Travel & Visa Updates
April 2021
COVID-19 Travel Alerts

See Berkeley International Office’s Immigration Policy Updates & FAQs for detailed information and updates:
https://internationaloffice.berkeley.edu/covid-19-updates-faq
Current U.S. Travel Restrictions - Bad news

• **Travel Bans** - for any new who were physically present within the following areas within 14 days prior to entry:
  1. South Africa*
  2. Brazil*
  3. United Kingdom* (excluding overseas territories outside of Europe)
  4. Ireland*
  5. 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),
  6. Iran*
  7. China* (excluding the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau)

**Mexico & Canada Travel Restrictions**

• Entry to US United States through land ports of entry along the U.S.-Canada and U.S. Mexico borders for “essential travel” only.
  • “Essential travel” includes “Individuals traveling to attend educational institutions; Individuals traveling to work in the United States.”
National Interest Exceptions - Good news!

* F-1 Student National Interest Exception for China, Iran, Brazil, South Africa, Schengen Area, United Kingdom, and Ireland

• April 26, 2021, the U.S. Department of State announced an automatic National Interest Exception for students with valid F-1 visas intending to begin or continue their academic program starting August 1, 2021

• F-1 students do not need to contact an embassy or consulate to seek an individual NIE to travel

• You can enter the United States *no earlier* than 30 days before the start of your academic studies

• *Dept of State has been asked to clarify ambiguities in their announcement. BIO will update you when we have more information!*

• **J-1s:** According to a [tweet](#) from the Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs, existing J-1 visa holders whose program begins after August 1, 2021 would need to apply for approval of an NIE through their local embassy before they can enter the U.S. Students who need a new J-1 visas should apply through their embassy for an NIE *after* the approval of a visa to be considered for travel to the U.S.

• **I-20 start date in the past? Continuing student entry date?** Currently unclear - “no earlier than 30 days before the start of academic studies”. This either means 30 days before the start of Fall 2021, OR anytime, if your I-20 is already Active. Clarity recommended before making entry.

• **F-1 OPT/STEM?** Prior NIE Exemption for Schengen area included F-1 OPT/STEM because it’s the same visa category. Clarity recommended before making entry.

• **F-2/J-2 Dependents?** Prior Schengen NIE allowed entry for dependents. Likely similar rules would apply as the primary F-1 or J-1.
Embassy/Consular Processing Issues

- **Global travel conditions** are highly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Department of State has **resumed some visa services**. Visa services may be limited, or backlogged and depend on home country conditions.
- Visit your **local U.S. embassy or consulate website** to confirm operating status and find information about appointments.
Testing/Quarantine Requirements/Vaccine

Information is changing day by day. *Before travelling:*

- Please review the [current CDC travel and testing requirements](#) for entry to the U.S.
- You can also review [state and local guidelines](#) for the U.S. location to which you will be traveling.
- The University of California is considering a vaccine requirement. The university will notify all students of any new requirements. BIO is in communication with UHS regarding international student needs.
- It’s our understanding that vaccines will be available for any students who need them. See the [UHS Vaccine website](#) regarding how vaccines will be made available.
What’s happening in Fall 2021? Will UC Berkeley have in person or online instruction?

• UC Berkeley has announced plans for the Fall 2021 semester, which will be primarily in-person

• The campus is aware of concerns for sufficient remote instruction to be available for students who are unable to arrival in the Fall. Campus is taking steps to address this issue.

• Check the online schedule of classes for updates
Am I a “new student” or a “continuing student” for visa purposes?

• “New student” enrollment rules apply to any student who entered or will enter the U.S. on a new F-1 J-1 record after March 9, 2020

• “Continuing Student” enrollment rules apply to any student who had an Active F-1/J-1 record as of March 9, 2020

• If you are a student who withdrew and are returning on the same SEVIS record after a period of less than 5 months using SEVIS Reactivation you are a “continuing student”

• If you are a student who withdrew and you are starting a NEW SEVIS record (new SEVIS ID), you are a “new student”

• Transfer students who exited and re-entered the US using your “Initial I-20” from UC Berkeley after March 9, 2020 are ”new students”

• Transfer students who remained in the US during transfer and were Activated by UC Berkeley are “continuing students”
How will UC Berkeley's plan for Fall 2021 instruction affect my visa status as a new or continuing student?

- *Updated DHS Guidance for Fall 2021* does not allow new, initial students to enter the U.S. for 100% remote instruction. At least 1 class must be in-person!

- We consider Fall 2021 to be a hybrid model, and the Fall 2021 guidance continues to allow increased remote instruction for new and continuing students.

- **New Students** planning to attend Fall 2021 should plan to be here in-person and take steps to request their new I-20/DS-2019 and apply for visas for arrival.

- Continuing students should review [travel & re-entry information](#) and make sure they have all required documents, including a new visa if your F-1/J-1 visa has expired.

- BIO will communicate any changes to you when more information is available.
I’m a new student and I want to enter in Summer!

• If you plan to enter in Summer you must: 1) be enrolled full-time in Summer and 2) you must have some course enrollment that is flexible or in-person and 3) you must actually have an in-person meeting after arrival.

