
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

US Department of Homeland Security Fall 2020 Guidance Summary

Overview

The US Department of Homeland Security has provided the following [guidance](#).

Students who enroll full-time in a mixture of in person and online courses (“hybrid courses”) within the United States may do so and maintain their F-1 status.

- Students may enroll in more than one online course as long as they are making normal progress towards their degree completion and are enrolled full-time.
- All students attending hybrid courses at SAIC this fall will need to receive an updated I-20.

If a school offers hybrid courses, students who enroll for all online courses this fall must depart the United States and their immigration status will be terminated for authorized early withdrawal.

- If an international student is already outside of the United States and will enroll in online courses, their immigration record and I-20 will be terminated for authorized early withdrawal.

Key Terms

- Hybrid Courses: A mix of courses offered both in-person and online
- I-20: “The Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status” that International Affairs staff issues for all new students at SAIC to apply for F-1 visas and updates whenever there is a significant change to a student’s program.
- F-1 Visa: A visa issued by the US Department of State typically at the Embassy/Consulate in a student’s home country and is in a student’s passport. Students require a valid I-20 to apply for a F-1 visa. A valid F-1 visa is required to enter the US following international travel (except for Canadian students who are exempt).
- I-20 Terminations: While “termination” sounds negative, this term is used for any time a student’s online immigration record (SEVIS record) is completed—this includes for reasons such as “Authorized Early Withdrawal” when a student takes a Leave of Absence from the school. A termination for “Authorized Early Withdrawal” is not negative and does not reflect poorly on a student’s immigration record. However, it can mean that a student would need to apply for a new F-1 visa to return to the US in the future. Also, it can mean that they may not be eligible for certain benefits, such as OPT (Optional Practical Training—needed to work for a year after graduation) or CPT (Curricular Practical Training—needed for off-campus internships) if they will have fewer than 2 full semesters left to complete their degree when they return to the US.

Guidance by Scenario

Below you will find the five most common scenarios for SAIC international students this fall and how the modified guidance will apply to your situation this fall semester.

1. International students currently **inside the US** who plan to take **hybrid courses** at SAIC this fall.

According to this guidance, international students who plan to remain in Chicago to attend a mixture of in-person and online courses will be able to do so. To properly maintain your F-1 status, International Affairs will need to provide you with an electronic copy of a new I-20 that has been updated to reflect this.

2. International students currently **inside the US** who plan to take **all classes online**.

According to this guidance, international students on F-1 visas would **not** be permitted to remain inside the US and study fully online. Students who wished to study fully online would be required to depart the US to study remotely (with their I-20/SEVIS record terminated for "Authorized Early Withdrawal").

3. International students currently **outside the US** who plan to take **hybrid courses** at SAIC this fall and **currently** hold a valid I-20 and F-1 visa.

According to this guidance, international students who plan to return to Chicago to attend a mixture of in-person and online courses will be able to do so. To properly maintain your F-1 status, International Affairs will need to provide you with an electronic copy of an updated I-20.

Please be aware that, currently, foreign nationals who have visited or have been present in certain countries in the past 14 days may not enter the US, even if they possess valid immigration documents. You may find the most up-to-date list here of travel restrictions [here](#).

4. International students currently **outside the US** who plan to take **hybrid courses** at SAIC this fall and **do not** hold a valid I-20 OR F-1 visa.

According to this guidance, international students who plan to return to Chicago to attend a mixture of in-person and online courses will be able to do so. To properly maintain your F-1 status, International Affairs will need to provide you with an electronic copy of a new I-20. However, you will also need to apply for a new F-1 visa to return to the US unless you are a Canadian citizen (who are exempt from visa requirements).

Currently, most visa processing services are suspended. If you need to renew your visa, you may not be able to make or keep your visa appointment. For the announcement of the suspension of routine visa services, please visit the US Department of State [website](#).

While some students have reported being able to schedule appointments at their local consulates, we have not yet received official confirmation from the US Department of State when routine visa services will resume. If you were unable to apply for a new F-1 visa to return to the US in time to start in-person courses, it is possible you would not be able to attend SAIC in person this fall.

