Planning for Autumn Quarter 2020:
What International Students Need to Know
Updated July 20, 2020

Q1: What is the new policy for autumn 2020?
The ISS is pleased that the [U.S. government agreed to rescind the July 6 SEVP guidance](https://www.ice.gov/agencies/sevp/assets/2020-07-07-faqs.pdf) and return to the status quo as established by the [March 9, 2020 policy directive](https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/txa/docs/03092020.pdf) and the [addendum issued on March 13, 2020](https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/txa/docs/03132020.pdf). SEVP released an updated [Frequently Asked Questions for Stakeholders](https://www.ice.gov/agencies/sevp/assets/2020-07-15-faq.pdf) on July 15.

It is our understanding based on this recent announcement that continuing students will be allowed to stay in the U.S. or return to the U.S. for either online or in-person courses. Continuing students will not be required to register for an in-person course to maintain F1 status. Continuing students who wish to remain outside of the U.S. for autumn quarter and take online courses will be allowed to maintain their F status as long as they continue to follow all F visa regulations. The UW will also not be required to re-issue or certify I-20s and students can maintain their status or travel with their currently endorsed I-20.

We are waiting for additional information from the U.S. government to confirm this information and we need further clarification about online course eligibility for new, incoming students entering the U.S. for autumn 2020. It is unclear whether new students will be issued an F1 visa for online or hybrid courses. Although we cannot answer all questions at this time, we will continue to update [our COVID-19 information](https://coronavirus.washington.edu/) and will send follow up emails to all F1 students once additional information is available to us.

Q2: Will fall quarter classes be online?
The UW sent an [email to all students on June 29 announcing plans for autumn quarter](https://uwnews.uw.edu/2020/06/29/uw-to-begin-autumn-quarter-with-both-in-person-and-remote-learning-options/) to begin as scheduled September 30. UW classes begin almost a month later than many schools on the semester system, which will give UW additional time to finalize plans for in-person and remote options for autumn quarter.

The [Back to School Task Force](https://uw.edu/backtoschool/) has been working on plans for autumn quarter that will include both in-person or remote learning options. The autumn quarter [Time Schedule](https://uw.edu/autumn-quarter-2020/) has been updated with which courses will be taught in-person or offered remotely. Schools and colleges will continue to update the schedule over the summer as plans are finalized. The [Back to School Task Force](https://uw.edu/backtoschool/) continues to review and update University protocols to protect student, faculty, and staff health in campus spaces, including residence halls, classrooms, labs, and libraries. The UW will continue to follow directives from [state and local governments](https://coronavirus.washington.edu/) as part of the collective effort to combat this virus.

Q3: I am currently in the U.S. and plan to study full-time autumn quarter. Can I travel internationally during the summer?
We do not know how long [COVID-19 travel restrictions](https://www.cdc.gov/travel/conditions/disease-outbreaks/coronavirus.html) will last and what additional countries may be added or removed from the restrictions already in place. If you are concerned you may not be able to return to the U.S., you may want to reconsider your travel plans. If you decide to travel and have carefully researched your plans, be prepared, understand the risks, and be advised you might not be able to return to the U.S. before the quarter starts on September 30.

*The information contained in this FAQ is provided for educational purposes only and is not a substitute for expert legal advice. ISS Advisors are not attorneys and are unable to provide legal advice. Consult an immigration attorney for legal advice if needed.*
Things to consider:

- **Essential travel:** Is your travel this summer essential, for example health or family related reasons?
- **Risks:** Are you comfortable with the travel risks, both health risks and reentry to the U.S. for autumn quarter?
- **Visas:** Do you require a new F-1 visa? If yes, consider the U.S. consulate closures and visa delays.
- **Travel restrictions:** Are you traveling to a country with current travel restrictions? Be prepared for quarantines and limited flights or additional restrictions that may impact your return to the U.S.
- **U.S. immigration rules:** Exceptions were made to the online enrollment rules to keep SEVIS records active and I-20s valid for through at least autumn quarter. We are waiting for further clarification of this exception.
- **Graduating students planning for OPT:** See [Graduating Students](https://iss.washington.edu/StudentServices/Faq/COVID-19/) on the ISS COVID-19 FAQ page.

