

Spring 2021: Frequently Asked Questions for International Students

Will the Graduate Center offer a hybrid program of study option to new international students for Spring 2021?

According to the October 29, 2020 [Message from the President](#), The Graduate Center will not be offering a hybrid program of study for Spring 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the serious health and safety concerns this brings to our entire community.

We understand and appreciate the many reasons why our international students want to come to New York and join our Graduate Center community in person. We are all looking forward to that time when it will be safe again for all of us to come together on campus. Due to COVID19, the Graduate Center will be operating all online and will not be offering in-person or hybrid courses for students to enroll for spring 2021. The University President and the Graduate Center Administration are not making any exceptions to the operational format for spring 2021 due to health and safety concerns caused by the COVID19 pandemic. It will not be possible to offer a hybrid course of study to students.

For spring 2021, I will be a second semester international student currently outside of the United States. What are my academic options for the Spring 2021 semester?

Any incoming student, including transfer students, who received an initial I-20 Form to begin their program will not be able to enter the U.S. in F-1 status as course instruction at The Graduate Center, CUNY will be offered online for spring 2021 due to the COVID19 pandemic. On July 24, 2020, ICE released updated [SEVP policy guidance](#) and updated [SEVP FAQ's](#) that does not permit newly admitted international students to enter the US in F-1 status to enroll in a program of study that will be offered entirely 100% online.

Given these developments, our newly admitted international students currently have the following two options.

Please review these options and inform The Graduate Center of your decision by no later than December 1, 2020.

Option 1: Remain outside the US and enroll in all online courses at the Graduate Center, CUNY for Spring 2021.

Enroll in all online classes for Spring 2021 while remaining outside of the United States for the entire semester. You would apply for an I-20 for a future semester (e.g. Fall 2021) to enter the US in F-1 status, when, conditions allow, to attend in person classes full-time. If you already had an I-20 issued, we will defer the program start date on the I-20 form to the fall 2021 semester start date. You could apply for the F-1 visa at the United States Consulate 120 days prior to the Fall 2021 semester start date. You will use your updated I-20 form for fall 2021 to apply for the F-1 visa. If

you have already been issued an F-1 visa by the US Consulate prior to receiving the message from the University President, you may use this F-1 visa to enter the US for Fall 2021 if it has not expired.

The Graduate Center will continue to apply your Tuition Fellowships towards your full-time enrollment charges. For students who would have received a fellowship that covered the student fees of \$182.20 per semester, we will apply that portion of your fellowship towards your bill. The rest of your fellowship will be “saved” for a future semester. Your ten semesters of fellowship/assistantship payments (minus the amount deducted for student fees) will begin when we can resume classes in-person.

If you choose this option, please notify the Office of International Students at intstu@gc.cuny.edu by no later than December 1, 2020.

Option 2: Take a Leave of absence

Students in good standing may request a [Leave of Absence](#) if they do not want to enroll remotely for spring 2021. Fellowship recipients who choose to take a leave of absence should also request a [fellowship deferment](#). While second semester students are not traditionally eligible to defer their fellowship, given the circumstances, we feel this flexibility was warranted.

If you already had an I-20 issued for spring 2021, we will defer the program start date on the I-20 form to the fall 2021 semester start date and issue you an updated I-20 form. You may apply for the F-1 visa at the United States Consulate 120 days prior to the Fall 2021 semester start date. You will use your updated I-20 form for fall 2021 to apply for the F-1 visa. If you have already been issued an F-1 visa by the US Consulate prior to receiving the message from the University President, you may use this F-1 visa to enter the US for Fall 2021 if it has not expired.

If you choose this option, please notify the Office of International Students by no later than December 1, 2020.

I am a newly admitted international student for spring 2021 currently outside of the United States. What are my academic options for the Spring 2021 semester?

Any incoming student, including transfer students, who received an I-20 Form to begin their program will not be able to enter the U.S. in F-1 status as course instruction at The Graduate Center, CUNY will be offered online for spring 2021 due to the COVID19 pandemic.

On July 24, 2020, ICE released updated [SEVP policy guidance](#) and updated [SEVP FAQ's](#) that does not permit newly admitted international students to enter the US in F-1 status to enroll in a program of study that will be offered entirely 100% online.

Given these developments, our newly admitted international students currently have the following three options.

Please review these options and inform The Office of International Students of your decision by no later than December 1, 2020.

Option 1: Remain outside the US and enroll in all online courses at the Graduate Center, CUNY for Spring 2021.

