Dear Students and Scholars,

Several of you have inquired recently about traveling outside the U.S. to visit home during the winter break from November 25, 2020 to January 25, 2021. Since this topic seems to be on many minds right now, the ISSO wants to share some of this advice that may be helpful for some of you.

There is always at least a small amount of risk when a student leaves the U.S. before completing a program of study. Usually, this is not a significant concern and I would not advise against travel. However, with the rapidly changing nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, the risk of re-entry problems is elevated. We cannot predict when there may be a surge in infections or a change in U.S. government policy that would suddenly prevent people from certain countries or all countries from returning to the U.S. I am not comfortable suggesting whether or not you should visit home, but I can recommend that you carefully consider the risks and benefits of any potential travel. You may have compelling needs to see your family or take care of business back at home that could be worth risking travel there. Or, you may only have one more semester (Spring 2021) to complete before graduating and returning home to see family anyway, so it may be less risky just to remain in the U.S. a few months longer. You should also consider whether or not, in a worst-case scenario, you would be able to complete your degree online if you cannot travel back to campus. It might also be helpful to consider these questions: Could it be safer for your academic future for your family and/or to try and come to visit you here? Could you schedule frequent telephone calls and online events with your family and friends back home to get you through the winter break, while embracing some of the great socially-distanced outdoor winter activities that a person can enjoy in Cedar Falls, like hiking, snowshoeing, skiing, fat-bike cycling, running, and more? (Like creating a stay-cation here in Iowa!)

If you have any questions, or any ideas for us to help you explore, the ISSO staff would be happy to help as we can. Please don't hesitate to keep in touch.

I've copied some helpful links below to sites that are updated regularly and will contain official U.S. Government travel information.

https://www.cbp.gov/travel

Sincerely,

Ross

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