Remote Learning for International Students - Autumn 2020 & Winter 2021
Frequently Asked Questions (Seattle campus only)
Updated November 23, 2020

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Throughout these FAQs, we refer to new/initial students and continuing students. Please see the definitions below to help you understand your specific situation.

- **Continuing Students**: Students whose I-20s are activated. These students have been registered in SEVIS after completing one quarter of studies in the U.S. at University of Washington.
  - Includes students who have a continued attendance I-20, students with a transfer complete I-20, or students who changed education level within the United States in summer or autumn quarter.
- **New/Initial Students**: Students who have not activated their I-20s to continue F-1 status. This includes students who have an initial attendance I-20, students who changed education level and are outside the U.S., or those students with a transfer pending I-20 who have not completed their first quarter at University of Washington. These records have not yet been registered in SEVIS to verify full-time enrollment status at UW.
  - Notes on SEVIS Activation:
    - 1) Students who begin their studies inside the U.S. and take one in-person class will activate their status after one quarter in the U.S.
    - 2) Students who begin their studies outside the U.S. remotely will not be able to activate their status.
- **SEVIS Registration**: Each quarter, ISS is required to verify your full-time enrollment in courses and register your SEVIS record. We can only register records of students who are registered full-time AND have entered the U.S. to activate their F-1 status.

Autumn quarter - current enrollment

**Q1#:** I am studying full-time in remote courses outside the U.S. Can I drop below full-time or withdraw from all of my autumn courses?

- **Continuing Students:**
Yes. However, if you do this without an approved exception, we will need to terminate your F-1 status. This will impact your F-1 benefit eligibility and may require you to get a new visa.

If you want to maintain your F-1 status, you must remain enrolled full-time from abroad. You may request a reduced course load for government-approved exceptions.

- **New/Initial Students:**
  - This differs based on your situation.
  - Students who are on a new initial I-20:
    - ISS has not been able to register your SEVIS record. Thus, you are not required to maintain your F-1 status.
    - ISS will collaborate with UW Admissions offices to defer the start date of your I-20.
    - You may add or drop classes within what is possible for UW registration rules.
    - A delay in activating your F-1 status may impact your eligibility for CPT and OPT.
  - Students with a transfer pending I-20:
    - ISS has not been able to register your SEVIS record. Thus, you are not required to maintain your F-1 status.
    - Your SEVIS Record will automatically be terminated for having an incomplete transfer. ISS will work with the SEVIS Help Desk when you are ready to return to try to reactivate your current SEVIS Record. If this is not possible, we will issue you a new initial I-20 (with new SEVIS ID) when you are ready to return to the U.S.
    - You may add or drop classes within what is possible for UW registration rules.
    - A delay in activating your F-1 status may impact your eligibility for CPT and OPT.
  - Students with a change of education level I-20:
    - Yes. As your record has not yet been registered in SEVIS to verify full-time enrollment status, you may drop below full-time. If, however, we registered your record, dropping below full-time would put you out of status and we would need to terminate your I-20.
    - A delay in activating your F-1 status may impact your eligibility for CPT and OPT.

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**Winter quarter - planning ahead**

**Q#2: What is the government’s winter guidance?**
- At this time, we have no updated guidance for winter 2021.
- ISS is planning to adapt the autumn quarter guidance for winter at this time. Other institutions around the United States are currently taking a similar approach.

**Q#3: Will winter quarter classes be online or in person?**
- On October 14, President Cauce sent an email announcing that most winter quarter courses will be offered remotely.
The winter quarter time schedule is currently available.

- Note: Remote courses are labeled as “offered via remote learning.” In-person courses will have a classroom assignment.
- The time schedule may change as professors finalize their plans. Please confirm the schedule before you register and prior to the start of winter quarter.

Q#4: Can I take classes from outside the U.S.?

- Most courses at UW are being taught via remote learning this quarter. All international students are able to begin taking classes outside of the U.S. to stay safe.
- If you do take all online courses outside the U.S., please do the following:
  - Read through this full list of frequently asked questions.
  - Know whether you are considered a continued or new/initial student (please see questions 1 and 2).
  - Plan ahead for your F-1 benefits. Understand whether you will be eligible for CPT or OPT when you hope to apply. (Please see F-1 benefit eligibility (vacation quarter, CPT, OPT, etc...))

