

**International Student Services  
University of Florida International Center (UFIC)**

***Frequently Asked Questions***

**Guidance for Fall 2020**

**Last updated: August 5, 2020**

***NOTE: This FAQ is based on currently available information and may be revised as needed***

- This document is based on guidance provided by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security published on [March 9](#), [March 13](#), [July 24](#), the COVID-19 [FAQ](#) and a Fall 2020 [FAQ](#). The ICE Guidance on COVID-19 [site](#) is updated periodically for schools hosting F-1 and M-1 students. We encourage you to read the above referenced documents for context.
- This guidance does not currently apply to students on J-1 visas. At the moment we have been informed that: “The exchange [J visa] visitors who are already in the U.S. in Active status can continue with online classes to help reduce the spread of COVID-19.” Should you have any questions regarding J-1 students, please contact EVS at [EVS@ufic.ufl.edu](mailto:EVS@ufic.ufl.edu).
- The University of Florida will be operating in a hybrid model for fall 2020, which consists of a mix of in-person and online classes.
- UFIC is providing this FAQ document primarily to help explain our understanding of the SEVP guidance for the situation of F1 students who plan to attend the University of Florida in fall 2020.
- This FAQ is only applicable to Fall 2020, pending any updated guidance from SEVP.
- At the University of Florida, a [full course load](#) means 9 credits for graduate and professional students and 12 credits for undergraduate students.

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## Registration within the U.S.

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**Question: How should continuing F1 international students enroll in fall 2020, if presently in the U.S. or planning to return to the U.S. by the start of the fall semester? Is a 100 percent online course load allowed?**

Yes, the SEVP guidance for fall 2020 clarifies that continuing F1 students may enroll in 100 percent online course load for fall 2020 and still maintain valid F1 status. This applies to both continuing F1 students studying within the U.S. and those studying while abroad.

Under normal circumstances (prior to the temporary Covid-19 related guidance), F1 students must enroll in a [full course load](#) and there is a limit on the number of online credits that may be taken towards the minimum full course load per semester. At the University of Florida, a full course load means 9 credits for graduate and professional students, and 12 credits for undergraduate students. One course, or 3 credits maximum, online can be used to fulfill the full course load. The remainder of the full course load must consist of courses with a physical presence requirement.

In light of the global pandemic, SEVP issued a temporary exception for the spring and summer 2020 terms, allowing students to enroll completely in online coursework. This flexibility will continue into the fall 2020 semester for continuing F1 students.

F1 students who were present in the U.S. already pursuing a degree program in F1 status, or engaged in post-completion practical training (OPT or STEM OPT) as of spring 2020, are allowed to enroll for fall 2020 according to how their school is offering courses for fall 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Students in this category are considered “continuing” students with already Active SEVIS records as of spring 2020. Even if all courses are taken online, this category of F1 students is deemed to be maintaining F1 status, as long as they enroll for a full course load, meaning 9 credits for graduate/professional students and 12 credits for undergraduate students.

**Question: Is the SEVP relaxation of the online course limit applicable to both new students starting a degree program in fall 2020 and existing students continuing enrollment in a degree program?**

No. The policy guidance that allows for a relaxation of the online course limit, including 100% online enrollment, specifically applies to continuing F1 students that were present in the U.S. as of March 9, 2020.

Any new “initial” student entering the U.S. to begin a degree program after March 9, 2020 may not enroll 100% online within the U.S. These new F1 students need to have at least some percentage of the full course load that requires physical presence on the school’s campus (at least one course).

**Question: Which groups of students are considered “continuing students” for whom the online credit limit relaxation is allowed?**

- Any F1 student that was in the U.S. (in spring 2020) studying at UF in a degree program that began as of spring 2020 or earlier and is continuing studies in the same degree program.
- Any F1 student that was in the U.S. (in spring 2020) at another SEVP certified school and is completing a SEVIS transfer to the University of Florida to begin studies for fall 2020 as long as the student is inside the U.S. and completes the check-in requirement with the University of Florida International Center.
- Any F1 student that graduated from one program at UF either in spring or summer 2020 and will begin a new degree program at UF in fall 2020 as long as the student obtained a timely change of education level I-20.
- Any F1 student that was engaged in post-completion practical training (OPT or STEM OPT) during the spring of 2020 and will subsequently begin a new degree program in fall 2020; provided the student obtained a timely transfer pending I-20 (if doing a SEVIS transfer between schools) or a timely change of education level I-20 from UF.
- Any F1 student that began a degree program at UF in summer 2020, while present in the U.S., is considered a continuing student for fall 2020.

