March 13, 2020

Dear Students & Scholars,
In follow-up to Wednesday’s email from UNC Charlotte regarding the new Coronavirus-related measures and restrictions, we’re writing to give you an update on Services and Programs offered through the International Student and Scholar Office (ISSO) Services.

How ISSO Services and Programs Are Impacted

Advising, In-Person and Phone Options
As of Monday, March 16th until further notice, ISSO will offer two days of in-person walk-in advising hours per week: Mondays from 10 to 12 and on Thursday from 2 to 4pm. Additionally, we will offer phone advising appointments on Tuesdays from 2 pm - 4 pm and Fridays from 10 am - noon.

Document Pick Up From the ISSO
If you have applied for an updated I-20 or DS-2019 from our office, you can continue to pick up your document at the front desk or receive it at the location you indicated in your application.

Travel Signatures
Although we don’t advise for you to travel internationally at this time, if you are traveling and need a travel signature on your I-20 or DS-2019, you may drop your document in-person at the ISSO front desk in-person and allow 4 days processing time.

OPT Application Review Sessions
The ISSO will continue to hold regularly scheduled OPT Review Sessions until further notice. However, we have made some additional spaces available and students should try to attend the earliest possible session (after 1 week of submitting your ISSO OPT application) that they can sign up for. You will receive a link to sign up for an OPT review session once you submit your ISSO OPT application.

All Other In-Person ISSO Programs
All in-person workshops and events previously scheduled for the month of March are now cancelled. Those events are:

1. International Scholar Reception scheduled for March 17th
2. Speed Friending scheduled for March 18th
3. International Coffee Hour scheduled for March 19th
UNC Charlotte Alternative Instructional Method Does Not Violate your Immigration Status

The ISSO has confirmed with both UNC Charlotte and U.S. Immigration that any of your face-to-face classes that are moving to alternative instructional methods in response to COVID-19 will continue to count as face-to-face classes for immigration purposes. As of March 12th, SEVP reiterated that they support universities in their temporary use of alternative instructional methods so that international students can continue to make normal progress in their program of study.

Implications and Risks if You Choose to Leave the U.S.

Very few students are thinking about departing the U.S to return to their home countries due to the current situation. The ISSO strongly discourages all international students from departing the U.S. prior to the completion of the Spring 2020 semester. However, if you do decide to leave the U.S., please be aware of the following risks:

It is possible that you will be unable to return to the U.S. this semester

- There is currently an entry ban for all non-citizens of the U.S. (except lawful permanent residents and immediate family members of US citizens and lawful permanent residents) who have visited China or Iran within 14 days of the day they are trying to enter the US. and those who have been in certain European countries at any point during the 14 days prior to their scheduled arrival to the United States. Please note: This entry ban is applied even to those with valid F-1 and J-1 visas. Visit reliable websites for up to date information.
- Entry bans can change quickly so even if you travel to an area without an entry ban currently, it may change prior to your planned return.
- Boarding a flight is at the discretion of both the airlines and any U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents who may be involved.
- If the airline or CBP thinks that you may be not admissible to the U.S, the airline is permitted to refuse to let you board the flight, and the CBP officer is able to prevent you from re-entering the US.

If you need to renew your visa, check visa appointment times before traveling

- Some U.S. consulates are experiencing extreme delays in visa appointments. Check with the US consulate or embassy closest to your home city for visa wait times.

You may lose eligibility for OPT / CPT if you cannot re-enter the U.S.

- If you leave the US and are unable to return, this could occur if you fail to maintain full-time enrollment for each semester.
• If that occurs, you would need to be enrolled for two subsequent semesters before you could apply for CPT or OPT.
• If you have fewer than two semesters remaining, you would no longer be able to apply for OPT or CPT.

You may lose tuition/credits and/or may experience course sequencing issues
• If you leave the US and are unable to return, you may need to withdraw from the current semester, lose tuition already paid, lose course sequencing for your degree and be unable to finish your program on time.
• Talk to your academic and ISSO advisors about these matters before you decide whether to travel outside the U.S. at this time.

Additional Resources
University NinerNotice Update on Coronavirus
UNC Charlotte Coronavirus (COVID-19) Information Page
Coronavirus Outbreak World Map
U.S. Center for Disease Control COVID-19 Information for Travel

We recognize that you may have questions about what the current situation means for you. Each situation will be different, and we are happy to advise on a case-by-case basis. Please stop by the ISSO during the walk-in advising hours, or schedule a phone advising appointment, for further information.

We thank you for your patience and cooperation; we are here to assist you in any way we can.

Sincerely,
ISSO Staff