

OISS Update: Travel Information (March 17, 2020)

Dear Students,

We have received many inquiries asking if you can return to your home countries or countries of residence and have many questions related to this question.

The OISS can deeply sympathize with students wanting to return home to be with their families. However, it is important to know all the risks associated with traveling at this time as it relates to non-immigrant visa compliance and global health impact.

Travel Signatures

Travel signature on the Form I-20 is not required to depart the United States. Students who decide they must return home immediately can do so without a travel signature. The OISS is currently closed and the OISS staff is unable to accommodate travel signatures requests at this time. If you decide to leave the United States, please see all the information included in this email.

SEVP Update

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) has recently advised that due to the COVID-19 emergency, students can travel home to continue current classes online while still maintaining their Active SEVIS status. However, these students are to report to their Designated School Official their departure decision and information. Students are also expected to keep in touch with their DSO regularly while out of the United States. **Per SEVP this approval is only valid for the duration of the emergency.

***Please note that SEVP still has not made any changes to the 5-month rule. The current policy requires students who are outside of the country and are not able to return and enroll in school within 5 months will be required to obtain a new I-20, pay a new SEVIS I-901 fee, and obtain a new visa to return to resume studies. For students who are planning to depart now and come back for the fall 2020 semester, you would be subject to this regulation. We hope that SEVP will make updates accordingly, however, we have to prepare for the fact that they may not change the regulations.

For this reason, if you feel you must depart the United States, and if at all possible with given circumstances, the OISS recommends departing later.

*Please note that students with expired or soon to be expiring visas will be required to have a valid visa upon re-entry into the United States. Given the impact COVID-19 has globally, the OISS is unsure of what visa application processing, procedures, and timelines will look like in the near future. Please understand these risks before deciding to depart the United States.

OPT/STEM Issue

Be advised that per USCIS policy, students cannot file an OPT/STEM OPT application from outside the United States.

It is important to know that prior to COVID-19 concerns, the OISS strongly discouraged students from leaving the United States while their OPT or STEM OPT is pending. If you have an application pending and intend to continue with your application, we strongly encourage you to stay in the U.S.

Health Impact

Before you travel, please be sure to know the risks associated with traveling. It is very possible that traveling at this time will put you at a greater risk of contracting COVID-19. Please note that this also means you may be at a greater risk of spreading COVID-19 to your family, friends, and greater population in your home country or country of residence. As a reminder, here are the symptoms to watch for:

- A fever of 100.4 or higher
- Cough
- Difficulty breathing

Please see the CDC website for further info: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>

Departing the U.S.

Before departing the United States, please ensure there are no travel restrictions imposed by your home country or country of residence. Please also be mindful of scheduled layovers and what travel restrictions will be imposed in those locations as well.

****If you plan to depart the United States, you are required to report to the OISS. Prior to your departure, please send us an email to oiss@emich.edu with the following information:

- Your name
- EMU student ID number
- Date you plan to depart the U.S.
- When you plan to return (estimated date)
- A copy of your flight itinerary

The OISS will update your record with this information. This is VERY important to prepare in case there are adjustments to SEVP regulations for students on F-1/J-1 visas.

Students who depart the U.S. and do not notify the OISS may risk SEVIS record complications.

Departing Michigan (Domestic Travel)

While SEVP has approved students to travel to their home country or country of residence for the duration of the emergency, we want to advise that SEVP has NOT set any approved guidance on students leaving current areas and studying from other places in the United States.

The OISS still does not recommend domestic travel within Michigan or out-of-state during the Michigan State of Emergency and the National State of Emergency. We strongly encourage students to stay local and ensure they are meeting all their academic requirements.

If you decide you must travel outside the area or the state of Michigan, strongly recommend you report this to the OISS. Prior to your departure, please send us an email to oiss@emich.edu with the following information:

- Your name
- EMU student ID number
- Date you plan to depart the area/Michigan
- When you plan to return (estimated date)
- A copy of your flight itinerary, or if not flying, intended travel plans

The OISS will update your record with this information.

Please understand that things have been changing very quickly. The OISS will continue to update you with any information or changes. Know that we are working on helping you the best way we can while ensuring we are following all policies and regulations imposed by the federal and state governments as well as Eastern Michigan University.

Don't forget to check the EMU COVID-19 page for updates often:
<https://www.emich.edu/uhs/coronavirus/index.php>

Please be sure to email us at oiss@emich.edu with any questions or concerns. Please understand that we are receiving a high volume of emails and are working as quickly as we can to answer them in a timely manner. We greatly appreciate your patience during these challenging times.

Best Regards,
Office for International Students & Scholars
oiss@emich.edu

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