Fall 2020 Guidance for International Students

July 17, 2020

Office of International Services
DHS Rescinds the July 6, 2020 Policy

• On July 14, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) agreed to rescind the July 6, 2020 policy directive and the July 7 frequently asked questions (FAQs) issued by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP)

• The prior SEVP guidance from March 2020 has been reinstated

• Current advice is based on the March 2020 guidance but could change if new SEVP guidance for fall is released
USC Fall 2020
Mode of Instruction

• A large majority of classes will be offered online for fall 2020
• Your academic advisor is the best resource to help you understand your enrollment options in your academic program for fall 2020
What does this mean for students admitted to USC for fall 2020?
Fall 2020 Admits Outside the U.S.

• Newly admitted students who are currently outside the U.S. will not be eligible to enter the US and enroll in online classes

• If you are a new admit for fall 2020 you should not enter the U.S. on an F-1 student visa since USC will not be able to offer a full in-person academic program
Fall 2020 Admits Outside the U.S.

• Newly admitted transfer students who are currently outside the US, **will not** be eligible to enter the US with your current transfer I-20 and enroll in online classes.

• If you are a new admit with a transfer I-20 you **should not enter the U.S.** on an F-1 student visa since USC will not be able to offer a full in-person academic program.
Fall 2020 Admits Outside the U.S.

Two Academic Enrollment Options:

1. Begin academic program from abroad as a non-F-1 student
   • Contact academic advisor
   • To find a suitable schedule of online courses for fall 2020
   • For information about getting a new I-20 deferred to the spring 2021 semester.

2. Inquire about possible options for beginning your academic program in a future semester.
   • Contact your admissions advisor
Other Students Currently Outside the U.S.

Students in these other situations may not be fall 2020 admits, but they have been issued an Initial Attendance I-20 for fall 2020. It is unclear if CBP will allow U.S. entry for such students, based on existing guidance.

• Return from a leave of absence (out of the country for more than five months)
• Reinstatement of status via travel/re-entry
• Change of status (i.e. began academic program at USC in another visa category and was planning to re-enter with F-1 visa for fall 2020)
• Change of degree level (i.e. completed bachelor’s degree at USC in spring/summer 2020 and was issued a change of level I-20 for fall 2020)

Therefore, you **should remain outside the U.S. at this time.** You may enroll in online classes from abroad, but will do so as non-F-1 students.
EXCEPTION:
Fall 2020 Admits Currently inside the U.S.

• The only exception is for newly admitted students who are already in the US (undergraduate transfer students or new graduate students coming directly from another degree program at USC).
  • These students can remain in the country and maintain F-1 status while completing coursework online this fall.

• The USC Office of Admission I-20 processing team will assist these students. Please email usci20@usc.edu if you have not already received your USC transfer I-20.
EXCEPTION:
Fall 2020 Admits Currently inside the U.S.

- Must complete Passport Verification (PPV)
- Enroll in a full course load for fall 2020
- Permitted to take online classes while in the U.S.
- Can study in F-1 status (SEVIS record will be activated after PPV)
  - To avoid complications at the port of entry, do not depart the U.S. until your SEVIS record has been activated

*Includes undergraduate & graduate transfer students or new graduate students coming directly from another USC degree program. The USC Office of Admission I-20 processing team will assist these students. Please email usci20@usc.edu if you have not already received your USC transfer I-20.
PPV Info for Fall 2020 Admit-
Currently Inside the US

- Passport Verification (PPV) instructions will be available soon. Please check the New Student section on the OIS website
What does the current SEVP guidance mean for continuing USC students?

Current advice is based on the March 2020 guidance and could change if new SEVP guidance for fall is released.

Since continuing students have an active SEVIS record:
• You are permitted to take online classes while in the U.S. or from outside the U.S.
• You must enroll in a full course load for fall 2020
• You will continue to maintain F-1 status (SEVIS record will remain in active status)
  • Fall 2020 enrollment will count towards the one academic year requirement for CPT/OPT eligibility
• Students do not need updated I-20s to reflect USC’s mode of instruction
Continuing USC Student and Currently Outside the U.S.

If you are a continuing student and would like to return to the U.S. in the coming weeks to participate in your fall classes, you will be eligible to do so with your current valid documents:

- I-20 with a valid travel endorsement by OIS (travel endorsements are valid for one year from the date they were signed)
  - I-20s digitally signed and electronically sent to you are still okay. However, you will need to have a hard copy (printed out) of that I-20 when providing documents to US CBP
  - NO UPDATED I-20 NEEDED! There is no longer a requirement for all continuing F-1 students to receive updated I-20s at this time
- valid passport
- valid F-1 visa (many U.S. Embassies and consulates still closed)

*Plan for possible delays at the US Port of Entry’s secondary inspection unit.*
Five-month Rule for Continuing Students

Current advice is based on the March 2020 guidance and could change if new SEVP guidance for fall is released.

