The current government guidance does not encourage the new international students on F-1 and J-1 visa to enter the U.S. if all classes are online. However, students are allowed to start their academic programs from abroad taking all of their classes online. That said, if you receive a visa and enter the country before the end of the semester, we will still be able to register you in SEVIS. Rice University is planning the hybrid/dual delivery mode which means both in-person and online courses will be offered in the fall semester. Based on the current guidance, there is a possibility that the U.S. Embassy may issue you a visa, and it will be at the discretion of the Customs & Border Protection (CBP) to allow you entry into the U.S. Unfortunately, the OISS cannot guarantee that the CBP will grant you entry into the U.S. However, we are seeing positive outcomes, as well.

The situation revolving around the current pandemic is changing rapidly. Please visit our OISS Coronavirus FAQ page often to ensure that you have the most up-to-date information about the immigration requirements for the fall semester!

**WHAT’S IN THIS ISSUE**

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**VISA**

Applying for your visa is a vital first step to begin your journey to Rice. Before you attend your visa interview, there are two important payments you are required to complete – one-time SEVIS fee for initial F-1 and J-1 visa applicants and visa application fee upon your completion of DS-160 (Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application form). You can find more helpful tips when applying for a U.S. visa on our OISS website.

**TRAVELING TO THE U.S.**

What to bring with you on the plane (as personal items or in a carry-on):
- Documents: passport, visa, I-20/DS-2019, letter of admission from Rice, financial documents (all original, no photocopies)
- Sanitizing wipes, hand sanitizer
- Cash and/or credit/debit card
- Face masks
- Medication
- Phone charger
- Earplugs
- Jacket or sweatshirt
- Travel pillow

What NOT to bring on the plane:
- Check out the search function in the Transportation Security Agency (TSA) website to find out which items you are allowed/not allowed to bring on a plane (both in checked and hand luggage).
ENTERING THE U.S.

When you arrive in the U.S you will have to go through the Immigration check point. There is generally a line for the U.S. citizens and permanent residents, and a separate line for non-immigrant visitors. Make sure you enter the correct line to avoid confusion and wasting your time. Please have all your documents ready to present to the customs and immigration officer. Remember, newly admitted students can enter the U.S. no earlier than 30 days before the program start date (as stated in your I-20 or DS-2019).

Officers may ask you questions about the nature and duration of your visit, where you will be staying, etc. Some students might be selected for secondary inspection when officers have additional questions or issues with documentation, or just for random checks. You may be escorted to a separate room for those purposes, and you can be granted admission into the country once inspection is complete. Stay calm and answer all their questions.

Make sure you received the proper visa admission status from the customs and immigration officer (example shown below) before leaving the kiosk. If you experience any problems, please notify our office.

TRAVELING FROM THE AIRPORT

Regardless of which airport (IAH or Hobby) you arrive at, there are several options you can use to help you travel to your destination in Houston. There are a variety of ride share services available from both airports (Uber, Lyft, Get Me, GreenLight, and Wingz), but make sure you have the app installed and the payment method sorted out beforehand (certain ride share apps allow you to pay via PayPal)! If you have cash and would like to go old school, taxi services are still available. You are expected to tip the driver afterwards (usually around 15-20%) in the U.S.

MANDATORY GRADUATE INTERNATIONAL ORIENTATION (GIO)

As a new student you should plan to attend the Orientation sessions offered to you. All graduate international students (except for MBA students) in the U.S. or abroad are required to be present on all four mandatory GIO days. We want to help you to be as prepared as possible before you begin classes and the GIO is designed to do that! MBA students are also welcome to join, if they don’t have any classes or other engagements at that time.

MANDATORY CHECK-IN

All new students are required to attend a mandatory Check-in session within 15 days after arrival. Your F-1 student status starts after you attend the GIO and complete the Check-in, which consists of e-Check-in of your immigration documents and virtual session with an OISS advisor.

Transfer students who are already in the U.S. are required to complete the Check-in process before the program start date specified on your form I-20. MBA students are required to attend the Orientation on August 6th. The students who are in the U.S on August 6th will also be able to Check-in during the Orientation.

For more information about GIO and Check-In, check out our website here.

Want to learn how to speak like a Texan? Here’s a list of essential words and expressions that will have you yee-hawing in the local language in no time!

1. Y’all: the southern contraction of you all (e.g. what is going on with y’all?)
2. Howdy: How do you do? (e.g. Howdy from the people of Texas!)
3. Fixin’ to: about to (e.g. I am fixin’ to go to the store.)
4. Fixings: condiments (e.g. I’ll have a cheeseburger with all the fixings.)
5. Bless your heart: an expression used when something bad happens; or could be used sarcastically, too.
6. Coke: any carbonated soft drinks
7. 10-gallon hat: a cowboy hat

Questions?
Email us at OISS@rice.edu
or
Visit us at oiss.rice.edu