

Planning for Autumn Quarter 2020: What International Students Need to Know

Updated August 13, 2020

Q1: What is the updated U.S. immigration policy for autumn 2020?

The U.S. government agreed to rescind the proposed July 6 SEVP guidance and return to the status quo as established by the [March 9, 2020 policy directive](#) and the [addendum issued on March 13, 2020](#). SEVP also released an updated [Frequently Asked Questions for Stakeholders](#).

International students previously enrolled at the UW for spring quarter, will be allowed to stay in the U.S. or return to the U.S. for either online or in-person courses. Continuing students are allowed to take 100% of their courses online and are not required to register for an in-person course. Students who wish to remain outside of the U.S. and take online courses for autumn quarter can also maintain their F status as long as they register full-time for autumn quarter and continue to follow all F regulations. A new I-20 is not required for continuing students. International students issued a [transfer pending I-20](#) who were enrolled at another U.S. institution in March, should review [question #7](#) below to determine whether you are considered by U.S. immigration as a continuing or initial student.

Incoming, **new students who were not previously enrolled** in March who will be entering the U.S. with an [initial I-20 record](#) will not be allowed to take 100% of courses online according to [SEVP's FAQ](#) and [July 24 broadcast message](#). Students starting a new degree program at the UW who wish to enter the U.S. for autumn quarter will be required to register for at least one in-person course to maintain F status. UW has added an in-person course elective for autumn quarter that undergraduate or graduate students can take if you are not already registered for one. Please consult UAA Advising if you are a pre-major or your department academic adviser if you have direct entry to a major or you are a graduate student. New, incoming students issued a [transfer pending I-20](#) should review [question #7](#) below to determine whether you are considered a continuing or initial student.

For **new students** who prefer to take all of their courses online from outside the U.S., that is also allowed but your SEVIS I-20 record and F visa will not be made active until you physically arrive in the U.S. Undergraduate Admissions and Graduate Enrollment Management Services (GEMS) will be contacting students in September to determine whether you plan to take classes from outside the U.S. for autumn quarter. We will provide additional instructions at that time about how to request an updated I-20 with a new start date.

Q2: Will fall quarter classes be online?

President Cauce sent an [email to all students on June 29 announcing plans for autumn quarter](#). An [update was also sent on August 6](#), finalizing details about autumn quarter. Classes will begin as scheduled on September 30 and a limited number of in-person courses will continue to be available.

The [Time Schedule](#) for autumn quarter has been updated with which courses will be offered in-person or remotely. You can also use [MyPlan](#) to [find in-person courses](#). The [Back to School Task Force](#) 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](#) as part of the collective effort to combat this virus.

Q3: Is it true I need an updated I-20 that confirms my courses are not all online?

According to the [U.S. government's updated FAQ](#), institutions are not required to update, re-issue, reprint, or add specific remarks to the I-20 about the mode of instruction for autumn quarter for any students. Students previously enrolled at the UW returning to the U.S. for autumn quarter may use their current I-20 for travel as long as you have a valid travel signature. Review our [Online Travel Signature](#) information page to determine if you need an updated travel signature.

New, incoming students also do not require a new I-20 but you must be registered for at least one in-person course if you plan to travel to the U.S. to begin classes in September. You may be asked to show proof of your classes when applying for a visa or entering the U.S. We recommend you register for classes prior to your visa appointment and take a print-out of your class schedule showing the in-person course as a precaution. It is also recommended you travel with this information in case you are asked to show it.

Q4: Can I get a letter confirming classes will be offered in-person?

The ISS has created an online [Support Letter Request form](#) for undergraduate, graduate, and professional program international students enrolled in degree programs on the Seattle campus. Once you complete the form by answering a few questions, you will receive an auto-generated email reply with additional information, including confirmation of UW's mode of instruction for autumn quarter.

Q5: I am currently in the U.S. and plan to study full-time autumn quarter. Can I travel internationally before autumn quarter begins?

We do not know how long [COVID-19 travel restrictions](#) will last and what additional countries may be added or removed from the restrictions already in place. It may be risky to leave the U.S. right now because it is not guaranteed you will be able to return. The situation remains very unpredictable. You may want to reconsider your travel plans if you are concerned you may not be able to return to the U.S. If you decide to travel, we strongly recommend you carefully research your plans, be prepared, understand the risks, and be advised you might not be able to travel back to the U.S. before the quarter starts on September 30. Consider the following before making your decision.

