



FAQS FOR INCOMING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ON F-1 & J-1 VISAS RE: COVID-19

Updated 08/03/20

Please be reassured that Rutgers University is closely monitoring and responding to the COVID-19 situation, and that we at [Rutgers Global](#) will continue to share additional information as soon as it becomes available.

Stay regularly tuned to university and government resources:

- [President Holloway](#) and [Chancellor Molloy's](#) messages on July 6, 2020 regarding Rutgers fall operating status.
- The University's coronavirus.rutgers.edu site
- [Rutgers Global alerts](#), the [Rutgers Global Travel Updates and Advisories](#) website, and your Rutgers email inbox for updates from the university and our offices.
- For further information, especially concerning travel advisories, you should continue to follow the relevant [U.S. Department of State](#) (U.S.DOS) and [CDC](#) sites.

Feel free to [contact our office](#) if you have any questions that are not answered by the FAQs below.

1. Will classes be online or in-person in the Fall 2020 semester?

On Monday, July 6, 2020, [President Holloway](#) announced that Rutgers will be operating in a hybrid model - delivering mostly remote instruction with a limited number of in-person classes in fall 2020. [Chancellor Molloy's](#) message further outlines how remote instruction, student services, and social engagement will be offered in the fall. The [R-Connection website](#) provides answers to many questions regarding campus services, academics, etc.

RBHS students should visit the [Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences webpage](#) for any announcements about the RBHS campuses.

2. What is the current government policy on online study and SEVIS status?

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) guidance from July 6, 2020 [has been rescinded](#) (July 14, 2020) and will no longer take effect. F-1 students are expected to follow the [guidance issued in March 2020](#). On July 24, 2020, the SEVP issued a broadcast message and [clarification on its March guidance](#).

Based on the [July 24 clarifications from ICE](#) and the [ICE FAQs \(updated on July 15, 2020\)](#), Rutgers Global - ISSS has the following advice and guidance for international students in F-1 status.

If you are inside the US with an I-20 marked "initial attendance" (students transferring their SEVIS status or changing status within the US)

- You can enroll in 100% online coursework or any combination of in-person and online study, as needed, to make normal progress toward your degree. You must follow all other rules and regulations to [maintain your legal status](#).

If you are outside the US with an I-20 marked "initial attendance"

You may not enter the US unless your academic schedule has some in-person component. If your schedule is 100% online, you may not enter the US for fall 2020. You can still begin/resume your studies from overseas through one of the following options, but you will need to request to have your I-20 start date changed to the next semester.

- Online courses offered through Rutgers (available to all students)

- ROSE Program (for first year undergraduate students residing in China)
- Study Abroad at Home (for undergraduate students, if offered at/near your location)
- If your program requires your in-person presence on-campus, please contact your program to discuss this requirement.
 - Should you need to be on-campus for the fall 2020 semester, you will be provided with a “Travel/Visa Support Letter” through the [RGlobal portal](#). Please note that this support letter does not guarantee that you will be issued a visa or be permitted entry into the United States and is only meant to provide additional documentation that you intend to enroll in a course of study which is a combination of hybrid and in-person requirements.
 - Graduate students may also request an optional letter of support from your academic department. See an [example of an academic letter of support](#). This is not a requirement, but it may be helpful.
- If you are transferring your SEVIS record to Rutgers, please contact the office that issued your original Rutgers I-20 (e.g. graduate admissions, undergraduate admissions, or ISSS) to discuss how you can get an I-20 with a future start date.

3. What are the current travel restrictions and updates I should be mindful of?

The U.S. government has suspended entry for any non-U.S. citizens and non-permanent residents who were physically present within the following countries during the 14-day period preceding their entry to the U.S.

- [People’s Republic of China](#) (excluding Hong Kong and Macau)
- [Islamic Republic of Iran](#)
- [European Schengen area countries](#) - 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.
- [United Kingdom and Ireland \(as of Monday, March 16, midnight\)](#)
- [Brazil \(May 24-25\)](#)

[Canada-Mexico Essential Travel Restrictions](#) - COVID-19 restrictions that restrict entry to the United States through land ports of entry along the U.S.-Canada and U.S.-Mexico borders to “essential travel” only.

[Presidential Proclamation](#) (June 22, 2020) - Temporarily Suspending Entry of H-1B and Certain J Nonimmigrants to the U.S. The Proclamation does not affect any students in F-1 or J-1 status. No Immediate effect on those presently in the U.S.

