

F-1 Visa International Student FAQ

Center for Global Study & Engagement

July 21, 2020

INTRODUCTION

On July 14, 2020, the guidance from I.C.E. that was released on July 6th was officially rescinded! Thank you, Harvard and M.I.T., and many thanks to all of the strong advocates (Dickinson College included) who worked so hard to have this guidance rescinded!

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR F-1 visa students is, AS OF THE PUBLICATION OF THIS FAQ, all guidance from I.C.E. and the SEVP is reverting back to the [March 13th guidance](#). (Additional [FAQ's here](#).)

CGSE continues to work collaboratively with multiple departments across campus to address the unique needs of our International Students. We are also still tirelessly working through our various international education and governmental networks to get the most clarity as possible on exactly what this guidance now means for the Fall 2020 semester.

PLEASE NOTE: This FAQ is intended for any Dickinson Students who are already in “active status” in SEVIS. A separate FAQ has been created for incoming First-years and Transfer students who are currently in “initial status.”

There are rumors the SEVP will be releasing updated information that will answer additional questions on how the March 2020 guidance now works for the start of the new Fall 2020 semester. THE BELOW FAQ'S ARE WHAT WE KNOW AS OF RIGHT NOW.

I WANT TO CONTINUE MY STUDIES AS A FULL-TIME STUDENT THIS FALL 2020 – DOES ANYTHING CHANGE WITH MY F-1 VISA STATUS?

- 1. I have petitioned to be on campus in Carlisle for the Fall 2020 semester – Am I permitted to take all-online courses and maintain my F-1 visa status?**

YES. You may stay on campus and do all online classes. According to the March 13, 2020, COVID-19 guidance released by SEVP, returning, current active-status students are permitted to take remote coursework and remain in “active status.” As always, you must maintain a full-time course load.

- 2. I am in the U.S. but plan to remain off-campus for the Fall 2020 semester (e.g. at a family member's house in New York, at a friend's home in Maryland, etc.) – Am I permitted to take all-online courses and maintain my F-1 visa status?**

YES. You may stay in the U.S. and do all online classes. According to the March 13, 2020, COVID-19 guidance released by SEVP, returning, current active-status students are permitted to take remote coursework from anywhere in the U.S. and remain in “active status.” As always, you must maintain a full-time course load.

3. I am outside of the U.S. (in my home country or otherwise), and DO NOT plan to return to Carlisle or the U.S. for the Fall 2020 semester – Am I permitted to take all-online courses and maintain my F-1 visa status?

YES. You may remain outside of the U.S. (in your home country or otherwise) and do all online classes. According to the March 13, 2020, COVID-19 guidance released by SEVP, returning, current active-status students are permitted to take remote coursework from outside of the U.S. and remain in “active status.” As always, you must maintain a full-time course load.

A. You may enroll full-time in Dickinson courses. Please see the [Dickinson FAQ](#) page for further details on course registration, remote coursework structures, grading, etc.

B. If you currently live in China, Vietnam, or Korea (and hold a valid passport for that country)... CGSE has worked hard to create new opportunities for “study abroad from home” options for international students in these countries. Below are the links to each of our Program Pages for these “Dickinson In” programs:

[Dickinson in Beijing: International Student Program](#)

[Dickinson in Shanghai: International Student Program](#)

[Dickinson in Korea: International Student Program](#)

If you have questions about the China and Korea programs, please contact Marissa Mitchell mitchmar@dickinson.edu

[Dickinson in Vietnam: International Student Program](#)

If you have questions about the Vietnam program, please contact Stephanie Gulden guldens@dickinson.edu

SPECIAL UPDATE: the CGSE is currently developing additional International Student Programs for select countries/regions. Students from those countries will receive more information about this option in the coming days.

If you opt into one of the above programs, you will be officially registered in SEVIS as a “Study Abroad” student, therefore keeping your F-1 visa status “active.”

C. If you would like to petition to enroll in one of your local universities...

This option would be treated as a Non-Dickinson Study Abroad option. You have already received email correspondence from CGSE with the details of what this would mean for

enrollment at Dickinson. If you have a hard time finding these details, please email us at global@dickinson.edu, or visit the program page at the link below:

[Non-Dickinson: International Student Program \(Petition\)](#)

If you have questions about this Non-Dickinson option, please contact Katie DeGuzman deguzmak@dickinson.edu

If you petition and are accepted into this Non-Dickinson Study Abroad program, you will be officially registered in SEVIS as a “Study Abroad” student, therefore keeping your F-1 visa status “active.”