**Question: How should new students, coming from abroad to start a degree program in fall 2020, enroll to maintain valid F1 status in the U.S.?**

New students, also referred to as “Initial” students, may arrive in the U.S. to begin a new degree program as long as they will be enrolling in a full course load and some percentage of their course load will require the student’s physical presence on campus. Essentially these new F1 students may **not** be enrolled in a 100% online course load within the U.S. Thus, it is reasonable to understand that new “initial” students must have at least one course that requires physical presence (such as a campus-based course or hybrid/blended course).

### **Question: Which groups of students are considered “initial students”?**

- Any student that was issued an I-20 for reason of “initial attendance.” These students are typically present abroad, and have not previously established F1 status in the U.S. Their SEVIS records are in “initial” status until the student enters the U.S. with the F1 visa and I-20, obtains an I-94 record that reflects entry in F1 status, and reports to the school to complete the mandatory check-in. The SEVIS record is only activated once the student enters the U.S. in F1 status, reports to the school and enrolls for a full course load.
- Any student that was issued an I-20 for reason of “initial attendance”
  - because of a prior F1 status violation and decided to travel and reestablish F1 status
  - because they held a different visa category and travelled abroad to apply for the F1 visa at a U.S. consulate or embassy
  - because they took a leave from studies that exceeded five months
- Any student that was issued an I-20 for reason of “initial attendance – change of status requested” because they applied for a change to F1 status with USCIS within the U.S.

## SEVIS Transfer Students

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### **Question: What is the proper procedure for SEVIS transfer-in students to maintain F1 status in fall 2020?**

#### Transfer-in student remaining in the U.S.

New UF students completing a SEVIS transfer from a previous school to UF, who remain in the U.S., will need to enroll in a full course load for fall 2020. Whether all courses are online or not, does not impact the F1 status, because these students are considered “continuing” due to having been in the U.S. as of spring 2020, already in F1 status. Once the check-in with UFIC is completed and the student enrolls full time, the SEVIS record will be activated.

#### Transfer-in student traveling abroad and returning to the U.S. in time for fall 2020

If a new UF student completing a SEVIS transfer from a previous school to UF, travelled abroad and will return to enroll within the U.S. for fall 2020, the student must complete the check-in with UFIC and enroll in a full course load. Whether all courses are online or not does not impact the F1 status, because the student is considered “continuing” due to having been in the U.S. as of spring 2020, already in F1 status. Once the check-in with UFIC is completed and the student enrolls full time, the SEVIS record will be activated.

#### Transfer-in student traveling abroad but not returning to the U.S. for fall 2020

If a new UF student completing a SEVIS transfer from a previous school to UF travelled abroad and will not return to enroll within the U.S. for fall 2020, the SEVIS record may not be activated. Instead, the I-20 that was issued for fall 2020 will need

to be updated to spring 2021 for the student to return to enroll from within the U.S. in spring 2021. In this case, because the student cannot report to the school in person, the SEVIS record is handled in a similar way to the “initial” students. The assigned UFIC [F1 Advisor](#) will work with the student to submit a request for SEVIS to update the program start date on the I-20 to reflect the spring 2021 start date. If the student does not intend to arrive on campus for spring 2021, the current SEVIS record will be terminated and a subsequent SEVIS record (with initial I-20) can be issued for the semester (beyond spring 2021) in which the student plans to arrive on campus. A student in this situation may decide to enroll from abroad (whether part or full time) or not enroll at all. If they choose to enroll, the student needs to complete the entire semester from abroad. If they do not enroll, the student should request that the academic department defer the admission term to spring 2021.