Q#5: Will the university create an in-person course to help international students who need to meet the in-person requirement?

- Yes. There is a class available to international students to meet the in-person requirement. To register for the class, you must get a code from an academic advisor.
- For winter quarter, the only students who will need to take an in-person course are students with I-20s that have new/initial records with University of Washington with a January 2021 program start date. These records may be Initial Attendance, Transfer Pending, or Change of Education Level I-20s.

Q#6: Can I take all of my winter quarter classes online here in the U.S.?

- We do not have updated guidance from the U.S. government. However, ISS is interpreting the following:
  - Continuing Students:
    - You should be able to take all of your winter courses online here in the United States.
    - You do not have to be physically located in Seattle to maintain status during COVID. Please update your U.S. address in MyUW to ensure compliance.
  - New/Initial Students:
    - As we are following autumn guidance at this time, we have interpreted the following:
      - You are required to take one in-person course as part of your full-enrollment requirements to be allowed to enter the United States to begin your studies. If you meet this requirement, we will register your SEVIS record for winter quarter full-time enrollment.

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Q#7: I’ve been told I need a new I-20 or letter confirming my enrollment meets government requirements. How can I request one?

- The most recent government guidance said that we do not need to reprint I-20s with mode of instruction information.
- Students may request a travel support letter for their convenience. We know that students may need these for different purposes.
- Continuing students may travel with their current I-20 if it contains a valid travel signature. You may request an online travel signature if needed.

Q#8: Who needs to take an in-person course?

- Only students with an initial attendance, transfer pending or change of education level I-20, who come to the United States need to take an in-person course. This is required during the COVID-19 pandemic so that we can activate your I-20 through SEVIS Registration.
- Whether or not you will be required to take an in-person course depends on your physical location. Students with a transfer pending or change of education level I-20 and winter quarter start date, should review the options below:

  a) Inside the U.S. – no plans to travel internationally before January 4
     ISS is interpreting the previously issued U.S. government guidance to say international students with a transfer pending or change of education level I-20 are allowed to take all courses online if they have stayed inside the U.S. AND maintained their F-1 status.

  b) Outside the U.S. – planning to travel to the U.S. before winter quarter begins January 4
     The government SEVIS system separates I-20 forms into two categories – continuing and initial. Students who have been issued a transfer pending or change of education level 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 or change of education level I-20.

  c) Outside the U.S. – no plans to travel to the U.S. before spring quarter (March 2021)
     The previous 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.

     ISS is interpreting the U.S. government guidance to say we cannot register SEVIS records for students outside the U.S. with a change of education level I-20 which is in the initial category.

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ISS will contact students with a transfer pending or change of education level program start date of 1/4/2021 by early December to confirm your plans for winter quarter. If you will continue taking classes remotely from outside the U.S., we will send additional instructions about how to request an updated I-20 with a later start date. There is nothing you need to do at this time.

Q#9: I am registered for a lecture that is offered as remote learning but a quiz section that is in-person. Does that qualify as an in-person course for U.S. immigration?
   ● Yes. ISS believes that any in-person requirement for a course helps establish the in-person course element.

Q#10: Are independent study/dissertation/thesis/research credits considered remote courses?
   ● Independent study, dissertation, thesis, and research credits are overseen by a professor. Usually, there is a required meeting with a faculty member in order to complete the course.
   ● UW has always counted these courses as “in-person” courses for international students.

Q#11: Winter 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 COVID guidance, you are allowed to take only one online class in your final quarter. Please apply for a Final Quarter Reduced Course Load to maintain your F-1 status.

Q#12: Can I apply for OPT from outside the United States?
   ● The I-765 form to apply for Optional Practical Training instructs you to submit the form from within the United States. We recommend that you follow the instructions on the form. We have not received any guidance from USCIS about leniency on this rule.

Travel to or from the U.S.

Q#13: Can I travel to the U.S. for winter quarter classes? And, am I required to take an in-person course?
   ● Continuing students are maintaining their F-1 status and can travel to the U.S. to take winter quarter classes. They are not required to take an in-person course, but they can if they would like.
   ● New/initial students are establishing F-1 status in the U.S. and are required to take one in-person course in order to establish this status.

