

Broadcast Message: COVID-19 and Fall 2020

To: All SEVIS Users

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General Information

Temporary procedural adaptations related to online courses permitted by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) during the height of the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) crisis will be modified for the fall 2020 semester. There will still be accommodations to provide flexibility to schools and nonimmigrant students, but as many institutions across the country reopen, there is a concordant need to resume the carefully balanced protections implemented by federal regulations. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security plans to publish the procedures and responsibilities described in the below Broadcast Message in the near future as a Temporary Final Rule in the Federal Register. This message is intended to provide additional time to facilitate the implementation of these procedures.

Due to COVID-19, SEVP instituted a temporary exemption regarding the online study policy for the spring and summer semesters. This policy permitted F and M students to take more online courses than normally allowed for purposes of maintaining a full course of study to maintain their F-1 and M-1 nonimmigrant status during the COVID-19 emergency.

Temporary Exemptions for the Fall 2020 Semester

For the fall 2020 semester, SEVP is modifying these temporary exemptions. In summary, temporary exemptions for the fall 2020 semester provide that:

- 1) Students attending schools operating entirely online may *not* take a full online course load and remain in the United States. The U.S. Department of State will not issue visas to students enrolled in schools and/or programs that are fully online for the fall semester nor will U.S. Customs and Border Protection permit these students to enter the United States. Active students currently in the United States enrolled in such programs must depart the country or take other measures, such as transferring to a school with in-person instruction to remain in lawful status or potentially face immigration consequences including, but not limited to, the initiation of removal proceedings.
- 2) Students attending schools operating under normal in-person classes are bound by existing federal regulations. Eligible F students may take a maximum of one class or three credit hours online (*see 8 CFR 214.2(f)(6)(i)(G)*).
- 3) Students attending schools adopting a hybrid model—that is, a mixture of online and in person classes—will be allowed to take more than one class or three credit hours online. These schools must certify to SEVP, through the Form I-20, “Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status,” that the program is not entirely online, that the student is not taking an entirely online course load for the fall 2020 semester, and that the student is taking

the minimum number of online classes required to make normal progress in their degree program. The above exemptions do not apply to F-1 students in English language training programs or M-1 students, who are not permitted to enroll in any online courses (see 8 *CFR* 214.2(f)(6)(i)(G) and 8 *CFR* 214.2(m)(9)(v)).

Forms I-20 Requirements and Maintaining Student Records for the Fall 2020 Semester

For all students attending schools in the United States this fall 2020, designated school officials (DSOs) must issue new Forms I-20 to each student certifying that the school is not operating entirely online, that the student is not taking an entirely online course load for the fall 2020 semester, and that the student is taking the minimum number of online classes required to make normal progress in their degree program. DSOs must indicate this information in the Form I-20 Remarks field in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS).

Schools must update and reissue all Forms I-20 to reflect these changes in program enrollment and student information within 21 business days of publication of this Broadcast Message, on Aug. 4, 2020. When issuing new Forms I-20, please prioritize students who require new visas and are outside of the country.

For the fall 2020 semester, continuing F and M students who are already in the United States may remain in Active status in SEVIS if they make normal progress in a program of study, or are engaged in approved practical training, either as part of a program of study or following completion of a program of study. If a school changes its operational stance mid-semester, and as a result a nonimmigrant student switches to only online classes, or a nonimmigrant student changes their course selections, and as a result, ends up taking an entirely online course load, schools are reminded that nonimmigrant students within the United States are not permitted to take a full course of study through online classes. If nonimmigrant students find themselves in this situation, they must leave the country or take alternative steps to maintain their nonimmigrant status such as transfer to a school with in-person instruction.

For the fall 2020 semester, continuing F and M students outside of the United State, whose schools of enrollment are only offering online classes, may remain in Active status in SEVIS if they are taking online courses and are able to meet the normal full course of study requirements or the requirements for a reduced course of study. Only students enrolled at a school that is only offering online coursework can engage in remote learning from their home country. In this case, DSOs should annotate the student's record to make it clear that the student is outside the US but taking full time online courses as that is the only choice offered by the school.

School Reporting and Procedural Requirements

- 1) Schools that offer *entirely online classes or programs* or *will not reopen* for the fall 2020 semester *must* complete an operational change plan and submit it to SEVP@ice.dhs.gov no later than Wednesday, July 15, 2020. The subject line must read: "Fall 2020 (Fully Online/Will not Reopen) – School Name and School Code."
- 2) Certified schools that will not be entirely online but will reopen in the fall and that will use any of the following educational formats must update their operational plans by August 1, 2020 and include whether they will be:

- Solely in-person classes, or
- Delayed or shortened sessions, or
- A hybrid plan of in-person and remote classes.

These plans shall also be submitted to SEVP@ice.dhs.gov and the subject line must read: “Fall 2020 (in person/hybrid/modified session) – School Name and School Code

- 3) Schools should update their operational plans if circumstances regarding their operational posture change within 10 calendar days.

SEVP will continue to develop and provide resources to stakeholders on ICE.gov, including answers to frequently asked questions, to clarify and expand upon information in this Broadcast Message.

Disclaimer

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