Remote Learning for Autumn Quarter 2020:  
What International Students Need To Know  
Last updated July 14, 2020

**JULY 14 UPDATE:** The ISS is pleased with today’s news that the U.S. government has agreed to rescind the July 6 SEVP guidance regarding international students and online courses for autumn 2020. We are waiting for official notification and an updated broadcast message from SEVP which we anticipate will be released soon. The ISS will update these FAQs and our COVID-19 information page as additional details become available. We will also send a follow up email to continuing and new international students once further clarification is received.

Q1: What is the new policy?
On July 6, 2020, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Student & Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) announced it would no longer allow exemptions for international students on F-1 visas taking online courses due to the COVID-19 pandemic during autumn quarter.

Q2: When does the new fall 2020 guidance take effect?
According to the FAQ for SEVP Stakeholders published after the July 6 announcement, the new proposal (which is not policy yet) will take effect at the start of a school’s defined fall term. For UW, that would be the first day of fall quarter on September 30.

Q3: If I am already in the U.S. and I am registered for an in-person course, will I be affected by this policy?
If you are in F-1 status and you already registered for an in-person course or section, we believe that will meet the proposed government requirement and you should not be impacted by this policy change. The ISS office will be re-issuing I-20s for all students in the U.S. or planning to return to the U.S. as soon as we have further clarification on this requirement. We are working on identifying which students will need a new I-20 and will contact them with clear instructions for how to request it once a final policy decision has been made.

Continue to check the ISS COVID-19 Information page for updated guidance and instructions.
Q4: How many online courses may I take?
The guidance from the government is not yet clear on this issue. According to the [July 6 SEVP broadcast message](#), “...students attending schools adopting a hybrid model—that is, a mixture of online and in-person classes—will be allowed to take more than one class or three credit hours online,” but must continue to meet the standards to make normal progress in the degree program.

The UW will adopt a hybrid model of instruction for autumn quarter 2020. We are waiting for further guidelines on this policy, but we believe international students will be required to take only one in-person course as long as they maintain normal progress in the degree program. We will update this section as we learn more.

Q5: Can I stay in the U.S. and take 100% of my classes online?
Based on the [July 6 SEVP broadcast message](#), international students in the U.S. under F-1 status will not be allowed to enroll in all online courses for autumn 2020. The UW will operate under a hybrid model of education for autumn quarter with both in-person and remote course options. UW administration is working on increasing the number of in-person options that will be available for autumn quarter. We anticipate international students who are currently in the U.S. or planning to return to the U.S. will be able to register for an in-person course or section that meets the government’s proposal.

Q6: 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 not clear to us yet whether the U.S. government will allow schools to keep SEVIS records active if you remain outside the U.S. If schools will be required to terminate SEVIS records for procedural reasons, we would re-issue you an I-20 before you return to the U.S.

As we receive further information and clarification on the government’s proposed policy, we will update these FAQs and the [ISS COVID-19 Information page](#) - check back for updates.

*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.*
Q7: What will happen to my F-1 benefits if I remain outside the U.S. and take all my classes online?
We cannot answer this with certainty at this time. For new students holding an initial I-20 issued by the UW, we cannot activate your SEVIS immigration record until you physically arrive in the U.S. Once your SEVIS record is activated and you maintain F1 status, the clock starts counting towards future immigration benefits.

For continuing students who decide to remain outside of the U.S. and take all online courses, whether your immigration benefits (like CPT and OPT eligibility) will be impacted depends on whether the U.S. government allows schools to keep your SEVIS record active. If SEVIS records remain active, then future immigration benefits will not be impacted. If SEVIS records must be terminated and a new I-20 issued before you return to the U.S., then the eligibility clock for benefits will be reset.

Q8: If I am registered for a lecture course that will be offered as remote learning but a quiz section that is in-person, will that satisfy the SEVP requirement?
The Code of Federal Regulations provides a definition of online courses for F-1 students. This definition describes an online class as one 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 and would meet the government’s proposed requirement.

As we receive further information and clarification on the government’s proposed policy, we will update these FAQs and our ISS COVID-19 Information page - check back for updates.

Q9: What if my department is not offering any in-person courses? What should I do?
The UW administration is working with departments across campus to find a solution to this issue. They are working on plans to increase in-person options for autumn quarter to ensure all international students who need to take an in-person class will be able to. We recommend you continue to check the time schedule for in-person options, discuss your options with an academic adviser, and review ISS updates, especially as course availability is changing, and new or revised in-person course offerings are implemented.
Q10: 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 one 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 most of these courses should not be considered remote unless it is specifically published as a remote offering in the time schedule. Under normal academic circumstances, if these courses were not considered remote then they were counted towards full-time enrollment for international students. We do not anticipate that changing for autumn 2020 unless a course has been specifically changed to reflect it will be offered as remote learning.

We will provide additional information about individual courses as we learn more or get further clarification on the government’s proposal - please continue to check back for updates.

Q11: I heard I need a new I-20 with a certification. How can I request an I-20 to confirm I am not taking online courses?
The ISS office is waiting for further clarification on the proposed guidance and requirements before beginning to re-issue new I-20s. We are aware of this guidance from SEVP, and will share clear instructions for how to request a new I-20 once a final policy decision has been made. For the time being, we are working on identifying which students may need a new I-20 with this certification and we send communications to anyone impacted by this proposed policy.

Please continue to check the ISS COVID-19 FAQ for updated guidance and instructions.

Q12: I have a J visa or a different non-immigrant visa. Does the SEVP guidance affect me?
No - the July 6 SEVP broadcast message specifically addresses policies for students in the U.S. on F or M visa status only who will be enrolling in coursework in Autumn 2020.

Q13: I’m on Post-Completion OPT/the STEM OPT extension. Does the SEVP guidance affect me?
No - the July 6 SEVP broadcast message specifically addresses concerns for F-1 students enrolling in coursework in Autumn 2020. Although you are in F-1 status, you are no longer an enrolled student and therefore this guidance does not apply to you.

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Q14: What should I do next? How do I know if I am impacted by this new policy?
We understand your frustration, confusion, and anxiety over this announcement. We too are feeling angry and frustrated with this situation. The ISS staff are working to identify those students who are not registered for any in-person courses and will be reaching out to them. Because the UW is home to over 8,000 F-1 visa holders, we need a little more time to determine our plan of action. We are reviewing the SEVP broadcast message, consulting experts in the field, seeking further guidance from SEVP, and waiting for the final rules to be published to the federal register.

We will send email communications to all international students as updates become available and specific next steps are developed. We will also update these FAQs and the ISS COVID-19 Information page with updates as they become available.

Q15: 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 will be hosting online webinars starting in late July so we can provide updates and answer your questions. Details and dates will be added to our ISS events calendar soon.