Q#14: How late can I enter the U.S. for winter quarter?
   ● We recommend for you to arrive prior to the start of the January 4 start date. Arriving on time will hopefully limit interruptions to your coursework and may help set you up for success.
If you are not able to arrive in the U.S. by the start of winter quarter on January 4, please be prepared. Review our travel website and ensure you have updated travel documents. You may request a travel signature through our online process. Please communicate with your professors if your late travels will impact your studies. Be prepared to talk to Customs & Border Protection about your plans and studies for the quarter and have a copy of your class schedule available to share.

- Check University of Washington's Plan for safe travel during holidays and winter break.
- Our team is dedicated to support you as you work towards your academic goals. We encourage you to make the decision on travel and safety that is right for you. While we do not know all of the challenges that may arrive this winter, we are here to offer our support.

**Q#15: I am currently in the U.S. but would like to travel internationally during winter break. Will I be allowed to return to the U.S. in January for winter quarter?**

- We do not know what the future holds. Travel restrictions and social distancing guidelines have been implemented in Washington state recently to protect people from the spread of COVID-19. Please make decisions for travel and studies that are best for your safety and overall wellness. If you do travel, please review our considerations listed below.

**Things to consider:**

- **Essential travel:** Is your travel essential, for example mental health & wellness, medical, or family reasons?
- **Risks:** Are you comfortable with the travel risks, both health risks and re-entry to the U.S.?
- **Visas:** Do you require a new F-1 visa? If yes, consider the limited U.S. consulate services 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 valid through autumn quarter. We do not know when or if updated restrictions will be announced before January.
- **Graduating students planning for OPT:** Currently, government guidance states you must submit your OPT application to USCIS from within the U.S. Additional information available under Graduating Students on the ISS COVID-19 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.

**Q#16: Will I be required to self-quarantine when I arrive in the U.S. or on-campus?**

- The Center for Disease Control & Prevention has recommendations for people after they travel.
Washington Governor Inslee has issued travel advisories for our state. Please review as you make travel plans.

The UW does not have a strict quarantine policy for students or staff following travel. However, there is Coronavirus information for residents living on campus.

Please do your research and make a decision that is best for your health and safety.

Q#17: 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 in April 2020 and have been extended every 30 days since then. On October 19, the border closure was extended again through November 21, 2020.

Before traveling from Canada or Mexico, we recommend checking for the most up-to-date information and you should be prepared to explain why your travel to the U.S. is “essential.”

Q#18: What documents are required for continuing students in F-1 status to re-enter the U.S. at this time?

- 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 for autumn 2020 and your winter 2021 class schedule (recommended)
- SEVIS I-901 fee receipt (recommended)

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

Taking a Leave of Absence (Gap quarter or year)

Q#19: Can I take winter quarter off or study part-time instead?

- Yes, you take a break from your studies, but we want you to understand the impacts of this decision.
- Continuing students may take winter quarter off (0 credits or part-time) and maintain an active F-1 SEVIS record and valid I-20 only if they meet one of these enrollment exceptions. If you do not qualify for an exception, you must request an immigration Leave of Absence and depart the U.S.
- New/Initial Students may take classes remotely outside of the U.S. part time. If you want to drop your courses, please contact your ISS through the Have a Question Form and we help direct you.

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Q#20: Can I take the rest of the academic year off and resume my studies in Autumn 2021?

- Yes. If you want to take a longer break from your studies at this time, you can make that decision. If you are considering this, please consult with your academic advisor to discuss how this may impact your academic journey.
- Continuing students should request a leave of absence. You will need to leave the U.S. within 15 days of when you withdraw from courses. When you are ready to return to the U.S. to resume your studies, you will need to complete the Return to UW process.
- New/Initial Students do not have an active SEVIS Record. You may need to contact ISS to get help withdrawing from your classes. Before the quarter you wish to re-enroll at the UW, review the Returning Students information and instructions. We recommend that you begin the Returning Student process three months in advance of your planned return.

Q#21: Is there a deadline to submit an immigration Leave of Absence for winter quarter 2021?