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 through autumn quarter. We do not know what future restrictions or allowances will be.
- **Graduating students planning for OPT:** See [Graduating Students](#) on the ISS COVID-19 FAQ page.

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

Q6: Can I take all of my autumn classes online if I am in the U.S.? Is my I-20 valid?

Based on the U.S. government's agreement to rescind the proposed July 6 SEVP guidance and the updated [Frequently Asked Questions for Stakeholders](#), continuing students who were previously enrolled for spring quarter will be allowed to remain in the U.S. or return to the U.S. to take all of their courses online. Based on UW's autumn quarter course options, it will be possible for continuing students to have a full-time online schedule or take a combination of online and in-person courses. Your SEVIS I-20 record will remain valid as long as you maintain your F status and enroll full-time.

For new, incoming students issued an [initial attendance I-20](#) and who were not previously enrolled at a school in the U.S. as of March 2020, you are not allowed to take 100% of your courses online from within the U.S. If you plan to apply for an F visa and travel to the U.S. to begin classes in September, you must register for an in-person course to maintain your F status. Please consult academic advising or your department adviser for additional details and in-person options available. If you are a new, incoming freshman, transfer, or graduate student who was issued a transfer pending I-20, please review [question #7](#) below.

Q7: If I have a [Transfer Pending I-20](#), do I have to take in-person courses?

Whether or not you will be required to take an in-person course depends on your physical location. New students with a [transfer pending I-20](#) and autumn quarter start date, should review the options below:

a) Inside the U.S. – no plans to travel internationally before September 30

ISS is interpreting updated U.S. government guidance to say international students with a [transfer pending I-20](#) are allowed to take all courses online if they have both stayed inside the U.S. since March **AND** maintained their F-1 status.

b) Outside the U.S. – planning to travel to the U.S. before autumn quarter begins September 30

There is conflicting U.S. government guidance about whether students currently outside the U.S. with a [transfer pending I-20](#) will be required to take an in-person class or not. The government SEVIS system separates I-20s into two categories – continuing and initial. Students who have been issued a [transfer pending I-20](#) are included in the initial category within SEVIS.

To be safe, the ISS recommends you register for an in-person course if you plan to return to the U.S. with a [transfer pending I-20](#). We will continue to monitor the situation and will update this FAQ if additional SEVP guidance becomes available before classes begin.

c) Outside the U.S. – no plans to travel to the U.S. before winter quarter (January 2021)

The March 2020 U.S. government guidance states, “U.S. institutions will not be able to keep [transfer pending](#) SEVIS records active for students who plan to stay outside of the U.S. for autumn quarter.” The guidance also states Designated School Officials (DSOs) can contact the SEVP help desk to request the I-20 start date be updated to the start of the quarter a student will physically travel back to the U.S. Undergraduate Admissions and GEMS will provide additional instructions about how this process will work if you have a [transfer pending I-20](#) but will not enter the U.S. for autumn quarter.

Q8: If I have been issued a [Change of Level I-20](#), do I have to take in-person courses?

Whether or not you will be required to take an in-person course depends on your physical location. Students who are starting a new program in autumn quarter with an I-20 issue reason of [Change of Education Level I-20](#) should review the options below:

a) Inside the U.S. – no plans to travel internationally before September 30

ISS is interpreting updated U.S. government guidance to say international students with a [Change of Education Level I-20](#) are allowed to take all courses online if they have **both** stayed inside the U.S. since March **AND** maintained their F-1 status.

b) Outside the U.S. – planning to travel to the U.S. before autumn quarter begins September 30

The government SEVIS system separates I-20s into two categories – continuing and initial. Students who have been issued a [Change of Education Level I-20](#) are included in the initial category within SEVIS. To be safe, ISS recommends you register for an in-person course if you plan to return to the U.S. with a [Change of Education Level I-20](#).

