

Frequently Asked Questions For Continuing Students Fall 2020 and Spring 2021

Updated September 21, 2020

The FAQs below are based on U.S. government guidance related to international students and the COVID-19 pandemic. This information is subject to change at any time.

[General Questions for Spring 2021](#)

[General Questions for Fall 2020](#)

[General Questions](#)

[Travel](#)

[Employment](#)

General Questions for Spring 2021

What is The New School's decision about classes for the Spring 2021?

The New School administration has not yet determined the academic structure for the Spring 2021. Given the continuously evolving nature of the public health crisis, The New School is reviewing all options to offer a safe and effective academic environment that will protect the health and safety of our entire community. Once the university announces its decision, ISSS will provide students additional information through detailed email notifications, updates on the ISSS website, Instagram (@ISSSNewSchool) posts, and webinars to address questions regarding your immigration status.

I'm a continuing student whose immigration status has been active during Spring 2020 and Fall 2020. How might my immigration status be impacted in the Spring 2021 semester?

[Current SEVP Guidance](#) permits flexibility in study options for continuing F-1 international students during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Continuing F-1 students who have maintained their F-1 immigration status may study in any of the following ways: completely online, in a hybrid study model (partly online and partly in-person), or completely in-person. Students studying online may remain inside the U.S. or outside the U.S. and all F-1 students must engage in a full course of study (12 credits for undergraduate; 9 credits for graduate) in order to maintain their status.

I'm a continuing student that was admitted for Fall 2020 and want to know how my immigration status will be impacted in the Spring 2021 semester.

According to [Current SEVP Guidance](#) F-1 international students with new/initial I-20s may not enter the U.S. or have their immigration record activated from outside of the U.S. if the academic program is online. In order for an F-1 student to enter the U.S. the institution must have in-person requirements, which may include a hybrid model (partly online, partly in-person). For new/initial students who began their academic program in Fall 2020, you will need to wait for the university decisions on the academic structure for Spring 2021 before you can make plans to enter the U.S.

I am a J-1 student. How will my immigration status be impacted in the Spring 2021 semester?

Continuing J-1 international students at The New School who maintain a full course of study will continue to have an active J-1 record and may remain inside or stay outside of the U.S. for Spring 2021.

General Questions for Fall 2020

How will The New School being fully online for the Fall 2020 affect my F-1 student immigration status?

Continuing F-1 international students at The New School who maintain a full course of study will continue to have an active F-1 record and may remain inside or stay outside of the U.S. for Fall 2020.

How will The New School being fully online for the Fall 2020 affect my J-1 student immigration status?

Continuing J-1 international students at The New School who maintain a full course of study will continue to have an active J-1 record and may remain inside or stay outside of the U.S. for Fall 2020.

Since the Fall semester is online, can I choose to study part-time for Fall 2020 and resume full-time study in Spring 2021? Will it affect my visa and/or graduation?

If you will be below the credit requirements for a full course of study for Fall 2020, you must be approved for a [Reduced Course Load](#) for the semester in order to maintain your F-1 status or J-1 status. Reduced Course Loads are only possible in instances where there is a medical necessity, it is your final semester of your academic program, or the availability of courses makes it impossible for you to register full time. If you drop below a full course of study without a Reduced Course Load authorization, your immigration record will be terminated. This could negatively impact your ability to apply for Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT) for F-1 students, or on-campus employment and Academic Training for J-1 students, so please check with an ISSS advisor before enrolling for less than a full course of study and/or before dropping courses.

If I decide not to take classes for the Fall semester and want to take a personal Leave of Absence and return for the Spring 2021 semester, what happens to my immigration record?

F-1 students who take Leave of Absence for personal reasons will have their I-20 terminated and must depart the U.S. You cannot remain in, or enter the U.S., as an F-1 international student during your Leave of Absence. Your SEVIS record (and I-20) will be terminated on the date of the ISSS approval. To take a Leave of Absence, please contact ISSS for more information. If your Leave of Absence is for medical reasons and you can provide a note from a doctor recommending a leave for medical reasons, your F-1 record will continue to be in Active status and you can remain in the U.S. during your Leave.

