



Frequently Asked Questions for SEVP Stakeholders about COVID-19

Last Updated: March 25, 2020

This document provides answers to frequently asked questions from Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) stakeholders about the impact of the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) on SEVP-certified schools and F and M students.

Note: SEVP continues to actively monitor COVID-19 and provide up-to-date information to stakeholders, including designated school officials (DSOs) and F and M students. Due to the fluid nature of this situation, the answers in this document may be subject to change. Refer to [ICE.gov/COVID19](https://ice.dhs.gov/COVID19) for the most up-to-date version of this FAQ.

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Nonimmigrant Students

Maintaining student records

1. Many F and M students may choose to travel home and complete the spring term remotely. Since they are still enrolled, do DSOs have to cancel their Forms I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status," if they are taking classes outside of the United States? If their Student and Exchange Visitor



Information System (SEVIS) records remain in Active status, will students be subject to the five-month rule?

- A. Under current conditions, if an active F student leaves the United States to complete the spring term online, their SEVIS record should remain in Active status and not be terminated. While the temporary measures related to COVID-19 are in place, students deemed to be maintaining status if they are making normal progress in their course of study. For that reason, the five-month temporary absence provision addressed in *8 C.F.R. 214.2(f)(4)* will not apply for students who remain in Active status.

SEVP will allow F and M students to temporarily count online classes toward a full course of study in excess of the limits stated in *8 CFR 214.2(f)(6)(i)(G)* and *8 CFR 214.2(m)(9)(v)*, even if they have left the United States and are taking the online classes elsewhere. This temporary provision is only in effect due to COVID-19 and only for schools that comply with the requirement to notify SEVP of any procedural changes within 10 business days.

Schools can find additional information about reporting procedural changes to SEVP in [Broadcast Message: COVID-19 and Potential Procedural Adaptations for F and M Nonimmigrant Students](#).

2. Due to COVID-19, what is the requirement for Initial status students who have already arrived in the United States?

- A. Initial students currently in the United States that have reported to their school should be made Active in SEVIS and follow the guidelines the school provides to all its F and M students related to COVID-19. If Initial students have not arrived in the United States, they should remain in their home country.

3. Does SEVP have any guidance for students who have been asked to move out of their university housing?

- A. If students are required to leave campus, they can continue to study online—if possible—either inside or outside of the United States. If students remain in the United States, DSOs should update their address in SEVIS. If there are no online classes and the closure is temporary, students can find a place to live and return to



class when the school opens. For scenarios regarding school procedures and online classes, refer to the [COVID-19: Guidance for SEVP Stakeholders](#).

Electronic Form I-20 issuance

1. Can DSOs electronically send signed Forms I-20 to students instead of physically mailing the forms?

- A. Yes, due to COVID-19, DSOs may electronically send Forms I-20 to student email addresses listed in SEVIS. In the case of a minor students, the email address may belong to their parent or legal guardian. Schools do not need to request permission from SEVP or report their plans to electronically send Forms I-20 as part of their COVID-19 procedural changes.

2. What methods can DSOs use to sign and send Forms I-20?

- A. SEVP has identified the following methods to sign and send the Form I-20:
- Email a scanned version of the physically signed Form I-20;
 - Email a digitally signed Form I-20 using electronic signature software; or
 - Email a digitally signed Form I-20 that contains a digitally reproduced copy of a physical signature.

Only approved principal designated school officials (PDSOs) and DSOs may physically sign or input their own digital signature to the Form I-20. Individuals who are not approved on the school's Form I-17, "Petition for Approval of School for Attendance by Nonimmigrant Student," may not input a DSO's signature—either digital or physical—to the Form I-20. Improper issuance of the Form I-20 in this manner may constitute grounds for withdrawal of SEVP certification. By signing the Form I-20 or inputting their digital signature, PDSOs and DSOs attest that they are the approved individual issuing the Form I-20.

Full course of study requirements and online learning

1. Our school has switched to fully online instruction but not all courses will be offered; some courses will be canceled due to inability to deliver via online means. Will students be excused from meeting full course of study requirements if the classes they need are not being offered?



- A. Yes, full course of study requirements can be waived as a direct result of the impact from COVID-19. This information should be reported in a school's procedural change documents submitted to SEVP, as described in [Broadcast Message: COVID-19 and Potential Procedural Adaptations for F and M Nonimmigrant Students](#). If this is a material change to previously submitted documents, schools should resubmit those documents as part of their submission to SEVP.

Employment

1. Can students with proper authorization participate in curricular practical training (CPT) while they are abroad?

- A. Students may engage in CPT during their time abroad, provided they are:
- Enrolled in a program of study in which CPT is integral to the program of study;
 - Their DSO authorized CPT in advance of the CPT start date; and
 - Either the employer has an office outside the United States or the employer can assess student engagement and attainment of learning objectives electronically.

As noted in SEVP's March 13, 2020, [COVID-19: Guidance for SEVP Stakeholders](#), this enrollment may be online. All other requirements at *8 CFR 214.2(f)(10)(i)* still apply.

2. Universities that moved to online courses have allowed students to travel to their home country to complete their studies. Will this international travel alter the student's optional practical training (OPT)/CPT and social security number (SSN) status?

