Fall Term 2021 FAQs for Continuing Students

This page will be updated with new information as it becomes available. If you have other questions and concerns, please email the International Center at icenter@umich.edu [1].

Whether you plan to come to campus for the Fall Term or are considering remote study, please be sure to read the Campus Maize and Blueprint [2] web page for detailed information about U-M’s plans for Fall Term 2021, and check it often for updates. If you plan to return to campus for the Fall Term, be sure to review the information about the COVID-19 prevention measures [3] students arriving from international or domestic locations via plane, bus or train are expected to follow. During the Fall Term, courses will be offered in formats that include in-person, remote and mixed (hybrid) instruction, depending on curricular needs.

This FAQ applies to continuing students only. If you are a new student and have not yet entered the United States, please refer to the FAQs for Newly Admitted Students [4]. The FAQs for Newly Admitted Students [4] also apply if you are transferring to U-M after attending an institution located in the U.S. or changing to a new academic level at U-M.

Immigration Status

As a current, continuing F-1 or J-1 student, can I take all remote classes, or must I take a mixture of in-person, mixed and remote classes?

- Current students who began their studies on campus do not have in-person enrollment requirements. You can take the most appropriate courses for your degree program as long as you maintain a full course of study (or have an approved Reduced Course Load [5]) and as long as your proposed course schedule, including your choices of in-person, mixed (hybrid) or remote classes, meets your academic program’s requirements.
- Students who left the United States during or after the Winter 2020 Term and have not been able to return, may choose all online classes for Fall Term 2021, as long as appropriate courses are available and their planned course schedule is acceptable to their academic program. Their SEVIS record and I-20 or DS-2019 will remain in active status.
- Continuing students considering remote study should check with their academic programs regarding any requirements to be in residence or attend in person classes on the Ann Arbor campus.
If study remotely, you must be enrolled full-time, participate in your online courses, and make normal progress toward your degree in order to maintain your immigration status. If you continue to do these things, your SEVIS record and I-20 or DS-2019 will remain in active status.

I would like to study remotely inside the U.S. but from outside Michigan during the Fall Term. Will I lose my F-1 or J-1 status?

As long as you remain enrolled full-time, participate in your online courses, and make normal progress toward your degree, you will maintain your F-1 or J-1 status. You must also update your current address in Wolverine Access. However, be sure to check with your academic unit, since they may require you to be in residence on the Ann Arbor campus. You may also be required to be in residence on the Ann Arbor campus if you are a Graduate Student Instructor or a Graduate Student Research Assistant.

Do I need a new I-20 or a formal letter from the University in order to return to the U.S.?

No. Current DHS guidance does not require this. You can use the most recent I-20 you received from U-M to enter the U.S. If you want, you can also download and print this letter, which explains U-M’s plans for the Fall Term.

If U-M must switch to all-remote classes during the Fall 2021 term, will I be required to leave the U.S.?

No. You will be able to maintain your F-1 or J-1 status through participating in remote classes as long as you are enrolled full-time.

If I move to a new U.S. address, even temporarily due to isolation measures, do I need to report it within 10 days? How do I report it?

Yes, you need to report any change of residential address in the U.S. within 10 days of the change. If you need to move to temporary housing for a COVID-related period of isolation or quarantine of more than 10 days, you should also update your address. Be sure to change it again when you move back into your regular residence. Follow our guidelines for updating your address, and please remember that your “current” address needs to remain a U.S. address.

Health Insurance

Will the mandatory U-M International Health Insurance plan cover COVID-19 testing and treatment?

Yes. The International Student/Scholar Health Insurance Plan covers COVID-19 testing and treatment. GradCare also covers COVID-19 testing and treatment. Please review the health insurance FAQs for details. If you still have questions, contact the International Center’s Health Insurance Advisor.

Does the mandatory health insurance requirement apply to me if I study remotely?

