outside the U.S.

- **Academic Training (AT, J-1 visa):** At this time, students who apply for Academic Training are expected to be physically present inside the United States. Academic Training must also begin within 30 days of completion of your program of study.

If you do not submit your Academic Training application and begin your Academic Training within the 30 days after completion of your studies, you will definitely not be able to do so later.

Q. *Can I apply for CPT or OPT right now, and is ISSS accepting paper applications?*

A. You can apply for CPT and OPT at this time. We are accepting electronic applications and continue to process CPT and OPT applications which are available in MYISSS (<https://myiss.umn.edu>). Paper applications are not accepted.

Q. *I have a position for OPT, but they have informed me I will need to work fewer than 20 hours a week due to the economic impacts of COVID-19? Is that acceptable?*

A. Yes. For the duration of the COVID-19 emergency, SEVP considers students who are working in their OPT opportunities fewer than 20 hours a week as engaged in OPT.

Q. *Are non-citizens eligible for unemployment insurance?*

A. The [U.S. Department of Labor](https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-services) website has general information.

Each state administers its own program, and the eligibility requirements may vary. Please follow the link above to see what the requirements are for the state where you are living, and for the contact information for each state's unemployment office.

Q. *I am on OPT, and my company plans to give its workers "leave without pay." Does this count as unemployment?*

A. This is a grey area, and we recommend checking with your employer about whether they continue to consider you to be an employee. If they do, you could request that they prepare a letter on your behalf. Different employers and states will have different interpretations about what is considered unemployment.

Q. *Should a student on OPT who is on a leave without pay, been furloughed, or laid off, report in their SEVP Portal that they have employment?*

A. If an employer-employee relationship still exists and this is considered to be a leave rather than a termination, we believe an argument can be made for not reporting this as "unemployment"

- Ask your employer for documentation stating what your status is.
- If your employment start date has been postponed due to the pandemic, and you have not started working, we recommend reporting these days as unemployment.

Academic-Related Items

Q. What if I have an internship requirement?

- A. Governor Walz's "stay at home" order (3/27/20) means that there are new restrictions for courses with in-person requirements, such as internships and practicums. For more information, please review the Office of Public Engagement's [Information](#) and [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

J Scholar Visa Items

Q. *I am departing the U.S. and ending my J program. What do I need to do with ISSS?*

- A. Please review our information about [permanent departures](#) for the steps you should take.

Q. *I am going home. I would like to work remotely; is this OK? Do I have to be in the U.S. to maintain my J program?*

- A. You can go home and work remotely, but you should contact ISSS and your Faculty mentor so we can make appropriate arrangements based on your long term plans:

- **If You Plan to Return:** You can come back to the University of Minnesota to continue your J program if you continue your work from home and do not let your DS-2019 expire. Be sure to talk with your faculty mentor about your plans before you leave and make sure your faculty mentor is in agreement. You should also get a letter from your faculty mentor explaining your plans to show at the consulate and/or border upon your return.

You will need a travel signature on your DS-2019 to get back into the U.S. Be sure to get one before you leave, if possible. You can also request one while in your home country through MyISSS, but make sure to leave enough time before you will return for processing and shipping.

- **If You Are Not Certain Whether You Will Return or Not:** We can keep your J program active or end it. You should discuss this with your faculty mentor before you leave. If we end your J program, we can not reactivate it. For those in the Research Scholar or Professor categories, you are subject to the 24 month bar once your J program ends. This means that you will not be able to return as a J-1 Research Scholar or Professor for 24 months if we end your program now.

We can keep your J program active while you are at home overseas and you can let us know if you would like your J program to end. If you decide that you have no intention of returning to the University of Minnesota, we should end your J program.

- **If You Know You Will Not Return to the University of Minnesota:** ISSS can end your J program. Be sure to fill out a departure form upon your return to your home country. If you are a UMN employee, talk to your HR person in your department about your wish to keep working

remotely to get paid and not needing to pay for health insurance as it is no longer required by J regulations. Someone in HR has to set this up.

