International Student & Scholar Office Virtual Town Hall

COVID-19 Considerations for F-1 Visa Holders: Fall 2021

May 19th, 2021
Housekeeping Items & Ground Rules

1. Topics to be covered include:
   • Health & Safety
   • Travel
   • Enrollment
   • Employment
2. We will answer questions at the end as time allows.
3. Please keep your microphones on mute.
4. Personal or situation-specific questions should be emailed to an advisor at intlsso@uncc.edu.
5. Recording of this webinar will be posted at isso.uncc.edu soon!
Quick Updates / Reminders

- The ISSO is open during business hours (Monday-Friday 8am-5pm).
- **Phone advising appointments** offered every day except Wednesday. Advance sign-up is required.
- Same 10 business day processing time for most applications.
- Please monitor your emails and check the ISSO’s website for updates.
  - COVID-19 page
  - Fall-21 & Spring-22 FAQ page (Check out our easy to read table!)
- This Town Hall references the [SEVP COVID-19 FAQ’s](#) which is the most comprehensive guidance
Health & Safety
Re-entry COVID testing for returning to campus

- UNC Charlotte strongly recommends for unvaccinated people to wear a face covering.
- The Student Health Center provides COVID testing
- See also after hours/off-campus COVID resources
- See Niner Cares Health and Safety guidelines
Travel
What should I consider when planning to enter the US?

- What are the requirements to enter the country you are travelling to?
- Will you have a valid visa and passport for re-entry?
  - If not, are the U.S. embassies fully operational in your country?
- All must follow the CDC requirements for re-entry to the U.S.
- Must have a negative, approved COVID-19 test prior to arrival
  - If you plan to travel internationally, you will need to get tested
    - No more than 3 days before your arrival to the United States
    - Show negative result to the airline before you board
What should I consider when planning to enter the US? (Continued)

- If you don’t have a valid visa, can’t get a flight, etc., you can keep trying, but this is **out of the ISSO’s control**

- **National Interest Exception (NIE)** automatically granted for F-1 students coming from the travel advisory areas of China, Iran, Brazil, South Africa, and Iran, United Kingdom, Ireland, Schengen Zone (regardless of entry date)

- However, **NIE rules for travelers from India** are different
  - Automatically granted if entering after 8/1
  - Must apply if attempting to enter before 8/1
I’m outside the U.S.—can I travel to Charlotte for Fall 2021?

- If you have a valid visa and can get a flight...yes, you can travel to the US to attend UNC-Charlotte
  - You will need an I-20 with a valid travel signature on page two (travel signatures are valid for 12 months for current students)
  - You should arrive on campus in time to fulfill your course requirements -- this is your responsibility
  - We’ll upload a letter to your ISSOconnect Portal that you can use upon re-entry as proof of UNC Charlotte’s method of instruction
What are my options if I’ve decided to take online-only courses?

- If students are taking **online classes** only, they may maintain their F-1 status while studying anywhere in the world (**inside or outside the U.S.**)
  - Be sure to keep your **local address updated** in Banner Self Service
Survey Reminder:

We will be sending out the Fall 2021 Outside the U.S. Confirmation Form

This form alerts the ISSO to annotate your SEVIS record. We will send reminders closer to the start of the fall semester.
**CDC COVID-19 Guidelines - AFTER travel**

**CDC guidelines AFTER international travel**

- Get tested
  - Self isolate for a full 7 days
- If you don’t get tested
  - Self quarantine for 10 days after travel
- Pay attention for symptoms of COVID-19.
SEVP Guidance, Fall 2021 & Spring 2022 Enrollment
SEVP Guidance Overview:
Top takeaways:

1. UNC Charlotte plans to operate in a hybrid method (an offering of online, hybrid, and in person courses)
2. Continuing students are eligible to enroll in an entirely online course load either within the U.S. or from abroad
3. Students studying outside the U.S. for the fall 2021 semester will need a notation in their SEVIS record, but are able to keep their F-1 record active
Full Time Enrollment (9 cr grad & 12 cr undergrad):

Reduced Course Load Reasons:

1. Illness/medical condition (requires a letter from a doctor)
2. Difficulty understanding English or difficulty adjusting to U.S. teaching methods during 1st semester
3. Course level is an improper placement for the student (requires advisor explanation)
4. Student needs less than full-time to graduate this semester
Students planning to study outside of the U.S.:

- **Continuing students** may study outside of the U.S. for the fall semester and keep their F-1 record active.
- Since you will **remain enrolled full time**, none of the 5 month rules would pertain to you due to COVID-19 exceptions.
- The fall **semester will count towards** the two semester requirement eligibility for CPT and OPT.
- Continuing students need to **complete the fall 2021 Outside the U.S. Confirmation Form** (coming soon) to notify us of your plans.
Leave of Absence:

- A Leave of Absence **temporarily closes your F-1 record** and you must **leave the U.S.** (or remain outside) prior to the start of the fall 2021 semester.
- Consider a Leave of Absence **if you have personal reasons for not wanting to take courses in the fall** (a break from studies, family emergency, etc.).
- Check our [Leave of Absence Webpage](https://www.uncc.edu) and sign up for an advising appointment for more information.
Employment
Can I participate in on-campus employment while outside the U.S?

• See https://provost.uncc.edu/faculty-resources-government/fall-2020-instruction/physical-location-workforce

• Generally, no, this is not allowed
  – Additional costs are extremely high for your Department ($20K+)
  – Doesn’t make sense if your position only pays $5K a semester -- Dept./HR will not approve

• You would need approval from BOTH your Academic/Hiring Dept. and Human Resources prior to starting work
Are there any changes to CPT location due to the fall exceptions for online enrollment?

- If you will work remotely while outside the U.S., your job offer letter must include the statement of understanding provided on our CPT webpage.
- It is your and your employer’s responsibility to research and comply with all tax requirements if you are outside the U.S.
- If you are taking only online courses you can work for an employer outside of the 1.5 hr radius of Charlotte.
- If your courses have any in person component you will only be permitted to work for companies remotely or within that 1.5 hr radius.
How does the latest SEVP guidance impact OPT (off-campus employment authorization)?:

- If in the US, OPT process is “new normal”
- If not in US, if pursuing a full-time course load as a continuing student, your SEVIS record would remain Active and you would continue to accrue time towards the CPT/OPT eligibility requirements.
- Can I apply for OPT from abroad if fall 2021 is my final semester?
  - Generally not recommended; you would want to re-enter the U.S. before applying (entering U.S. mid-semester is allowed, but up to CBP discretion)
Wrap-Up/Reminders

- We still encourage social distancing and mask-wearing to keep yourselves and others healthy!
- DO read your Niner Notices, ISSO emails, ISSO website and other sources of reliable information.
- DO reach out for help if you need it - that’s what we are here for! Only you know what you need.
Questions?
Thank you!