Hello everyone. Welcome to our Returning Student video series. This first video will be an overview of the Returning Student process.

After watching this video, you should be able to do the following three things: Describe how to resume your enrollment at the University of Washington​, identify which F-1 Returning Student pathway fits your situation, and prepare for the documents required to return to the U.S. in F-1 status.

The first step of the Returning Student process is establishing that you are eligible to return to the University of Washington.

For undergraduate students, this may include an additional step. If you are an undergraduate student who took two or more quarters, excluding summer, off from study, you’ll need to complete an online Returning Student request form with the Registrar’s Office​.

Instructions for this form can be found on the Registrar’s website. Since the form is maintained and reviewed by the Registrar, please direct any questions regarding this form to the Registrar by emailing them at regoff@uw.edu.

If you had any registration holds applied to your account prior to, or during, your time off, you should also plan to clear these at this stage of the process.

For graduate students, the Graduate On-Leave request is required to maintain your student account for each quarter that you do not register for classes​.

​If you did not have an approved Graduate On-Leave during your absence, you’ll need to submit a reinstatement request to the U-Dub Graduate School​ in order to establish your eligibility to return.

Questions should be directed to your Graduate Program Advisor or the Graduate Enrollment Management Services office at uwgrad@uw.edu.

The next step in the Returning Student process is to register full-time for your intended returning quarter.

If you have any questions about your academic plans, you should contact your Academic Advisor or Graduate Program Advisor for assistance. Some topics you may reach out to them about include registration for the quarter of your return, course selection​, class sequencing, or degree completion timeline and planning​.

Once you’ve established your eligibility to return and you’ve registered for your classes, you will need to request a new I-20 from ISS. Depending on your individual situation, there are two possible pathways to do this.

The first option is SEVIS Reactivation​, which we call Pathway A. This option is available for students who were absent for one quarter only and requires students to return to the U.S. to resume their full-time study the quarter following their leave of absence.

The second option is to request a new SEVIS record, or an initial I-20, which we call Pathway B. Pathway B is generally utilized by students who have been absent for two or more quarters, including summer, but students who qualify for SEVIS reactivation may still choose Pathway B.

When you receive an initial I-20, the I-20 start date must match the quarter you will ​re-enter the U.S. as an F-1 student​.

Let’s take a deeper look at the two pathways. Some of the key differences between Pathways A and B are listed in this chart.

One of the biggest differences that may impact students, is eligibility for CPT or OPT after returning. For SEVIS reactivation, your eligibility for work authorization remains the same as prior to your leave of absence. If you return to the U.S. with a new SEVIS record, you will not be eligible for work authorization until you complete three quarters after you return.

Another difference is the next eligible vacation quarter. If you return with a reactivated SEVIS record, you will need to complete the next three consecutive quarters of full-time study. With an initial I-20, you are eligible for a vacation quarter the first summer quarter you return, unless your first quarter back is summer.

There is also a difference in the timeline for processing. The earliest you can request a reactivation is 60 days before the start date of the next quarter. Alternatively, if you are applying for a new visa, you can request your reactivation 60 days before the date of your visa interview appointment. For an initial I-20, we recommend that you begin the request process at least three months before your planned return.

Finally, it’s important to note who is in control of the approval process for each pathway. Pathway A, SEVIS Reactivation, is approved by the U.S. government. We submit a correction request to reactivate your record, and SEVP makes the decision to approve or deny this request. The initial I-20 process all happens within UW ISS.

Now let’s talk about the documents you’ll need when you re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status.

You will need your valid passport​ with a valid F-1 visa​, as well as your new I-20 that you’ve received by completing either pathway A or B. If you are returning after a SEVIS reactivation, a travel signature is required on page two of your I-20. Students who have an initial I-20 will not have a travel signature. You should have proof of your full-time registration for your returning quarter, and it is recommended, but not required, for you to have your I-901 SEVIS fee receipt as well as proof of finances.

Here are some additional travel considerations for returning F-1 students.

You must have a valid visa to re-enter the U.S. ​If your current visa will be expired at the time of your return travel, you should apply for a new F-1 visa. If your visa in your passport will still be valid, you can use this visa to re-enter the U.S. regardless of whether you’re returning with pathway A or B.

Please keep in mind that you can only enter the U.S. up to 30 days before the start of your return quarter​.​

To learn more about the two pathways to return, you can watch the corresponding ISS videos.

Depending on your re-entry plans, you can choose to watch either the F-1 SEVIS reactivation video or Initial I-20 video next.