

Fall 2020: Frequently Asked Questions for International Students

I am a newly admitted international student for fall 2020 currently outside of the United States. What are my academic options for the fall 2020 semester?

Any incoming student, including transfer students, who received an I-20 Form to begin their studies this fall will not be able to enter the U.S. in F-1 status as course instruction at The Graduate Center, CUNY will be offered online.

On July 24, 2020, ICE released updated [SEVP policy guidance](#) and updated [SEVP FAQ's](#) for the fall 2020 semester that does not permit newly admitted international students to enter the US in F-1 status to enroll in a program of study that will be offered entirely 100% online.

Given these developments, our newly admitted international students currently have the following three options. Please review these options and inform The Graduate Center of your decision by no later than Monday, August 17, 2020.

Option 1: Remain outside the US and enroll in all online courses at the Graduate Center, CUNY for Fall 2020.

Begin the program by enrolling in all online classes for fall 2020 while remaining outside of the United States for the entire semester. You would then apply for an I-20 for a future term (e.g. Spring 2021) to enter the US in F-1 status when conditions allow in order to attend in person classes full-time. If you already had an I-20 issued for fall 2020, we would defer the program start date on the I-20 form to the spring 2021 semester (January 29, 2021). You could apply for the F-1 visa at the United States Consulate 120 days prior to the spring 2021 semester start date. If you choose this option, please contact intstu@gc.cuny.edu to apply for the deferred I-20 form.

While you are enrolled remotely, your Tuition Fellowship will pay your full-time tuition. Unfortunately, we are not able to send any other fellowship or assistantship payments to incoming international students who are outside of the United States. We know this is not what we were hoping for, but this is the unfortunate reality we are faced with.

Instead, The Graduate Center will provide 10 semesters of tuition support beginning with the Fall 2020 semester. We can begin issuing your fellowship and assistantship payments as outlined in your initial fellowship letter during the first semester you can attend in person. If we can resume in person classes in the spring of 2021, you will begin receiving your financial aid fellowship/assistantship support as outlined in your initial fellowship letter as promised. If we can't resume in person classes until the fall of 2021, your financial aid fellowship and/or assistantship support will begin then.

Option 2: Postpone admission

If approved by your Academic Department and the Office of Admissions, postpone admission and apply for an I-20 form for the semester you will begin the program. If you already had an I-20 form issued for fall 2020, we would defer the program start date on the I-20 form to the semester you will begin the program. You could apply for the F-1 visa at the United States Consulate 120 days prior to the new program start date. You would need to speak with your academic department to determine if postponing admission is possible.

Postponement of admission would guarantee the five-year fellowship you were originally offered.

Option 3: Apply for admission for a future academic year

You may apply again for admission to the program of study for a future year and would be considered in relation to that year's applicants. You would apply for an I-20 form once you have been admitted and have accepted your admission for the future year (e.g. fall 2021, fall 2022, etc.). If an I-20 form was already issued for fall 2020, it would be cancelled in SEVIS. You could apply for the F-1 visa at the United States Consulate 120 days prior to the semester start date you will begin your program of study.

I am a newly admitted F-1 transfer student that remained in the United States. What are my academic options for the fall 2020 semester?

If you are transfer student who transferred your active SEVIS record to the Graduate Center CUNY, received a transfer pending I-20 form from the Office of International Students, and remained inside the United States, you will be allowed to begin your program of study, enroll in all online courses for fall 2020, and remain in the United States in F-1 status with a SEVIS active record.

For students who do have a valid Social Security Number, we will be able to begin paying your fellowship as expected in Fall 2020. In order to ensure timely payment of your fellowship, please make sure you do the following:

- [Claim your CUNYfirst account.](#)
- [Accept your fellowship.](#)
- *Attend a One Stop Orientation – information forthcoming.*
- *Once you are able, register as full-time (7 credits or Weighted Instructional Units (WIUs)).*
- *After you check in with the Office of International Students, complete your Sprintax information and supply the necessary documents to the Office of the Bursar.*