[National Interest Exceptions for Certain Travelers from the Schengen Area, United Kingdom, and Ireland](#) (July 16, 2020) – This guidance from the Department of State allows certain travelers eligibility of National Interest Exceptions (NIE) to travel to the US even while the travel bans remain in effect. According to the guidance, F-1 students from the "Schengen Area, the UK, and Ireland with valid F-1 and M-1 visas, do not need to seek a national interest exception to travel. Students from those areas who are traveling on a J-1 may contact the nearest embassy or consulate to initiate an exception request.”

Students who qualify for the NIE should be able to enter through a [designated airport](#).

Please note that the situation is changing daily. For further information, please review travel advisories available from the [U.S. State Department](#), the [CDC](#), and the country/countries outside of the US from which you want to fly from or to. Feel free to [contact our office](#) if you have any other questions.

4. Do I need an I-20/DS-2019 if I am starting my program from overseas? What is the general process to receive my I-20/DS-2019?

No, you do not need an I-20 or a DS-2019 if you are starting your program from overseas. However, if you have received an I-20/DS-2019 and are unable to come to campus for the fall semester, you will be issued a new document with a later start date. The admissions office will provide you with instructions on providing the documentation needed to issue the I-20/DS-2019. You will also be asked to provide copies of your passport, and financial documentation. Please follow these instructions as you receive them, to request your new I-20/DS-2019. To change the start date of your I-20s/DS-2019, you may need to resubmit newer versions of your financial documents. You will be informed about what is needed for this process.

Admissions offices are working remotely and will process I-20s with electronic signatures for a future semester when you are expected to enroll at Rutgers for in-person instruction. You will need your I-20/DS-2019 to apply for a visa at a US Embassies and Consulate. If you are starting at Rutgers in J-1 status, we will make special arrangements to mail your DS-2019 to you.

RBHS Students - Initial and Transfer students are still receiving original I-20's via mail.

5. I have been re-admitted to Rutgers for the summer; how does the current crisis impact my situation?

Students who are in the U.S. in active SEVIS status (possibly at another institution, e.g. a community college) can transfer their SEVIS records to Rutgers and participate in remote instruction offered by their program.

Please review the information on our "[Returning to Rutgers](#)" section of our website for more details.

Students who are outside the U.S. will need to contact an advisor at ISSS for guidance on the appropriate way to obtain a new I-20 when they are able to return. According to current guidance, students with I-20s marked "initial attendance" will not be able to enter the U.S. if their academic schedule is 100% online. Students who may have received an I-20 to resume their studies at Rutgers in the fall can do so remotely if they are pursuing a fully online course of study. If their program has any in-person requirements, they may return to the U.S. ISSS will advise on support documentation that may help with visa issuance and travel to the U.S. for those that may need it.

6. The COVID-19 crisis has impacted my financial situation. Can I still apply for my I-20/DS-2019?

I-20s and DS-2019s can only be issued if you can show enough funds to cover the first year of tuition/fees, living expenses, and health insurance. If you find that you are ultimately unable to come for your program, you can contact ISSS to either cancel your I-20/DS-2019 or defer to a future term provided admissions and your academic program grants the deferral. Please note that F-1 students are not eligible for paid off-campus work authorization until after they have completed one academic year at Rutgers (in the United States). New students are eligible for on-campus employment provided they are in the U.S.

If your financial documents are more than six months old by the time of your visa appointment, we recommend that you get updated documents for the visa appointment.

7. Will I have any issues with a digitally signed I-20?

[US government guidance](#) indicates that I-20s issued electronically or with electronic signatures remain valid until students have a need for an updated I-20. This same guidance indicates that both the US Department of State (the unit that issues US visas) and Customs and Border Protection (the unit that checks documents at US borders and entry points) are in support of this action.

8. I am a new student starting my studies in the fall 2020 session at Rutgers University. Can I begin my studies in the fall if I cannot come to the U.S. in time?

Yes, you can still to begin your program from overseas if your department/school provides remote instruction options, but your immigration status would only be activated when you are able to enter the U.S. In this case, you will need to change your I-20/DS-2019 start date to a future semester.

