

COVID-19 FAQs for International Students (Returning and Incoming) May 18, 2020

1. I'm a newly admitted international undergraduate or graduate student, and I'm concerned that I won't be able to get a visa to travel to SUNY Poly in time for Fall 2020 semester. What options do I have?

There are currently two possible options, although not all options are available for all undergraduate and graduate programs at SUNY Poly. The deputy director, Mr. Tze Teck Sim of International Admissions and Student Services (tsim@sunypoly.edu) will let you know which option(s) are available to you.

- a. If available for your degree program, take the necessary SUNY Poly coursework remotely for the fall semester, with a plan to come to SUNY Poly for the spring semester. Note that you cannot begin a course remotely and then physically transfer to SUNY Poly in the same semester. You will need to wait and transition at the start of the next semester.
- b. Contact Mr. Tze Teck Sim to request a matriculation deferral and begin your SUNY Poly studies in either Spring 2021 or Fall 2021. Programs may differ as to whether they are in a position to grant a deferral, and if so, whether a semester or a full year deferral makes more sense.

2. I'm a continuing international undergraduate or graduate student, and I'm concerned about continuing my studies in the form of face-to-face or online courses at SUNY Poly. Are there any updates here?

We do not yet know when SUNY Poly will reopen its Albany or Utica campus or what form that re-opening will take. Before the pandemic, federal regulations stated that an international student could enroll for only one (1) online course per semester. COVID-19 instructions changed this regulation to allow international students in the U.S. to continue their studies online through Spring 2020. These changes were identified as temporary. At this time, we do not know if there will be an extension of the change in policy allowing online courses. We will provide updates as we have them.

3. I'm a newly admitted international Ph.D. student without a visa. Can I start my doctoral studies virtually? When will I start receiving my stipend?

Please see answer to No. 1 above regarding course enrollment options.

Regarding stipend: It is not legally permissible for SUNY Poly to pay international students who do not have a valid U.S. visa. You will not receive a stipend until you have a U.S. visa, arrive at SUNY Poly, and complete the necessary paperwork. No monies will accrue over the time period you are outside of the U.S.

4. I'm an admitted international master's degree student without a U.S. visa. I have a graduate assistantship as part of my package. Can I start the program remotely? And can I work remotely as a GA and receive funding?

Please see answer to question No. 1 regarding remote classes.

It is not legally permissible for SUNY Poly to pay international students who do not have a valid U.S. visa. You will not receive any payments until you have a valid visa, arrive at SUNY Poly, and complete the necessary paperwork. No monies will accrue over the time you are outside of the U.S.

5. I'm an international student and am wondering about the Immigration paperwork necessary if I begin (or continue, if I am a current student) my coursework online.

New students: The start date on your I-20 must reflect the start date of the first semester after your arrival in the U.S. If we have already issued an I-20 for Fall 2020 with a Fall 2020 start date, but you cannot arrive into the U.S. until Spring 2021, then we must change the start date and issue a new I-20 with the Spring 2021 start date. If we did not yet issue the I-20 for Fall 2020 and you start in Spring 2021, we will issue the I-20 with the Spring 2021 start date.

Continuing students: If you have a current I-20, we are not required to issue a new I-20 if you requested a travel signature before departure. If you did not request a travel signature, we will send a letter that can be used with the I-20 so that you can enter the U.S.

6. Is the tuition less for students who will take classes remotely than for students who will take the classes on SUNY Poly campus?

Yes, tuition charges are different.

7. I'm interested in the possibility of starting my master's degree at SUNY Poly and going to SUNY Poly when my visa is approved. Can you tell me more about this possibility?

We will not be able to accommodate all master's degree programs that would like to start classes at SUNY Poly in Fall 2020. We are working now on which master's programs can be accommodated at SUNY Poly. We will notify admitted students about these programs as soon as possible. If you are not notified, this means that we are not able to accommodate this program at SUNY Poly.

If we are able to accommodate your program at SUNY Poly, we anticipate offering face-to-face instruction.

8. I'm an international student who will graduate in May. What if I have trouble getting back to my home country? Is it ok if I stay past the allowed grace period?

SUNY Poly cannot approve an overstay of your visa because of COVID-19. We know that the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) is discussing this issue.

Please see response to No. 11 below about grace periods.

9. I'm an incoming international student in a SUNY Poly two-year master's program. I am thinking of starting the program online. I hope to be able to get to SUNY Poly in Spring 2021 for face-to-face instruction. I very much want to do CPT or OPT in summer 2021. Will this be possible?

Practical training (CPT or OPT) is typically only authorized for F-1 students who have been enrolled in a U.S. institution on a full time basis for one full academic year.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT): Current information per U.S. visa services indicates that you would not qualify for CPT unless you have completed two full semesters on campus as an F-1 student. For CPT, exceptions to the one academic year requirement as an F-1 student are only provided if you are enrolled in graduate studies that require immediate participation in curricular practical training.

Optional Practical Training (OPT): Current information per U.S. visa services indicates that you would not qualify for OPT unless you have completed two full semesters on campus as an F-1 student.