We will continue to monitor the situation and will update this FAQ if additional SEVP guidance becomes available before classes begin.

c) Outside the U.S. – no plans to travel to the U.S. before winter quarter (January 2021)

ISS is interpreting the U.S. government guidance to say that we are unable to register the SEVIS record of a student who is outside the U.S. and whose [Change of Education Level I-20](#) is in the initial category. Your I-20's program start date will need to be updated to the start of the quarter you will physically travel back to the U.S. Undergraduate Admissions, GEMS, and ISS will provide additional instructions about how this process will work in September before autumn quarter classes begin.

We will continue to monitor the situation and will update this FAQ if additional SEVP guidance becomes available before classes begin.

Q9: I am continuing my studies at the UW but I am currently outside the U.S. Can I travel back to the U.S. to study full-time for autumn quarter?

We do not know how long [COVID-19 travel restrictions](#) 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 to return before autumn quarter starts.

The U.S. Department of State announced [routine visa services are resuming](#) at consulates around the world on a post by post basis. F and J visa appointments will be prioritized for individuals with urgent travel needs. [Check the local consulate or embassies](#) web page directly for the most up-to-date information. It was also announced F visa holders from the [Schengen area, UK, and Ireland will be allowed to travel without a national interest exception](#). J-1 visa holders should contact the nearest U.S. consulate before traveling.

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

Q10: Will I be required to self-quarantine when I arrive in the U.S. or on-campus?

We recommend you review the [Centers for Disease Control & Prevention recommendations for people after air travel](#). It is generally recommended that you monitor your health for 14 days from the time you return from domestic or international travel. International flights arrive at specific airports in the U.S. which may have additional screening and requirements. It is recommended you prepare to social distance and monitor your health for 14 days after returning to the U.S. There are currently no mandatory quarantines for international travelers. UW Housing & Food Services has provided additional [coronavirus information for residents living on-campus](#). There is currently no requirement to self-isolate when after moving into on-campus housing.

Q11: Are there restrictions on returning to the U.S. from Canada or Mexico?

We recommend reviewing the [Fact Sheet: DHS Measures on the Border to Limit the Further Spread of Coronavirus](#). "Non-essential" travel includes travel that is considered tourism or recreational in nature. These measures were implemented on March 21, 2020 and have been extended several times since. On July 16, the border closure was extended once again through August 20, 2020. Before traveling from Canada or Mexico, check for the most up-to-date information on closures and be prepared to explain why your travel to the U.S. is "essential."

Q12: What travel documents are required for students with an F-1 visa to re-enter the U.S. at this time?

Continuing students in F status who were previously enrolled spring quarter must have the following:

- Valid I-20 with a [valid travel signature](#) on page 2
- Valid passport that must be valid for 6 months beyond your expected return to the U.S.
- Valid F-1 visa stamp in passport (Canadian citizens exempt)
- Proof of funding or financial evidence (recommended)
- Current class schedule showing autumn 2020 enrollment (recommended)
- SEVIS I-901 fee receipt (recommended)

According to the [U.S. government's FAQ](#), institutions are not required to update, re-issue, reprint, or add specific remarks to the I-20 about the mode of instruction for autumn quarter. Students previously enrolled at the UW returning to the U.S. for autumn quarter may use their current I-20 for travel as long as you have a valid travel signature. Review our [Online Travel Signature](#) information page to determine if you need an updated travel signature.

We recognize it is a highly stressful and unpredictable time, with travel options and restrictions changing daily. Reentry to the U.S. is always at the discretion of U.S. Customs & Border Protection. More information regarding re-entry requirements and how to prepare for possible questions is available on the ISS [Travel & Visas page](#).

Q13: I am an admitted international student for autumn quarter. Will I be able to defer my admission if I cannot begin classes in September?

Undergraduate Admissions and GEMS work with all newly admitted international students to process and send immigration documents for all new students. ISS begins managing your immigration record and benefits once you physically arrive in the U.S. under the F visa status. Questions about how to request immigration documents, when you will receive the I-20, obtaining a visa, and deferring admission should be directed to Undergraduate Admissions at intladm@uw.edu for freshman and transfer students or GEMS at uwgrad@uw.edu for Master's and PhD students.

Q14: Can I enter the U.S. in the middle of the quarter if I do not get my F1 visa before autumn quarter begins? Will I need an updated I-20?

