

COVID-19 Updates: Frequently Asked Questions **for Fall 2020 (last updated July 22, 2020)**

Here are some frequently asked questions pertaining to maintenance of F1/J1 immigration status during the COVID-19 pandemic, based on available guidance from Student & Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP), US Department of State, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). As situations related to the COVID-19 crisis change and more guidance become available, this document will be updated. Please continue to check your CSUF email for campus and ISS updates.

New Students for Fall 2020

I am admitted for Fall 2020. Will I be receiving a Form I-20?

According to July 15, 2020 guidance from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), "If Initial students have not arrived in the United States, they should remain in their home country." It is advisable that new international students admitted for Fall 2020 who are currently outside the U.S. remain in their home countries and enroll in fully online/web courses for Fall 2020 semester. The ISS team will issue the Form I-20 with a Spring 2021 program start date, so that you can apply for an F-1 visa to attend CSUF when the University returns to standard operations and in-person instruction mode. You do not need an I-20 to enroll in online/web courses from your home country.

If you are transferring your SEVIS record to CSUF and you are currently in the United States, ISS will issue the form I-20 with a Fall 2020 program start date. Your I-20 will be issued electronically and sent to your CSUF email. As long as you have transferred your SEVIS record within your 60-Day Grace Period, you can remain in the U.S. in valid F-1 status while you wait for your I-20 to be issued.

We are waiting on additional guidance from ICE and Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) regarding issuance of Form I-20s for F-1 students who are transferring their SEVIS record to CSUF and are currently outside the U.S. Please stay connected with International Students and Scholars (ISS) for further updates on your Form I-20.

I have returned to my home country. I have already transferred my SEVIS record to CSUF. Can I attend CSUF remotely from my home country?

Yes, you can enroll full time in fully online/web courses for Fall 2020 and study remotely from your home country. Please be sure to inform ISS of your Fall 2020 plans and remain enrolled full time for Fall 2020 semester.

I have returned to my home country due to the COVID19 situation. I have already transferred my SEVIS record to CSUF. Can I return to the U.S. to begin my first semester at CSUF this Fall 2020?

ISS is waiting for clarification from ICE/SEVP on new international students overseas who have transferred their SEVIS record to CSUF and wanting to return to the U.S. before or during the Fall 2020. Please continue to stay connected to ISS for updates on this. Until we receive further guidance from ICE/SEVP, we advise you to avoid attempting to travel to the US. Instead, you can enroll full time in fully online/web courses for Fall 2020 and study remotely from your home country. Please be sure to inform ISS of your Fall 2020 plans and remain enrolled full time for Fall 2020 semester.

I cannot get my visa to come to the U.S. for the fall semester. What can I do?

In response to the COVID19 pandemic, as of March 20, 2020 U.S. embassies and consular offices worldwide cancelled routine visa services. As such, it is highly unlikely that you will obtain the F-1 visa for the Fall 2020 semester. You can still begin your CSUF academic program by enrolling in fully online/web courses in the Fall semester, studying remotely from your home country. This will allow you more time to obtain the F-1 visa once U.S. embassies reopen for visa services. If you would like to start your CSUF academic program in Spring 2021 due to not having the F-1 visa, please send an email to the CSUF Admissions office at admissions@fullerton.edu (Subject: Deferment Request, Your Name and CWID). In your email, state that you want to defer your admission to the Spring 2021 semester due to inability to obtain F-1 visa and that you will not be enrolling for Fall 2020. Please also inform ISS of your deferment request so that your Form I-20 can be updated.

Due to COVID-19, can I postpone my admission to 2021?

To defer your Fall 2020 admission to a later semester (Spring 2021), please send an email to the Admissions Office: admissions@fullerton.edu. Please also inform ISS via email (iss@fullerton.edu) if you decide to do this.

If I accept admission and pay the enrollment deposit fee for the Fall 2020 semester but cannot attend or would like to defer admission to the following semester, do I get a refund for the enrollment deposit?

You will not get a refund for the enrollment deposit; however, your enrollment deposit may be applied to the Spring 2021 semester if you are approved for an admission deferral. Please email your admission deferral request to the Admissions Office: admissions@fullerton.edu. Please also inform ISS via email (iss@fullerton.edu) if you decide to do this.

For Continuing Students

Continuing students are international students who were admitted before Fall 2020.

Maintaining Immigration Status

Can I remain in the US while doing online instruction for Fall 2020 semester?

Yes, you can remain in the US as long as you maintain a full course of study for the Fall 2020 semester. If you are unable to maintain your full course of study, please schedule a virtual appointment with an ISS Advisor immediately and before requesting any withdrawal(s).

Will my SEVIS record or immigration (F1/J1) status be terminated if I leave the US and continue doing online instruction from my home country?