If you are studying remotely in the United States, the health insurance requirement will continue to apply to you. If you plan to study remotely outside the United States, you can request a Fall Term 2021 COVID-19 waiver. You will not be able to make this request until August, 2021.
Travel and Visas

If I plan to leave the U.S. during the Fall Term and need a new travel signature in order to return, what should I do?

You may drop your I-20/DS-2019 off at the International Center during our office hours if you are on campus, or you may submit an online reprint request [11].

If I am enrolled for classes but have been or will be outside the U.S. for more than five months, will I lose my F-1 status?

Under normal circumstances, if an international student were to remain outside of the U.S. for five or more months, they would need a new initial I-20 in order to resume their studies at U-M. This is known as the five-month rule. However, according to the SEVP guidance currently in effect, if you were enrolled full-time for online courses during Winter Term 2021 and continue full-time enrollment during Fall Term 2021, then the five-month rule will not apply to you. As long as your visa stamp is valid (unexpired with multiple entries) you can use it to re-enter the U.S.

I would like to study remotely from outside the U.S. during the Fall Term. Will I lose my F-1 or J-1 status?

- No. As long as you are enrolled full-time, participate in your online courses, and make normal progress toward your degree, your SEVIS record and I-20 will remain in active status. However, you should check with your academic program regarding any requirements to be in residence or attend in person classes on the Ann Arbor campus.

Will my plans to come to campus be affected by travel restrictions?

The COVID-19 entry restrictions [12] the U.S. has imposed are still in effect. However, there are exceptions for F-1 and J-1 students. Please read Visas and Travel for Students from China, India, Iran, Brazil, South Africa, the Schengen Area, the United Kingdom, and Ireland [13] for more information.

My visa has expired, or will expire before I plan to return to the U.S. If I leave the U.S. now, will I need a new visa, or can I re-enter on an expired visa?

If you leave or have left the U.S. and your visa will expire by the date you wish to re-enter the U.S., then you will need to obtain a new visa at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate before you can re-enter the U.S. (Canadian citizens do not need a visa to enter the U.S.).

The U.S. Department of State is resuming routine visa services in a phased-in process, based on local conditions [14]. If you need a new visa, check with the U.S. embassy or consulate nearest you to find out more about their plans and about your options for scheduling an appointment for a visa interview. Try to schedule your visa interview appointment as soon as possible.

If you will be travelling to Canada, Mexico, or adjacent islands, please contact the International Center to see if you are eligible to return to the U.S. with automatic visa revalidation [15]. The U.S. has partially closed the land borders with Canada and Mexico to all non-essential travel, but these closures should not affect students who wish to return to the U.S. for their studies, whether they cross land borders or take flights.
If I need to renew my F-1 or J-1 visa, will an in-person visa interview be required?

Due to a recent U.S. State Department policy change [16], you may not need to have an in-person visa interview if your visa expired within the last 48 months. This policy change is in effect through December 31, 2021. If you need to renew your visa to re-enter the U.S., check the website of the U.S. embassy or consulate where you plan to apply for your visa for detailed information on what services are currently available as well as for eligibility information and instructions on applying for a visa without an interview.

Employment

I have an on-campus job. May I continue that work remotely from my home in the U.S.? May I continue that work remotely from my home country?

Yes, SEVP has issued special guidance confirming that if your on-campus employment has transitioned to remote work or can be performed through remote means, you may continue to engage in on-campus employment remotely.

I need to apply for OPT (Optional Practical Training). Can I do this from elsewhere in the U.S.? Can I do it from outside the U.S.?

You must be physically present in the U.S. at the time you submit your OPT application to USCIS. The International Center will continue to process OPT requests as we receive them. If you are interested in applying for OPT, review the OPT information on the International Center website [17].

Can I leave the U.S. and return home after I mail my OPT application to USCIS? Will I be allowed to re-enter the U.S. to start working once my application is approved?

