COVID-19 Update: FAQs for J-1 Scholars

The International Center is committed to supporting you during this global health crisis. The global COVID-19 situation is dynamic and quickly changing, and so is the guidance on how to minimize its impact on international scholars. Since we are in an environment of continuously evolving information, please make sure to regularly check the International Center's COVID-19 update page [1] for important information and updates.

Below are answers to immigration related questions regarding J-1 exchange visitor programs here at U-M. We will continue to update this page with new information or guidance as they become available. If you have other questions and concerns, please email the International Center at icenter@umich.edu [2]. We will continue to compile relevant questions and provide answers here.

J-1 Scholars Who Are Unable to Return Home

My program at U-M ended during March and I was planning to return home, but now I cannot. What should I do?

If you are still in the United States and are having difficulty returning home because flights have been cancelled or are unavailable, please email the International Center at icenter@umich.edu [2] immediately. We may be able to work with the Department of State to extend your J-1 program so that you will have some extra time to make arrangements to return home without staying beyond your grace period.

My program at U-M will end between April 1 and May 31, and I plan to return home, but I am worried I will not be able to do so. What should I do?

The Department of State recently extended your J-1 program for an additional 60 days in order to provide you with the opportunity to complete your J-1 program at U-M or to finalize your plans to return home. There is nothing you need to do. This program extension is automatic. If you would like an updated DS-2019 form reflecting this change, please set up shipping through eShip Global [3] and email icenter@umich.edu [2] to notify us you would like your updated DS-2019 shipped to you.

What should I do if I am having trouble arranging my flight home because flights are either canceled or unavailable?

If you have not already done so, you should contact your home country embassy in the U.S. Many are registering citizens and compiling lists of those who are trying to return home, and may be able to assist.
J-1 Scholars Who Are Finishing Their J-1 Program and Departing the U.S.

If you are finished with your J-1 program here at U-M, and are able to return to home during your 30-day grace period, then you do not need to do anything else.

If you will finish your J-1 program early, please coordinate any early departure with your host department at U-M. Ending your J-1 exchange program may have a number of different immediate impacts and future repercussions. Please contact an advisor at the International Center regarding your situation and future plans so we may best advise you on your options. If you decide to end your J-1 program early, please follow the guidance and submit a departure notice [4] to the International Center. It is important to report early departures to the International Center in order to prevent potential difficulties in returning to the U.S. in the future.

J-1 Scholars Who Are Continuing Their J-1 Program While Temporarily Outside of the U.S. and Plan to Return to the U.S. to Complete Their J-1 Program

If you leave the U.S., but you will continue to work towards your exchange program objectives while you are outside the U.S., then you will want to follow the procedures to request an “Out of Country” authorization [5]. The Out of Country authorization may be used by J-1 scholars who will be outside the U.S. for more than 30 days, but will continue their program activities while out of the U.S.

New J-1 Scholars Who Have Not Yet Arrived in the U.S.

As of March 2020 routine U.S. visa issuance has been suspended worldwide [6] and restrictions on travel are being implemented. Please check the U.S. Department of State's visa page [7] and your nearest U.S. embassy/consulate website for announcements and updates in order to stay informed about the resumption of consular services and visa processing times. The International Center is carefully monitoring Department of State announcements and will update our website and communicate changes to scholars as we receive new information.

At this time, work on non-critical research projects has decreased significantly at U-M. You should be in regular contact with your host department about your J-1 exchange program due to the fluid nature of the current global health crisis. Your plans may need to be adjusted due to the new research timelines, or they may need to be canceled if the timing of your visit is no longer viable.

I was issued my J-1 DS-2019 by the University of Michigan with a start date in March, April, or May. Can I start my program on time?

Unfortunately, no, you may not. The University of Michigan is delaying all start dates until at least June 1, 2020. We have already amended your DS-2019 and will be sending you an updated form by the middle of April. Your DS-2019 will be shipped by the courier service (DHL, FedEx or UPS). Please note that due to
the current COVID-19 situation, there may be a delay in delivery by the courier service. Your SEVIS record will remain in initial status, and you will not need to pay the SEVIS fee again. If you need to further amend your J-1 program dates at the University of Michigan to a later time, please contact your host department who will work with the International Center on updating your DS-2019.

I already received my J-1 visa; will I have to apply for a new one since my program has been delayed?

In most cases, no, you should not have to apply for a new J-1 visa. Please check your current visa stamp to see how long it is valid (i.e.: unexpired). If your current visa will remain valid by your expected arrival date, then you will not need to re-apply for a new J-1 visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate, even though your program start date may change (to June 1, 2020, at the earliest).

Can I go ahead and make my travel arrangements now in order to arrive by June 1, 2020?

It is not advisable at this time since global events are changing daily. Please check with your U-M department about your arrival plans, even if your program start date is after June 1, 2020. We recommend you regularly check the International Center's COVID-19 update page [1] for important information and updates and remember to check the U.S. Department of State's visa page [7] and your nearest U.S. embassy/consulate for announcements and updates in order to stay informed about the resumption of consular services and visa processing times.

I plan to start my J-1 program at U-M after June 1, 2020, and I do not currently have a DS-2019. Is there anything I should do now?

No. Host departments at U-M will continue submitting new J-1 requests to the International Center. You will be contacted by U-M for any specific documents we need to process your immigration paperwork. We will continue to process all department requests, and we will amend program start dates as needed. Your department may contact you about your plans given the current global health crisis or you may be asked for further documentation during the process of requesting a DS-2019 for you.

I have decided to not come to U-M. Is there anything I need to do?

Yes, please contact your host department at U-M and inform them of your plans not to come. They will contact the International Center, and we will update your SEVIS record accordingly.

New J-1 Scholars Who Recently Arrived in the U.S.

I just arrived in the U.S. in J-1 status. What should I do now?

Please inform the International Center at icenter@umich.edu [2] that you have arrived so we may be able to check you in electronically while we work remotely. We will then update your J-1 SEVIS record. Please contact your department to see when or how you might be able to begin your program at the University of Michigan. Noncritical research activities have decreased significantly due to the governor’s "stay at home" order [8], which may also affect your ability to begin or participate in your J-1 program. Please note that people coming from certain countries may be asked to self-isolate before beginning their programs here at U-M. Please see additional information [9] about when to practice self-observation, self-quarantine, or self-isolation.