No. As long as you maintain a full course of study for Fall 2020 semester and follow instructions from your Professors to complete course requirements, your SEVIS record will remain in Active status.

Will my SEVIS record or F1/J1 status be terminated if I drop my classes or do not virtually attend online classes?

Yes, in most cases. Please refer to <https://extension.fullerton.edu/international/students/status/default.aspx>

I returned to my home country and am facing difficulties with virtual coursework due to the time difference. What should I do?

Please be sure to clearly communicate your situation with your professor(s) and ask if any accommodations can be made available. If you plan to withdraw from a course, you must discuss your situation with an ISS Advisor if the withdraw will result in you being enrolled in less than a full course load.

I returned to my home country. Is it possible for me to return to the U.S before or during the Fall 2020 semester to study remotely for Fall 2020 in the U.S.?

Given the current evolving COVID19 pandemic situation, there are several COVID19 related travel restrictions still in place. We are waiting for additional clarification from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in regards to international students in Active SEVIS status who are currently outside the U.S. Please continue to frequently check your CSUF emails for updates from ISS on this matter.

Are international students on F1 or J1 visa status eligible for the financial aid grants from the CARES Act Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF)?

No, international students on F1 or J1 visa status are not eligible to receive this financial aid grant. For more information, please see: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/heerfstudentfaqs.pdf>.

Health Insurance

Do I have to purchase health insurance for Fall 2020 semester if I am studying from my home country? Can I get a health insurance refund?

If you will remain outside the U.S. for the entire duration of the Fall 2020 semester while studying virtually, you are not required to purchase the CSUF International Student Health Insurance Plan for the Fall 2020 semester. Please be reminded that if you decide to remain in the U.S., the CSUF International Student Health Insurance is a condition of your enrollment and F-1 status.

To request an exception to the health insurance requirement based on being outside the U.S., please submit the appropriate form listed below. You may use this form if you have already purchased the Fall 2020 health insurance coverage and would like to request a refund or if you have not purchased the Fall 2020 health insurance coverage and would like to request for your ISS hold to be removed. Please note that health insurance refunds will be processed beginning August 2020.

[Request for Exception to Health Insurance Requirement](#)

To be eligible, you must provide proof that you have departed the U.S. (examples of acceptable proof include I-94 Travel History, copy of airline ticket, copy of arrival date stamp in passport). If you have been admitted for Fall 2020 semester and you are not transferring from a SEVIS approved school, you are not required to provide proof of departure.

In the event that I actually have Coronavirus, does my CSUF International Student Health insurance cover the hospital and testing fees?

Effective immediately, Aetna members will have access to the following resources:

- Aetna will waive co-pays for all diagnostic testing related to COVID-19. This policy will cover the test kit for patients who meet CDC guidelines for testing, which can be done in any approved laboratory location. Aetna will waive the member costs associated with diagnostic testing at any authorized location.
- For the next 90 days, Aetna will offer zero co-pay telemedicine visits – for any reason. Aetna members should use telemedicine as their first line of defense to limit potential exposure in physician offices. Cost-sharing will be waived for all video visits through the CVS MinuteClinic app, Aetna-covered Teladoc® offerings and in-network providers delivering synchronous virtual care (live video-conferencing).
- For more information, please visit the [Aetna Student Health Page](#)

Beginning August 1, 2020, international students' health insurance coverage will be under **Anthem**.

Anthem is waiving the following:

- cost-sharing for the treatment of COVID-19 from April 1 through Dec. 31, 2020, for members of its fully-insured student health plans. This includes FDA approved medications for the treatment of COVID-19 when they become available.
- Cost-sharing for COVID-19 diagnostic tests, including serology tests, for members of our student health plans. This is effective throughout the duration of the public emergency.
- Cost-sharing for COVID-19 screening related tests (e.g., influenza tests, blood tests, etc.) performed during a visit that results in an order for, or administration of, diagnostic testing for COVID-19 will also be covered with no cost-sharing for members. This is effective throughout the duration of the public emergency.
- Cost-sharing for visits to get the COVID-19 diagnostic test, regardless of whether the test is administered, beginning March 5 for members of our student health insurance plans. This is effective throughout the duration of the public emergency.
- Cost-sharing for telehealth visits from in-network providers from March 17 through Sept. 30, 2020, including visits for behavioral health, for our student health plans, and where permissible, Medicaid plans.
- Cost-sharing for FDA-approved vaccines when they become available. The cost-sharing waiver includes copays, coinsurance, and deductibles.
- For additional services, members will pay any cost shares their plan requires unless otherwise determined by state law or regulation. Members can call the number on the back of their identification card to confirm coverage.

Employment

I am planning to graduate in Fall 2020. After I complete my classes virtually, can I apply for Post-Completion OPT while I am overseas?

