

F-1 Visa International Student FAQ

Center for Global Study & Engagement

November 2, 2020

INTRODUCTION

As we await institutional news from President Ensign's Office on what the Spring 2021 semester will look like here at Dickinson, we want to address some frequently asked questions coming into our office here at the *Center for Global Study and Engagement* (CGSE.)

AS OF THE PUBLICATION OF THIS FAQ, there has been no new COVID-19 guidance issued from I.C.E. and the SEVP. Unless something new would be released, we continue to operate under the temporary guidance released on both [March 9](#) and [March 13](#), 2020. Updated [FAQ's](#) from I.C.E. dated on August 7, 2020, are also available.

*****THEREFORE, IF DICKINSON CHOOSES TO REMAIN FULLY ONLINE FOR THE SPRING, OR CHOOSES A HYBRID MODEL, NOTHING WILL CHANGE WITH YOUR CURRENT F-1 VISA REQUIREMENTS. ONLY IF DICKINSON RETURNS TO NORMAL OPERATIONS WILL F-1 STUDENTS ONCE AGAIN BE REQUIRED TO ATTEND ALL IN-PERSON COURSES.*****

PLEASE NOTE: Most of the questions in this FAQ are intended for Dickinson students currently in "active status" in SEVIS (or returning from a Leave of Absence.) A separate FAQ re: the issuance of initial I-20's was sent to incoming First-years currently in "initial status" on [October 14th](#).

I'VE HEARD ABOUT THE PROPOSED RULE ATTEMPTING TO ELIMINATE THE "DURATION OF STATUS." WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

1. What is this proposed rule to eliminate "duration of status," and how does it affect me?

Here is [a link to the full document](#) released by the Department of Homeland Security.

Quick background description from our colleagues at NAFSA (National Association for Foreign Student Affairs): "On September 25, 2020, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) published a proposed rule to eliminate duration of status (D/S) for F students and their dependents, J exchange visitors and their dependents, and I media representatives. The proposed rule was published in the Federal Register at 85 FR 60526 (September 25, 2020)."

Here is [very helpful link from NAFSA](#) with an explanation of details re: the proposed rule, the comment period, how the international community is responding, and what this rule will mean for F-1 students if it passes.

Please keep in mind this was only a *proposed* rule. The rule was followed by a 30-day comment period which ended on October 26, 2020. During the comment period, institutions, businesses, individuals, etc. were encouraged to “comment” on the proposed rule.

2. What has Dickinson been doing to address this issue?

We’re so glad you asked! President Ensign posted an official comment on the proposed rule during the “comment period” on behalf of the institution. In addition, many of us wrote to our representatives, asking them to sign on to a letter supporting the continuation of the duration of status. We are following this matter very closely and will continue to advocate for you as the situation progresses.

REGARDLESS OF WHAT THE SPRING SEMESTER LOOKS LIKE, I WANT TO CONTINUE MY STUDIES AS A FULL-TIME STUDENT THIS SPRING 2021 – WILL ANYTHING CHANGE WITH MY F-1 VISA STATUS?

3. I am currently on campus in Carlisle. Regardless of what the Spring 2021 semester looks like, I would like to remain on campus – If needed/preferred, 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, *even if* the school chooses a hybrid model (a mix of online and in-person courses.) 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” in a hybrid model. Please plan to maintain a full-time course load, regardless of your course styles.

NOTE: Student Life will release additional information about housing/return to campus for the Spring semester after President’s Ensign’s announcement. All students must adhere to the clear guidelines set by Student Life in regard to move-in dates/times, COVID-19 procedures, testing, quarantining, etc. Stay tuned.

4. Regardless of what the Spring 2021 semester looks like, I would like to return to campus in Carlisle – If needed/preferred, 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, *even if* the school chooses a hybrid model (a mix of online and in-person courses.) 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” in a hybrid model. Please plan to maintain a full-time course load, regardless of your course styles.

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guidelines set by Student Life in regard to move-in dates/times, COVID-19 procedures, testing, quarantining, etc. Stay tuned.

5. I am in the U.S. but plan to remain off-campus for the Spring 2021 semester (e.g. at a family member's house in New York, at a friend's home in Texas, 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, *even if* the school chooses a hybrid model (a mix of online and in-person courses.) 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.” Please plan to maintain a full-time course load.