- Since continuing students who are enrolled for fall 2020 are deemed to be maintaining active SEVIS status, the five-month temporary absence provision will not apply for students who are currently abroad or decide to leave the US to continue online classes from abroad.
Full-Time Enrollment Requirement for Continuing Students

To maintain F-1 status for the fall semester all international students must be enrolled in a full course load unless you have been approved for a Reduced Course Load (RCL) or Leave of Absence (LOA) from your academic advisor and USC’s Office of International Services.

- No extra Academic Difficulty RCLs available due to COVID-19
- Final semester RCL still possible

Undergraduate Students: 12 units  
Master’s degree students: 8 units  
Doctoral students: 6 units
Fall 2020 Planning – Students Coming to or Returning to Campus

Foreign nationals who have been in any of the following countries during the past 14 days may not enter the U.S.:

- Brazil, People’s Republic of China, and Iran

As of July 16: National Interest Exceptions for Certain Travelers from the Schengen Area, United Kingdom, and Ireland. Visit travel.state.gov for more information. Please still be cautious!
Fall 2020 Planning – Students Coming to or Returning to Campus

• 14-day quarantine after entering US—Refer to the Travel Guidance section on the USC COVID-19 website

• Fall 2020 campus guidelines, health protocols, community expectations – See USC COVID-19 website
Employment Issues

On-campus employment

• Students may continue to engage in on-campus employment remotely.
  • Actual on-campus jobs will be very limited in fall due to restrictions in access to campus and remote operations of most services.

• RA/TAship eligibility: Please contact your academic department. The guidance regarding this matter will be provided by the Graduate School.
Employment Issues

• Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
  • DHS-SEVP guidelines have not included any new policies related to CPT due to COVID-19
  • Remote work appears to still be possible to fulfill CPT employment
  • 1 full academic year in F-1 status required before becoming eligible for CPT
Employment Issues

- **Optional Practical Training (OPT)**
  - DHS-SEVP guidelines have not included any new policies related to OPT due to COVID-19
  - Current temporary guidance allows ANY number of weekly hours of employment (1+) to meet the OPT requirement for maintaining status, instead of normal minimum hours requirements. The end date for this guidance is unclear
  - Otherwise, all current rules apply
  - 1 full academic year in F-1 status required before becoming eligible for OPT
  - F-1 status only begins once student enters the U.S. with student visa and begins in-person enrollment. Requires student to report their U.S. residential address to DHS
  - Student must be inside the U.S. to apply for OPT
Employment Issues

Social Security Administration

On-campus employment

• Due to the high volume of applications they are receiving, the local SSA will only take in-person appointments for urgent cases and on-campus work does not qualify at this moment as an urgent case. Since you do not meet their criteria to apply during this round, you can quickly apply once they reopen to the public since you will have all documents in hand. We are hoping since California is opening up in phases, the SSA will be one that will do so soon.

• USC Payroll will permit students to start working on-campus without an SSN
Employment Issues

Social Security Administration

Curricular Practical Training

• If your CPT employer can provide a letter on company letterhead indicating the SSN is required for you to start your internship, the SSA can take that into consideration when reviewing your application. If even with this letter you do not meet their criteria to apply during this round, you can quickly apply once they reopen to the public since you have all documents in hand. We are hoping since California is opening up in phases, the SSA will be one that will do so soon.
USC Housing Issues

• Please refer to the University Housing FAQ on the USC COVID-19 website
Leave of Absence

Students who are interested in taking a leave of absence should attend the OIS Leave of Absence Information Session (group Zoom advising session).

Next LOA Information Session: July 21, 2020 at 8:00 PM

Please check the OIS event calendar for upcoming sessions: [https://ois.usc.edu/events/](https://ois.usc.edu/events/)
Future Planning

- USC is advocating for further helpful guidance and temporary flexibility from DHS on issues related to international students during COVID-19 emergency
- OIS will continue to update the USC community as information becomes available.
  - USC COVID-19 Website
  - Future webinars as needed
  - OIS newsletters (International Update) for continuing students
  - OIS website
  - Academic advisors
In Summary

Current advice is based on the March 2020 guidance and could change if new SEVP guidance for fall is released.

• Fall 2020 Admits who are outside the U.S.: Do not enter the U.S. since USC will not be able to offer a full in-person academic program.
• Fall 2020 Admits who are inside the U.S.: Complete Passport Verification (PPV) and enroll in online classes for fall. Must be full-time enrolled.
• Continuing students: Enroll in online classes whether you are inside or outside the U.S. Must be full-time enrolled.
OIS is committed to supporting you throughout this rapidly evolving situation, and we will share additional details as soon as they become available.