At this time, we are waiting for clarification on this topic from Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) and US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Once we receive guidance, ISS will provide updates through emails and the ISS website.

I am on approved OPT or STEM Extension OPT and my employer has reduced my hours. Does working less than 20 hours per week affect my F1 status?

During the COVID19 emergency, SEVP considers employment that is less than 20 hours per week to be valid for OPT employment.

I am on approved OPT or STEM Extension OPT and my employer has instructed me to work from home. What steps do I need to take to report this?

According to the SEVP FAQ released on April 14, 2020, your SEVIS record does not need to be updated if you are working from home due to COVID19. Additionally, students on STEM OPT are not required to update their I-983 if working from home due to COVID19.

I am on approved OPT or STEM Extension OPT and my employer has placed me on a paid/unpaid leave. Does this count as unemployment or affect my status?

Time off work consistent with the employer's leave-related policies does not count as unemployment. As long as you are expected to resume work after the leave, you do not need to take any action to update your SEVIS record or Form I-20. Please be sure to save any documentation and/or communication from your employer pertaining to the leave. If you are on approved OPT or STEM OPT and your employment has been permanently terminated, you must report the end of your employment to ISS within 10 days.

I am on approved OPT or STEM Extension OPT and I am unable to find a job. Will USCIS allow for additional unemployment days?

At this time, there have not been any changes or flexibility in regards to the limit on unemployment days. If you are on OPT and want to avoid exceeding the unemployment limit, you may want to consider a [qualifying volunteer position](#). Unlike OPT, STEM Extension OPT cannot be maintained with volunteer and/or unpaid positions. Otherwise, you must depart the U.S. or transfer to a new school before exceeding the unemployment limit.

I am on approved STEM Extension OPT or plan to apply for STEM Extension OPT. Can I submit the form I-983 with electronic signatures?

At this time, there has not been an official announcement indicating that an electronic signature on the I-983 is permitted. We therefore must defer to the instructions on the I-983 form itself which indicates “sign in ink”.

Travel

Can I travel internationally?

ISS does not recommend travel due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, travel restrictions for certain foreign nationals, and temporary suspension of visa services in most US Embassies. If you choose to depart the U.S., please be prepared for delays and possible inability to re-enter the U.S.

Can I travel within the U.S.?

ISS does not recommend travel within the U.S. due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. Various parts of the U.S. have travel restrictions and stay-at-home orders. Please refer to [CDC: COVID-19 Cases in the U.S.](#) If you choose to travel within the U.S., please seriously consider your health and safety. Be sure to follow the recommendations provided by [Centers of Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Do I have to return to my home country?

No. While Cal State Fullerton is taking precautionary measures and providing virtual instruction mode for all students, F1 and J1 students can remain in the US if they choose to do so. Students should check the expiration date on their Form I-20 (for F1 students) or Form DS-2019 (for J1 students).

Do I need to submit my Form I-20 or Form DS-2019 before departing the US?

No. Please submit the [online Travel Signature Request](#) prior to departure. A new I-20 or DS-2019 will be electronically signed and emailed to your CSUF email address.

Do I need to apply for a new visa if I am outside the U.S.?

A visa is valid until its expiration date. You are not required to apply for a new visa if it has not yet expired or been revoked.

What should I do if I am unable to depart the United States before the end of my Grace Period?

F-1 Visa Holders: If you are unable to depart the U.S. before the end of your Grace Period, your options to extend your F-1 status include receiving admission to another SEVP certified School and transferring your SEVIS record or applying for OPT. Please consult with an ISS Advisor regarding procedures and eligibility. Additionally, we encourage you to also contact your home country's local consulate or embassy in the U.S. for support and information regarding travel home.

If I apply for unemployment benefits, will it affect my F-1 status?

USCIS expects visa holders to be “self-sufficient” while in the United States. Receiving public benefits could result in you being considered a “[Public Charge](#)” which may impact your eligibility for future benefits, such as change of status or adjustment of status. However, Department of Homeland Security specifically states that unemployment benefits are not considered a public charge as “these are considered to be earned benefits through the person's employment and specific tax deductions.” (Please see the [Final Rule](#) published in the Federal Registrar.)

It is important to note that although unemployment insurance is not considered a public charge by DHS, eligibility requirements vary from state to state. Check with the unemployment insurance agency in the state where you worked regarding eligibility guidelines. Click [here](#) to search for your state’s program.

Are F-1 and J-1 students eligible for the US Economic Stimulus payment (or Economic Impact Payments)?

Please see the [Economic Impact Payment Information Center](#) students for more details. If you have further questions or concerns, please contact the [Internal Revenue Service \(IRS\)](#) or consult an immigration attorney.

What should I do if I received the economic stimulus check in error?

Please follow the [instructions in the to return the payment to the IRS](#). Be sure to keep a copy of the check and of anything else that you send to the IRS.