

St. John's University
Fall 2020 Policy Guidance for F-1/J-1 Students
July 9, 2020

This International Student & Scholar Services Office (ISSSO) created this document in response to regulatory guidance from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) regarding F-1 students for the fall 2020 term that was released on July 6, 2020. Federal regulatory guidance is subject to change, and our institutional policies may need to be adjusted based on those changes.

New/Continuing Students Studying on the St. John's New York Campuses:

- Students studying in the U.S. may not take a fully online schedule, and new students cannot seek admission to the U.S. as F-1 or J-1 students if their schedule is fully online.
- As long as students are enrolled in classes that take place either partially or fully in person, they may study in the U.S. under F-1 or J-1 visas. In order to remain in compliance, students must be:
 - Enrolled in at least one course that is taught either fully or partially in person. Courses taught partially in-person are designated as “hybrid.”
 - Registered full-time (12 credits for undergraduate students, 9 credits for graduate students) or on an approved reduced course load (such as during the last semester of study).
 - Taking the maximum possible number of either fully or partially in person classes. The DHS indicates that students should take the minimum number of online classes required to make normal progress toward degree. If a course is offered in various formats, they advise students to enroll in course sections that are either taught fully or partially in-person where available.
 - Note: St. John's will issue students studying on campus a new I-20 certifying all of the above.
- If the University is required to move all classes online for any reason during the fall semester, students may be required to depart the country, but would be able to complete their coursework remotely from home. While this is not a scenario the University wants to happen, students should feel assured that the University will do everything possible to facilitate a safe return home, a successful completion of the semester, and a return back to New York in the spring if it does.
- Students with a pending transfer in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) who are inside the U.S. are expected to begin courses in fall 2020 and follow normal transfer-in procedures, including meeting all of the requirements detailed above.
- Before seeking entry to the U.S., students should consider the following:
 - The status of current travel restrictions. Be sure to check [updated guidance](#) just prior to your scheduled arrival. Currently, the U.S. government has the following rules in place:
 - F-1/J-1 students who have been present in the following regions/countries in the 14 days preceding their attempted entry into the U.S. will not be allowed into the U.S.: China; Iran; European/Schengen countries; the United Kingdom and Ireland; and Brazil. (U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents are exempt from these bans).
 - Restricted entry from Canada and Mexico using land crossings.
 - Even outside of these federal bans, flights and airline travel worldwide are severely limited.
 - When seeking entry to the U.S., students are required to have:

- A valid I-20/DS-2019 (continuing students must also have a DSO/ARO travel signature from within the past year).
- A valid passport (with at least 6 months of validity remaining).
- A valid F-1/J-1 visa.
- Evidence that they intend to engage in a fall 2020 course load that meets all the requirements detailed above. Students should be sure to print their course schedules from [UIS](#) and have it with them when they arrive into the U.S.
- The status of arrival quarantines, which may require students to self-isolate upon arrival in the U.S. For further information, please review the guidance from the [NYS Department of Health](#).

Continuing Students Studying Outside the U.S.:

- Students who are unable (or choose not) to meet the requirements for study in the U.S. (as detailed above) can still take a fully online schedule from outside the U.S.
- Because these students will not be in the U.S., they will no longer be “active” in SEVIS; in formal SEVIS language, their records will then be “terminated.”
- Students in this situation are no longer required to maintain a full-time course load for immigration purposes, though it may be required by a given college or academic program. Students should check with their academic advisors to confirm. However, part-time study may have implications for future practical CPT/OPT eligibility.
- Prior to resuming study in the U.S., [students must request a new I-20](#). If their F-1/J-1 visas expired while they were overseas, they must also renew their visas before returning to the U.S. For students returning after a SEVIS termination, DHS normally utilizes a “5-month rule”: if students are absent for 5 months or less, it may be possible to reactivate the SEVIS record. If more than 5 months have passed, ISSSO is normally required to issue a new I-20 with a new SEVIS ID; students are then required to pay a new SEVIS I-901 fee prior to returning to the U.S. DHS may release further guidance on how this 5-month rule will apply to current circumstances.
- Students should begin discussing their return to the U.S. with an ISSSO advisor approximately 3 months before they intend to come back.