Yes, you can leave the U.S. when an OPT application is pending with USCIS, but there has always been an element of risk in doing so. The basic risk factor is that if you receive correspondence from USCIS in the mail, such as a Request for Evidence (RFE), you would not be there to respond. This has always been true, and in these extraordinary times, it remains so.

In the best-case scenario, if your application is approved without any issues, your EAD will be delivered to a valid U.S. address (see the OPT online course for more information). USCIS will not send your EAD to an address outside the U.S. You will need to arrange for someone to send you the EAD because you should have it with you when you re-enter the U.S. Please be aware that you are still considered to be an F-1 student while on OPT, and you will need to have valid travel documents [18] with you when you re-enter the U.S.

Please also remember that the COVID-19 entry restrictions [12] the U.S. has imposed are still in effect. Although there are exceptions for F-1 students [13], it is not yet clear whether these exceptions apply to F-1 OPT students.

I am a J-1 student, are there any changes to Academic Training I should be aware of?

As Academic Training requirements are different than OPT, you should refer to Academic Training for J-1 Students [19] for guidance. The Department of State has confirmed that active J-1 students engaged in
Taxes and Social Security

How do I apply for my Social Security Number since Social Security Administration offices are still closed?

You can request an in-person appointment by following the instructions at Applying for a Social Security Number and Card [20], and you should plan to apply for your SSN as soon as possible after you receive a job offer. However, since you do not need an SSN to begin working, a delay in obtaining your SSN due to the pandemic should not affect your employment start date.

I have questions about U.S. taxes.

For the 2020 tax year, the filing deadline for both federal and state tax forms is May 17, 2021. The International Center’s Tax Information Session [21] has general filing tips. The Glacier Tax Prep software [22] for the 2020 tax year will be available through December 31, 2021. Glacier Tax Prep software for the 2021 tax year will be available in early February.

Reminder: International Center staff are not tax experts. The tax information [23] on our website does not substitute for advice from a qualified tax professional or the Internal Revenue Service.

Is the U.S. Government sending out a third round of economic stimulus payments?

Yes, the U.S. government is sending out a third round of Economic Impact Payments (EIP). However, since many international students and scholars are nonresidents for U.S. tax purposes [24], they are not eligible for the payment. As was the case with the first and second rounds of payments, if you were not a U.S. tax resident for 2020, you probably are not eligible for the payment. You must also have a social security number.

If you believe you are eligible for the economic impact payments

- These payments are being issued automatically. There is no need to contact the IRS to request the payment. However, you can check the status of your payment using the IRS Get My Payment tool [25].

If you received an economic impact payment in error:

- If you received any of the economic stimulus payments but are not eligible for them because you were a nonresident for U.S. tax purposes in 2020, you should follow these instructions [26] to return the payment (s) to the IRS. Be sure to keep a copy of the check and of anything else that you send to the IRS.
- You should also confirm that your recent tax returns (2018 or 2019) were filed correctly. Most likely, you received the payment (s) because you incorrectly filed a resident tax form for 2018 or 2019 instead of a nonresident tax form. In that case, you should correct your error by filing an amended tax return. Glacier Tax Prep [27] software includes detailed instructions for preparing an amended tax return form in the FAQs that you will see once you have logged into Glacier Tax Prep. All U-M/Ann Arbor international students can use Glacier Tax Prep free of charge.
- If you filed a resident tax form in error, this probably happened because you used tax software that is
designed for residents, and that software prepared the resident tax form (Form 1040) instead of the nonresident form (Form 1040NR). One example of tax software designed for U.S. tax residents is TurboTax, but there are many others. In the future, be sure to use Glacier Tax Prep (27), the software that the International Center licenses for you, since it will prepare the correct nonresident tax form for you.

For more information: the IRS has posted a summary (28) and detailed information and FAQs (29)

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Links
[1] mailto:icenter@umich.edu
[5] https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/students/reduced-course-load
[6] https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/address-notification-requirement
[8] https://hr.umich.edu/benefits-wellness/health-well-being/health-plans/gradcare
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