Q. *I am about to reach the end of my DS-2019, but I am having a difficult time finding a flight and may not be able to leave on time. Is there anything I can do?*

A. The Department of State has approved a two-month extension for J scholars that are still active and have a program end date between April 1 – May 31, 2020. This decision was made to provide time for scholars to finalize travel plans to return home. We are hoping this will give scholars who had reached their maximum limit of stay, sufficient time to find a flight and return home.

Our office has been gradually reaching out to scholars with April or May program end dates to ask whether they have already departed the United States, inform them of the two month extension granted by the Department of State, or for those eligible, asking if they wish an extension of their J program beyond the two months. If an extension is wanted, eligible scholars should apply as soon as possible.

Please be sure to pay attention to your email and respond to our questions.

Q. *I am wanting and needing an extension and now I cannot come into ISSS. What do I do?*

A. Go to the ISSS website, download our extension application, fill it out, and email it to issjast@umn.edu. We cannot respond immediately, but we will respond soon.

If your program end date is coming up in 1-2 weeks and you need an extension right away, please let us know by typing your current program end date in the subject line of your extension application email.

We are processing extension requests in 1-2 weeks. We email you if we have any questions and/or when your new extension is ready. If you do not hear back from us in 2 weeks, please contact us.

Mental Health, Stress, and Loneliness

International Students

[Student Mental Health](#)

Q. *I'm an international student and feel worried about my family and my future plans. It can be difficult to concentrate. Can I get support from ISSS?*

A. These questions are very understandable. Many students are feeling worried about the uncertainties they and their families are facing. ISSS counselors are here to support you; complete our [Phone Request Form](#) to request a phone or video chat.

Q. *I am feeling alone because my friends went back home. I spend all of my time alone in my room or apartment. How can I get support? How can I connect with others?*

A. Many students who stayed in the Twin Cities are feeling isolated because they are spending most or all of their time alone. It is important to have daily virtual contact with others during this time.

ISSS counselors would be happy to talk with you about how you are doing and how you can connect with others. Complete our [Phone Request Form](#) to request a phone or video chat.

Q. *Are campus mental health offices still providing services for students?*

A. These [campus mental services](#) are still available; they are operating remotely:

- [Student Counseling Services](#)
- [Boynton Mental Health](#)
- University's 24-hour phone and text crisis line (Call 612-301-4673 or Text "UMN" to 61222)
- [Stress Check-ins](#)
- [Learn-to-Live \(online cognitive behavioral therapy\)](#)

International Scholars and Employees

Q. *I'm an international scholar/employee. Where can I get support? I am worried and feeling isolated.*

A. International scholars and employees can get support from ISSS counselors. Complete our [Phone Request Form](#) to request a phone or video appointment.

Other resources include:

- If you are eligible for U employee benefits, contact: [Employee Assistance Program](#)
- Check your health insurance provider for additional resources.
- 24-Hour crisis line for All University staff, faculty and students: Call 612-301-4673 or text "UMN" to 61222.

Medical and Health Insurance

[Boynton Health Services Coronavirus Webpage](#)

Medical Questions

Q. *Is Boynton Health open?*

A. Yes, but you should visit [the website](#) to determine what services are available. If you are unsure what type of service you need or the urgency for being seen, call the Boynton Health Nurse Line at 612-625-7900. You can get answers to your health questions seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

Q. *How do I obtain a clearance letter of good health if it is requested by an airline or employer?*

A. If you are asked for a clearance letter of good health, contact the Boynton Health Service Nurse Line at 612-625-7900. The nurse will discuss with you the process for seeing a physician and obtaining the letter required.

Q. *What if I get sick with something else?*

A. You still need to treat yourself for all ailments. The Boynton Health Service Nurse Line is available seven days a week and 24 hours a day available for guidance at 612-625-7900. You can also [call or go online](#) to schedule appointments.

Health Insurance

[Office of Student Health Benefits Coronavirus](#)

Q. *Do I have health insurance? For how long?*

- A. Students on the Student Health Benefit Plan can find [the coverage dates](#) on their website. For those on the Graduate Assistantship Plan, [the coverage dates](#) including [summer coverage](#) are listed on their website.