You must be aware that if you take a Leave of Absence for the Fall 2020, and want to return for Spring 2021, the university must have in-person or hybrid classes. If the university is online for Spring 2021, you will not be able to return to the U.S.

J-1 students who will take a Leave of Absence, should schedule an appointment with an ISSS advisor to discuss taking a Leave of Absence. Students in J-1 status will have their SEVIS record shortened to the date they last attended classes and would be required to depart the U.S.

If I am outside the U.S. for the Fall semester, can I waive the university health insurance?

Students who have questions about waiving health insurance should visit the [Student Health Insurance webpage](#) for more information.

General Questions

Do I need to have my I-20 or DS-2019 shipped or can I request a scanned copy?

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security permits the issuance of digital I-20s that have been digitally signed by a university Designated School Official (DSO). The U.S. Department of State (U.S. Embassies and Consulates), U.S. Customs and Border Protection (U.S. Port of Entry), and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) have agreed to accept digital I-20s that have been digitally signed by a university DSO.

All I-20s created through [iGlobal](#) requests will be digitally signed and emailed to you. There is no longer a need to pay to have your I-20 shipped to you.

DS-2019s cannot be scanned if the document will be used in formal processing (e.g. at the port of entry, applying for a visa, etc) and students must have the hard copy. To receive the new DS-2019s you must make a document shipping request in [iGlobal](#). Students who will not use their DS-2019 in formal processing, may contact ISSS for more information.

What is a full course of study?

A full course of study is 12 credits for undergraduate students (Associates and Bachelors) and 9 credits for graduate students (Masters, Doctoral, and Professional Studies Diploma). Audited courses do not count towards a full course of study. This applies to both F-1 and J-1 visa holders.

I am a Doctoral level student enrolled in EQ credits full time. Is my immigration record affected?

As long as you are enrolled in a full course of study, your I-20/DS-2019 record will remain Active. You may stay in or outside the U.S. with an active SEVIS record for the Fall semester.

Will my immigration status or my visa be affected if I am outside of the United States for more than five months?

U.S. Department of Homeland Security has issued guidance that allows students to be outside of the United States for more than five months if you are enrolled in a full course of study for the fall 2020 semesters and completed your online coursework. Your I-20 or DS-2019 will remain active and you will be considered to be maintaining your immigration status.

Where can I get Covid test in NYC?

<https://www.nychealthandhospitals.org/covid-19-testing-sites/>
<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/coronavirus/get-tested/covid-19-testing.page>

Travel

I'm a continuing student whose immigration status has been active during Spring 2020 and Fall 2020. Am I allowed to travel in and out of the U.S. even though my Fall semester classes are online?

Yes, continuing F-1 students with an active SEVIS record may enter the [U.S. SEVP broadcast message released on July 24, 2020](#), stated that F-1 "Students actively enrolled at a U.S. school on March 9, 2020, who subsequently took courses online while outside of the country can re-enter the United States, even if their school is engaged solely in distance learning." J-1 students with valid documents may also travel

back into the U.S. with an [active SEVIS record](#).

You should review the [ISSS Fall 2020 Travel Checklist](#) for documents you will need to prepare before traveling.

If you are having difficulty at the border, you can call us at 212-229-5592 during [business hours](#) or 212-229-7001 (ISSS Emergency Phone) outside of business hours.

ISSS is unable to predict what your individual experience will be when traveling internationally. Please be aware that you may face additional questions at the border about your reason for traveling. Because entry to the U.S. is at the discretion of CBP, ISSS cannot predict with accuracy how individual CBP officers will act. Because of this and health risks associated with international flights, ISSS would recommend avoiding repeated international journeys in the Fall semester if possible.