## Registration from abroad

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### **Question: Can international students currently outside the U.S. or planning to depart the U.S. prior to fall 2020, remain abroad and take all courses online for fall 2020?**

Yes. Students may enroll in all online courses while remaining abroad. But the SEVIS records for students will be handled differently depending on whether the students are new/initial or continuing.

New Students: If a new student for fall 2020 cannot arrive in the U.S. in time for the start of the fall semester, the student should first communicate directly with their academic department and then follow up with their specific [F1 Advisor](#) at UFIC. The academic department may provide information to the student about the possibility of taking classes online while remaining abroad for the duration of the fall 2020 semester, or the academic department may advise the student to defer admission to a future semester. In either of the above cases, the academic department must advise UFIC of the student’s plan since we will need to provide an updated I-20 to the student that will be effective for the semester in which they intend to arrive in the U.S. for in-person classes.

If a new student who has not entered the U.S., decides to enroll while abroad, F1 status has not been established yet. Thus, the student may enroll for a full course load or less than a full course load, depending on their specific academic program requirements.

Continuing Students: If a continuing student has left the U.S. and does not return to the U.S. in time for the start of fall classes, either because they choose not to, or because they want to return but are unable to do so (e.g. due to delays with visa renewals or inability to travel), the student may choose to enroll from abroad as long as courses are available.

**Caution:** Although enrollment from abroad is possible for continuing students, *F1 status is maintained and the SEVIS record can be kept active as long as the student enrolls in a full course load.* A student that enrolls in less than a full course load may need to seek a [reduced course load](#) authorization or may need to seek a temporary [leave of absence](#).

### **Question: Does the 5-month rule apply to F1 students that study from abroad for fall 2020?**

No. The 5-month rule means that for a student that departs the U.S. for a period exceeding 5 months, the F1 visa becomes invalid. To return to studies, the student will need to obtain a new Initial I-20, pay the SEVIS I-901 fee for the new SEVIS

record, and likely apply for a new visa. However, the 5-month rule applies when the student does not maintain full time enrollment at their school. Thus, for a student that enrolls full time while remaining abroad for fall 2020, the 5-month rule will not negatively impact their F1 status.

**Caution:** If the student chooses to remain abroad and not enroll full time, or not enroll at all, a temporary leave of absence may be necessary. In this situation, the 5-month rule will apply.

### **Question: Can F1 students conduct research from abroad for fall 2020 and maintain valid F1 status?**

Yes. As long as the research is authorized by the academic department, and the student enrolls full time, the SEVIS record is maintained active and the student may remain abroad or travel back to the U.S. at any point in the semester. In this situation, the 5-month rule does not apply.

**Caution:** Although students may choose to conduct research from abroad and not enroll in research credits, the lack of enrollment would lead to a termination of the SEVIS record for a temporary leave of absence. In this situation, the 5-month rule will apply.

## Course Schedules and Course Modalities

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### **Question: What should I do if I see my class schedule currently says that all my courses are 100% online?**

#### Continuing Students (within the U.S. or abroad):

Since continuing students, who had an active F1 SEVIS record in Spring 2020, can enroll in all online courses for fall 2020, this is not a problem. But if the student wishes to adjust their class schedule, we advise consulting the academic advisor to discuss the availability of other courses.

#### New/Initial Students remaining abroad:

Since new students can take all online courses from abroad, this is not a problem, as long as the student will complete the semester while remaining abroad.

#### New/Initial Students arriving in the U.S.:

As a reminder, if a new student plans to arrive in the U.S. to enroll in classes, the student's enrollment must not consist of 100% online course load. If the student needs to adjust their class schedule, we advise consulting the academic advisor to discuss the availability of courses with physical presence requirements (at least one).

### **Question: How will students know what courses meet physical presence requirements? What about online courses?**

Generally, courses that have less than 100% online classification are considered to have some physical presence requirement (i.e. Primarily Classroom, Hybrid/Blended, and Primarily Distance courses). Courses designated as Full Distance Learning are considered 100% online.