We recommend that you arrive on or before the program start date on your I-20. It is not recommended that you travel to the U.S. in the middle of the quarter. If you will arrive more than 1 week after the start date, we recommend you stay outside of the U.S. and take all online courses for autumn.

The Undergraduate or Graduate Office of Admissions will contact you in September with additional information about how to request a deferral of your I-20. If you are unable to get your visa before classes begin and you plan to stay outside the U.S., we will send additional information before autumn quarter begins.

Q15: If I am planning to stay in my home country and take online courses, should I still apply for an F1 visa now with my UW I-20 for autumn quarter?

The July 24 U.S. government guidance states new or initial status students who intend to take all of their courses online will not be eligible for an F-1 visa. If you are planning to stay outside of the U.S. and take online courses, we recommend you wait to apply for the F-1 visa. Undergraduate Admissions and Graduate Enrollment Management Services (GEMS) will be contacting students in September to determine whether you plan to take classes from outside the U.S. for autumn quarter. We will provide additional guidance at that time about options and details about how to request an I-20 deferral.

Q16: I do not want to study full-time for autumn quarter. Can I take autumn quarter off or study part-time instead?

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, you must request an immigration [Leave of Absence](#).

If you take an immigration [Leave of Absence](#) in autumn 2020, you are required to 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 your summer or autumn quarter classes. 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 quarter 2020 starting **September 1, 2020**. This timeline allows summer quarter classes to finish, and for students and staff to have the most up-to-date information on current U.S. government guidance and the COVID-19 situation. To be eligible for the annual vacation quarter for summer, you must stay registered for autumn quarter until after you submit the Leave of Absence Request in September. If you have questions, please join our webinars about the Leave of Absence process. Register in advance at [ISS Events](#).

Q17: 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 summer quarter classes to finish, and for students and staff to have the most up-to-date information on current U.S. government guidance and the COVID-19 situation. 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 questions, please join our webinars about the Leave of Absence process. Register in advance at [ISS Events](#).

New students whose first quarter at the UW is autumn 2020 should contact either Undergraduate Admissions or the Graduate Enrollment Management Services (GEMS) to discuss deferral options if available. ISS cannot process Leave of Absence requests for new students.

Q18: What is the deadline to submit an 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 UW autumn quarter instructional options are finalized. Depending on the course options available, 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 your classes. ISS advises you submit the [Leave of Absence Request](#) and drop autumn quarter classes **by October 6 (last day to withdraw)** without owing tuition and fees. If you have questions, please join our webinars about the Leave of Absence process. Register in advance at [ISS Events](#).

Q19: Can I stay in the U.S. and take all (100%) of my classes online? How many online courses can I take and am I required to take an in-person course?

Based on the U.S. government's agreement to rescind the proposed July 6 SEVP guidance and the updated [Frequently Asked Questions for Stakeholders](#), continuing students who were previously enrolled spring quarter will be allowed to stay in the U.S. or return to the U.S. to take all of their courses online. Based on UW fall quarter course options available, you may register for in-person courses, online courses, or a combination of both. Your SEVIS I-20 record will remain valid as long as you maintain your F status and enroll full-time.

For new, incoming students who were not previously enrolled in spring quarter, you are not allowed to take 100% of your courses online from within the U.S. If you plan to apply for an F visa and travel to the U.S. to begin classes in September, you must register for an in-person course to maintain your F status. UW has added an in-person course elective for autumn quarter that undergraduate or graduate students can take if you are not already registered for one. Please consult UAA Advising if you are a pre-major or your department academic adviser if you have direct entry to a major or you are a graduate student.

New, incoming students issued a transfer pending I-20 should review [question #7](#) above to determine whether you are considered a continuing or initial student. Please consult Undergraduate Academic Advising or your department adviser for information on in-person options.

Q20: Can I stay outside of the U.S. and take all of my classes online? What will happen to my F-1 benefits?

International students who wish to remain outside of the U.S. may register and take all of your courses online for autumn quarter. As long as the courses you want to take are available through remote learning, you may remain outside of the U.S. for autumn quarter.