Continue to check the [Coronavirus information for F1 & J1 students](https://iss.washington.edu/StudentServices/Faq/COVID-19/) for updates as they become available. You can also monitor the U.S. Government's [Study in the States: COVID-19 Resources](https://iss.washington.edu/StudentServices/Faq/COVID-19/) for updates.

**Q4: If I am currently in the U.S., can I take all of my autumn classes online? Will my I-20 stay valid?**

Based on the U.S. government’s agreement to rescind the July 6 proposed policy, it is our understanding that continuing students will be allowed to take all of their courses online or take a combination of in-person and online courses. Based on UW fall quarter course options available, it will be possible for students to have a full-time online schedule. As long as you maintain your F status and enroll full-time, your SEVIS I-20 will remain valid.

We are waiting for additional information from the U.S. government to confirm this information and we need further clarification about online course eligibility for new, incoming students entering the U.S. for autumn 2020. It is unclear whether new students will be issued an F1 visa for online or hybrid courses. Although we cannot answer all questions at this time, we will continue to update our [COVID-19 information](https://iss.washington.edu/StudentServices/Faq/COVID-19/) and will send follow up emails to all F1 students once additional information is available to us.

**Q5: I am currently outside the U.S. but want to return to the U.S. to study full-time autumn quarter. Can I reenter the U.S. for the start of autumn?**

We do not know how long [COVID-19 travel restrictions](https://iss.washington.edu/StudentServices/Faq/COVID-19/) will last and what additional countries may be added or removed from the restrictions already in place. Travel restrictions and visa processing delays at U.S. consulates, for students who need a new F-1 visa, might make it difficult for some students to return to campus for autumn quarter.

The U.S. Department of State announced that [routine visa services would begin to resume](https://iss.washington.edu/StudentServices/Faq/COVID-19/) at consulates and embassies around the world on a post by post basis and that F and J visa appointments will be prioritized for individuals with urgent travel needs. [Check the local consulate or embassies](https://iss.washington.edu/StudentServices/Faq/COVID-19/) web page directly for the most up-to-date information. It was also announced F and J visa holders from the [Schengen area, UK, and Ireland will be allowed to travel without a national interest exception](https://iss.washington.edu/StudentServices/Faq/COVID-19/).

We recommend you register for classes or stay registered for autumn quarter. UW is planning to offer both in-person and remote learning options for autumn quarter, so you will be able to take online classes even if you...
are not able to return by September 30. Choose a schedule for autumn quarter that gives you the most flexibility in case you are unable to return for autumn quarter.

Q6: I am not planning to study full-time in autumn quarter. Can I take autumn quarter off or study part-time?
Every student’s situation is different. If you want to take autumn quarter off (0 credits or part-time) and maintain an active F-1 SEVIS record and valid I-20, you must meet one of these enrollment exceptions. If you do not qualify for the exceptions above, you must request an immigration Leave of Absence. If you take an immigration Leave of Absence in autumn 2020, you must depart the U.S. If you are registered for summer or autumn quarter, then you must depart the U.S. within 15 days from the date you drop/withdraw from summer or autumn quarter. If you return to UW for full-time studies for winter 2021, ISS can request reactivation of your current SEVIS record / I-20 (Pathway A).

ISS will accept Leave of Absence Requests for autumn 2020 starting September 1, 2020. This timeline allows for summer quarter to complete, and for students and staff to have the most up-to-date information on important factors like COVID-19 cases and U.S. government guidance. To be eligible for the annual vacation quarter in summer, you must stay registered for autumn quarter until after you submit the Leave of Absence Request in September.

If you have further questions after reviewing the enrollment exceptions and Leave of Absence information, complete the ISS Have a Question form. An ISS advisor will reply to you directly about your options. It may take 2-4 business days for a reply due to the very high volume of emails we receive.

