

Frequently Asked Questions (updated April 29, 2021)

Here are some frequently asked questions pertaining to maintenance of F1/J1 immigration status during the COVID-19 pandemic, based on available guidance from the Student & Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP), U.S. 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 webpage will be updated. Please continue to check your CSUF email for campus and ISS updates.

New Students for Fall 2021

What is CSUF's mode of instruction for Fall 2021?

CSUF is planning for primarily in-person instruction for Fall 2021, with some courses delivered virtually and some delivered as hybrid (mixture of in-person and virtual). Please frequently check your CSUF email and the [Titans Return website](#) for more Fall 2021 updates.

I am admitted for Fall 2021. Will I be issued a Form I-20?

Consistent with current [SEVP's COVID-19 guidance for 2021-2022 academic year](#), ISS will issue CSUF Form I-20 to admitted students who plan to enroll in at least one in-person or hybrid Fall 2021 course. (This in-person course enrollment requirement does not apply to F1 students currently in the U.S.) Please check the ISS New Student webpage for documents and action needed to receive your CSUF Form I-20. You will receive your Form I-20 via CSUF email.

Please note that you do not need the Form I-20 to enroll in Fall 2021 fully online/web courses to begin your CSUF academic program remotely from outside the U.S.

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 2021 and study remotely from your home country. Please be sure to inform ISS of your Fall 2021 plans to remain outside the U.S.

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 in Fall 2021 semester?

Consistent with [SEVP's COVID-19 guidance](#), ISS will issue your CSUF Form I-20 for Fall 2021 if you plan to enroll in at least one in-person or hybrid Fall 2021 course. Please note that the Form I-20 is a certificate of eligibility for the F-1 status. Entry to the U.S. remains at the discretion of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

I cannot get my visa to come to the U.S. for the Fall 2021 semester. What can I do?

You can still begin your CSUF academic program by enrolling in fully online/web courses for the Fall 2021 semester, studying remotely from outside the U.S. This will allow you more time to obtain the F-1 visa. Please note that your CSUF admission offer is specific to the Fall 2021 semester. If you do not enroll in Fall 2021 courses, then you must reapply for admission for a future term. If any further questions related to your CSUF admission, please contact the Admissions Office: admissions@fullerton.edu.

Due to COVID-19, can I postpone my admission to Spring 2022 or a future term?

Your CSUF admission offer is specific to beginning your academic program in the Fall 2021 semester. If you do not enroll in the Fall 2021 term, then you must reapply for admission for a future term. If any further questions about your CSUF admission offer, please contact the Admissions Office: admissions@fullerton.edu.

Continuing Students

Continuing students are international students actively enrolled at CSUF or on approved OPT/STEM OPT since March 9, 2020 (based on SEVP Broadcast messages, [March 9, 2020](#) and [April 26, 2021](#)).

Maintaining Immigration Status

I was admitted (in Fall 2020 or Spring 2021) and plan to begin in-person coursework for Fall 2021 semester.

What do I need to do?

Please expect an email from ISS regarding documents needed for your updated Form I-20 for Fall 2021, along with visa and travel information. Based on current SEVP's COVID-19 guidance, if Fall 2021 is your first semester as an F1 student, then you must plan to enroll in at least one in-person or hybrid Fall 2021 course.

I am not able to secure an F1 visa. What should I do?

In most cases, you can enroll in fully online (100% web) courses for the Fall 2021 semester and study remotely from outside the U.S. To maintain your F1 status, you must enroll in a full course load. If you are not enrolling in Fall 2021 courses, then if eligible, you can request a [Leave of Absence](#). Please meet virtually with an ISS Advisor to discuss your situation, eligibility for Leave Request and explore other options.

Can I remain in the US while doing online instruction for Fall 2021 semester?

Yes, you can remain in the U.S. as long as you maintain a full course of study (or have ISS approved reduced course load) for Fall 2021 semester. If you are unable to maintain a full course of study, please schedule a virtual appointment with an ISS Advisor before submitting withdrawal requests.

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 and follow instructions from your Professors to complete course requirements, your SEVIS record will remain in Active status.

Please note that if your SEVIS record was transferred to CSUF, you must be in the U.S. at the start of your first semester in order for your SEVIS record to 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 he withdrawal will result in you being enrolled in less than a full course load.

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 2021 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 2021 semester while studying virtually, you are not required to purchase the CSUF International Student Health Insurance Plan for the Fall 2021 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 found on the [ISS Health Insurance webpage](#). You may use this form if you have already purchased the Fall 2021 health insurance coverage and would like to request a refund or if you have not purchased the Fall 2021 health insurance coverage and would like to request for your ISS hold to be removed.

To be eligible for the health insurance exception, 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 2021 semester and you are not transferring from a SEVIS approved school, you are not required to provide proof of departure. To be eligible for health insurance refunds of Fall 2021 coverage or annual coverage (August 2021-July 2022), requests must be received by ISS before September 1, 2021.

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

Please view your COVID-19 Coverage information on Anthem's Individual and Family webpage: <https://www.anthem.com/ca/coronavirus/individual-and-family/>

Health, Wellness & Coping

How can I maintain good health during COVID-19 when many facilities are currently closed or operating remotely?

Health

- Manage Your Health at Home (CDC) - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html>
- Anthem International Student Health Insurance – See information on [ISS Health Insurance webpage](#)
- CSUF Health Services - <http://www.fullerton.edu/health/>
- Orange Country Health Care Agency (OCHCA) - Health Referral Line with questions about COVID- 19 screening & testing - <https://www.ochealthinfo.com>

Wellness

- Titan Recreation Center (virtual programs)- <https://titanrecreation.fullerton.edu/>
- You@Fullerton (total wellness online tool) - <https://you.fullerton.edu/>

Coping

- Stress and Coping (CDC) - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>
- CSUF Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) - <http://www.fullerton.edu/caps/>

Employment

I am planning to graduate in Fall 2021. 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 OPT Extension 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 current SEVP guidance, 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 Alerts & FAQs

National Interest Exceptions (NIE) for Certain Travelers from China, Iran, Brazil, South Africa, Schengen Area, United Kingdom, and Ireland (April 26, 2021)

On April 26, 2021, the U.S. State Department announced that they "made a national determination regarding categories of travelers eligible for exceptions under Presidential Proclamations (PPs) 9984, 9992, and 10143 related to the spread of COVID-19....Students and academics subject to these proclamations due to their presence in China, Iran, Brazil, or South Africa, may qualify for an NIE only if their academic program begins August 1, 2021 or later." For more info, please check [U.S. State Department website](#) and [media note](#). If you are a CSUF student from one of these countries wanting to enter the U.S., please contact the U.S. Embassy nearest you to seek clarification on whether an NIE is needed for your case.

Negative COVID-19 Test Results Required Prior to Air Travel to U.S.

If entering the U.S. by air travel, you are required to present proof of a negative COVID-19 test or documentation of having recovered from COVID-19 prior to traveling. Please refer to [CDC web](#) for detailed info.

After International Travel Guidance from CDC

For your health and safety, please see [CDC's After International Travel Guidance](#).

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. F-1 students: A new I-20 will be electronically signed and emailed to your CSUF email address. J-1 students: Your reprinted DS-2019 will be mailed to you.

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 for returning the economic impact payment found on the IRS website](#). Be sure to keep a copy of the check and of anything else that you send to the IRS.