Credits taken for practical training requirements (practicums, internships, etc.) as well as credits taken for independent study or thesis/dissertation research credits are considered to meet the physical presence requirement for students who are at the stage of the degree where enrollment in these types of credits is a normal part of the degree program.

**Caution:** [CPT](#) is generally necessary for practical training credits (“alternate work/study, internship, cooperative education, or any other type of required internship or practicum.” This may include but is not limited to paid and unpaid/volunteer, part-time and full-time, on-campus and off campus rotations, clerkships, externships, clinical, field experience, etc.) Students **must** consult with their specific UFIC [F1 Advisor](#) about the need for CPT whenever enrolling in these type of credits, and **prior** to the start of the practical training activity. If CPT is needed, the student must wait to receive written authorization on the updated I-20 before engaging in the practical training activity.

### **Question: What will happen to F1 students if there is a change in course format during the semester?**

Courses that have been designated as fully online or hybrid/blended at UF, are expected to remain that way for the duration of the semester.

If the COVID-19 situation worsens, the UF administration will consider input from subject matter and health experts in any decisions to move classes to full online format. There is no definitive guidance on this at this time, as the COVID-19 situation is constantly changing. However, SEVP did clarify that if schools need to change to full online instruction at some point in the semester, the international students’ ability to remain in the U.S. will not be negatively impact. Essentially all F1 students in the U.S. may remain in the U.S.

## Additional Registration Questions

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### **Question: How should Masters Thesis and Doctoral students, who have completed all coursework and have only research remaining, enroll in fall 2020?**

For students who have already completed all coursework and have only research remaining to complete the degree, enrollment in only research credits is fine. Research credits are considered to meet physical presence and enrolling in these credits is normal at this stage of their degree program. Students should continue to observe the “**Enrollment Requirements for Master’s Thesis and Doctoral Students**” explained in the [Registration Requirements](#) UFIC page.

### **Question: What happens if a continuing F1 international student decides not to enroll for Fall 2020?**

Whether the student is currently in or has already left the U.S., the student must request a [Leave of Absence](#) (LOA). In this case, the SEVIS record will be terminated for Authorized Early Withdrawal. A copy of the flight itinerary showing the departure date must be submitted as part of the LOA request.

- A student who is currently in the U.S. must depart the U.S. within 15 days of the SEVIS record termination and must remain abroad until at least December 09, 2020.
- If a student has already left the U.S., is unable to return, and will not enroll for classes from abroad, the student must remain abroad until at least December 09, 2020.

**Caution:** Depending on the duration of the temporary leave, the 5-month rule will impact how the current SEVIS record is handled and if a new SEVIS record will need to be issued in the future. Thus, please read the detailed information about the Leave of Absence process on the UFIC site. The duration of the leave may also impact eligibility for CPT and OPT upon return from the leave.

**Question: How long can international students be away from school before returning to complete a degree program?**

The decision about the duration of the leave largely rests with the student based on his or her individual circumstances. However, we caution the student to be informed about the impact of the 5-month rule when making this decision. If a student is absent from UF for three consecutive semesters, the student must apply for readmission to the program before returning to enroll. Students should discuss the readmission process directly with the academic department. If the student is readmitted to the program, the International Center should be notified. The specific UFIC [F1 Advisor](#) will work with the student to process an initial I-20 for the semester in which the student will return to enroll.

**Question: What if an F1 student in the U.S. is supposed to graduate in fall 2020? How should they enroll?**

Students planning to graduate in fall 2020 should enroll for the number of credits needed to complete degree requirements to graduate even if the total credit enrollment results in less than 9 for graduate students and less than 12 for undergraduate students. Students must submit the [Degree Application](#) via [ONE.UF](#) prior to the deadline and as soon as possible once the drop/add week ends. Students should continue to observe the *“Final Semester Minimum Registration Requirements”* explained in the [Registration Requirements](#) UFIC page for *total number of credits*. As a reminder, for fall 2020 all the credits may be taken online if necessary.