I'm a continuing student whose immigration status has been active during Spring 2020 and Fall 2020. What do I do if my F-1 or J-1 visa expires and I am not in the U.S. but wish to return?

Once you leave the U.S. and your visa is no longer valid or it will expire before you return to the U.S., then you must apply for a visa renewal at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate (outside the U.S.) Citizens of certain countries, including Canada, Bermuda, and The Bahamas, do [not need a visa](#) to enter the U.S.

Since classes for Fall 2020 are online some U.S. Embassies and Consulates may require additional documentation of your reason to return to the U.S. ISSS can provide you with a [visa application support letter](#) which you can request in [iGlobal](#) and show at your appointment.

If your F-1 or J-1 visa has expired, do not enter on a visitor visa or ESTA if you intend on remaining in the U.S. to resume your studies in the Spring 2021. Study in a university program is not permitted as a visitor.

How can I get a travel signature?

You will need a valid travel signature and visa when you return to the U.S. You do not need an updated travel signature to depart the United States. If you require an updated signature, please complete the *Reprint I-20 or DS-2019* e-form in [iGlobal](#).

The U.S. Department of State (U.S. Embassies and Consulates) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (U.S. Port of Entry) have agreed to accept digital I-20s that have been digitally signed by a university DSO. Thus, as of June 15th, all I-20s created through requests to ISSS will be digitally signed and emailed to students. There is no longer a need to pay to have your I-20 shipped to you.

DS-2019s for J-1 students cannot be scanned and students must have the original document. To receive your new DS-2019s, you must make a [Document Shipping Request](#).

Employment

Can I still apply for a Social Security number (SSN) during the coronavirus outbreak?

The Social Security Administration (SSA) has limited, emergency-only appointments available for students. If you need to apply for a Social Security number (SSN), you must call your local SSA Office to request an appointment, but offering appointments is at their discretion. If you apply (or have applied) for a SSN through your OPT application to USCIS, the Social Security Administration will still process your request.

As an F-1 student, can I work as an on-campus student employee if I am outside the U.S.?

All students should contact the hiring department where they intend to work to determine their eligibility to work from abroad.

I am a Fall 2020 student who began my studies outside the U.S. and will complete my first semester online, how does that impact my eligibility for work authorization for CPT or OPT?

If you are a *new/initial who began studies online for Fall 2020 from outside the U.S.* this semester will not count toward eligibility for Curricular Practical Training (CPT) or Optional Practical Training (OPT). CPT is an off-campus work authorization for students to do internships related to their field of study. OPT is a post-graduation off-campus work authorization for graduates to work in the U.S. for one to three years in positions related to their field of study. In order to be eligible for CPT or OPT, F-1 students must complete two full semesters of study in the U.S. Therefore, the first semester completed online (not in F-1 visa status) will not count towards this eligibility.

I'm a continuing F-1 student whose immigration status has been active during Spring 2020 and Fall 2020. How will The New School being fully online affect my eligibility for Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT)?

Immigration regulations state that to be eligible for CPT and OPT an F-1 international student must be in lawful U.S immigration status as a full time student for one academic year. One academic year at The New School is a combination of a Fall and a Spring semester (Summer session does not qualify). For continuing F-1 students with active F-1 status, the Spring 2020 and Fall 2020 are qualifying semesters toward CPT and OPT eligibility provided that you maintain your full time status for each semester.

I'm a continuing F-1 student whose immigration status has been active during Spring 2020 and Fall 2020. Can I engage in Curricular Practical Training (CPT) while doing my classwork remotely during the Fall semester?

If you qualify for CPT you may receive approval from the Experience Office to work on CPT from within the U.S. or while you are abroad. ISSS recommends if you are abroad and will work for a U.S. based employer that you still receive CPT authorization on your I-20 record. For questions about how to apply for CPT, please email experience@newschool.edu.

Can I apply for OPT from outside the U.S.?