Q7: Can I take a gap year and resume my studies in 2021 if I do not want to take autumn quarter classes?
Continuing UW students who choose not to enroll at UW for 2 or more quarters, must request an immigration Leave of Absence for autumn 2020 and then depart the U.S. If you are registered for summer or autumn quarter, you must depart the U.S. within 15 days from the date you drop/withdraw from summer or autumn quarter. If you return to UW for full-time studies after winter 2021, you must complete the Return to UW process to request a new I-20 (Pathway B).

ISS will accept Leave of Absence Requests for autumn 2020 starting September 1, 2020. This timeline allows for summer quarter to complete, and for students and staff to have the most up-to-date information on important factors like COVID-19 cases and U.S. government guidance. New students whose first quarter at the UW is autumn 2020 should contact either the Undergraduate Office of Admissions or the Graduate Enrollment Management Services to discuss whether deferral options are available. ISS cannot process a Leave of Absence for new students entering the UW.

If you have further questions after reviewing the Leave of Absence and Return to UW information, complete the ISS Have a Question form. An ISS advisor will reply to you directly about your options. It may take 2-4 business days for a reply due to the very high volume of emails we receive.

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Q8: What is the deadline to submit the immigration Leave of Absence Request for autumn quarter 2020?
The Leave of Absence (LOA) Request can be submitted to ISS starting September 1, 2020. We recommend you wait to make a final decision about taking autumn quarter off until after you review the UW autumn quarter instructional options and after the updated U.S. government immigration guidance is available. Depending on the options, you may want to stay enrolled. Continue to check the Coronavirus information for F1 & J1 students for updates as they become available.

After submitting the Leave of Absence Request, you must drop all your autumn classes. Be aware you are required to depart the U.S. within 15 days from the date you drop/withdraw from autumn quarter. ISS advises that you submit the Leave of Absence Request and then drop autumn quarter classes by October 6 (last day to withdraw without owing tuition and fees).

Q9: I am an admitted international student for autumn quarter. Will I be able to defer my admission if I cannot begin classes in September?
The Undergraduate Admissions and Graduate Admissions offices work with all newly admitted international students. Those offices process and issue immigration documents for new students. ISS will begin processing immigration records and benefits for students once they physically arrive in the U.S. and are enrolled full-time at the UW.

Questions about immigration documents, obtaining a visa, and deferring admission should be directed to Undergraduate Admissions for freshman and transfer students or Graduate Admissions for Master’s and PhD students.
   UW Graduate School: COVID-19 Admissions FAQs or Covid-19 Information
   Undergraduate Office of Admissions: COVID-19 Admissions FAQs

Q10: Am I still required to register for an in-person course if I am already in the U.S.?
Based on the U.S. government’s agreement to rescind the July 6 proposed policy, it is our understanding that continuing students will be allowed to take all of their courses online or take a combination of in-person and online courses. Based on UW fall quarter course options available, you may register for in-person courses, online courses, or a combination of both. As long as you maintain your F status and enroll full-time, your SEVIS I-20 will remain valid.

We are waiting for additional information from the U.S. government to confirm this information and we need further clarification whether new students will be issued an F1 visa for online or hybrid courses. We will continue to update our COVID-19 information and will send follow up emails to all F1 students once additional information is available to us.

Q11: How many online courses may I take?
Based on the U.S. government’s agreement to rescind the July 6 proposed policy, it is our understanding that continuing students will be allowed to take all of their courses online or take a combination of in-person and online courses. Based on UW fall quarter course options available, you may register for in-person courses, online courses, or a combination of both. As long as you maintain your F status and enroll full-time, your SEVIS I-20 will remain valid.
We are waiting for additional information from the U.S. government to confirm this information and we need further clarification whether new students will be issued an F1 visa for online or hybrid courses. We will continue to update our COVID-19 information and will send follow up emails to all F1 students once additional information is available to us.

Q12: Can I stay in the U.S. and take all (100%) of my classes online?
Based on the U.S. government’s agreement to rescind the July 6 proposed policy, it is our understanding that continuing students will be allowed to take all of their courses online or take a combination of in-person and online courses. Based on UW fall quarter course options available, you may register for in-person courses, online courses, or a combination of both. As long as you maintain your F status and enroll full-time, your SEVIS I-20 will remain valid.