**Question: What is the impact on OPT eligibility for a student who will graduate in fall 2020?**

For a student in the U.S. who will graduate in fall 2020, the student may apply for [OPT](#) as long as they otherwise meet all other OPT eligibility requirements.

For a student enrolling from abroad who will graduate in fall 2020, OPT eligibility may be adversely impacted. This is because a student must be in the U.S. with a valid I-94 entry record along with a valid SEVIS record to file an application with USCIS for OPT authorization. To our knowledge, USCIS has not indicated any change to the standard policy. This means the student that remains abroad, would need to re-enter the U.S. in F1 status prior to the graduation date and prior to filing the application with USCIS to be eligible to apply for OPT.



## Practical Training: CPT, OPT, STEM OPT

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### **Question: Is there any impact for students participating in Practical Training (CPT, OPT, STEM OPT)?**

[CPT](#) (approved by UF): Participation in CPT is allowed, according to the normal CPT eligibility requirements. Credits taken for CPT participation count as physical presence credits (*not* as online credits). Students seeking CPT approval for fall 2020 must register according to the normal CPT registration requirements. It is understood that CPT participation will occur *within* the U.S.

[OPT](#) (SEVIS record managed by UF): For students who have already graduated and are on an active period of OPT, the fall 2020 enrollment guidance does not impact their OPT since they may not be enrolled in a degree program while on OPT. The student must continue to work as necessary to maintain F1 status as described in the regulations applicable for OPT.

For a student who will transition from OPT to starting a new degree program, the student must communicate with the school at which he or she will enroll to ensure proper registration requirements during fall 2020 according to how that school will operate. If the student is admitted to a new degree program at UF, they must submit an [I-20 request for a Change of Education Level](#) within [all applicable deadlines](#). The remainder of OPT, if any, then becomes invalid as of the first day of classes at UF. A student transitioning from OPT to begin a new program at UF for fall 2020 must enroll in a full course load; it does not have any impact if all courses are online or not as long as the student is within the U.S.

[STEM OPT](#) (SEVIS record managed by UF): For students who are on an active period of STEM OPT, the fall 2020 enrollment guidance does not impact them since students may not be enrolled in a degree program while on STEM OPT. The student must continue to work as necessary to maintain F1 status as described in the regulations applicable for STEM OPT.

For a student who will transition from STEM OPT to starting a new degree program, the student must communicate with the school at which they will enroll to ensure proper registration requirements during fall 2020 according to how that school will operate. If the student is admitted to a new degree program at UF, they must submit an [I-20 request for a Change of Education Level](#) within [all applicable deadlines](#). The remainder of STEM OPT, if any, then becomes invalid as of the first day of classes at UF. A student transitioning from STEM OPT to begin a new program at UF for fall 2020 must enroll in a full course load; it does not have any impact if all courses are online or not as long as the student is within the U.S.

[OPT/STEM OPT approved students with SEVIS records managed by another school:](#)

For a student who will transition from OPT or STEM OPT, coming from another U.S. school to UF, the SEVIS transfer in procedure applies. Please refer to the section of this FAQ that addresses SEVIS transfer-in students.

## Change in Visa status to F1

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### **Question: What is the proper procedure for students seeking a change of visa status to F1? How should these students enroll in fall 2020?**

[Students seeking an F1 visa abroad at a U.S. consulate or embassy:](#)

Students that travelled abroad for the purpose of applying for an F1 visa at a U.S. consulate or embassy will need to follow the registration procedures for new “Initial” students. Any new “initial” student entering the U.S. to begin a degree

program after March 9, 2020 may not enroll 100% online within the U.S. These new F1 students need to have at least some percentage of the full course load that requires physical presence on the school's campus (at least one course).

Students seeking F1 status within the U.S. who have their application pending with USCIS:

If the application seeking F1 status is still pending with USCIS, within a few weeks of fall classes starting, the specific UFIC [F1 Advisor](#) will defer the I-20 to the next semester (spring 2021). The student should send a copy of the newly updated I-20 to USCIS with the copy of the receipt/case notice and a short letter explaining that the I-20 has been deferred to the next available semester since a decision on the case was not received in time for the start of fall 2020 classes. Students in this situation may enroll for fall 2020 courses as long as their current visa status allows enrollment. If the current visa status does not permit enrollment in a school of higher education, the student may not enroll. For case specific advise, students may contact their specific UFIC [F1 Advisor](#).