For students who do not have a valid Social Security Number, due to the COVID-19 pandemic the Social Security Administration is currently closed and has not resumed normal processing of Social Security Applications at this time. Due to the high volume of applications they are receiving, the Social Security Administration will only take in-person appointments for urgent cases, and on-campus employment does not currently qualify as an urgent case. We do not yet know when the SSA offices will reopen. Social Security Application instructions are available at: https://www.gc.cuny.edu/CUNY_GC/media/International-Students/PDFs/SSN-Application-Procedures-2017-doc.pdf?ext=.pdf

While you are enrolled remotely, your Tuition Fellowship will pay your full-time tuition. Unfortunately, we are not able to pay any other fellowships or assistantships to incoming transfer students who do not have a Social Security Number. Instead, The Graduate Center will provide 10 semesters of tuition support beginning with the Fall 2020 semester. We can begin issuing your fellowship and assistantship payments as outlined in your initial fellowship letter during the first semester you have a Social Security Number.

Will the Graduate Center offer a hybrid program of study option to new international students for fall 2020?

The Graduate Center will not be offering a hybrid program of study for fall 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the serious health and safety concerns this brings to our entire community.

I am a continuing F-1 or J-1 Student. What are my academic options for the fall 2020 semester?

Per March 13th SEVP guidance, continuing F-1 and J-1 students with an active SEVIS record, may enroll in all online classes for fall 2020 while in the United States or outside the United States. You must enroll in a full-time course load for fall 2020 and you will continue to maintain F-1 status with a SEVIS active record.

Does the five-month temporary absence provision apply to me if I am outside of the United States for more than five months?

The five-month temporary absence provision will not apply to continuing international students who are maintaining their F-1 or J-1 status while enrolled full-time for fall 2020 and are currently abroad or decide to leave the United States to continue taking online classes abroad.

Do I still need to receive an updated I-20 form by August 4th?

No. On Tuesday July 14, 2020, SEVP rescinded the July 6th guidance and July 7th FAQs that that required students to receive an updated I-20 form indicating the operational plan for fall 2020. As this guidance has been rescinded, this is no longer applicable.

I am a continuing F-1 or J-1 student, will I be able to receive my Fellowship/Assistantship?

All continuing international students who remain in their active F-1 or J-1 legal status will be able to receive their fellowship/assistantship. Doctoral students are still required to enroll full-time (7/31 is the financial aid registration deadline) and, where necessary, fulfill their service requirement.

One important note: Students who are considered **non-resident aliens** for tax purposes will have their lump sum payments mailed to their CUNYfirst mailing address. Please be sure to keep this address updated. If you are abroad, you may also want to make sure your home country is currently accepting mail from the United States.

Students who are considered **resident aliens** for tax purposes can receive their lump sum payments via direct deposit. If you have not already done so, please sign up for direct deposit in CUNYfirst. Instructions can be found here: <https://www.cuny.edu/financial-aid/tuition-and-college-costs/refunds/direct-deposit/>

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the Office of Fellowships and Financial Aid at financialaid@gc.cuny.edu.

I am a continuing F-1 student who received an Initial Attendance I-20 for fall 2020 for a return from leave of absence. What are my academic options for the fall semester?

For students who are not fall 2020 admits but received an Initial Attendance I-20 for fall 2020, it is unclear if U.S. Customs and Border Patrol will allow entry into the United States, based on existing SEVP guidance. Therefore, you should remain outside the United States at this time. You may enroll in online classes from abroad, but you will do so as a non-F-1 student.

The Office of International Students will need to defer the program start date on your I-20 form to the semester you will return to the US to resume your program of study. Please contact the Office of International Students at intstu@gc.cuny.edu to discuss the process.

Have the US Consulates resumed F-1 and J-1 visa application processing?

The Department of State suspended routine visa services worldwide in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As global conditions evolve, U.S. Embassies and Consulates are beginning a phased resumption of routine visa services.

The resumption of routine visa services will occur on a post-by-post basis, in coordination with the Department's Diplomacy Strong framework for safely returning their workforce to Department facilities. U.S. Embassies and Consulates have continued to provide emergency visa services since March and will continue to do so as they are able. We are unable to provide a specific date for when each U.S. Consulate will resume full visa services. Please refer to each individual U.S. Embassy or Consulate's website for information regarding operating status and which services it is currently offering.

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/phased-resumption-routine-visa-services.html>

I am a continuing international student enrolled full-time for fall 2020, may I return to the United States?

