COVID-19 Update: Leaving Ann Arbor Before the End of Winter Term 2020

U-M classes will be delivered remotely from March 16 through April 21, due to University measures enacted to minimize the potential spread of COVID-19 [1]. Some international students are considering leaving Ann Arbor and completing the Winter Term from outside the U.S.

There are a variety of issues to review in making this decision, including academic, immigration, and health insurance considerations among other factors.

This advice is based on the information that is currently available to us. The University is continuing to monitor this rapidly changing situation, and this announcement will be updated as we receive new information or new guidance provided by government agencies.

Academic Considerations: Consult with the faculty and instructors who are teaching your classes to confirm what your academic requirements are between now and the end of the term. For example, while President Schlissel's announcement [2] on March 11 confirms that classes will not be held in person through April 21, it is not yet clear how final exams will be handled.
March 13 update: All final exams will also take place remotely in alternative formats [3].

Immigration Status: if you maintain full-time enrollment and participate in your classes in their new format so that you continue to make normal progress towards degree completion, then your current I-20 form and F-1 SEVIS record will remain active even if you are no longer in Ann Arbor for the final weeks of the winter term.

Employment Considerations: If you are in your final term of study and plan to apply for Optional Practical Training, review the OPT application deadlines [4]. These deadlines are not flexible. Remember that you cannot apply for OPT from outside the United States.

Immigration Documents: Review your immigration documents and make sure you have the documents needed to request admission to the US from outside the US, including a valid travel signature [5]. Check the expiration date (program end date) on your I-20. If your I-20 is expiring soon but you will need additional time to complete your academic program, apply for an extension of your I-20 [6]. You will not be able to re-enter the US with an expired I-20.

Re-entry to the United States: If you depart the US now, your ability to return to the US prior or close to the start of fall semester will be determined by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials at the US Port of Entry. There are currently a variety of restrictions prohibiting various groups of foreign nationals
from entering the US due to COVID-19. We have no ability to predict how suspensions of travel will evolve during the upcoming months, nor what kind of scrutiny will be in place at the Port of Entry. Please view our announcements page [7] for more information on travel restrictions and other coronavirus-related topics. Also, the length of time you are outside of the country could impact your ability to return to the U.S. Currently, Department of Homeland Security guidance on F-1 travel [8] and re-entry defines five months as the period of temporary absence from the US for returning F-1 status holders. If you depart the US in mid-March, and do not return until late August (fall term classes are scheduled to begin August 31), then you would fall outside of the five month window. If you are considering staying outside of the US for more than five months, please consult an International Student/Scholar Advisor [9] to discuss your particular circumstances and any changes to your SEVIS record or any new documents that may be required.

Health Insurance: For questions or concerns related to health insurance, please refer to the health insurance information [10] on our website, and direct questions to the health insurance advisor [11]. If you would like to apply for a waiver of your required health insurance while you are outside the U.S., please read U-M International Student/Scholar Health Insurance Requirement and Enrollment Process [12]. Look for the section called Temporary Absence from the U.S. - special procedure while COVID-19 campus measures are in effect.

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Source URL: https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/covid-19-update-leaving-ann-arbor-end-winter-term-2020

Links
[2] https://umich.edu/announcements/
[4] https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/students/f1-students/apply-opt#deadlines
[6] https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/students/f1-students/extension
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