Contact the Student Health Benefits Office at umshbo@umn.edu if you have additional questions about your insurance plan.

Q. *I graduated this spring. Will my health insurance continue over the summer?*

- **Students:** Yes, if you are graduating this spring, your coverage under the [Student Health Benefit Plan](#) or [Graduate Assistant Plan](#) will continue past graduation until the end of summer coverage.
- **Graduate Assistants:** You must maintain your Assistantship through April and into May to receive coverage over the summer. If you do this:
 - **GAs with a 50% Assistantship:** You will pay no extra amount
 - **GAs with less than a 50% Assistantship:** You will be billed the equivalent of your normal monthly contributions for the coverage. You will be sent additional information about your payment and the option to cancel.

Q. *What if I get tested for COVID-19? Would my insurance cover my care?*

- A. There have been recent updates about expanded COVID-19 coverage. Updated information is available about the cost for testing and care is available on the [Student Health Benefits COVID-19 webpage](#).

Q. *I am a J-1 scholar and still in MN working from home on my UMN J program. Do I need to enroll in the UMN's insurance?*

- A. UMN J-1 scholars need to continue to enroll in health insurance through the Office of Student Health Benefits or Employee Benefits while in the U.S. Enrolling in insurance is still a requirement to maintain J-1 status and the UMN's requirements, and more importantly, it is imperative for your well-being. If you have questions about how to enroll:
- **Those enrolling in the Student Health Plan:** Contact the Student Health Benefit Plan (umshbo@umn.edu or 612-624-0627/1-800-232-9017).
 - **Those enrolled through Employee Benefits:** You will automatically be enrolled for the length of your employment. Communicate with your department's Human Resources department, if you have questions about your employee benefits.

Travel Items

[COVID-19 Updates Related to Travel](#)

Q. *I am preparing to leave the United States (temporarily or permanently). What do I need to know?*

A. Please review our information on [Departing the U.S.](#)

Q. *If I enter the U.S., what do I need to do?*

A. All travelers entering the U.S. will be expected to comply with [Action Steps for Returned Travelers](#) pertaining to returning to their communities. This information was provided by the Minnesota Department of Health.

Bias and Discrimination

[ISSS Tips for Responding to Bias, Harassment, and/or Discrimination](#)

Q. *If I feel I'm being treated unfairly, discriminated against, or harassed due to concerns around the Coronavirus, what should I do?*

A. It is valid for you to feel angry, confused, sad, and disappointed when you experience bias or discrimination. If you have experienced bias, discrimination, misunderstanding, or differential treatment related to the reactions and fears of coronavirus, please reach out to our office through our [online call request form](#) or email iss@umn.edu. If an ISSS staff person is not available, make a report to the [Bias Response and Referral Network](#) (BRRN) and/or the [Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action](#). If you feel that you are in danger, call 911 immediately.

By contacting ISSS, we will be able to provide you support and connect you to other important services on campus. It will also help us understand where and how bias is occurring, so we can be informed advocates for our International student and scholar community.

Q. *What should I do if I witness someone being treated unfairly, discriminated against or harassed?*

A. Please review our documents about tips for responding to bias, harassment, and/or discrimination. We have included a section with [suggestions for bystanders](#).

Employment Issues (On-Campus, SSN)

[Review Immigration Section for CPT/OPT/AT questions](#)

On-Campus Employment

Q. *Can I continue my on-campus job if I go back to my home country?*

A. As of right now, during this declared state of emergency, students can continue with their employment while outside the U.S in order to support the continuation of university services.

Q. *Can I complete my I-9 Form to start employment?*

A. Yes, the UMN Office of Human Resources is continuing to accept I-9 appointments for new foreign national employees. Email ohr@umn.edu to make an appointment at the [Donhowe Building](#) and review [OHR's website](#) for more information.

New employees do not need a Social Security Number to complete their I-9. You will need to apply for a Social Security Number when the SSA office reopens and report it to your department's HR office. A Social Security Number is needed for tax treaty purposes and to obtain a W-2, a form you will need to file your tax return.