Enrolling in all online classes for Spring 2021 while remaining outside of the United States for the entire semester. You would then apply for an I-20 for a future semester (e.g. Fall 2021) to enter the US in F-1 status, when, conditions allow to attend in person classes full-time. If you already had an I-20 issued, we would defer the program start date on the I-20 form to the fall 2021 semester start date. You could apply for the F-1 visa at the United States Consulate 120 days prior to the Fall 2021 semester start date. If you choose this option, please contact intstu@gc.cuny.edu to apply for the deferred I-20 form.

The Office of Fellowships and Financial Aid will reach out to doctoral students who had postponed until Spring 2021 to explain how their fellowships will work.

Option 2: Postpone admission

If approved by your Academic Department and the Office of Admissions, postpone admission and apply for an I-20 form for the semester you will begin the program. If you already had an I-20 form issued, we would defer the program start date on the I-20 form to the semester you will begin the program. You could apply for the F-1 visa at the United States Consulate 120 days prior to the new program start date. You would need to speak with your academic department to determine if postponing admission is possible.

Postponement of admission would guarantee the five-year fellowship you were originally offered.

Option 3: Apply for admission for a future academic year

You may apply again for admission to the program of study for a future year and would be considered in relation to that year's applicants. You would apply for an I-20 form once you have been admitted and have accepted your admission for the future year (e.g. fall 2021, fall 2022, etc.). If an I-20 form was already issued, it would be cancelled in SEVIS. You could apply for the F-1 visa at the United States Consulate 120 days prior to the semester start date you will begin your program of study.

I am a continuing F-1 or J-1 Student. What are my academic options for the Spring 2021 semester?

Per March 13th SEVP guidance, continuing F-1 and J-1 students with an active SEVIS record, may enroll in all online classes while in the United States or outside the United States. You must enroll in a full-time course load and you will continue to maintain F-1 status with a SEVIS active record.

Has the SEVP Spring 2021 Policy been released?

The SEVP Spring 2021 Policy has not yet been released. Once they release the SEVP Spring 2021 Policy the Office of International Students will inform you of any updates or changes that may impact you.

Where can I find the SEVP Policy Guidance?

The SEVP Policy is available at: <https://www.ice.gov/coronavirus>

The Office of International Students anticipates that SEVP will release further updates to their guidance for Spring 2021. We will continue to monitor the information released by SEVP and will update you as information becomes available.

Does the five-month temporary absence provision apply to me if I am outside of the United States for more than five months?

Per the current SEVP policy, the five-month temporary absence provision will not apply to continuing international students who are maintaining their F-1 or J-1 status while enrolled full-time and are currently abroad or decide to leave the United States to continue taking online classes abroad.

I am a continuing F-1 or J-1 student, will I be able to receive my Fellowship/Assistantship?

All continuing international students who remain in their active F-1 or J-1 legal status will be able to receive their fellowship/assistantship. Doctoral students are still required to enroll full-time (12/31 is the financial aid registration deadline) and, where necessary, fulfill their service requirement.

One important note: Students who are considered **non-resident aliens** for tax purposes will now be eligible to have their lump sum payment direct deposited. The Bursar's Office will be reaching out in the near future to help you set up direct deposit to a U.S. based bank account. Students who do not opt for direct deposit will have their lump sum check mailed to their CUNYfirst mailing address. Please be sure to keep this address updated. If you are abroad, you may also want to make sure your home country is currently accepting mail from the United States.

Students who are considered **resident aliens** for tax purposes can receive their lump sum payments via direct deposit. If you have not already done so, please sign up for direct deposit in CUNYfirst. Instructions can be found here: <https://www.cuny.edu/financial-aid/tuition-and-college-costs/refunds/direct-deposit/>

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the Office of Fellowships and Financial Aid at financialaid@gc.cuny.edu.

I am a continuing F-1 student who received an Initial Attendance I-20 for Spring 2021 for a return from leave of absence. What are my academic options for the Spring 2021 semester?

Please speak with an International Student Advisor at the Office of International Students regarding your plans for return from leave of absence. Please email intstu@gc.cuny.edu to schedule an appointment.

Have the US Consulates resumed F-1 and J-1 visa application processing?

The Department of State suspended routine visa services worldwide in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As global conditions evolve, U.S. Embassies and Consulates are beginning a phased resumption of routine visa services.

The resumption of routine visa services will occur on a post-by-post basis, in coordination with the Department's Diplomacy Strong framework for safely returning their workforce to Department facilities. U.S. Embassies and Consulates have continued to provide emergency visa services since March and will continue to do so as they are able. We are unable to provide a specific date for when each U.S. Consulate will resume full visa services. Please refer to each individual U.S. Embassy or Consulate's website for information regarding operating status and which services it is currently offering.

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/phased-resumption-routine-visa-services.html>

I am a continuing international student enrolled full-time for fall 2020, may I return to the United States?

