International Student & Scholar Office
Virtual Town Hall

COVID-19 Considerations for F-1 Visa Holders

February 19, 2021
Housekeeping & Ground Rules

1. Topics to be covered include:
   - Immigration Forecast
   - Taxes
   - Stimulus Checks
   - Summer Travel
   - 2021 Enrollment

2. Personal or situation-specific questions should be emailed to an advisor at intlsso@uncc.edu.

3. Do not attempt to annotate or take notes on the shared slides.

4. The slides from this webinar will be posted at isso.uncc.edu soon!
Quick Updates / Reminders

- ISSO staff are working remotely during normal business hours (Monday–Friday 8am–5pm).
- Phone advising appointments offered every day except Wednesday. Sign-up at isso.uncc.edu.
- Same 10 business day processing time for most applications with some slight delays.
- Please update your address if you have moved!
- Please monitor your emails and check official websites for updates.
Immigration Forecast
Change Is On The Horizon...

Due to previous administration’s immigration changes, court case challenges, and impact of COVID-19, we have to revisit many of our immigration practices.

However, the current administration can make significant immigration-related changes and initiatives especially relevant to higher education and some without help from Congress. Here are a few:

- Ending Discriminatory Bans on Entry to the United States
- Recent Employment-Based Changes and Proposals
- Other

Big picture: stability, more engagement with stakeholders (NAFSA, DSOs) etc.
OPT/STEM OPT Forecast:

“The art of prophecy is very difficult, especially about the future.” -- Danish Proverb

- What can we reasonably expect re: OPT/STEM OPT?:
  - No major changes to OPT/STEM OPT expected soon (whew!)
    - Anti-OPT/STEM OPT rhetoric no longer coming from DC
  - Harsher elements of I-765 adjudication may go away (e.g. RFE instead of outright denial)
  - Stability, more engagement with stakeholders (NAFSA, DSOs)
- However...
OPT/STEM OPT Forecast:

- Proposed items, like PhD to green card pathway, need legislative action; no known time frame.
- A lot of the day-to-day OPT/STEM OPT aspects will remain the same:
  - It’ll still take ~90 days for EAD processing
  - Address/Employer reporting still needs to happen
- I-765 fees may still go up; we will let you know
- New administration may be more sympathetic overall, to the USCIS Receipt Notice delay situation e.g.
Glacier Tax Prep (GTP) Software Codes

Tax deadline – Anyone who earned money in the U.S. in 2020 must submit tax forms “file taxes” by April 15th

• Who:
  ○ F-1/J-1 students and scholars, F-1 Students & Scholars, H-1B employees – who have been in the U.S. 5 calendar years or less (a ‘non-resident’ for tax purposes)

• What:
  ○ GTP is tax software for filing federal tax form 1040-NR

• Note:
  ○ ISSO has begun selling GTP licenses, licenses are sold first come, first served
Tax form 8843

All foreign students, teachers or trainees admitted to the United States on an F, J or M visa, even if they had no U.S. earned income for the previous tax year, and their spouses and dependents must file Form 8843.

- **ISSO instructions for 8843:**
  - Common answers for most students
  - Filing address
  - Average time to complete form - 30 min or less
  - Filing deadline is April 15
Stimulus Checks
I received a stimulus check, is that ok?

The ISSO is unable to advise on stimulus checks so we have provided resources from Sprintax

- Blog posts from Sprintax Non-Resident Tax Software
  - Who qualifies for the CARES Act stimulus check
  - What students should do if they received the stimulus check in error
  - Nonresident Guide to CARES Act Stimulus Checks, Second stimulus checks – what nonresidents need to know

- There may or may not be a third stimulus check so review this information as needed
Summer Travel
Important Reminders

- **Travel signatures** are good for 12 months for enrolled students and 6 months for students on OPT/STEM OPT
- There are still delays at embassies due to COVID-19 closures so keep that in mind if you will need to renew your visa
- Be aware of continuing **travel restrictions** due to COVID-19
- All air passengers entering the U.S. will need to have **proof of a negative COVID test** within 3 days of the departure date
2021 Enrollment
Spring 2021:

- Students must maintain their full time enrollment status or be approved for a Reduced Course Load prior to dropping a course.
- The ISSO cannot approve a Reduced Course Load once the semester ends.
- Initial students must keep at least one course with an in-person component for the entire semester.
Spring 2021: Post semester options due to COVID-19

Pass/No Credit

● You will have the option of switching to Pass/No Credit after the semester has ended
● This is an option for international students, but letter grades are better when possible
● Students should speak to their Academic Advisor before selecting this option

Withdrawal for Extenuating Circumstances

● This option allows a student to drop a class after the grade has been issued
● If withdrawing from a class for extenuating circumstances would put your enrollment at less than full time you are unable to select this option
● Even after the semester is over, dropping a course that puts you at below full time enrollment would violate your legal status
Summer 2021:

- Students can choose IF they want to enroll in summer courses
  - If you are graduating in the summer you MUST register for classes
- If you choose to enroll in summer courses there is no credit limit
  - You can take as many or as few classes as you want
- Summer courses can have any method of instruction
- Summer enrollment does not count towards CPT or OPT eligibility
Fall 2021:

- USCIS has not issued official Fall 2021 enrollment guidance.
- We expect that USCIS will return to the actual F-1 regulations
  - UG – 9 credits in-person, 12 credit minimum
  - GR – 6 credits in-person, 9 credit minimum
  - Hybrid classes meet the in-person component for immigration purposes
My I–20/DS–2019 ends in May, but I am not finished with classes

See [Request an Extension of Your I–20/DS–2019](#)

- **Timing**
  - Submit the extension request a minimum of 2 months before your I–20/DS–2019 end date

- **Note:**
  - You must have a valid academic reason for requesting the extension, and you must continue to make normal progress toward completing your degree
Questions?
Tips from the ISSO

● **DO** practice social distancing 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.
Reliable Resources

- **U.S. Customs and Border Protection** – travel information
- **U.S. Department of Homeland Security** – general F-1 immigration resources
- **Student and Exchange Visitor (SEVP) Frequently Asked Questions**
- **ISSO COVID-19 website** – ISSO resources and communications
- **UNC Charlotte NinerNotices** – for currently enrolled students
- **Center for Teaching and Learning** – for currently enrolled students