International Student & Scholar Office Virtual Town Hall

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

December 18th, 2020
Clockwise from left: Amy Mabery, Assistant Director; Melaina Fraboni, International Student & Scholar Advisor; Dillon Clausner, International Student & Scholar Advisor
1. Topics to be covered include:
   • Health & Safety
   • Enrollment
   • Travel
   • 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

● 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.
● The ISSO will be closed from December 24 - January 3.
   ○ Sign up for advising or submit your applications before December 20th!
● Same 10 business day processing time for most applications.
● Please monitor your emails and check the ISSO’s website for updates.
   ○ COVID-19 page
   ○ Spring 2021 Update & 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

- Re-entry testing will be required for the Spring 2021 semester for anyone who will be on campus
- Testing will be provided for free by the university so look for communications regarding scheduling
- See Niner Cares Spring 2021 Re-entry Testing
CDC COVID-19 Guidelines

Follow the CDC safety practices

● Practice social distancing 2 meters from others not in your household
● Wear a mask
● Wash your hands often
● Pay attention for symptoms of COVID-19.

Entering the U.S. after international travel?

● Stay home as much as possible for 14 days, or until you obtain a negative COVID-19 test
SEVP Guidance, Spring 2021 Enrollment
SEVP Guidance Overview:
Top takeaways:

1. UNC Charlotte plans to operate in a **hybrid method** (an offering of online 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 Spring 2021 semester will need a notation in their SEVIS record, but are able to **keep their F-1 record active**
4. When the university moves to an entirely remote status after Spring Break, continuing students will be able to remain within the U.S.
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 within the U.S.:

- **Continuing students** can enroll in **online, hybrid or in person** courses from within the U.S. or abroad while keeping their F-1 record active
  - This includes your final course in your final semester if applicable
- If a continuing student is currently abroad, but **plans to return to the U.S.** for the start of the semester, we’ve **uploaded a letter of support** for your travel in **ISSO Connect**. You should receive an email with the details.
- Be sure to **keep your ‘Local’ U.S. and ‘Permanent’ international addresses updated** in Banner Self Service
Students planning to study outside of the U.S.:

- **Continuing students** may study outside of the U.S. for the spring 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 spring **semester will count towards** the two semester requirement **eligibility for CPT and OPT**.
- Continuing students need to **complete the Spring Enrollment Survey** (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 Spring 2021 semester.

- Consider a Leave of Absence **if you have personal reasons for not wanting to take courses in the Spring** (a break from studies, family emergency, etc.).

- Check our [Leave of Absence Webpage](#) and sign up for an advising appointment for more information.
Travel
I’m outside the U.S.--can I travel to Charlotte for Spring 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 must be here by **January 25th**, if you plan to take in-person classes
  - 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
- If you don’t have a valid visa, can’t get a flight, etc., we’ll discuss that on the next slide
What should I consider when planning to enter the US?

- 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**

- **Active Travel advisories** in effect for **China, Iran, Brazil**

- **Schengen Zone, UK, Ireland**: qualify for a **National Interest Exception**
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
- Graduating students must mail their **OPT** application from within the U.S.
Survey Reminder:

We will be sending out the Spring Enrollment Survey soon asking about your enrollment plans for Spring 2021.

You must complete this survey to minimize any complications with your visa status.
Employment
Can I participate in on-campus employment while outside the U.S?

- Continuing students may participate in on-campus employment outside the U.S. if:
  - You are in valid F-1 status
  - Your supervisor and HR specifically approve that YOU may continue your job while outside the U.S.
  - You have a UNC Charlotte I-9 form on file before exiting the U.S.
  - You are enrolled full-time or are approved for an RCL
  - You have a SSN or can obtain one within 90 days of starting your job
- You are responsible for fulfilling any tax requirements in your home country
Are there any changes to CPT location due to the Spring 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 normal (first OPT workshop=Feb 2nd)
- 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 Spring 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

• **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
Questions?
Thank you!