Students seeking F1 status within the U.S. who have an approval for F1 status by the start of fall 2020:

If the application is approved in time for the start of fall 2020, the student will receive a formal approval notice from USCIS stating the effective date of the F1 status. The student needs to provide a copy of this approval letter to UFIC and complete the mandatory check-in requirement. Students with newly approved F1 status may not enroll 100% online within the U.S. These new F1 students need to have at least some percentage of the full course load that requires physical presence on the school's campus (at least one course).

## Timelines and Timeframes

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### **Question: What are the SEVIS reporting deadlines for new and continuing students?**

- New students can enter the U.S. up to 30 days prior to the program start date. For fall 2020, the program start date is August 31<sup>st</sup>, thus students may begin entering the U.S. in F1 status on August 1<sup>st</sup> or later.
- New students must report to the school (check-in with UFIC) within 30 days of the program start date. Thus, new students need to be able to arrive on campus by August 31<sup>st</sup> and no later than September 30<sup>th</sup>.
- Transfer in students are not limited by the 30-day prior to program start date requirement and thus can travel abroad and return prior to the program start date as long as they have the valid UF I-20, and valid F1 visa and passport.
- Transfer in students must report to the school (check-in with UFIC) within 15 days of the program start date. Thus, transfer in students need to be able to arrive on campus by August 31<sup>st</sup> and no later than September 15<sup>th</sup>.
- Continuing students and change of education level students are not limited by the 30-day prior to program start date requirement and thus can travel abroad and return as long as they have an active SEVIS record, valid I-20, and valid F1 visa and passport.
- All students who enroll need to have their fall 2020 schedules finalized by the end of the drop/add week (September 4<sup>th</sup>). Please see the official [UF critical dates](#) site for all university-wide deadlines.
- Students who will request a temporary [leave of absence](#) must submit the request to UFIC by the end of the drop/add week (September 4<sup>th</sup>).
- Students who will graduate in fall 2020, please submit the degree application before the deadline (September 25<sup>th</sup>)
- UF is required to report in SEVIS the enrollment status of all new and continuing students within 30 days from the semester start date, thus by September 30<sup>th</sup>.

### **Question: Will new students be receiving new I-20s?**

Yes. Depending on the arrival or deferral procedure, new F1 students will receive updated I-20s. Student do not need to submit an I-20 request. We are addressing the need for the updated I-20 at this time.

New students who arrive in the U.S., report to UF, complete the mandatory check-in with UFIC, and enroll for a full course load with at least one course which requires physical presence, will receive a continued attendance I-20 once the SEVIS record is activated, around the middle to late September.

New students who do not arrive in the U.S., will receive updated I-20s depending on their chosen course of action for fall 2020. If the student has the admission deferred to spring 2021 or a later semester, the I-20 will be updated according to the new semester of admission. If the student enrolls from abroad for fall 2020 and intends to arrive on campus for spring 2021, the I-20 will be updated to reflect the spring 2021 class start date. If an I-20 was not previously issued, but the student still intends to begin the degree program at UF, the I-20 will be issued according to the student's chosen course of action of either deferring the admission term or enrolling from abroad for fall 2020. The I-20 updates for spring 2021 or later will largely be processed starting in late September to early October.

New students who decline the admission offer, should inform the academic department and their specific UFIC [F1 Advisor](#) about their decision. If an I-20 was issued, it will be cancelled.

### **Question: Will continuing students be receiving new I-20s?**

No. Continuing students do not generally receive new I-20s unless they specifically ask for an updated one for travel purposes or because they applied for an F1 process that results in a new I-20 being issued.

## Expirations: I-20, Passport, Visa, Grace Period

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### **Question: Will the electronic I-20s be useful for all processes just like the paper I-20s?**

Yes. During the COVID-19 emergency, SEVP has allowed schools to send I-20s to students to the email address listed in SEVIS. These I-20s are to be printed by the student, signed, dated, and used for all processes that require proof of an I-20, just as a paper I-20 provided by the school.

