TRAVELING OVER THE WINTER HOLIDAY?

If you are planning to travel outside the US during Winter Break, make sure your travel documents are valid and endorsed. This includes a valid passport, a valid visa, and a valid I-20/DS-2019 with a current travel endorsement signature. If you are on OPT, you should also bring your EAD card and proof of employment. If you have applied for OPT but not yet received your EAD card, you should bring your Approval Notice and/or Receipt Notice. Travel signatures are now good for 1 year (previously 6 months). This means that on the date that you will re-enter the US, the travel signature date must be less than 1 year old.

IF YOU ARE ON OPT, your signature must be LESS THAN 6 MONTHS OLD.

The OIS will be closed from Dec. 23 until Jan. 2, so please plan accordingly if you need to meet with an advisor.

If you want to leave the US and return again, but you need to renew your F-1 or J-1 visa, you can request a Visa Renewal Letter from the Forms page of the OIS website. Please request your letter at least 2 weeks before your departure.

When you re-enter the US, if you do not have your I-20/DS-2019, or the signature is not valid, you can ask for a Form I-515. Once you are in the US, you must make an appointment with us immediately so we can fix your I-515.

As you know, the I-94 is now an electronic record. The OIS does not require students to submit their I-94 upon returning to the US, but we do recommend that you retrieve your I-94 from www.cbp.gov/i94 whenever you re-enter the country. You will NOT be able to retrieve your I-94 while you are outside the US, because the I-94 is an ENTRY document.

STAYING ON CAMPUS DURING WINTER BREAK

At Lincoln Center, McMahon Hall will be open only for students who have completed the Lincoln Center Winter Break Housing Application form by Dec. 5. Students can complete the form after Dec. 5 but will be charged a $75 late submission fee.

At Rose Hill, all residence halls will close on December 19th at noon except Belmont Community Housing, Campbell Hall, and Salice Conley Hall. These halls will be open over break, but if you do not live in one of these halls, you MUST find a host who lives in Belmont, Campbell, Salice Conley, or Walsh, and you must complete a Breakstay Request Form by Dec. 12. Walsh Hall will re-open on January 2 at 10:00am, and all other residence halls at RH will reopen on January 12 at 10:00am.

For more information on Residence Hall closures, and to complete the Breakstay form, please visit www.fordham.edu/student_affairs/residential_life
NAME STANDARDIZATION

In spring 2015, SEVP will implement a new rule which will impact how names appear in SEVIS. This will also introduce a new I-20 on which two names will appear: passport name and preferred name. This is rule is called SEVIS Name Standardization.

We expect this will cause much confusion among federal agencies (Department of State and Social Security Administration) and state agencies (e.g. DMV).

OIS staff and our professional association (NAFSA) is now working closely with SEVP to have this new system be less stressful for F and J students and scholars.

SEVP will require us to use your name as it appears in the Machine Readable Zone (MRZ) of your passport. Reacting to this requirement, our University will create a new field in Banner (the University database) called ‘SEVIS Name.’ Your current ‘regular’ name in Banner remains the same, which will be your ‘preferred’ name in SEVIS and on the I-20.

The most observable changes between your MRZ and ‘regular’ names will be the removal of hyphens and apostrophes. Also, any ‘middle’ names will now be added to your given name. Citizens of certain nations (e.g. Malaysia, Vietnam) will experience a more acute impact since those nations list ALL names on one line in the passport MRZ. This means that your entire name will appear in the family name field, with no given or middle name on your I-20 and in SEVIS.

OIS staff will be continuously involved with SEVP officers as this program rolls out. Please do not hesitate to contact OIS if you have any questions or concerns about this issue.

GLOBAL TRANSITION

Global Transition (GT) is the welcome program for international undergraduate students who start at Fordham in the Fall. It is full of fun, interesting, and useful activities and sessions, and it is a great way for new international students to get to know New York, Fordham, and other Fordham students! For current students who volunteer as Global Transition Assistants (GTAs) during the program, it is also a really wonderful opportunity for them to get to know each other, share their Fordham knowledge, and expand their friendships.

GT 2014 was a HUGE success, and the new students and GTAs loved the program. If you would like to be involved in GT 2014, please keep your eyes open for our Global Transition Assistant application. The application will be available in late January. You should receive an email from intlorient@fordham.edu when the application is available, and it will also be available on the GT website: www.fordham.edu/gt

If you want to help your new international peers adjust to life at Fordham, and if you are hoping to get to know more Fordham students (international AND domestic), Global Transition is the way to do it!

IMPACT INITIATIVE

Are you interested in the United Nations? Would you like the opportunity to attend UN NGO high-level briefings and hear about events/opportunities at the UN? Sign up on our facebook page - Fordham University Impact Initiative and read our blog here: http://fordhamimpactinitiative.wordpress.com/

COMPLETION DATE

Look at section 5 of your I-20 (or section 3 of your DS-2019). What is the completion date? If that date is NOT the date that you will complete your studies, you must contact us.

If your completion date is for a future term, but you will complete your studies this term, you must also let us know.

Remember that reality is always more important than your I-20. You should NEVER try to re-enter the US with an I-20/DS-2019 just because the date is still valid. If you have already completed your studies, the I-20 is no longer valid.