• For most students, this is not possible because Summer is almost 100% remote. Check with your academic advisors if you are considering this option to see what’s possible for you.

• You will be required to provide proof of full-time enrollment in appropriate coursework when you submit your NIF.

• Can’t do it? It’s OK! You can study remotely from abroad and enter up to 30 days before the start of Fall 2021 semester—that’s late July!
Is BIO still processing I-20/DS-2019 requests? Should I make a visa appointment?

• Yes! We are still processing all requested F-1 I-20/J-1 DS-2019 documents.
• BIO can distribute new I-20s electronically, so make sure to select that option when requesting your documents if you want them more quickly.
• If your I-20 is later updated, we can send the updated I-20 electronically.
• If you want the possibility of attending in person in Fall 2021, continue to follow all document request and visa application processes as they are available.
• Be aware there are no refunds for visa application fees!
I’m student returning after withdrawal, or transfer from another school. I have a valid F-1/J-1 visa. Do I need a new one?

• See the Returning Students webpage for detailed instructions on obtaining the documents needed for re-entry. Current guidance indicates that if you have an unexpired F-1 visa, you can use that visa for re-entry.

• Under normal circumstances, BIO recommends obtaining a new F-1 visa if you begin a new SEVIS record, and have a new SEVIS ID.

• Students who have transferred their I-20 to UC Berkeley may continue to use their unexpired F-1 visa. If you started a new visa record, it’s recommended you obtain a new F-1 visa because the visa will not match upon your first entry on a new record.
What if I cannot arrive in time for the start of Fall 2021?

• If you are not able to enter the U.S. to begin your studies for Fall 2021, please consult with an academic advisor in your department or college to discuss your options, including the possibility of deferring or withdrawing for the semester.

• In the coming months, BIO will provide instructions for students unable to arrive for Fall 2021.

Late Arrivals

• BIO will work with students who are facing entry issues to make necessary adjustments to your I-20/DS-2019

• Confirm with your academic advisors and instructors that your arrival date is acceptable

• New students arriving late cannot have 100% remote instruction and must have at least 1 in-person course

Deferrals

• *Newly Admitted Undergraduates* will need to contact the [Office of Admissions](#) to determine if you have an option to defer to a future semester.

• *Graduate Students* should also communicate with their academic department regarding any option to defer.

• If you have been approved for a deferral of your admission to a future semester, please notify BIO. We will work with you to adjust your I-20/DS-2019 to a future start date.
Can I get an arrival letter? Do you need to add an annotation to my I-20/DS-2019 about Fall?

• Our COVID-19 website has arrival letters for students entering in Spring, Summer or Fall 2021

• The letter states you can arrive up to 30 days after the start of your I-20/DS-2019 (if necessary)

• If you’ll be arriving more than 30 days after the start of Your I-20/DS-2019, you need an updated I-20/DS-2019 and BIO will work with you on that.

• No special notes or annotations are needed on the I-20 or DS-2019 regarding instructional models!
What if I wish to cancel or withdraw my attendance?

• Notify BIO so that we can cancel your I-20 or DS-2019
• See information from the Office of the Registrar regarding
  • Cancellation and withdrawal procedures: https://registrar.berkeley.edu/registration/cancellation-withdrawal
  • Tuition & fee refund deadlines: https://registrar.berkeley.edu/registration/cancellation-withdrawal/refunds-after-withdrawal
• Newly Admitted Undergraduates cancelling before the start of their first semester should follow instructions from the Office of Admissions regarding their cancellation process: https://admissions.berkeley.edu/application-faqs#cancel
• Graduate Students should also communicate with their academic department regarding any plans to cancel or withdraw.
What type of visa do I need?

Non-immigrant visa

Sponsored by your school

Allow you to remain in the U.S. for duration of status

Employment benefits

F-1 or J-1? Which status is right for you?
Other visa categories that allow study:
H4, J-2, E-2, TD

B1, B2, and F-2 prohibit full-time study
The Application Process

1. Submit the online Non-Immigrant Information Form (NIF)
3. Pay SEVIS fee
4. Complete online visa application (Form DS-160)
5. Pay visa application fee
6. Schedule visa interview appointment
7. Attend visa interview
8. Receive passport back with visa
NIF Processing: 10-15 business days + shipping time

Visa application fees, forms and appointment scheduling are all accessible online

Wait times for visa appointments and processing vary by location; apply as early as possible to avoid delays.
Your I-20 or DS-2019

Certificate of Eligibility; Allows you to apply for a student visa.

Contains details about you, your school, and program of study.

To request your I-20 or DS-2019, you must complete the Non-immigrant Information Form (NIF).

Berkeley International Office (BIO) will mail this document to you.

SEVIS ID number is located in the top right corner.
Pay the SEVIS Fee

**SEVIS**: Student and Exchange Visitor Information System

Make this payment after receiving SEVIS ID. The fee amount is subject to change, you may pay online at and find the most up-to-date information at: www.fmjfee.com

Print your receipt after payment!