### **Question: What should F1 students do if the I-20 will expire prior to graduation?**

If the I-20 will expire prior to the graduation date, the student should request an [I-20 extension](#) prior to the expiration. Applications need to be submitted to UFIC at least two weeks prior to the I-20 expiration. If the I-20 expires due to the student not submitting a timely extension request, it is considered a violation of the F1 status that merits a termination of the SEVIS record. The student may then need to apply for [reinstatement](#), if eligible.

**Question: When will the I-20 extensions be processed?**

When processing the I-20 extension request, both the submission date of the application and the actual I-20 end date are taken into consideration. Extension requests for August expirations are experiencing a delay due to the number of requests being submitted in a short period of time. However, all extension requests that are submitted in a timely manner, will be processed by UFIC prior to the I-20 expiration date.

**Question: What should F1 students do if the passport expires but embassies are closed due to COVID-19? Does it affect the F1 status?**

We advise students to continue to communicate with their embassies so that they may renew the passport as soon as possible once normal operations resume at their nearest embassy. The expiration of the passport does not negatively impact the F1 status and we may continue to process I-20 extensions as normal for students in this situation.

However, a valid passport is needed for process with other agencies such as USCIS for OPT applications, the Social Security Administration for Social Security Number (SSN) applications, and the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) for driver license and State IDs. For purposes of submitting application to USCIS, we advise including an explanation letter about the soon-to-be expired or already expired passport and the attempts made to renew it. For purposes of SSN applications and DMV related applications, we advise contacting those agencies directly for additional guidance. For entry into the U.S., a valid passport is needed and must generally be valid for at least six months into the future.

**Question: What should F1 students do if the F1 visa expires while in the U.S.? Does it affect the F1 status?**

The visa in the passport must be valid at the time of entry into the U.S. However once in the U.S., the visa can expire without having a negative impact on the F1 status, as long as the I-20 and I-94 record remain valid. A student with an expired visa that does not plan to travel internationally, does not need to renew the visa. If the student will travel internationally, the visa must be renewed prior to returning to the U.S. The visa may only be renewed at as U.S. consulate or embassy abroad and not within the U.S. For detailed information about the visa renewal process, we advise contacting the U.S. consulate or embassy where the student will apply for the renewal. Though the application process is generally the same, different locations may have slightly different requirements for documentation.

International students from Canada do not need an F1 visa in the passport; their entry in F1 status is recoded in the I-94 record upon processing at a U.S. Port of Entry.

**Question: What should F1 students do if the grace period will end and departing the U.S. is not possible? What if the grace period has already ended?**

F1 students have a 60-day grace period after graduation or after completing OPT/STEM OPT. Within the 60-day grace period students have the following options:

- Recent graduates may apply for [OPT](#) with USCIS; the application needs to arrive at USCIS prior to the 60-day grace period ending.  
**Caution:** Students on post completion OPT with a STEM eligible degree and qualifying job, may apply for the [STEM OPT Extension](#) with USCIS; the application needs to arrive at USCIS *prior* to the current OPT/EAD end date. The student may not apply for the STEM OPT extension *while* on the grace period.
- The student may request a [SEVIS transfer](#) to another U.S. school to begin a new degree program; the transfer must occur prior to the grace period ending.
- The student may request a [Change of Education Level](#) I-20 to begin a new degree program at the same school; the new I-20 must be processed prior to the grace period ending.
- The student may apply with USCIS to change visa category; for instance, to a dependent status (if applicable) or B (visitor) status.
- The student may depart the U.S. prior to the 60-day grace period ending.  
**Caution:** A student that is abroad, graduates, and has not applied for OPT, may not re-enter the U.S. in F1 status during the grace period; if a student departs the U.S. prior to the 60<sup>th</sup> day, the remainder of the grace period is void.