Please note that the deferral of your I-20/DS-2019 and the deferral of your actual enrollment at Rutgers are separate processes. If you are unable to come to the US in time for the fall semester, your I-20/DS-2019 start date will need to be deferred; however, you can begin your enrollment at Rutgers from overseas by enrolling in online classes offered by Rutgers or participating in some of the other options available to you such as the [ROSE program](#) or a Rutgers Study Abroad program (for undergraduate students).

9. What is the process of changing my I-20/DS-2019 start date?

Graduate Students

If you decide to defer your program start, you must confirm the deferral with your admitting school/department first. Contact the admissions office (grad_help@gradadm.rutgers.edu) and they will issue you an updated I-20/DS-2019 with a later start date but the same SEVIS ID number, when needed.

Undergraduate Students

If you would like to defer your program start date, you must contact the undergraduate admissions office (ruinternational@admissions.rutgers.edu) to discuss your options. The undergraduate admissions office will also be able to issue you an updated I-20 with a later start date and the same SEVIS ID number, when needed.

RBHS Students

If you decide to defer your program start, you should first contact your school to apply for a deferral and then contact Stephanie Otte (sotte@global.rutgers.edu) with a copy of the deferral letter and she will issue you a new I-20 with a later start date but the same SEVIS ID number, when needed.

10. What is the process of deferring my enrollment at Rutgers?

We understand that some students may choose to defer their enrollment at Rutgers to a later semester. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, several departments/programs/schools at Rutgers are offering this option to new students.

Undergraduate Students – please follow the instructions [here](#).

Graduate Students – please discuss your enrollment options with your graduate program and the [graduate admissions office](#).

RBHS Students- Please contact the [RBHS Admissions office](#) of the school you have been accepted into.

11. I am planning to attend Rutgers in the fall and am already in the U.S. What should I do?

New students who are already in the U.S. (in high school, or at a different institution), can have their SEVIS records transferred to Rutgers and stay in the U.S. even if their program at Rutgers begins in the fall. Please consult with the international services office in your current school about your transfer eligibility and timelines.

12. I am a student currently enrolled at another institution in the U.S. Do I need a new visa to begin study at Rutgers in the fall?

You do not need a new visa to begin the new program at Rutgers if you remain in the U.S. while between schools. If you choose to travel internationally, you will need to check with your embassy or consulate to determine if you need to apply for a new visa. If you have a valid visa (valid at the time of expected entry to the U.S.), chances are you won't need to apply for a new one.

F-1 students can have their record transferred to Rutgers within 60 days of their program completion date at the current school. Your program at Rutgers must begin within five months of the date of last enrollment at your current school (program completion date) or the last date of authorized Optional Practical Training (OPT).

If you are unable to enter the U.S. to start your program due to COVID-19, the 5-month rule could be waived with approval from the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP). This will require the ISSS office to work with SEVP to correct your F-1 program start date to the next available session. ISSS will work with transfer students in this situation on a case by case basis.

J-1 students can transfer their SEVIS records to Rutgers, but their new program must begin immediately after completion of the current program (no gap allowed).

If choosing to travel while between programs, please note that you still need to consider changing travel restrictions and your personal situation before deciding if travel is the best option. If you do not have a valid visa, you should consider not leaving the US, as the new visa process may prevent you from returning in time to start your program.

13. Will I be able to work off-campus in an internship in summer 2021 or earlier if I take my first semester at Rutgers outside the United States?

Newly admitted students who were not previously enrolled in another academic program in the United States and do their first semester remotely outside of the United States must complete two consecutive semesters in F-1 status in the United States to be eligible to apply for [Optional Practical Training \(OPT\)](#) or [Curricular Practical Training \(CPT\)](#).

Under these circumstances, students would NOT be eligible to apply for [Curricular Practical Training \(CPT\)](#) during the summer following their first academic year, unless their program requires an internship or practicum during that summer. If it is permissible for students to complete their internship or practicum at a later time in their academic program, then CPT would not be possible for students who do the first semester of their program at Rutgers outside of the United States.

Newly admitted students who previously did another academic program in the United States and transferred their SEVIS record to Rutgers would be eligible to apply for either CPT or OPT during the summer following their first academic year at Rutgers even if they do the first semester at Rutgers remotely outside of the United States (as long as their current SEVIS record remain valid).