10. When are international students eligible to return to SUNY Poly, or to come to SUNY Poly for the first time?

This answer depends on at least three factors: (1) what is the status of the SUNY Poly campus, (2) what is the visa status of the student, and (3) where is the student.

SUNY Poly has not made a decision as to when the Albany and Utica campus will reopen for face-to-face classes. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (USDHS) has also not made any announcement on this issue. DHS may allow individual schools to make this determination.

If you are a new international student who will need a visa to enter the U.S., the consulates are closed and have not posted the date they will reopen. Keep in mind there will be a backlog of visa requests when the consulates reopen.

If you are an international student who is transferring from another school or university in the U.S., and you did not leave the U.S., the current school can transfer the SEVIS files to SUNY Poly and you can start classes in SUNY Poly when reopens.

If you are a continuing international student and you did not leave the U.S., you can start classes when SUNY Poly reopens.

If you are a continuing international student, and you left the U.S., and your visa is valid for reentry, and you are not subject to the COVID-19 quarantine country policy per the President's proclamation, you should be able to re-enter the U.S. and start classes when SUNY Poly reopens.

If you are a continuing international student, and you left the U.S., and you need a new visa to reenter, you will likely face the same problems that a new student with no visa will have. In addition, if you are subject to the COVID-19 quarantine, there will be an additional delay.

11. Are there international students currently residing in the U.S. who will need their visas renewed in order to stay?

A valid visa is not required to remain in the U.S., so no one should leave the U.S. just to get a visa renewed. A valid I-20 or DS-2019 is required to stay in the U.S. and is valid based on enrollment in a degree program.

F-1 students graduating in May have a 60-day grace period to remain in the U.S. after graduation. These students can also apply for work authorization which will allow them to stay for an additional 90 days to seek employment and 12 months if they find employment before the 90 days end.

Some students may have received admission from other U.S. schools (for example, to enter graduate school) and can request that their SEVIS file be transferred to the new school so they can stay in the U.S. during the summer.

12. How is SUNY Poly approaching issuing I-20s amid this current health situation and travel ban?

At this time there is no change to I-20 issuance for Fall 2020 admitted students. The Office of International Admissions and Student Services is monitoring the impact of COVID-19 on F-1 international students, and will reach out if we anticipate any impact on students who are planning to attend for Fall 2020.

13. Will I be able to receive an F-1 visa prior to Fall 2020?

The United States Department of State has announced that all US Embassies are closed until further notice. The Department's message states:

"In response to worldwide challenges related to the outbreak of COVID-19, the Department of State is suspending routine visa services in most countries worldwide. Embassies and consulates in these countries will cancel all routine immigrant and nonimmigrant visa appointments as of March 20, 2020. These embassies and consulates will resume routine visa services as soon as possible, but we are unable to provide a specific date at this time."

The difficulty international students may face obtaining a visa is still unknown at this time. We encourage students to check their embassy's website for updates on when services will resume. It is not known at this time when services will resume. For the most up-to-date information about visa appointment availability, please refer to the website of the U.S. embassy/consulate.

14. Will international students be able to return to the US with the current visas in their passports?

According to DHS, students returning to the United States to resume their studies after an authorized temporary absence will not need to renew their visa, if the visa is still valid. DOS' policy is that a student does not need to apply for a new F-1 visa if the student's current visa is still valid, regardless of length of time outside the United States. Please also note that a valid visa does not guarantee entrance into the United States. US Customs and Border Protection agents at the US port of entry ultimately make the decision to admit people into the country, not DOS.

15. I am outside the United States and cannot return to SUNY Poly for my fall 2020 classes on time. What should I do?

Currently enrolled F-1 students should contact their academic advisor to discuss the possibility and the academic implications of taking a temporary leave in the fall

semester. Students should also contact Mr. Tze Teck Sim to discuss all immigration implications of taking a temporary leave before making a final decision.

16. Will international students who are graduating be able to apply for post-completion optional practical training (OPT) from outside of the US?

Current federal regulations affecting F-1 students do not allow for OPT applications from outside of the US. Mr. Tze Teck Sim will provide an update if DHS introduces any flexibility to these regulations.

17. How will SUNY Poly assist international students who are graduating and are currently in the US with optional practical training (OPT) applications?

We have made OPT workshops and intake process fully online. Please contact Mr. Tze Teck Sim at tsim@sunypoly.edu for OPT/STEM OPT application process.

18. I applied for Post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) based on my spring graduation. What happens if I cannot finish my degree requirements on time?

Students are encouraged to work with their faculty and academic department for options to finalize their academic work on time.

19. If I register for classes and start my coursework remotely from my home country, what will happen with my I-20 and F-1 visa?

SUNY Poly will provide you with an updated I-20 via email with updated program dates for the fall 2020 semester. You will use this updated I-20 for your consulate appointment (if you have not already had one), and when you travel to the U.S. If you have already received your F-1 visa, you will simply need the updated I-20 with updated program dates for entry to the U.S. when you travel.