In the event the student is trying to depart the U.S. but is unable to do so due to travel restrictions, flight cancelations, or other complications related to COVID-19, we advise the student documents the circumstances and attempts to depart as soon as possible. If this issue comes up later when seeking another U.S. visa or a future immigration related benefit, the student will be able to explain with readily available evidence their good faith efforts to depart the U.S. in a timely manner.

## Visa applications and travel

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### Visa Applications:

We are aware that all U.S. embassies and consulates have experienced closures and reduced services due to the COVID-19 pandemic and that some locations are just recently stating a return to more normalized operations. We will work with students as best as possible to facilitate the I-20 process and updates for students having upcoming visa appointment. Please bear in mind however, that the school is not able to influence how soon a student may obtain an appointment and whether or not the visa will be approved.

For new students that cannot obtain visas in time to arrive for fall 2020, please review the sections of this FAQ that address new/initial student procedures. We will work as best as possible to make the I-20s available for the spring 2021 visa application cycle.

For continuing students seeking visa renewals, if the new visa is not obtained in time to arrive for fall 2020, please review the sections of this FAQ that address enrollment from abroad for continuing students and the section that addresses requesting a temporary leave of absence.

### Travel:

We are aware that students currently abroad may face travel restrictions due to closed borders, U.S. travel bans imposed by the Trump administration, or unavailability of flights. We will do our best to assist students with upcoming travel plans if they need updated I-20s for travel. However, the school is not able to guarantee entry into the U.S. will be granted by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers. We advise that all students seeking entry in F1 status, carefully review the [F1 Travel](#) page for important information.

Additionally, we advise all travelers keep informed about COVID-19 related travel guidance from the U.S. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) the U.S. Department of State and the [Transportation Security Administration](#). Additionally, please check with the airlines prior to any scheduled flight to ensure you have the most up-to-date information for purposes of traveling and any applicable safety precautions.

## **Additional Resources:**

### **COVID-19 Related Resources**

- Department of State has [advisories for international travelers](#)
- Customs and Border Protection issues [travel and trade advisories](#)
- Department of Homeland Security has information on arrival restrictions for [certain foreign nationals](#), restrictions for [Canada and Mexico border crossing](#), and [news and updates](#)

**Department of State Services:** visa appointment wait times and COVID-19 country-specific operations

- [Visa Appointment Wait Times](#)
- [Country-Specific Operations](#)

**CDC travel page:** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>

## Insurance

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### **Insurance:**

We are aware that many students who plan to remain abroad for fall 2020 have concerns about the insurance requirements and if those can be waived. Please visit <https://healthcompliance.shcc.ufl.edu/faq/faq-2/> regarding all insurance questions. If your question is not addressed at that page, please contact the Health Compliance Office via email at [healthcompliance@shcc.ufl.edu](mailto:healthcompliance@shcc.ufl.edu).

## New Student Check-in

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**Question: Do all new international students have to complete the mandatory check-in with UFIC? What happens if reminder emails are sent but a student will remain abroad?**

The check-in emails go out automatically from our system. We are in the process of changing the check-in process this year to be completely online. However, please be aware that:

New students who remain abroad to take classes online from outside the U.S., do **not** need to complete the check-in. It is only completed by students who enter the U.S. in F1 status to enroll from within the U.S. Similarly, SEVIS transfer students who leave the U.S. and will remain abroad for fall 2020, do **not** need to complete the check-in. Students in this situation may disregard the check-in reminder emails.

New students who arrive in the U.S. to take classes from inside the U.S., need to complete the online check-in **after** arriving in the U.S., and not before entering the U.S. Similarly, SEVIS transfer students who leave the U.S. but will return in time for fall 2020 classes, need to complete the online check-in only **after** returning to the U.S.

SEVIS transfer students who will not leave the U.S. may complete the online check in starting now.

After completion of the online check-in, a UFIC officer will review the check-in record and follow up with the student via email if anything further is needed. Once the check in is processed, students will receive a welcome email with important information, including a Zoom link for new and transfer students who wish to meet with an F-1 advisor during designated office hours and ask any questions that they might have regarding their status, UF resources, and life in Gainesville.