Travel & Visa Updates
July 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 individuals 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)
  8. India*

**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!

There are currently 3 NIE policy statements on the Department of State’s website dated [May 12, 2021], [May 27, 2021] and [June 24, 2021].

- Statements contain somewhat ambiguous wording. Dept. of State has been asked to further clarify
- 2 groups: the **Schengen Area, United Kingdom, or Ireland** and **China, Brazil, Iran, South Africa, or India**. These groups are subject to slightly different restrictions.
- Specifically, **the China, Brazil, Iran, South Africa, India NIE** restrictions specify entry allowed only for "programs that begin on or after August 1, 2021.”
Students in the United Kingdom, Schengen Area and Ireland

• The May 27, 2021 and June 24, 2021 statements indicate that both new and continuing F-1 and J-1 students who were present in the Schengen Area, United Kingdom, and Ireland are not subject to the August 1 entry date, and may enter the U.S. prior to August 1.

• The NIE is automatic for F-1 students.

• Individuals entering on a J visa are required to apply for an NIE through their local consulate, and as of June 6, 2021, the NIE for J-1s will remain valid for 12 months and multiple entries.
Entry date for students in China, Iran, Brazil, South Africa and India

- The May 27, 2021 statement indicates that "NIE eligibility for students who have been present in Brazil, China, India, Iran, or South Africa applies only to programs that begin on or after August 1, 2021,"
- The June 24, 2021 statement says that, "New or returning students present in China, Brazil, Iran, South Africa, or India may arrive no earlier than 30 days before the start of an academic program beginning August 1, 2021 or after, including optional practical training (OPT)."
- The wording has led to differing interpretations regarding the first allowable entry date and whether arrival prior to August 1 is allowable for all groups (new students, continuing students, students on OPT/STEM OPT).
- Plan cautiously. Consider suspending entry until August 1 or later OR consult with your airline and local embassy if planning entry prior to August 1.
- The NIE is automatic for F-1 students. Individuals entering on a J visa are required to apply to their local consulate for an NIE.
Special Issues: NIE for OPT/STEM

• The recent updates to the NIE announcements indicate that travel is also allowed for students on practical training, which includes OPT and STEM OPT.

• But, the updated announcements continue to make reference to training that “begins August 1, 2021 or later”

• BIO continues to advise OPT/STEM OPT students who are located in China, Iran, Brazil, South Africa or India to consider suspending entry to the U.S. prior to August 1 OR to consult with their airline and local embassy if planning entry prior to August 1.
Special Issues: F-2/J-2 Dependents

• The [May 12, 2021](https://example.com) and [June 24, 2021](https://example.com) NIE statements address dependents of NIE-eligible “principals” (the primary F-1 or J-1 status holder) indicating that the entry is available to: “Derivative family members accompanying or following to join a noncitizen who has been granted, would be reasonably expected to receive an NIE,... and who is engaging in certain types of long-term employment, studies, or research lasting four weeks or more.”

• F-2 dependents would qualify for the automatic NIE at the same time that the F-1 would become eligible for entry.

• J-2 dependents would need to apply to their local consulate with the primary J-1 for an NIE.
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.

• Students can find information about COVID testing, vaccination, and self-sequester arrival guidelines here: [Summer and Fall 2021 COVID Guidelines for Students](#).
UC Berkeley Vaccination Requirement

• University of California is moving forward with a vaccine mandate. For more information about what this means for students, please visit the University Health Services (UHS) website to review the COVID Vaccine Policy, which includes a helpful Student FAQ about the policy and requirements.

• Vaccines will be available for students who need them. See the UHS COVID-19 vaccine webpage for details about upcoming vaccine clinics.

• For information about COVID testing, vaccination, please visit Summer and Fall 2021 COVID Guidelines for Students.
What’s happening in Fall 2021? Will UC Berkeley have in person or online instruction?

• The default instructional mode for Fall 2021 will be primarily in-person and in general, all students are expected to be physically present on campus for Fall 2021.

• The campus is aware of concerns for sufficient remote instruction to be available for students who are unable to arrive in the Fall.

• Check the [online schedule of classes](#) for updates

• **New or Initial F-1/J-1 students** who began or will begin their program of study in the U.S. after March 9, 2020 must be enrolled in at least one course with in-person instructional mode. Berkeley’s instructional model is primarily in-person, but it includes hybrid instruction as well.

• **Continuing F-1/J-1 students** who were in Active F-1/J-1 status as of March 9, 2020 are technically allowed fully remote instruction if needed, but most instruction will be in-person.
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

Returning Students
- 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
- 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?

• **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 an I-20/DS-2019 for entry to attend Summer Session!

• BIO can also issue an I-20/DS-2019 with a Summer start date if you: 1) are enrolled full-time in Summer and 2) you have some course enrollment that is flexible or in-person and 3) you actually have an in-person meeting after arrival.

• For most students, this is not possible because Summer Session 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! (Students under Travel Ban should review the NIE rules before choosing a travel date in 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.

• 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?

Late Arrivals
• Arriving after the start of instruction? **First** contact your academic department to see what options are possible for you.
• BIO will work with students who face arrival difficulties for Fall 2021 to determine the best option for their specific circumstances, including advising on late arrivals, readmission and return after deferral/withdrawal, and how to receive updated I-20/DS-2019 documents.
• BIO will send an Arrival Survey to new students in early August to confirm arrival dates and arrival delays.
• If you urgently need an updated I-20 for a visa interview appointment prior to that time, please [contact us](mailto:) and include a copy of your visa appointment confirmation.

Admissions Deferrals
• If you have been approved for a deferral of your admission to a future semester, please [notify Berkeley International Office](mailto:). Upon notification by Admissions of your official deferral, we will work with you to adjust your I-20 or DS-2019 start date to the future term.
• Newly admitted undergraduates will need to contact the [Office of Admissions](mailto:) 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.
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. Receive passport back with visa.
6. Attend visa interview.
7. Schedule visa interview appointment.
8. Pay visa application fee.
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](http://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
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.


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
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