

From: AGexchanges <AGexchanges@state.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, May 5, 2021 10:26 AM
To: AGexchanges <AGexchanges@state.gov>
Subject: 2021 FAQs Update Broadcast

EXTERNAL EMAIL: Use caution with links and attachments.

Dear Sponsors,

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to our J-1 visa nonimmigrant exchange visitors as we continue to navigate COVID-19 challenges. At the onset of the pandemic, ECA encouraged sponsors, exchange visitors, and hosting academic institutions and organizations to find alternative ways to maintain program objectives, to include online classes or other arrangements where appropriate to prevent unnecessary exposure to COVID-19. As sponsors proceed with plans for Fall 2021, please keep in mind that the purpose of the Exchange Visitor Program (EVP) is to facilitate in-person exchanges. While the COVID pandemic necessitated shifting some programs temporarily to online or virtual programming to provide for the health, safety, and welfare of participants, the Department of State (the Department) reminds sponsors that the EVP generally requires programs to foster the exchange of ideas between exchange visitors and their American counterparts in person. Thus, new exchange visitors can participate in programs only if the host organizations (e.g., schools or businesses) have reinstated partial to full in-person activities as of the date sponsors accept exchange visitors into their exchange programs.

The Department will continue to keep you informed through sponsor broadcasts and FAQs posted to our website. Please see the most recent, updated FAQs for Current Programs (Updated 4/26/2021) at: <https://j1visa.state.gov/covid-19/>. Per our June 25, 2020 guidance, host academic institutions should have reinstated partial to full-time classroom participation or be able to meet other formal in-person requirements before hosting new exchange visitors.

With regard to exchange visitors who wish to return to the United States to continue a program that began before the onset of the COVID pandemic, sponsors should keep an exchange visitor's SEVIS record "active" until the exchange visitor is able to return to the United States to continue with his or her original program. All exchange visitors must have a valid J visa to enter the United States. Should their J visa have expired, they will need to renew prior to traveling.

Also, in keeping with the Department's commitment to facilitate legitimate travel to the United States, Secretary Blinken announced this week that the Department will apply several National Interest Exceptions to all regional travel restrictions currently in effect as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Students seeking to commence studies in the fall, certain academics, journalists, individuals who provide critical infrastructure support, and their dependent family members who have been present in countries affected by a geographic COVID-19 restriction may now qualify for a National Interest Exception. This includes qualified applicants who have been present in Brazil, India, China, Iran, or South Africa within a 14-day period prior to their prospective entry into the United States. This National Interest Exception applies to academic programs beginning on or after August 1, 2021.

The pandemic continues to limit the processing of visa applications at our embassies and consulates abroad. As always, visa applicants should check the website of the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate for the most up-to-date information about visa appointment

availability. As the global situation evolves, the Department continues to seek ways to process more visa applications, in line with science-based guidance from health authorities, and with the health and safety of staff and applicants as our priority.

More information about National Interest Exceptions is available on the Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs webpage: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/national-interest-exceptions-for-certain-travelers-from-china-iran-brazil-south-africa-schengen-area-united-kingdom-and-ireland.html>

We appreciate your dedication to international exchanges. We remain committed to work closely with you as you continue to support our exchange visitors.

Sincerely,

The Office of Private Sector Exchange



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