We are waiting for additional information from the U.S. government to confirm this information and we need further clarification whether new students will be issued an F1 visa for online or hybrid courses. We will continue to update our COVID-19 information and will send follow up emails to all F1 students once additional information is available to us.

Q13: I am currently outside the U.S. and would like to take all of my classes online. Can I do this?
Yes, you may register and take all of your courses online from outside the U.S. if you prefer. As long as the courses you plan to take are available through remote learning, you may remain outside of the U.S. for autumn quarter. An I-20 and visa are not required to take online courses from outside the U.S.
If you are a continuing UW student who maintained your F status and you have an active SEVIS record, it is our understanding that institutions will be allowed to keep SEVIS records active for students who returned home during winter or spring quarters. Based on the U.S. government’s agreement to rescind the July 6 proposed policy, we believe your SEVIS record will continue as active as long as you maintain your F status and continue to follow F-1 visa regulations as if you were still in the U.S.

We are waiting for additional information from the U.S. government to confirm this information. We will continue to update our COVID-19 information once additional information is available to us.

Q14: What will happen to my F-1 benefits if I remain outside the U.S. and take all my classes online?
For new students holding an initial I-20 issued by the UW, institutions cannot activate your SEVIS immigration record until you physically arrive in the U.S. Once you travel to the U.S. and your SEVIS record is activated, you will begin accruing time towards future immigration benefits as long as you maintain your F status.
If you are a continuing UW student who maintained your F status and you have an active SEVIS record, it is our understanding that institutions will be allowed to keep your SEVIS record active. Based on the U.S. government’s agreement to rescind the July 6 proposed policy, we believe your SEVIS record will remain active as long as you maintain your F status and continue to follow F-1 visa regulations as if you were still in the U.S.
With an active SEVIS record, maintaining your F status will be critical to future benefit eligibility such as CPT or OPT, even if you are outside the U.S.

We are waiting for additional information from the U.S. government to confirm this information. We will continue to update our COVID-19 information once additional information is available to us.
Q15: If I am registered for a lecture that will be offered as remote learning but a quiz section that is in-person, will that be considered an in-person course?
The Code of Federal Regulations provides a definition of online courses for F-1 students. This definition describes an online class as a course that, “…does not require the student's physical attendance for classes, examination or other purposes integral to completion of the class.” 8 CFR 214.2(f)(6)(i)(G) By this definition, required in-person meetings of the quiz section would preclude a course from being considered fully online. It is our understanding that an in-person quiz section would not be considered an online course. We will continue to update our COVID-19 information once additional information is available to us.

Q16: Will independent study/dissertation/thesis/research credits be considered online courses?
The Code of Federal Regulations provides a definition of online courses for F-1 students. This definition describes an online class as a course that, “…does not require the student's physical attendance for classes, examination or other purposes integral to completion of the class.” 8 CFR 214.2(f)(6)(i)(G) By this definition, required in-person meetings would preclude a course from being considered fully online. It is our understanding that these UW courses will not be considered remote and would not be considered online. These credits have always counted towards full-time enrollment for international students at the UW and we do not anticipate that changing for autumn 2020.

Q17: I heard I need a new I-20 with a certification. How can I request that to confirm I am not taking online courses?
The July 15 SEVP FAQ update removed the requirement to re-issue I-20s. The government has clarified that DSOs are not required to re-issue I-20s certifying a student is not taking all online courses. The ISS will not be re-issuing I-20’s for continuing students and you do not need one to travel back to the U.S. as long as you have a valid travel signature. To determine whether you need an updated travel signature, review our Online Travel Signature information request form.

Q18: What resources are available to help me?
Your health and wellbeing are very important to us and we encourage you to reach out if you need help. Stay in touch with your academic advisers and Husky Community. CIRCLE offers drop-in office hours and FIUTS is an excellent resource. Both offices will help connect you to the international student community at the UW. The ISS is also hosting Autumn Quarter Planning information sessions for undergraduates and graduates. To register for one of these events and for further details, go to the ISS events calendar.