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## Frequently Asked Questions for SEVP Stakeholders about Guidance for the Fall 2020 Semester

Last Updated: July 7, 2020

This document provides answers to frequently asked questions from Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) stakeholders about the program’s guidance for F and M students and SEVP-certified schools for the fall 2020 semester.

*Note: SEVP continues to actively monitor the evolving situation related to Coronavirus Disease (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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## **General**

### **Shift from COVID-19 guidance to fall 2020 guidance**

**1. Why did the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) adopt this policy for the fall 2020 semester and change from the spring semester approach?**

- A. In the spring semester, DHS was faced with an urgent need to address challenges in this area mid-semester as the COVID-19 situation began evolving. Heading into a new semester this fall, DHS is adopting a new approach to carefully balance public health concerns against the varied approaches that schools and universities are taking to combat the spread of COVID-19.

Under DHS' fall 2020 guidance, all students scheduled to study at a U.S. institution in the fall will be able to do so, though some will be required to study from abroad if their presence is not required for any in-person classes in the United States. Through this guidance, DHS is seeking to maximize flexibility for students to continue their studies, while minimizing the risk of transmission of COVID-19 by not admitting students into the country who do not need to be present to attend classes in-person.

**2. When does the new fall 2020 guidance take effect?**

- A. SEVP's guidance for fall 2020 will take effect at the start of a school's defined fall semester.

**3. Will the new fall 2020 guidance supersede SEVP's current COVID-19 guidance? If so, when will the current COVID-19 guidance no longer be in effect?**

- A. Yes, the new fall 2020 guidance will supersede SEVP's current COVID-19 guidance located at [ICE.gov/Coronavirus](https://ice.dhs.gov/coronavirus). However, SEVP's current COVID-19 guidance will remain in effect through the end of a school's summer semester.

### **Interagency coordination**

**1. Did DHS coordinate with its government partners prior to issuing guidance for fall 2020?**

- A. Yes, DHS worked closely with its component agencies and partners at the U.S. Department of State prior to issuing guidance for the fall 2020 semester.



The health and safety of all students is of the utmost importance. A working group, which consisted of representatives from several government agencies, assessed the use of continued remote learning by nonimmigrant students in light of COVID-19. The group determined that three options—remote learning from outside the United States, in-person classes and a hybrid model that combined both in-person and online classes—provided the best options for flexibility for nonimmigrant students to continue education with health risks associated with international travel at this time. DHS also coordinated with the Department of State on issues related to visa issuance and U.S. Customs and Border Protection on issues related to the port of entry process.

## **Nonimmigrant Students**

### **Maintaining student records**

- 1. ) Are students attending schools that are entirely online barred from attending that school?**
  - A. No. Students will not be permitted to enter or remain in the United States to attend such schools *but they are not barred from continuing to attend all classes at these schools from abroad*. This approach balances students' ability to continue their studies while minimizing the risk of spread of COVID-19 in our communities by ensuring that individuals who do not need to be present in the United States are not physically here.
  
- 2. Can continuing F and M students study online outside the United States and remain in Active status in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS)? Are designated school officials (DSOs) responsible for maintaining these records?**
  - A. Yes, continuing F and M students may remain in Active SEVIS status while studying online, outside the United States. As these students remain Active in SEVIS, DSOs are responsible for maintaining these student records.

### **Form I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status"**

- 1. Will SEVP still allow electronic Form I-20 issuance for the fall 2020 semester?**
  - A. Yes, SEVP will still allow electronic Form I-20 issuance for the fall semester, and DSOs may electronically send Forms I-20 to student email addresses listed in SEVIS.



In the case of students who are minors, 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 fall 2020 semester procedural changes.

**2. What do DSOs need to annotate on the Form I-20 for students attending hybrid schools? Where should DSOs annotate this information on the Form I-20?**

- A. As noted in [Broadcast Message: COVID-19 and Fall 2020](#), all students attending schools in the United States this fall 2020, 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 SEVIS.

**I-901 SEVIS Fee**

**1. Will students receive an I-901 SEVIS Fee refund if they paid the Fee, entered the United States and now must leave?**

- A. No, students will not receive an I-901 SEVIS Fee refund in this situation.

**SEVP-certified Schools**

**Reporting school changes**

**1. By what date do schools need to submit operational change plans to SEVP? How should these plans be submitted?**

- A. 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](mailto: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."

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.

Schools must submit these plans to [:sevp@ice.dhs.gov](mailto:sevp@ice.dhs.gov) with the subject line: "Fall 2020 (in person/hybrid/modified session)- School Name and School Code."

Please refer to the Optional COVID-19 School Reporting Template that schools can use to report temporary procedural adaptations.

Schools should report subsequent changes within 10 days of the change.

**2. Does the fall 2020 guidance apply to schools generally or programs specifically? How should schools report information if certain university components are fully online while others are hybrid (e.g., a university's medical school is hybrid while a business school is fully online)?**

- A. Reporting, generally, applies to a school. However, when a school's instructional methodology varies by either a program designation or degree or by an instructional site, the school should indicate the differences.

**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 cannot 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.

**4. Do schools that will not have any F or M students enrolled in the fall 2020 semester need to send procedural change documents to SEVP?**

- A. No, only schools with F or M students currently enrolled need to submit procedural adaptation documents to SEVP.



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## **SEVP Response Center Contact Information**

For general SEVP questions, case-specific questions and SEVIS technical help, contact the SEVP Response Center (SRC). SRC offices are open Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. ET, except federal holidays.

- **Telephone:**
  - 703-603-3400 or 1-800-892-4829 for general and case-specific questions.
- **Email:**
  - [SEVP@ice.dhs.gov](mailto:SEVP@ice.dhs.gov) for general questions.
  - [SEVISHelpDesk@ice.dhs.gov](mailto:SEVISHelpDesk@ice.dhs.gov) for SEVIS technical questions.