

COVID-19 Updates: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Current CSUF Students **For Spring & Summer 2020 (last updated June 16, 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.

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 printed, signed, and shipped to your address. Since ISS is operating remotely and does not have easy access to regular US mail services, we strongly recommend setting up [Express Shipping](#).

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 You are not required to apply for a new visa if it has not yet expired or been revoked.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, you should take action to extend your F-1 status by receiving admission to another SEVP certified School and transferring your SEVIS record or apply 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.

As of May 5, 2020

| Things to Consider | Study Remotely While In US: Spring & Summer 2020 | Study Remotely from Outside US: Spring & Summer 2020 |
|--|--|--|
| <p>I-20 Expiring between May 22, 2020 – August 2020</p> | <p>Submit to ISS an online Program Extension Request to have your Form I-20 extended.</p> <p><i>Note to sponsored students: Make sure your Financial Guarantee is up to date.</i></p> <p>Set up Express Mail to receive extended I-20.</p> | <p>Submit to ISS an online Program Extension Request to have your Form I-20 extended <i>in case you need to return to US for Fall 2020 studies at CSUF.</i></p> <p><i>Note to sponsored students: Make sure your Financial Guarantee is up to date.</i></p> <p>Set up Express Mail to receive extended I-20.</p> |
| <p>Travel Signature on Form I-20</p> | <p>As long as your I-20 is not expired, you do not need to worry about this.</p> | <p>Submit an online Travel Signature Request to ISS. Set up Express Shipping. ISS will reprint your I-20 and provide travel signature.</p> <p>Note: You do not need to have the I-20 before you leave the U.S.</p> |
| <p>Visa Expiration</p> | <p>You can remain in US as long you maintain full course of study for Spring 2020. Summer enrollment is optional unless you are graduating in Summer 2020.</p> | <p>If your visa has expired, you will need to apply for visa renewal before returning to US.</p> <p>Note: As of March 20, 2020, in response to global challenges posed by COVID19 pandemic, US State Department have temporarily suspended all routine visa services and appointments. It is unknown when US Embassies will open visa services.</p> <p>Check for following webpages for timely updates: https://travel.state.gov/content/travel.html https://www.usembassy.gov/</p> |
| <p>Graduating Spring 2020 or Summer 2020</p> | <p>As long as you complete all your graduation requirements, you will be able to graduate.</p> <p>Check for emails and updates from CSUF and ISS regarding graduation.</p> <p>Your OPT eligibility will not be affected by studying remotely in the U.S.</p> | <p>As long as you complete all your graduation requirements, you will be able to graduate.</p> <p>Check for emails and updates from CSUF and ISS regarding graduation.</p> <p>USCIS has not confirmed whether or not students who are overseas are eligible to apply for OPT. We recommend applying for OPT while in the U.S.</p> |
| <p>Time zone difference</p> | <p>No time zone difference</p> | <p>This may be challenging depending where you are and how instructors deliver online classes.</p> <p>Please email your Instructors if having challenges due to time zone differences.</p> |
| <p>Ability to return to campus in Fall if back to in-person instruction</p> | <p>It will be easier for you to return to campus for in-person instruction if studying remotely at this time while in the US.</p> | <p>It will be more challenging to return to the US and to campus due to travel/re-entry restrictions and visa validity.</p> |

Immigration Status

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

Yes, you can remain in the US as long as you maintain a full course of study for the Spring 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 Spring 2020 semester and follow instructions from your Professors to complete course requirements, your SEVIS record will remain active.

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://international.fullerton.edu/students/status/>

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 was originally scheduled to graduate after the Spring 2020 semester, but it looks like I will need one more semester. Do I need to extend my I-20 program end date if I am going to be taking class from my home country?

Please schedule a virtual appointment with an International Student Advisor regarding your situation. If you plan to apply for Post-Completion Optional Practical Training, then you may need to extend your Form I-20 to reflect that you are still enrolling for another term and not graduating Spring 2020 semester.

I am an F1 student and enrolled full-time for Spring 2020. If I choose the Credit/No Credit (CR/NC) grading option for some or all of my Spring 2020 classes, will this negatively affect my F1 visa status?

As long as you are maintaining a full course of study and completing all required coursework for all of your Spring 2020 classes, choosing a CR/NC grading option for some or all of your Spring 2020 classes will not negatively affect your F1 visa status.

International students must seek advisement from ISS Advisors before any withdrawal from any courses. Any unauthorized drop or withdrawal from a course – where student receives a “WU” grade or “NC*” grade (if choosing CR/NC grading option) will negatively impact visa status.

I am enrolled in an Internship Class in Spring 2020 and was authorized CPT (Curricular Practical Training). Can I choose the Credit/No Credit (CR/NC) grading option?

Yes, you can choose the Credit/No Credit grading option. However, it is best to consult with the Instructor for your Internship Class. If you cannot fulfill the minimum required hours for a passing grade for the Internship class due to COVID19 disruption, please contact an International Student Advisor and your Internship Course Instructor immediately.

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 semester if I am studying from my home country? Can I get a 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 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](#)

Please note, beginning August 1, 2020, international students' health insurance coverage will be under Anthem, not Aetna.

Employment

I am planning to graduate in Spring 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".

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.