- ISS will accept a Leave of Absence request during the winter quarter. We do not have a strict deadline at this time. Please know that you will be required to leave the U.S. within 15 days of the day you drop/withdraw from classes.
- We recommend that you request the Leave of Absence by January 10 to avoid owing tuition or registration fees.
- Please review winter quarter course offerings and look at your academic plan before requesting an immigration leave of absence. The winter quarter time schedule is available now and is being updated as faculty finalize course options.

F-1 benefit eligibility (vacation quarter, CPT, OPT, etc.)

Q#22: If I took autumn quarter classes remotely from outside the U.S. and then I return to the U.S. for winter and spring quarters, will I be eligible for an annual vacation quarter in summer 2021?

- Yes. As you will have maintained your F-1 status in autumn, winter, and spring quarters, you will be eligible for a vacation.

Q#23: What will happen to my F-1 benefits if I decide to take remote classes from outside the U.S.?

- This varies for continuing and new/initial students.
- Continuing students will be able to maintain their status and winter quarter will count towards their benefit eligibility.
New/initial students who enter the U.S. and take one in-person course will activate their F-1 status and work towards their benefit eligibility.

New/initial students who begin their studies outside of the U.S. and do not activate their F-1 status will NOT work towards their benefit eligibility (CPT, OPT). Planning ahead is important.

Graduate Students (Master’s degree, PhD, or professional programs)

Q#24: I am an admitted graduate student for winter quarter. Can I defer my admission to a later quarter or year?

- Please contact Graduate Enrollment Management Services (GEMS) who handles admission to the UW and questions about deferring admission to a later term. Review the Graduate School's COVID-19 Admission FAQs for more information and discuss possible options with your graduate program advisor or faculty advisor in your academic department.

Q#25: I am a graduate student with an RA/TA position but I am currently outside the U.S. The Graduate School recommends “students should arrive in/return to the U.S. as reasonably possible...” Does this mean I might not be able to continue working remotely for winter quarter?

- This question is outside the purview of ISS. This is an employment matter and should be discussed with your academic department or hiring manager. There are significant tax and labor ramifications around how foreign nationals are paid in their home country by a U.S. employer, which makes this situation very complex. The Graduate School has additional information on their web page about Employing/Paying International Students Working Abroad. This is a temporary policy due to the current pandemic and travel restrictions. If you have concerns about continued employment from outside the U.S. for winter or spring quarter, please discuss this with your academic advisor or hiring manager.

Remote Learning Resources & Options

Q#26: There are many differences in remote learning due to the pandemic. How will the UW support my success in remote courses?

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

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If you are unable to participate in online or other alternative instruction requirements due to the lack of available technology resources, complete the ‘Have a Question’ form on the ISS website - advisors may be able to keep your SEVIS record active as long as you intend to resume your course of study when in-person classes resume.

**Q#27: What academic support programs are available to me?**

- There are several UW academic support programs available to enrolled students, including CLUE Tutoring, Online Learning resources, and Success Coaching. The Odegaard Writing and Research Center (OWRC) also offers appointments for help with writing assignments or help from a research librarian. The Math Study Center is available online for students needing help with math homework. The Engineering Academic Center is open to all Engineering students to help hone your skills in fundamental Math, Physics, Chemistry or Engineering courses. For additional campus resources by department or subject, review Other UW Resources. For additional information technology resources and help, visit UW’s IT Connect or Teaching and Learning Tools.

**Q#28: Where can I get more information about coronavirus resources for students?**

- The UW maintains various web pages with coronavirus information and resources for students. Go to the Resources for Students to learn more about Husky Coronavirus Testing, Husky Pack Pledge, Husky Health and Well-Being, on and off campus housing resources, and messages & updates sent to campus.
- Your health and well-being are very important to us and we encourage you to reach out if you need help. CIRCLE offers drop-in office hours and FIUTS is hosting a variety of virtual events. Both offices can help connect you to other students and the international student community at UW.

**Q#29: Does UW have any “Go Local” partnerships with universities outside the U.S.? Can I take courses at an institution in my country that will count towards my UW degree?**

- UW Study Abroad has developed a Go Local option for undergraduate students at University of Washington. Learn more about this information on the Study Abroad Website or email studyabroad@uw.edu if you have questions.

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