- A. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is evaluating these issues and may issue additional guidance. In the meantime, since [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services \(USCIS\)](#) adjudicates OPT employment authorization requests, SEVP recommends reaching out to USCIS for further guidance.

Students may engage in CPT during their time abroad, provided they are enrolled in a program of study of which the CPT is an integral component, the DSO has authorized the CPT in advance, and either the employer has an office outside the United States or the employer has a means to assess student engagement and attainment of learning objectives. As noted in SEVP's March 13, 2020, [COVID-19: Guidance for SEVP Stakeholders](#), this enrollment may be online. All other requirements at *8 CFR 214.2(f)(10)(i)* still apply.



For questions regarding SSNs, SEVP recommends reaching out to the [Social Security Administration](#).

Student transfer

- 1. Can students in transfer status who were supposed to start their program this spring but are unable to enter the United States defer their enrollment to summer or fall? Or, must they apply for an initial Form I-20?**

A. Schools may defer attendance and keep the student's status as "Transfer" in SEVIS.

Student return to the United States

- 1. Will F and M students be able to return to the United States if they are continuing their studies outside of the country as a result of COVID-19?**

A. Students who continue to make normal progress in their course of study remain eligible for admission into the United States. However, because of the changing array of travel restrictions, students should refer to their local embassy's website through the [U.S. Department of State](#) for any updates about visa issuance. Also, DHS and the [Center for Disease Control and Prevention's](#) (CDC) websites provide information about current travel restrictions to the United States.

- 2. What are the instructions for students who have traveled to their home country for spring break and whose classes have now moved online and have a return ticket to the United States in the coming days? Is it advisable that these students should travel at this time or should they remain in their home country? Will their student visa status change if they choose to remain in their home country?**

A. SEVP advises students currently outside of the United States and looking to enter the country to check on any travel restrictions their country might have regarding international travel, including restrictions applicable to countries they may travel through. Students should also check with their DSOs to confirm the school's operational status, or procedures for out-of-country students as some schools may not currently allow new or returning students on campus for an extended period of time.

Regarding options for maintaining student status while outside of the United States, students should check with their DSOs for alternate study arrangements.



Additionally, refer to [COVID-19: Guidance for SEVP Stakeholders](#) for information about online courses.

3. Our school switched to fully online instruction for the remainder of the spring semester and some students will return to their home countries to complete their programs online. Can DSOs extend students' program end dates so seniors can return to the United States at the end of the school year (e.g., May or June) for graduation ceremonies on their current Forms I-20?

A. DSOs should not extend students' programs to accommodate graduation ceremonies. Students wishing to return to the United States to attend graduation have the following options:

- Students can return to the United States prior to the program end date on the Form I-20 and attend their graduation during the 60-day grace period.
- Students who intend to continue their study in the United States can return with a pending change of educational level or transfer Form I-20.
- Students can return to the United States on another visa classification (i.e., B-2 visitor visa).

SEVP-certified Schools

Reporting school changes

1. Do schools need to notify SEVP of procedural adaptations?

A. Yes, schools need to notify SEVP any procedural adaptation due to COVID-19 within 10 business days of the change. SEVP included notification instructions with guidance to SEVP-certified schools in [Broadcast Message: COVID-19 and Potential Procedural Adaptations for F and M Nonimmigrant Students](#). The program also posted an [Optional COVID-19 School Reporting Template](#) that schools can use to report temporary procedural adaptations.

2. How should SEVP-certified schools report temporary procedural adaptations to SEVP?

A. SEVP included notification instructions with guidance to SEVP-certified schools in [Broadcast Message: COVID-19 and Potential Procedural Adaptations for F and M Nonimmigrant Students](#). The program also posted an [Optional COVID-19 School](#)



[Reporting Template](#) that schools can use to report temporary procedural adaptations.

3. Will schools receive confirmation or acknowledgment when SEVP receives their operational change documents? Is there any possibility that SEVP would deny or disapprove of a reported change by a school? If so, what happens in that instance?

- A. SEVP will send an email acknowledging receipt to each school that submits procedural change documents and add the submitted information to the school's file. However, given the significant number of changes being requested, SEVP is not going to respond to every submission in detail. If SEVP has concerns that the changes exceed permissible accommodations for COVID-19, it will contact the school for clarification or revision.

Remember, schools need to notify SEVP any procedural adaptation due to COVID-19 within 10 business days of the change. SEVP included notification instructions with guidance to SEVP-certified schools in [Broadcast Message: COVID-19 and Potential Procedural Adaptations for F and M Nonimmigrant Students](#). The program also posted an [Optional COVID-19 School Reporting Template](#) that schools can use to report temporary procedural adaptations.

Additional Resources

1. Where can I find COVID-19 information for J exchange visitors?

- A. Guidance for J exchange visitors is available on the Department of State's website, [Exchange Visitor Program Information on COVID-19](#).

2. Where can I find guidance distributed by SEVP in response to COVID-19?

- A. All COVID-19 guidance for SEVP stakeholders is located at [ICE.gov/COVID19](https://ice.dhs.gov/COVID19). Stakeholders should regularly visit this page for the latest guidance and frequently asked questions from SEVP.

Additionally, SEVP regularly shares updates and resources from government partners—including the Department of State and CDC—through our social media channels, including [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#).