Continuing students who were previously enrolled for spring quarter but wish to remain outside of the U.S. for autumn quarter, may take online courses and keep your SEVIS record active as long as you register full-time for autumn quarter and continue to follow all F regulations. SEVP has confirmed the university can keep your SEVIS record active and you will be eligible for future benefits such as CPT and OPT as long as you maintain your F status. **Note:** if Autumn 2020 is your final quarter, your F-1 status and SEVIS record will be active through the last day of your final quarter. Please review our [Graduation: Final Year Checklist](#) and [COVID-19 FAQs Graduating Students section](#) for important considerations about F-1 travel and applying for OPT.

New, incoming students are also allowed to take classes online from outside the U.S. if you prefer but your SEVIS I-20 record and F visa will not be made active until you physically arrive in the U.S. Benefits like CPT and OPT generally require one academic year (3 quarters) of study from within the U.S. to be eligible. Because the university cannot make your SEVIS record active until you enter the U.S. under the F1 status, your F-1 benefits may be impacted if you remain outside of the U.S.

Q21: If I am registered for a lecture that will be offered as remote learning but a quiz section that is in-person, is that 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 and would meet the in-person requirement for incoming, new students.

Q22: Are independent study/dissertation/thesis/research credits 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 meetings with your faculty would preclude a course from being considered fully online. It is our understanding that these UW courses will not be considered online and would meet the in-person requirement for incoming, new students. 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.

Q23: Autumn will be my final quarter and I will take only one class which will be offered remotely. I know immigration rules normally prohibit online-only study for the final quarter but can I take an online class as my only class in my final quarter?

Based on March SEVP guidance, you are allowed to take only one online class in your final quarter. You will need to apply a [Final Quarter Reduced Course Load](#) to maintain your F status. Also note, if you are planning to apply for OPT, applications must be submitted and mailed from within the U.S.

Q24: What options are available to international students taking online courses outside the U.S. when time differences make it difficult to attend at the time the course is offered? Will courses be recorded?

UW faculty have been encouraged to consider accessibility and time differences in developing online courses. Some courses or lectures may be recorded and made available to students at any time, but it is not a requirement. We encourage you to discuss concerns with an academic adviser, department adviser, or the instructor of your course to see what resources or options may be available to you.

Q25: I am an incoming, new graduate student for autumn 2020. I am receiving funding from the UW but I plan to take online courses from outside the U.S. Will I still receive my UW funding?

From an immigration standpoint, an incoming new international student who is outside of the U.S. can be employed by the UW as long as they meet all enrollment and other RA/TA position requirements. If you are outside the U.S., however, the U.S. government will not allow the ISS to make your SEVIS immigration record active and you will not be under standard F visa regulations until you physically enter the U.S. That means the ISS has no ability to authorize a student's F1 "on-campus" employment until they enter the U.S. There are significant tax and labor ramifications around how a foreign national is paid in their own country by a U.S. employer, which makes the situation very complex. The UW has been looking into this question and consulting the Attorney General's office, HR, and other stakeholders. The Graduate School hopes to answer this question soon.

Ideally, graduate students receiving UW funding should make every effort to obtain an F-1 visa and travel to the U.S. to begin studies in September. An in-person elective course option is available for any international student who does not have a department in-person course option already. Consult your department academic adviser.

Q26: Does UW have any partnerships with universities outside the U.S.? Can I take courses at an institution in my country that will count towards my UW?

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and significant challenges our international student community is facing, UW Study Abroad is working to develop a new opportunity for international undergraduates currently outside the U.S. to take courses from a UW-approved university and program. More details will be available at [Options for International Students](#).

Q27: What options are available to international students enrolled in online courses remotely when time differences make it difficult for us to attend at the time the lecture is offered? Will lectures be recorded?

We understand there will be challenges for students taking online courses from outside the U.S. The UW has encouraged faculty to consider these concerns as well as issues with connectivity and accessibility in developing their online course for autumn quarter. Although some courses or lectures may be recorded or made available to students at any time, it is not a requirement and will be up to each faculty to decide. We encourage you to discuss your concerns with your academic adviser, department adviser, or the faculty of the course.

Q28: What resources are available to help me?

Your [health and well-being](#) 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 hosting Autumn Quarter Planning webinars for undergraduates and graduates as well as a [Leave of Absence](#) webinar for continuing students. To register for one of these events and for further details, go to the [ISS events calendar](#).