*****DEADLINES are very quickly approaching for all of our “study abroad from home” options. If you are not yet on our radar to apply to one of these programs, you need to reach out to us IMMEDIATELY at global@dickinson.edu or directly to one of the CGSE staff members mentioned above under your preferred program.**

I WANT TO TAKE A LEAVE OF ABSENCE (LOA) THIS FALL 2020/AY2020-21 – WHAT HAPPENS NOW WITH MY F-1 VISA STATUS?

4. What happens to my F-1 visa status if I choose to take a LOA?

Taking a LOA would require us to “terminate” your SEVIS record, noting it as an “Authorized Early Withdrawal.” “Termination” has no negative future affect on your immigration status and will not affect your ability to regain your status as an F-1 student in the future.

5. When I’m ready to return from my LOA, what happens to my F-1 visa and SEVIS record? Do I get to keep the same SEVIS ID#?

In normal times pre-COVID-19, a student who has been outside of the country for 5 months or more is not permitted to have their initial SEVIS # reinstated. Normally, they would need to proceed with a brand new I-20 with a new SEVIS ID#, repay the [I-901 SEVIS Fee](#), and then contact their local embassy about the need for a new F-1 visa (some returning students still have a valid F-1 visa in their passport from before, and we recommend each student ask their local embassy on their need to secure a new visa or simply move forward with the old one. Embassies differ on their recommendations.)

In the March 13, 2020, guidance from I.C.E./SEVP, they chose to overlook the [“5-month rule”](#) in some cases during COVID-19. What this means for you is that when you are ready to return, one of our DSO’s can *attempt* to request that your SEVIS record be reinstated. WE CANNOT MAKE ANY PROMISES IT WILL SUCCEED. However, we *are* willing to try when the time comes (unless guidance would change on this issue between now and then.) Please click [this link](#) for detailed information from the *Study in the States* website on the 5-month Rule.

If there is less than a 5-month window from your date of “termination” in SEVIS and your return to campus (for example, you are only taking a LOA for one semester and can return in the 5-month window), we will request for your initial SEVIS ID# to be reinstated. Again, no promises, and there is a brief waiting period once the request has been made, but your chances are much higher in this case as it aligns with normal SEVP regulations pre-COVID-19.

6. Will I have challenges getting a new F-1 visa in the future if I take a LOA now?

In normal times pre-COVID-19, many students took LOA’s for varying reasons and were able to secure new F-1 visas without challenge. However, we cannot speak to future scenarios nor do we know what the future of the SEVP regulations hold.

7. What if I plan to take a LOA for the Fall 2020 but am still currently in the U.S.? Am I permitted to stay in the U.S. during my leave due to COVID-19?

If you are not studying full-time with Dickinson College while in the U.S., you are officially out of status and not permitted to stay. Even with incredibly challenging travel restrictions due to COVID-19, no allowances have yet been made for students choosing to take a LOA. According to the current guidance, **you have 15 days from your day of “termination” in SEVIS to leave the country.** If you are not able to assure your departure from the U.S. within that 15-day grace period, you may want to rethink your options for the Fall 2020 semester in an effort to remain in good standing with your immigration status.

8. Will my eligibility for CPT (Curricular Practical Training) be affected if I take a LOA?

YES or MAYBE. If you remember from your time as a First-Year, you were only eligible for CPT work authorization *after* your first two semesters were completed (for many of you, that meant the summer after your freshman year was over.) If you take a LOA and are unable to be reinstated with your same SEVIS ID#, that CPT eligibility clock will start over with your new SEVIS ID#. You will need to earn two complete semesters upon your return to active status (with your new SEVIS ID#) before once again earning your eligibility for CPT.

If you *are* able to return within the 5-month window, and your SEVIS record is able to be reinstated successfully, then your eligibility continues *as is* and your “CPT clock” does not start over.

9. Will my eligibility for Post-completion OPT (Optional Practical Training) be affected if I take a LOA?

In order to be eligible for Post-completion OPT after you graduate, you must have completed a full year of study (two consecutive semesters) at your current institution.

In other words, SENIORS...

- if you still have two remaining semesters to complete, taking a LOA would not jeopardize your OPT eligibility. You could take your LOA (either one semester or a year) and return to Dickinson for your final two semesters, thus giving you your eligibility for OPT.

- if you only have one remaining semester before graduating, and assuming you are currently in “active status” in SEVIS and were active last semester, you **MUST** be in active status THIS Fall 2020 semester in order to be eligible for post-completion OPT.

