

COVID-19 Updates & Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

International Students and Scholars are committed to supporting you during this COVID-19 pandemic. In observance of California Governor's "Stay At Home" Executive Order, International Students and Scholars (ISS) is operating remotely and have modified delivery of some services. We are closely monitoring the developments of this pandemic situation and its impact on international students and scholars.

This is created to help answer some frequently asked questions and provide additional resources. Please frequently check this ISS COVID19 FAQ webpage for updates as this global health crisis is rapidly evolving.

ISS Services While Operating Remotely

ISS Advising: International Student Advisors are available for virtual or Zoom appointments. To schedule an appointment, please go to <https://international.fullerton.edu/students/advising/>

ISS' SEVIS Document Production Services

Please note that ISS' SEVIS document production services (I-20s/DS-2019s) and processing times are severely impacted by the Executive Order. ISS is severely limited in the number of staff allowed to be on-campus to print and ship out immigration documents.

Processing Timeframe

We are currently accepting all requests, but we are prioritizing requests that are time-sensitive (i.e., OPT, STEM OPT Extensions, extensions of I-20s, or other requests requiring immediate action). We ask for your patience as processing of requests may take longer than usual. Processing of applications will be further delayed if it is incomplete or requires additional follow-up.

Express Mail Only

At this time, we are only mailing out documents via FedEx Express Mail, UPS, or DHL, which students need to set-up in advance: <https://international.fullerton.edu/students/express-mail/>

Although SEVP (Student & Exchange Visitor Program) made some allowance for emailing of electronic copies of I-20s, it is unclear whether other government agencies like USCIS (for OPT or STEM OPT Extensions) or Customs & Border Protection (for travel and re-entry) will accept electronic copies of I-20s. As such, ISS will continue to print I-20s and ship out Express Shipping. Outgoing shipments will occur on Thursday and Friday (subject to change without notice).

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Current CSUF Students

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.

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.

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?

At this time, virtual instruction has been extended through Summer 2020 term only. It has not been confirmed that Fall courses will be virtual. Should this change, you can send an email to ISS to request a refund of Fall 2020 health insurance coverage if you are remaining in your home country while enrolled for Fall 2020. Refund request must be submitted to ISS within 45 days of the Fall coverage start date (between August 1 – September 15), along with evidence that you are in your home country. Due to the current global health crisis, it is advisable that you have health insurance coverage. The CSUF International Student Health Insurance plan is usable worldwide, including in your home country.

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.

Health, Wellness & Coping

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

For any health information or questions, please see the following recommended resources:

Health

- Manage Your Health at Home (CDC) - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/caring-for-yourself-at-home.html>
- Aetna Student Health Page - <https://www.aetnastudenthealth.com/>
- CSUF Health Services - <http://www.fullerton.edu/health/>
- Orange County Health Care Agency (OCHCA) - Health Referral Line with questions about COVID-19 screening & testing - <https://www.ochealthinfo.com/>

Wellness

- 2020 Recreation Movement (April 6 – May 3, online workout classes) - <https://2020recreationmovement.com/>
- 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 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 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.

Am I eligible for the US economic stimulus payment?

International students are eligible for the \$1,200 economic stimulus payment through the [CARES Act](#) if they **meet all of the requirements listed below**. Since many international students are [nonresidents for U.S. tax purposes](#), they will not be eligible for the payment.

The economic stimulus payment should be automatic if you are eligible for it, but you should also be able to track your payment on the [Internal Revenue Service \(IRS\) website](#) soon.

You will only be eligible for the payment if you:

- **Are a [resident for U.S. tax purposes](#)**
 - If you are a resident for U.S. tax purposes for 2020, but not for 2019, you can [claim the economic stimulus payment when you file Form 1040 with the IRS for tax year 2020](#). Your tax return for tax year 2020 will be due on April 15, 2021.
- Filed a federal tax return for the 2018 or 2019 tax year
- Have a U.S. social security number (SSN)
 - Note: Married couples where one person has an SSN and the other spouse has an ITIN or no number appear to be ineligible

Have an “adjusted gross income” of \$75,000 or less. You can find your “adjusted gross income” on your federal income tax return form (Form 1040). A reduced amount will be issued to individuals with an adjusted gross income between \$75,000 and \$99,000 per year. For more information see the [Economic Impact Payment Information Center](#) on the IRS website.

FAQs for New Students

I am admitted. When can I receive my immigration document (I-20/DS-2019)?

At this time, ISS team is preparing Form I-20s for Fall 2020 admitted students who have paid the enrollment deposit. Form I-20s will be mailed out after May 1st (subject to change).

Will I be able to travel to the U.S. to start my program this Fall if I get my visa?

At this time, it is uncertain how long the US and other global travel restrictions will remain in place due to the evolving COVID-19 situation. Even if you already have an F-1 visa, due to the pandemic you might be restricted from entering the US. ISS staff will work with students on a case-by-case basis to determine the best option.

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

At this time, to defer Fall 2020 admission to a later semester (Spring 2021) you will need to submit a CSUF admission application for that semester (Spring 2021). Please also inform ISS via email (iss@fullerton.edu) if you decide to do this.

I have returned to my home country. Can I take my first semester at CSUF online from home? Will this affect my visa status?

If you decide to remain in your home country and enroll in Fall 2020 CSUF courses, please inform ISS as adjustments need to be made on your Form I-20. ISS might request additional documents from you. Additionally, please be sure to consult with your Academic Advisor in regards to your first semester studies remotely.

I have been admitted to CSUF for fall semester. Can I take summer online classes from my home country?

Newly admitted students are matriculated for the fall term, not summer term. If you are a newly admitted student for fall, we do not recommend taking summer online courses.

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

Please inform ISS if you are unable to obtain an F-1 visa for the Fall semester and schedule a [virtual appointment](#) with an International Student Advisor. Depending on your situation, some options for you to consider are enrolling for Fall 2020 CSUF courses and studying remotely from your home country, or reapplying for the F-1 visa, or submitting a CSUF admission application for Spring 2021.

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 this fee?

You will not get a refund; however, depending on the reason why you cannot attend, you can submit an [appeal](#) to the Office of Admissions and be eligible to obtain a refund.

ISS-COVID19-FAQ_Updated April 23, 2020