If you are planning to use your I-20 or DS-2019 to re-enter the country after Winter Break, your I-20/DS-2019 must still be valid. For continuing students, this means that the completion date is in the future. For F-1 students on OPT, this means that your I-20 has been endorsed for OPT. If your completion date has passed and you have not applied for OPT, you cannot use your current I-20 to re-enter the US—even if your visa is still valid!
NEXT SEMESTER

FULL TIME ENROLLMENT

F-1 students are required to be enrolled in classes FULL TIME every semester. Full time is 12 credits for undergraduates and 9 credits for graduate students. Many of you have already begun to pick your classes for next semester. Make sure you will be enrolled in at least the minimum number of credits required. Failure to enroll full time means that you violating your F-1 status. Therefore, if you will be enrolled less than full time, you must submit a completed Deviation From Full Course of Study Requirements form to the OIS as soon as possible after the semester starts. You will have 1 month to submit this form after the semester start date. If you do not submit this form within 1 month from the semester start date, your F-1 status will be in violation. You can find the Deviation Form on the Reduced Course Load page of the OIS website.

INVITATION LETTERS

The OIS will implement a new invitation letter policy beginning in the spring 2015 semester. At the NAFSA professional conference Department of State session, the visa officer informed advisors that students do NOT need an invitation letter from the OIS. The OIS will continue to issue invitation letters through the end of December. After 1/5/2015, if you wish to invite your family, relatives, or friends to the US to visit you on a B2 visitor visa, you can provide a personal invitation letter to them. A sample of a personal invitation letter will be available on the OIS website in January 2015.

UPDATE YOUR ADDRESS!

It is very important that the OIS always knows your up to date local US address!

If you will be moving next semester, please make sure to update your local address in my.fordham.edu or email your new address to ois@fordham.edu.

Please check your local and permanent (home) addresses on my.fordham.edu regularly to make sure they are up to date.

HEALTH INSURANCE

As you know, any student who has questions about their health insurance coverage or wishes to submit a health insurance waiver should go to University Health Services. The Compliance Officer can also assist you with understanding how your Fordham health insurance plan works and how to use it.

If you already waived the Fordham International Student Health Insurance plan in Fall 2014, you do NOT need to waive again in the spring (but you will need to in September if you are still a student next fall). Please note that the Spring health insurance charge will appear on your account. This happens automatically, and the charge will be removed.

If you enrolled in the Fordham insurance and you need to use that coverage in the first few weeks of school, please contact University Health Services immediately (prior to using the coverage) so that they can make sure your coverage is re-activated. All Fordham insurance accounts need to be re-activated, but we do not know the exact date that this will happen, so please let Health Services know before trying to use your Fordham insurance in January.

If you enrolled in Fordham’s insurance this fall, but you want to waive it in the Spring, you may do so, but you must email University Health Services and provide all needed waiver documents.

All information about the health insurance process can still be found on the OIS website under Health Insurance Info.

University Health Services: emarivera@fordham.edu
Rose Hill: (718) 817-4160
O’Hare Hall lower level
Lincoln Center: (212) 636-7160
McMahon Hall Room 203
EMPLEYMENT

Optional Practical Training (OPT) - If you are completing your studies this month and you wish to apply for OPT, you should do so NOW. You can apply for OPT up to 60 days after your program completion date. As you will see in the Completion Date article below, the date that you really complete your studies is more important than the completion date on your I-20.

Although you have up to 60 days the completion of your studies to apply for OPT, you should avoid filing for OPT after your date of completion. This is because it usually takes at least 2 months to receive your EAD (OPT) card after filing your application.

A federal regulation states that any student without employment after 90 days on OPT is in violation of F-1 status. DHS officials recommend that students keep a journal documenting their efforts to find a job, as well as any volunteer work and unpaid ‘internships.’ This will help you maintain your status. Once you do obtain employment, you must report the name and address of the employer to the OIS immediately.

If you are a J-1 interested in Academic Training, please contact the OIs before your DS-2019 expires.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) - if you are currently working under CPT and plan to continue this employment in the Spring term, you must get a new CPT approval for the Spring. CPT is per term, so any/ every term that you would like CPT, you will need to submit a new CPT application.

QQ USERS BE AWARE

Recently, the OIS has been hearing about stories from other International Student Advisors about students’ QQ accounts being hacked into. The hackers then send messages to the student’s family saying that there was a medical emergency and they need to transfer money immediately. In some cases, the criminals even call the family pretending to be a professor working with the student here in the US.

CHINA-U.S. VISA RECIPROCITY AGREEMENT

Previously, all F-1 visas issued in China were valid for only 1 year. In mid-November, a new reciprocity agreement took effect which will extend the validity of F-1 visas to up to 5 years for Chinese students studying in the US.

However, this new validity does NOT apply to your current F-1 visa. For instance, if your current F-1 visa has a validity of 07/01/2014—07/01/2015, then it will still be expired on July 1, 2015. This new agreement applies only to visas issued after the effective date.

For more information, please go to: http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/general/us-china-agree-to-extend-visas.html

THE HOLIDAY EASON IN NEW YORK CITY

New York has much to offer at this time of year! Here are some ways you can enjoy the holiday spirit in New York:

1. The tree at Rockefeller Center
2. Ice skating at Bryant Park, Central Park, or Rockefeller Centar
3. Window shopping along some of the world’s most well-known holiday window displays: Bloomingdale’s, Bergdorf Goodman, Barney’s, and Saks Fifth Avenue
4. Shopping at one of the holiday Markets: Columbus Circle, Union Square, Bryant Park, and Grand Central
5. Caroling
6. The Holiday Train Show at the Botanical Gardens: Not only model trains, but also over 140 replicas of NYC landmarks!
7. Christmas shows such as the Radio City Christmas Spectacular and the Nutcracker