10. How do I proceed with taking my LOA?

Please review [this link](#). Scroll down to “Status Changes.” If you are considering a LOA and have specific questions, or are already confident in your decision to move forward, reach out to *Angie Harris*, Associate Dean of Students, at harrisa@dickinson.edu, as soon as possible.

DO I NEED A NEW I-20?

11. Do I still need a new I-20?

NO... and YES, so allow us to explain.

NO, you do not *immediately* need a new I-20. After the July 6th guidance was rescinded, the need to reprint all I-20's with specific “remarks” became a moot point.

However, YES, everyone will require a new I-20 after the start of the new semester. This is due to the fact our institution changed our semester Start/End Dates. Our new dates will be reflected in your SEVIS record when we “register” everyone in SEVIS for the Fall term (something DSO's are required to do each and every semester anyway.)

- This process will *start* the week following Drop/Add.
- This process will *be completed* within the three weeks following Drop/Add.
- **YES, we are still permitted to *email* I-20's, so all F-1 students, no matter where you live or are taking classes this semester, should expect to receive your new I-20 digitally via email to your Dickinson email account.**

ARRIVAL TO CAMPUS:

12. I have petitioned (and been confirmed) to reside on campus this semester. When am I permitted to move in, and are there any special move-in procedures due to COVID-19?

Student Life continues to work diligently with a committee of stakeholders across campus to confirm move-in dates and policies. Thank you for your patience as there are so many factors affecting move-in. There *will* be a window of dates released detailing when and how you will be permitted to move in.

SPECIAL REQUEST: If you are planning to arrive to campus and move into an apartment or campus housing already inhabited by your roommate or a friend, PLEASE DO NOT DO SO without receiving permission from the college. This will put our entire campus and community at risk. You must follow all college health and safety protocols when arriving to campus for move-in.

13. Will I need to quarantine after arriving to campus?

YES (likely). Student Life continues to work diligently with a committee of stakeholders across campus to clarify all Health & Safety procedures for on-campus residents. The CDC's current guidelines *do* highly recommend a 14-day quarantine for all international travelers. Thank you for your patience as we continue to assess and make final decisions about quarantine and other Health & Safety measures.

14. Will there be any campus shuttles available for my ground transportation from Harrisburg to Carlisle?

NO. Due to health and safety precautions, DPS will not be providing any shuttles to/from airports or train stations. You are responsible for your own travel arrangements.

- Consider using other preferred forms of transportation to arrive to campus (Lyft/Uber/friend/etc.)
- CGSE also recommends a driver service called [Carlisle Car & Driver](#). They are using extreme cleaning protocols between each shuttle and honoring all health and safety measures during their trips. They are safe, reliable, and *will* be operating throughout all phases of the COVID-19 challenge.

OTHER QUESTIONS:

15. Am I permitted to work/intern/research, remotely or otherwise, if I am not on campus?

Working remotely for Dickinson College: (taken from the Dickinson FAQ page)

All requests for remote work must be approved before students are hired.

- If the student resides in the United States, remote work may be permitted with approval.
- If the student resides outside of the United States, no remote work will be permitted.
- Non-resident alien student employees who have left the United States are not permitted to perform any remote work.

Working remotely for anyone else:

According to F-1 regulations, you are not permitted to work/intern/research for anyone other than Dickinson College, whether remote or in-person, whether paid or unpaid labor, without CPT approval. This F-1 regulation has not changed. You **MUST** gain CPT approval *before starting your work* for any job, internship, research experience, etc.

- CPT *is* required in every circumstance if you are located within the U.S.
- CPT *is* required if you are located outside of the U.S. but working for a U.S.-based company

- CPT is *not* required if you are located outside of the U.S. and working for a non-U.S.-based company

If you are unfamiliar with CPT approval and how this works at Dickinson College, CGSE will once again be teaming up with our colleagues at the [Internship Notation Program](#) to host virtual Info Sessions this Fall. Stay tuned for dates and further details.

THANK YOU!!!

Here at CGSE, we recognize the multi-faceted challenges you face in the midst of this global pandemic, and we cannot express enough how much we care about you as an international student. We are here, we are listening, and we are working diligently to advocate for you and your needs. Hopefully this document has been of assistance to you at this time, and we are already working on the next one as soon as additional information is shared with us both from the institution *and* from I.C.E./SEVP.

NOTE: If you have sent an individual email to a staff member at CGSE, or to our main account at global@dickinson.edu, asking a question answered in this FAQ, **please accept this FAQ as your email response.** Thank you for your understanding.