After paying the SEVIS fee, Canadian citizens do not need to complete the remaining steps for visa application. Canadian citizens will apply at the border with required arrival documents.
Find the U.S. Embassy or Consulate near you

Go to www.usembassy.gov.

Check your local embassy or consulate’s website for specific visa application instructions.

Look for instructions to apply for a Non-Immigrant Visa

The U.S. Embassy website may link you to a 3rd party website for visa application instructions.
Form DS-160

Online visa application form for all non-immigrant visas.

Select your embassy location first.

Print the confirmation page with a barcode when complete.
DS-160 Tips

U.S. Point of Contact:
- Berkeley International Office
- Family member or friend

Address where you will stay in the U.S.
- It’s okay if you don’t know where you will live.
- Provide an address where you may stay when you first arrive.

Upload your photo while completing the online Form DS-160.

Check the photo guidelines on the official website: http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/general/photos.html
Pay the visa application fee

**Non-refundable fee**

Sometimes called the “MRV” fee or “NIV” application fee.

Payment instructions are specific to your local U.S. embassy.

Check FMJFEE.com for most up-to-date information on the fee amount.

Print your receipt!
Schedule visa interview appointment

Follow instructions given by the U.S. embassy or consulate where you intend to apply.

Do not wait to schedule! Wait times for appointments can be long during summer months. Schedule as soon as possible.
Congratulations! You've been admitted.

Preparing for the interview

Check the U.S. embassy website for a complete list of documents required for the interview.

Prepare to bring:

- Passport
- I-20 or DS-2019
- Acceptance letter
- Proof of funding (financial statements, award letters)
- SEVIS Fee receipt
- DS-160 Confirmation page
The interview

Security at the U.S. Embassy - find out what items will not be allowed inside the building before you go.

Wait for your number to be called.

A brief interview; only a few minutes.

The interviewer is interested in:

- Your studies
- Non-immigrant intent
- Financial ability
- Language ability
Interview Tips

Answer questions concisely and honestly.

Be aware that the consulate may also conduct a social media review. Be smart about what information you post online.

If you don't understand something, don’t be afraid to ask.

Be respectful and courteous.
Receive visa

Check U.S. embassy website for instructions for passport pick-up or delivery.

Check the visa for accuracy

- Spelling of your name
- Visa type: F-1 or J-1
Security Checks

Will cause a delay in visa processing. Contact BIO if you have concerns about a delayed arrival.

Average processing is 60-90 days, but in some cases can take as long as 6 months.

U.S. Department of State Information:
https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/administrative-processing-information.html

Berkeley International Office:
http://internationaloffice.berkeley.edu/security_clearances
Don’t panic if your visa is denied

Ask for the reason of denial in writing.

Make detailed notes about the interview (officer’s name, questions asked, and your answers).

Email internationaloffice@berkeley.edu and recount details including the location of the consulate and the date and time of your interview.

After consulting with a BIO advisor, re-apply with additional information that addresses the denial reason.
Visas for family

Visas for Dependents

- F-2
- J-2

Children under 21

Legally married spouse

May apply with the F-1 or J-1 or independently

Will need their own documents and copies of the F-1/J-1 documents

More information:
http://internationaloffice.berkeley.edu/inviting_family
Arriving in the U.S.

You can enter the U.S. up to **30 days** before the Program Start Date on the I-20 or DS-2019.

Check your I-20 or DS-2019

Students who transfer their I-20/DS-2019 are not subject to the 30-day limit.

BIO recommends entering at least 1 week before your classes begin

Make sure you arrive before any required Orientation events
Preparing for Arrival

Carry all required documents with you, not in your checked bag!

If possible, arrive during BIO Office hours Monday-Friday from 10-12 or 1-4pm. If you have a problem during arrival, request that CBP call BIO.


Be aware that U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) may inspect your electronic devices.

See the ACLU’s tips regarding precautions you can take to prepare your devices for travel: [https://www.aclu.org/blog/free-future/can-border-agents-search-your-electronic-devices-its-complicated](https://www.aclu.org/blog/free-future/can-border-agents-search-your-electronic-devices-its-complicated)
Required Arrival Documents

Be prepared to present the following documents to the CBP Officer:

• Passport (valid for at least 6 months into the future) with a valid nonimmigrant visa (if applicable)
• Original form I-20 or DS-2019
• Evidence of financial resources (see Required Funding Documentation)
• Proof of UC Berkeley admission (new students) or enrollment (current students)
• Proof of SEVIS fee payment

Officers may ask you questions about your reason for entering the U.S., where you are traveling, or about your academic program.

If you encounter problems at entry, please contact Berkeley International Office as soon as possible:
http://internationaloffice.berkeley.edu/contact-us
internationaloffice.berkeley.edu

General questions: internationaloffice@berkeley.edu

NIF questions: nif@berkeley.edu

510-642-2818

Virtual Student Advising Hours:
Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday (No advising on Wednesday!):

10am-12pm and 1pm-4pm (PT)

internationaloffice.berkeley.edu/virtual-student-advising