The current USCIS regulations state that in order to apply for OPT, a student must submit the application from within the U.S. If Fall 2020 is your final semester, you must re-enter the U.S. before the program end date, December 31, 2020, in order to submit an application to USCIS. If the USCIS rule is changed to allow students to apply for OPT from abroad, we will inform students immediately.

How do I apply for OPT if I am graduating in Fall 2020?

ISSS sent out a [Special Edition Newsletter](#) with instructions on how to apply for OPT on September 14th. The OPT Workshop has been converted to an OPT Webinar and the application process with ISSS is fully online through iglobal.newschool.edu.

Once my OPT has been approved and I have my Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card with me, can I re-enter the U.S. from abroad?

We recommend you complete a [reprint](#) or [an OPT employment update](#) request (if you have employment) in iGlobal to get an I-20 that lists your OPT as *approved* and has a new travel signature for your attempted re-entry. In addition to this I-20, you will need your valid F-1 visa (unless Canadian), your passport, your EAD card, and proof of employment or employment searches (if you can provide that.) Please note, there are many travel restrictions currently in place that may prevent you from re-entering the U.S. See the Travel section of these FAQs.

Is it acceptable to work under 20 hours per week on OPT during the COVID-19 crisis?

SEVP guidance states that for the duration of the COVID-19 emergency, students who work fewer than 20 hours a week are considered to be engaged in OPT. We recommend keeping personal records/documentation if you are working less than 20 hours per week while on OPT due to COVID-19. You do not need to report this change to ISSS. Please note that if you become unemployed on OPT, you still need to report that change to ISSS or in the SEVP Portal. Those on a STEM extension will need to

submit a final self-evaluation form.

Has USCIS increased the 90 days of unemployment available to students on OPT or 150 days of unemployment on STEM OPT?

At this time, the government regulation about unemployment days on OPT remains the same.

If you are approaching 90 (or 150) days of unemployment on OPT we recommend the following:

1. Find unpaid work within your field of study
 - a. Please note that students on a STEM extension must be compensated for their employment
2. Be admitted to a new academic program and have a new I-20 created before the 90 days of unemployment is reached
3. Change to a different immigration status before the 90 (or 150) days is reached
4. Depart the US before your 90 (or 150) days of unemployment and have your F-1 record completed

Important Notification: SEVP has begun reviewing the SEVIS records of **OPT participants** and sending notices by mail to those students who exceed their allotted 90 days of unemployment. SEVP will terminate the F-1 records of those who fail to report employment and/or have exceeded 90 days of accrued unemployment. Please remember that SEVP permits any employment/practical training that is directly related to your major field of study and can include hourly, salaried, paid, unpaid, self-employment, freelance, and/or volunteer positions. In addition, students who have been furloughed are still considered to be employed.

Can students engaged in OPT and STEM OPT work remotely when appropriate and permitted by the employer?

Students currently participating in OPT, including STEM OPT, may work remotely if their employer has an office outside of the United States or the employer can assess student engagement using electronic means. They must continue to report their employment and students participating in STEM OPT do not need to submit an updated Form I-983 to report remote work.

Do I need to update my employer address in iGlobal or the Student & Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) Student Portal, or submit an updated I-983 training plan (if on a STEM extension) if I am doing my work remotely during the COVID-19 crisis?

No. If you have moved from your employer site location to a remote location due to the COVID-19 crisis you are not required to update your work address.

Can I receive on-campus work authorization or Academic Training (for J-1 students ONLY) if abroad?

J-1 students should contact ISSS for more information and to confirm if they are eligible to receive on-campus work authorization or academic training while abroad.

How will The New School being fully online affect my eligibility for Academic Training (J-1 students ONLY) and on-campus work authorization (for J-1 students ONLY)?

Being fully online will not impact your eligibility for Academic Training or on-campus work authorization for J-1 students. J-1 students must be aware of each jurisdiction's shelter-in-place (or similar) orders; working in violation of such orders is not acceptable by the Department of State.