Continuing international students who are registered full-time for Spring 2021 with a SEVIS active record, may return to the US in either F-1 or J-1 status. You need the following documents to re-enter the United States;

1. Valid I-20 or DS-2019 form with a valid travel signature from the DSO/ARO at the Office of International Students.
2. Valid F-1 or J-1 visa in your passport
3. Passport valid for at least 6 months into the future
4. Full-time Enrollment Verification for Spring 2021 from the Office of the Registrar
5. Proof of financial support documents (e.g. fellowship and financial aid award letter for 2020/2021)

To request a travel signature on your I-20 or DS-2019 form for your re-entry to the US, please email the Office of International Student at intstu@gc.cuny.edu with your travel dates and copies of your I-20 or DS-2019 form, passport and F-1 or J-1 visa. If you require a new travel signature, we will re-print your I-20 or DS-2019 form, provide it with a travel signature, and mail it to you.

Are there any travel restrictions to the United States that I need to be aware of?

The U.S. government is currently enforcing an entry ban on foreign passport holders who have been in certain countries, including China, Iran, the United Kingdom, Brazil and many European countries, within 14 days of their arrival to the United States. See the [Center for Disease Control website](#) for more information and a full list of countries.

With specific exceptions, students residing in any of these restricted countries will need to spend at least 14 days in a different, unrestricted country before traveling to the United States.

Effective July 16, 2020, [F-1 student travelers from the Schengen Area, the UK and Ireland who are applying for or have valid visas may now travel to the United States](#), even though the

current presidential proclamations regarding travel remain in effect. F-1 students traveling with valid F-1 visas do not need to seek a national interest exception to travel to the United States, but students traveling from these countries may experience delays at inspection from Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) upon entering the United States.

Students from those areas who are traveling on a J-1 visa may contact the nearest embassy or consulate to initiate a national interest exception request.

My visa is expiring but I am unable to depart the United States at this time. What should I do?

Students may remain in the United States on an expired F-1/J-1 visa as long as they maintain their immigration status by being in possession of a valid I-20/DS-2019, an I-94 arrival record, and by meeting normal enrollment requirements. Students require a valid F-1 or J-1 visa to enter the United States in F-1 or J-1 legal status.

I am a continuing student who is not able to resume a full-time program of study for spring 2021 due to COVID-19. What should I do?

Please contact the Office of International Students at intstu@gc.cuny.edu to discuss your situation. You may be eligible to apply for a medical reduced course load authorization. You might also be eligible to apply for either a medical or personal leave of absence for the Spring 2021 semester depending on your circumstances. Fellowship recipients who choose to take a leave of absence should also request a [fellowship deferment](#).

May I apply for a Social Security Number?

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the Social Security Administration is currently closed and has not resumed normal processing of Social Security Applications at this time. Due to the high volume of applications they are receiving, the Social Security Administration will only take in-person appointments for urgent cases, and on-campus employment does not currently qualify as an urgent case. We do not yet know when the SSA offices will reopen. Social Security Application instructions are available at: https://www.gc.cuny.edu/CUNY_GC/media/International-Students/PDFs/SSN-Application-Procedures-2017-doc.pdf?ext=.pdf

As the Office of International Students physical office is currently closed due to COVID-19, how may I submit a request for service, schedule an appointment with an international student advisor, and receive documents?

While the Office of International Students physical office at The Graduate Center is closed, staff are working remotely to continue providing essential services and information to our international student community. You may email your questions, requests for service, or appointment requests to intstu@gc.cuny.edu. We will process your request and ship I-20 and DS-2019 forms to your location. Students may also schedule phone or zoom appointments with international student counselors.

We are happy to announce that the Office of International Students now has LIVE Chat available on our website! Live chat office hours will begin Wednesday, November 4th at 9:30 AM.

How does live chat work at the Office of International Students?

The International Student Advisors at the Office of International Students will be available for live chats with international students during their new live chat office hours. Please go to our [website](#) and click on the LIVE CHAT box in the bottom right corner to start a chat with an international student advisor during their office hours. You are also welcome to leave us a message in live chat outside of office hours and we will respond to you by email within two business days.

Please find the live chat office hours for each International Student Advisor below:

OFFICE HOURS:

Paul Croser:

Monday 9:30 - 11:30 am EST

Wednesday 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm EST

Bengisu Peker:

Tuesday 9:30 am - 11: 30 am EST

Wednesday 9:30 am - 11: 30 am EST

Heidi Rausch:

Monday 1:00 - 3:00 pm EST

Thursday 9:30 am - 11: 30 am EST

Linda Asaro:

Tuesday 1:00 - 2:00 pm EST