Continuing international students who are registered full-time for fall 2020 with a SEVIS active record, may return to the US in either F-1 or J-1 status. You need the following documents to re-enter the United States;

1. Valid I-20 or DS-2019 form with a valid travel signature from the DSO/ARO at the Office of International Students.
2. Valid F-1 or J-1 visa in your passport
3. Passport valid for at least 6 months into the future
4. Full-time Enrollment Verification for Fall 2020 from the Office of the Registrar
5. Proof of financial support documents (e.g. fellowship and financial aid award letter for 2020/2021)

To request a travel signature on your I-20 or DS-2019 form for your re-entry to the US, please email the Office of International Student at intstu@gc.cuny.edu with your travel dates and copies of your I-20 or DS-2019 form, passport and F-1 or J-1 visa. If you require a new travel signature, we will re-print your I-20 or DS-2019 form, provide it with a travel signature, and mail it to you.

Are there any travel restrictions to the United States that I need to be aware of?

The U.S. government is currently enforcing an entry ban on foreign passport holders who have been in certain countries, including China, Iran, the United Kingdom, Brazil and many European countries, within 14 days of their arrival to the United States. See the [Center for Disease Control website](#) for more information and a full list of countries.

With specific exceptions, students residing in any of these restricted countries will need to spend at least 14 days in a different, unrestricted country before traveling to the United States.

Effective July 16, 2020, [F-1 student travelers from the Schengen Area, the UK and Ireland who are applying for or have valid visas may now travel to the United States](#), even though the current presidential proclamations regarding travel remain in effect. F-1 students traveling with valid F-1 visas do not need to seek a national interest exception to travel to the United States, but students traveling from these countries may experience delays at inspection from Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) upon entering the United States.

Students from those areas who are traveling on a J-1 visa may contact the nearest embassy or consulate to initiate a national interest exception request.

Am I required to self-quarantine for 14 days upon return to the United States?

Yes. All international travelers arriving into the US should quarantine at home for 14 days after their arrival. At home, they are expected to monitor their health and practice social distancing. To protect the health of others, these travelers should not go to work or school for 14 days.

https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2020/04/doh_covid19_faqs_updated_041720_2.pdf

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/after-travel-precautions.html>

My visa is expiring but I am unable to depart the United States at this time. What should I do?

Students may remain in the United States on an expired F-1/J-1 visa as long as they maintain their immigration status by being in possession of a valid I-20/DS-2019, an I-94 arrival record, and by meeting normal enrollment requirements. Students require a valid F-1 or J-1 visa to enter the United States in F-1 or J-1 legal status.

I am a continuing student who is not able to resume a full-time program of study for fall 2020 due to COVID-19. What should I do?

Please contact the Office of International Students at intstu@gc.cuny.edu to discuss your situation. You may be eligible to apply for a medical reduced course load authorization for fall 2020. You might also be eligible to apply for either a medical or personal leave of absence for the fall 2020 semester depending on your circumstances.

May I apply for a Social Security Number?

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the Social Security Administration is currently closed and has not resumed normal processing of Social Security Applications at this time. Due to the high volume of applications they are receiving, the Social Security Administration will only take in-person appointments for urgent cases, and on-campus employment does not currently qualify as an urgent case. We do not yet know when the SSA offices will reopen. Social Security Application instructions are available at:

https://www.gc.cuny.edu/CUNY_GC/media/International-Students/PDFs/SSN-Application-Procedures-2017-doc.pdf?ext=.pdf

Where can I find the SEVP Guidance?

The March 13 SEVP guidance is available at:

<https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2020/Coronavirus%20Guidance%203.13.20.pdf>

The July 15th SEVP FAQ update is available at: <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/coronavirus/covid19faq.pdf>

The Office of International Students anticipates that SEVP will release further updates to their guidance for fall 2020. We will continue to monitor the information released by SEVP and will update you as information becomes available.

As the Office of International Students physical office is currently closed due to COVID-19, how may I submit a request for service, schedule an appointment with an international student advisor, and receive documents?

While the Office of International Students physical office at The Graduate Center is closed, staff are working remotely to continue providing essential services and information to our international student community. You may email your questions, requests for service, or appointment requests to intstu@gc.cuny.edu. We will process your request and ship I-20 and DS-2019 forms to your location. Students may also schedule phone or zoom appointments with international student counselors.