

U.S. Arrival Travel Guidance for Foreign Students and Exchange Visitors

Almost a million individuals enter the U.S. daily. Everyone arriving at a port of entry to the U.S. is subject to inspection by [Customs and Border Protection](#) (CBP) officers for compliance with immigration, customs and agricultural regulations. The more international travelers know about what to expect, the easier and quicker the process becomes.

Prior to Departing Home

Prepare your documents to include passport, valid visa in the passport to be used entering the U.S., SEVIS fee payment receipt if entering on F-1 or J-1 visa, letter of admission or invitation, sponsorship letter, up to date CV, complete list of publications, and other materials noted in your U.S. visa application as well as the following forms:

- ✓ [CBP Declaration Form](#) (completed prior or during your travel)

Air carriers operating flights to the U.S. provide CBP with passenger information such as full name, gender, and country of passport issuance. **This information is transmitted to CBP prior to departure** and enables CBP to review incoming student and scholar records in advance of their arrival to the U.S.

This information is used primarily to screen incoming travelers before granting them access to the U.S. It is important to understand that although once you land at the airport in the U.S. you are on U.S. soil, you are not formally “admitted” to the U.S. until CBP admits you. There may be a brief interview, or there could be a more in-depth interview in what is called “secondary inspection.” The ultimate decision whether to permit someone into the U.S. rests with CBP. Remember to answer any questions asked truthfully, calmly and respectfully. If you are asked to go to secondary inspection you will not have access to your devices or to Harvard officials.

U.S. Border Inspection

[Clearing Customs](#)

[Biometrics](#)

CBP has deployed facial biometric technology to support U.S. entry procedures. Once the camera captures an image of the traveler and the system successfully matches it with historical photos of all travelers from the gallery associated with that manifest, the traveler proceeds to inspection for admissibility by a CBP Officer.

[Secondary Screening - CBP Search Authority](#)

A CBP officer's border search authority is derived from federal statutes and regulations, including 19 C.F.R. 162.6, which states that,

"All persons, baggage and merchandise arriving in the Customs territory of the United States from places outside thereof are liable to inspection by a CBP officer." Unless exempt by diplomatic status, all persons entering the United States, including U.S. citizens, are subject to examination and search by CBP officers.

[Border Search of Electronic Devices](#)

[What to Expect](#)

CBP may conduct a border search of your electronic device(s). This may include copying and retaining data contained in the device(s). The CBP officer conducting the examination will speak with you and explain the process.

Travelers are obligated to present electronic devices and the information resident on the device in a condition that allows for the examination of the device and its contents. Failure to assist CBP in accessing the electronic device and its contents for examination may result in the detention of the device to complete the inspection.

CBP will return your electronic device(s) prior to your departure from the port of entry unless CBP identifies a need to temporarily detain the device(s) to complete the search or the device is subject to seizure. **If CBP detains or seizes your device(s), you will receive a completed written custody receipt detailing the item(s) being detained or seized, who at CBP will be your point of**



contact, and how to contact them. To facilitate the return of your property, CBP will request contact information.

Should you have additional questions or concerns regarding the devices, please contact the telephone number provided on the written custody receipt.

Return or Seizure of Detained Electronic Device(s)

If your device or devices are temporarily detained, CBP will contact you when the examination of your electronic device(s) is complete to notify you that you may pick up the item(s) from the location where the item or items were detained. If it is impractical for you to pick up your device, CBP can make arrangements to return your devices to you.

DNA Swab Searches

U.S. CBP may occasionally collect DNA samples from non-U.S. citizens detained under the authority of the United States and from U.S. citizens and lawfully admitted permanent residents arrested and facing federal charges between the ages of 14-79. Additionally, **samples are being collected from individuals encountered by CBP between the ages of 14-79 who are non-U.S. citizens detained under U.S. authority and are being processed for inadmissibility or removal.**

CBP Secondary Interviews

The CBP officer's questions at the U.S. port of entry are primarily targeted to verify the below

details related to the person entering the U.S. but will vary and can probe into research work, affiliations, and research publications.

- **Identity of Person:** The CBP officer's primary intent is to validate if you are the same person who applied for a U.S. visa; confirm your personal details like name, date of birth, nationality; and confirm your fingerprints.
- **Purpose and Intent of Entry:** CBP will verify the purpose of your travel to the U.S. and your intent. You need to **answer accurately** so that the CBP officer can assess if your purpose and intent are in-line with your U.S. visa application.
- **U.S. Visa Supporting Documents:** The CBP officer wants to ensure you have all the supporting documents related to your U.S. visa and the documents are genuine. They may ask for documents related to your visa to validate the same. They may also ask for a list of your published and pending publications.
- **Detect Fraud, and National Security Threats:** The CBP officers also want to ascertain whether there is any fraud involved in the overall process of the U.S. visa, if the documents are genuine, or if there are any security threats related to the individual entering the U.S.

Note: CBP is very prepared to interview any incoming student/appointee with knowledge of their visa application, CV, publications, and social media presence. Any indicators of deception in documents or verbal responses provided to CBP

officers may be grounds for immediate visa cancellation, denied entry, and even a ban on entering the U.S. for 5 years.

Review all written statements that are prepared for you, in a language that you can understand. You will be given a copy of the documents.

Potential Risk Factors That May Lead to Secondary Inspection:

- Citizen or national of a sanctioned, restricted or Country of Concern,
- Studies or plan to study in a STEM field or sensitive technology,
- Affiliated with an entity that is sanctioned or on a U.S. federal restricted party list,
- Certain types of foreign government funding, or
- Verbal deception or omission from visa application or travel documents.

Helpful CBP Links:

- [FAQs](#)
- [CBP Reminds Travelers from Canada that Marijuana Remains Illegal in the United States](#)
- [CBP Expands Filing of Joint Customs Declarations](#)
- [Bringing Agricultural Products Into the United States](#)
- [Registration for Dutiable Personal Articles Prior to U.S. Departure](#)
- [Currency Reporting](#)
- [Prohibited and Restricted Items](#)
- [Bringing Food into the U.S.](#)
- [Border Searches – Electronic Devices](#)
- [Arrival/Departure Forms: I-94 and I-94W](#)