6. 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 Spring 2021 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, *even if* the school chooses a hybrid model (a mix of online and in-person courses.) 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.” Please plan to 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

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 is available to sophomores, juniors, and seniors in their home country on a case by case basis. It would be treated as a Non-Dickinson Study Abroad option. For additional details, please 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."

*****If you are interested in opening an application for one of these programs now, please email CGSE at global@dickinson.edu. We will have those applications open very soon. If you would prefer to wait until Dickinson's spring decision is announced, CGSE will also provide you with instructions to apply at that time. You are also invited to reach out directly to one of the CGSE staff members mentioned above under your preferred program.**

I WANT TO TAKE A LEAVE OF ABSENCE (LOA) THIS SPRING 2021 – WHAT HAPPENS NOW WITH MY F-1 VISA STATUS?

7. 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 effect on your immigration status and will not affect your ability to regain your status as an F-1 student in the future.

8. When I am 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 same 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 students still have a valid F-1 visa in their passport from before, and we recommend each student ask their local embassy/consulate regarding their need to secure a new visa. 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.

NOTE: If you are hoping to have your SEVIS # reinstated for the Spring 2021 semester, we are unable to request this until 60 days before the start date of our next semester. Currently, our next semester begins on January 25, 2021. The earliest we are able to request your reinstatement would be Thursday, November 26, 2020. That date also happens to be our Thanksgiving holiday, which means **the earliest we can request reinstatements for LOA’s is Monday, November 30, 2020.**

9. 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.

10. What if I plan to take a LOA for the Spring 2021 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 Spring 2021 semester in an effort to remain in good standing with your immigration status.

11. 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.

12. 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 this Fall 2020, you MUST be in active status this Spring 2021 semester in order to be eligible for post-completion OPT.

For more detailed information on OPT, please visit [this link from Study in the States](#).

13. How do I proceed with taking my LOA?

Please review [this link](#). Scroll down to “Changes in Student Status.” 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?

14. I received my new I-20 this Fall and nothing has changed with my status or pertinent information. Will I need a new I-20 for the Spring semester?

NO. You will only need a new I-20 for the Spring semester if Dickinson’s academic calendar changes again (like it did in the Fall.) If there are no changes to your personal information, and no institutional changes to the academic calendar, you are good with your current I-20 and travel signature.

15. I received my new I-20 this Fall but need to update some important information (declared/dropped major, change of major, change of permanent home address, etc.) How do I request a new I-20?

Please use [THIS FORM](#) to request your new I-20. One of our DSO’s will follow up with you to assure all appropriate changes have been made and will then email you your new I-20.

NOTE: YES, we are still permitted to *email* I-20’s. All F-1 students, no matter where you live or are taking classes, should expect to continue to receive updated I-20’s digitally via email to your Dickinson email account.

I NEVER SUBMITTED MY 2019 U.S. TAXES. DO I STILL NEED TO DO THAT?

16. I never submitted my U.S. federal, state, or local taxes. Do I still need to?

YES!!! You are still required to submit your 2019 tax paperwork. Whether or not you owe any taxes, you must still file all tax paperwork as part of your F-1 visa compliance.

Please refer to our [previous FAQ dated July 10, 2020](#) for the complete details/reminders on how to file your U.S. taxes.

OTHER QUESTIONS:

17. I received a phone call about my social security #. I heard this might be fraudulent activity – is it safe to talk to them?

NO! The Social Security Administration will never call you unprompted asking for information or confirmation of your identity. PLEASE DO NOT EVER GIVE AWAY ANY IDENTIFYING INFORMATION CONNECTED TO YOUR SOCIAL SECURITY #. This number should be closely protected by you and only shared with trusted employers.

18. How can I book an advising appointment with one of our DSO's?

Our *International Student & Scholar Services* staff would love to meet with you! All advising appointments are currently being hosted either on Microsoft Teams or Zoom. Please email global@dickinson.edu with your need for an appointment, a basic description of your needs, and we will direct you to the best advisor for your situation.

THANK YOU!!!

Here at CGSE, we recognize the multi-faceted challenges you face in the midst of this global pandemic. We are here, we are listening, and we are working diligently to advocate for you and your needs. Hopefully this FAQ has been of assistance to you at this time, and we will continue to work diligently on any follow-up communications as additional information is shared from the institution *and/or* 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.