5. International students currently **outside the US** who plan to take **all classes online**.

According to this guidance, because SAIC is offering hybrid courses, students outside the US may study fully online but they may not keep their F-1 SEVIS records active.

If students decide to stay outside the US and study fully online, International Affairs may need to terminate your I-20/SEVIS record for Authorized Early Withdrawal.

In this case, we would recommend reaching out to International Affairs three months prior to when you plan to return to the US. We can then assist you in creating a new I-20 and advise you on if you need to apply for a new F-1 visa to return to the US. Most students that will be outside the US for more than five months will need to apply for a new F-1 visa to return to the US.

If you have to apply for a new F-1 visa to return to the US, you will need to study full time at SAIC for a full spring and fall semester before being eligible for CPT (needed for off-campus internships) or OPT (needed to work for a year following graduation). If you have fewer than 2 semesters left to complete your degree after this fall, you may not be eligible for either of these benefits and we encourage you to contact International Affairs to discuss your options.

Additional Updates Based on Current Guidance

Required I-20 Updates

This updated guidance will require students to receive new I-20s from International Affairs if they plan to study at SAIC in-person this fall. Please note that we cannot begin issuing these I-20s now because this government announcement is **not final**. When the announcement is finalized, SAIC International Affairs staff will be in contact with all international students to advise them if a new I-20 will be needed.

International Travel/I-20 Travel Signatures

At this time, International Affairs advises that international travel is very risky and should be avoided unless necessary, as travel conditions and country-specific travel restrictions can and have been changing frequently, often with little notice to the traveler. If you decide to travel internationally, or have already left the US, you will need to have a valid travel signature on your SAIC I-20 to return to the US this fall.

Please check page two of your I-20 for the travel signature. Travel signatures are valid for 12 months for students (six months for students on OPT). If you need a travel signature to return to the US this fall, please complete the [Travel Signature Request Form](#).

We have been advised that the government will accept printed electronic copies of I-20s that International Affairs will issue. Our office will email copies of your signed I-20 to you, but if you are traveling internationally, we recommend you carry a printed copy with you along with your passport and valid F-1 visa to enter the US.

If you prefer to have an original copy shipped to you, you will be responsible for the cost of the I-20 shipment. Please contact us at intaff@saic.edu so we can send you the instructions.

If you are outside of the US, planning to return to SAIC this fall, and think you may need a new travel signature, please contact us as soon as possible.

US Department of State Visa Services Suspension

All visa services continue to be currently suspended since March 2020. If you need to renew your visa, you may not be able to make or keep your visa appointment. For the announcement of the suspension of routine visa services, please visit the US Department of State [website](#).

While some students have reported being able to schedule appointments at their local consulates, we have not yet received official confirmation from the US Department of State when routine visa services will resume. We have also received reports that students who have requested emergency appointments have had those requests denied.

Travel to the US

Please note that currently there are travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic and foreign nationals who have visited or have been present in certain countries in the past 14 days may not enter the United States, even if they possess valid immigration documents. You may find the most up-to-date list here of travel restrictions [here](#).

If you have concerns or questions about how these government updates could impact you, please attend our webinar on Tuesday, July 14. If your questions have not been answered, please contact International Affairs at intaff@saic.edu so that we can assist you over email or by phone or video appointment.

Quarantine Requirements

As stated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, any person entering the US from abroad must self-quarantine for 14 days prior to engaging in normal activity. Please review your travel plans and plan accordingly so as to arrive for the start of the semester with enough time to meet this government requirement. You can find additional information [here](#).

Please continue to monitor your email as International Affairs will send detailed updates as soon as we have additional information from the US government when this guidance is finalized.

International Affairs is committed to advocating on behalf of SAIC's international student population. You are each an invaluable part of the SAIC community. We would not be who we are as a community of artists and makers without you. Please reach out to intaff@saic.edu with any questions or concerns. We are here to help.

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