14. What happens if the embassies do not open before the fall semester?

In response to the challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, on March 20, 2020, the [Department of State](#) suspended all routine visa services at all U.S. Embassies and Consulates world-wide. As global conditions evolve, the Department of State is now (as of July, 2020) beginning a "[phased resumption of routine visa services](#)". Students should check with the embassies or consulates near them as they prepare for their visa applications. We would also recommend checking the [Department of State website](#) for the status of operations at the embassy where they intend to apply for a visa.

Students should continue to monitor the news, airline travel information, and the [Rutgers Global website](#) for additional changes or updates. We also have a lot of good information related to [travel and visa application](#) on our website.

15. If I get the F1 visa, but cannot go to the US because of travel restrictions, is the visa still valid?

If you have an F-1 visa, it will remain valid until the expiration date on the visa stamp. You can use it to attend Rutgers at a later semester, even if you receive an updated/new I-20 from the university.

16. I will start fall 2020 remotely and expect to be on campus in spring 2021. When do I apply for my visa?

You should apply for a visa when a visa appointment is available at the Embassy or Consulate close to you. If you are not able to get a visa in time for the start of fall 2020 classes, you can apply for the visa later in the fall semester. However, you will need an updated I-20/DS-2019 document from Rutgers to show a deferred start date. Please contact the admissions office for your updated I-20.

Undergraduate Students: ruinternational@admissions.rutgers.edu

Graduate Students: grad_help@gradadm.rutgers.edu

RBHS Students: iss-rbhs@global.rutgers.edu

17. What should I do to prepare for questions that may be asked of me during the visa interview?

Please review the [pre-arrival information](#) on our website for resources and tips on how to navigate the visa interview.

18. If I start the fall semester online, can I come to campus mid-semester?

If you start your semester fully online, you will not be able to come to campus mid-semester unless your program requires you to attend in-person. Please [consult with an ISSS advisor](#) if that is the case.

19. I am a new incoming graduate student with a TA/GA/Fellowship appointment? What impact does the COVID crisis have on my appointment?

International students cannot be on University payroll unless they have reported to Rutgers to activate their SEVIS status and have applied for a social security number inside the US.

Newly admitted and funded international PhD students who are outside the US are not eligible to receive a salary, stipend, or health insurance. However, they may be eligible for some scholarship funds or some form of tuition remittance as determined by their program.

What if I am currently in another immigration status and wish to apply for a change of status to F-1 or J-1 and not travel to get a new visa to return?

We highly advise consulting an immigration attorney to review this option. Please review [information on our website](#) for more information.

Useful Resources

- [ISSS - New Student FAQ](#)
- [Pre-Arrival Guide](#)
- [Post-Arrival Guide](#)

Additional FAQ for Undergraduate Students Participating in the [ROSE program](#):

1. What is the general process to receive my I-20 for after the ROSE program?

You will receive your I-20 from the undergraduate admissions office in October 2020. Contact ruinternational@admissions.rutgers.edu if you have any questions.

2. Can I apply for my F1 visa during the ROSE semester if interviews are available?

Yes, you can apply for your F-1 visa during the ROSE semester, but you will need an updated I-20 with a later (Spring 2021) start date to do so. Please refer to question #9 on this FAQ for instructions on how to change the start date on your I-20 if you have already been issued one. If you haven't received an I-20 yet, you will get a new one from the undergraduate admissions office. Contact ruinternational@admissions.rutgers.edu if you have any questions.

3. If I get the F1 visa during the ROSE semester, but cannot go to the US because of travel restrictions, is the visa still valid?

If you have an F-1 visa, it will remain valid until the expiration date on the visa stamp. You can use it to attend Rutgers at a later semester, even if you receive an updated/new I-20 from the university.

4. If I get my F1 visa during the ROSE semester, can I travel to the US to take courses in NJ instead of ROSE?

Once the ROSE program starts, you cannot withdraw for the semester to join courses in NJ.

5. Will I need to purchase Rutgers required insurance for the United States if taking part in ROSE?

Students participating in ROSE do not have to purchase Rutgers required insurance for the duration of the ROSE semester. Students will be required to purchase insurance for when they travel to the United States. For more information on insurance needed for the ROSE program, please visit Rutgers.global.edu/rose or email rose@global.rutgers.edu

6. Will I be charged the university health insurance fee on my term bill?

No, the university health insurance fee will be waived for new students who are outside the U.S. The fee may appear on your term bill temporarily, but it will be waived without requiring any action on your part.

Useful Resources

- [ROSE Website and FAQ](#)