New Students Studying Outside the U.S.:

- New undergraduate students planning to study fully online from outside the U.S. should notify ISSSO. We will then notify our colleagues in offices throughout the University, including the appropriate dean’s office, the office of New Student Orientation, the University Freshman Center, and Residence Life. We will also issue a new I-20 with a spring 2021 start date to allow students to prepare to arrive in New York in the spring.
- New graduate (Master’s/PhD) students planning to study fully online from outside the U.S. should notify ISSSO so that we can issue a new I-20 with a spring 2021 start date. Prior to making that decision, students should speak with their academic department about beginning fully online.
- When students are ready to begin study in the U.S., they must obtain an F-1/J-1 student visa prior to entry. Visas are issued by the U.S. Department of State, and unfortunately, there is never a guarantee that a visa will be issued; the decision lies entirely with federal officials.
- Students choosing to defer admission to a future term should contact ISSSO and undergraduate/graduate admissions.
- Students choosing to study outside the U.S. in fall 2020 will still have many opportunities to interact with classmates, faculty, and administrators throughout the semester through virtual activities. Every student is a “Johnnie” from the moment they enroll, no matter where they are in the world, and the University will ensure you feel like part of the family from the beginning.

Continuing Students Not Taking Courses:

- If students will not be taking fall 2020 courses for any reason, their F-1 or J-1 SEVIS records will be terminated. If they are currently in the U.S., they must depart within 15 days of SEVIS termination.
- Undergraduate students should withdraw through their dean's office and will be required to apply for readmission through Undergraduate Admission before returning for future study.
- Master's and PhD level students should notify their dean's office for further guidance on the withdrawal, leave of absence, and return process.
- Prior to resuming study in the U.S., [students must request a new I-20](#). If their F-1/J-1 visas expired while they were overseas, they must also renew their visas before returning to the U.S. For students returning after a SEVIS termination, DHS normally utilizes a "5-month rule": if students are absent for 5 months or less, it may be possible to reactivate the SEVIS record. If more than 5 months have passed, ISSSO is normally required to issue a new I-20 with a new SEVIS ID; students are then required to pay a new SEVIS I-901 fee prior to returning to the U.S. DHS may release further guidance on how this 5-month rule will apply to current circumstances.
- Students should begin discussing their return to the U.S. with an ISSSO advisor approximately 3 months before they intend to come back.
- When students take a break from full-time study (i.e. when they don't take classes during the regular fall or spring term), the academic year requirement for practical training eligibility restarts beginning with the semester they resume study. These students would need to complete two more semesters (a fall and a spring term) after resuming study before being eligible for CPT/OPT.

New Students Not Taking Courses:

- If students choose to defer admission to a future term, they should contact ISSSO and the appropriate undergraduate/graduate admissions office. Based on current DHS guidance, students with a pending SEVIS transfer who are outside the U.S. may have their transfer-in deferred to a future term as well. Students with a pending SEVIS transfer who are inside the U.S. are expected to begin courses in fall 2020 and follow normal transfer-in procedures, including engaging in a fall 2020 course of study that meets the requirements in the "New/Continuing Students Studying on the St. John's New York Campuses" section above. Any students who are currently inside the U.S. with a pending SEVIS transfer and not planning to start in fall 2020 should contact ISSSO about their plans.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Office of Graduate Admission

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NOTES and DEFINITIONS

The Department of Homeland Security (**DHS**) is a federal department comprised of a number of agencies and units, many of which deal with international student issues and immigration. These include U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (**ICE**), Customs and Border Patrol (**CBP**), and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (**USCIS**).

ICE is responsible for managing the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (**SEVP**), which provides approval and oversight to schools authorized to enroll international students and gives guidance to both schools and students about the requirements for maintaining their status.

The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (**SEVIS**) is the web-based system that SEVP uses to maintain information regarding international students.

Curricular Practical Training (**CPT**) is training related directly to a student's major area of study, and is part of the established curriculum for the student's program. It takes place before the end of a student's program.

Optional Practical Training (**OPT**) is training related directly to a student's major area of study, and can take place during an academic program or after the program ends. Students are typically eligible for one year of OPT for each educational level they pursue, and students in designated STEM fields may qualify for an additional 24 months of OPT.

Fully In-Person (a.k.a face-to-face) courses are traditional classes with each in-person session taking place in the same classroom over the course of the semester.

Hybrid courses include courses listed by the Registrar as hybrid and include a partial in-person component. These may include Rotating or "Traditional" Hybrid models. Hybrid courses are *not* considered online courses but are equivalent to in-person courses for DHS reporting purposes.

Fully Online courses are offered in either a synchronous or asynchronous format. Synchronous courses are live streamed by faculty on the day and time on students' schedules. Asynchronous courses have no live component and therefore, no set class time. However, these courses require students to complete assignments according to due dates set by their professors. Both synchronous and asynchronous courses will be recorded for future viewing.