Social Security Number

Q. *I am about to start a job. Can I get a Social Security Number (SSN)?*

- A. If you have not yet applied for OPT and you need an SSN, you have the option to apply for one when completing the I-765 form.

Otherwise, you will need to wait to apply for an SSN as all [Social Security Administration field offices are closed due to COVID-19](#), and new applications are not being processed. If you have work permission, you should apply for an SSN as soon as the SSA begins processing applications again.

You will need to apply for a SSN once the office re-opens. You will need a SSN to qualify for any applicable tax-treaty benefits that exist with your country along with other U.S. tax requirements.

Q. *Can I begin work without a Social Security Number (SSN)?*

- A. Yes, [USCIS documentation](#) confirms F-1 students, J-1 students/scholars, and others **do not** need an SSN to properly complete an I-9 form (the form you will be required to complete by your organization before starting employment). You will need to work with your employer's Human Resource (HR) department to complete the I-9 form without a Social Security Number.

Q. *I lost my Social Security Card, and my employer needs a copy of it. How can I apply for a replacement card?*

- A. The Social Security Administration is continuing to process applications for replacement cards, but you will be required to mail your original passport with the application. ISSS advises that you ask your HR department if you can wait to submit your application until the Social Security Administration's Office reopens.

If you must apply for a replacement now, you will need to complete the [SS-5 application](#) and mail it along with the required identification documents (further information is available on the form).

Tax Information

[ISSS Tax Information](#)

Q. *Has the deadline for submitting my taxes changed?*

- A. Yes, both the federal and state tax deadlines have been extended until July 15, 2020. For more information, review:
- [Internal Revenue Service \(Federal\)](#)
 - [Minnesota Department of Revenue](#)

Q. *Can I get assistance with completing my non-resident tax return?*

- A. The Non-resident Tax Assistance program is no longer accepting new clients for the tax season. They are willing to answer simple nonresident questions by emailing nrvtap@umn.edu. Through the end of May, the target response time for questions is 1 business day. Starting June 1, they will continue to answer questions, but it may take a week for them to respond.

Sprintax remains available, and it can be accessed through MyISSS. Additional information can be found in the Powerpoint presentations linked through the [Taxes Section](#) of the ISSS website.

Housing

[Housing & Residential Life COVID-19 Webpage](#)

Q. *What are my on-campus housing and dining options over the summer?*

- A. Housing and Residential Life is providing housing over the summer for students who need it. Review the [Housing website](#) and submit the [Summer Housing Application](#) for more information.

Q. *How do I quarantine with a roommate or in the residence halls?*

- A. If you need to self-quarantine, you should talk with the Boynton Nurse Line at 612-625-7900. Nurses are available seven days a week and 24 hours a day for guidance. The nurse line can help you identify the type of situation and guidelines you need to follow. Additionally, connect with your Hall Director as soon as possible to get assistance.

Boynton Health Services also recommends visiting the Center for Disease Control (CDC) website specifically on "[What To Do if You Are Sick](#)" and "[Guidance to Prevent Spread in Homes and Residential Communities](#)."

Boynton can work with you to identify alternative housing if you are not able to stay at your current location.

Food, Internet, and Utilities

Q. *I am worried about having enough food to eat. What resources are available?*

- A. The Nutritious U Pantry will be open limited hours this summer. Beginning May 13th, any University of Minnesota student can request to pick up a bag of food for pick up at Coffman Union or to have it delivered to their residence through the form available on the [Nutritious U Pantry website](#). The requested food will be available for pickup on Wednesdays between 3 and 6pm or deliveries will be done Wednesday afternoons.

The [Off-Campus Living website](#) also lists local food pantries where qualifying individuals can get free food.

Q. *How can I access the internet at home if I don't have it?*

- A. For those in Minneapolis, USI opened their [WiFi network](#) in Minneapolis for those that may need temporary free internet access. Additionally:

- The University's [Off-Campus Living website](#) for further information on what other internet companies and other companies are providing free short-term service.

Other Resources

- [Safe Campus Update](#)
- [Safe Campus Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [UMNTC Undergraduate Education COVID-19 Updates](#)
- [Graduate School COVID FAQ](#)