



DREXEL UNIVERSITY

## International Students and Scholars Services

### GUIDANCE UPDATE: FALL 2020 FOR CURRENT/RETURNING F-1 INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Below, you will find answers to frequently asked questions and the steps you should take based on your study, co-op or leave of absence plans, for the fall term. **Please be aware that this guidance is subject to change based on policy adjustments announced by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) and any federal/state mandates that affect Drexel's reopening plans.**

In addition to this guidance, you can review [Drexel's hybrid/HyFlex plan to return to campus](#).

#### ISSS OFFICE STATUS AND FORM SUBMISSION/PICK-UP

Beginning Monday, September 28, and until further notice, the ISSS office will open during the following hours:

- Monday & Tuesday: 1:00 PM - 5:00 PM
- Wednesday: CLOSED
- Thursday & Friday: 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM

You may visit the office for document drop-off, document pick-up, and travel signatures. There will be no face-to-face advising at this time.

For questions and advising, we encourage all interactions be conducted via email: [iss@drexel.edu](mailto:iss@drexel.edu). You can schedule a phone call or Zoom appointment in [DrexelOne](#) > My Success Team.

#### 5+ MONTHS OUTSIDE THE US

**As long as you remain in Active F-1 status, the 5-month physical presence requirement will not apply while the temporary measures related to COVID-19 are in place.** This means you can remain outside the US for more than 5 months without fear of termination. In normal circumstances, an absence from the US of 5 months or more would result in termination of your F-1 status. However, this is currently not being enforced.

If you departed the US during the spring or summer term and choose to study remotely from outside the US during the fall, your status should remain active as long as you meet full-time enrollment requirements, even if you will be outside the US for more than 5 months.

#### UNDERGRADUATE CO-OP STUDENTS

**As long as you are enrolled in at least 12 co-op credits from the Steinbright Career Development Center (SCDC), your status will remain active, regardless of your physical location.** This means: If you are doing co-op abroad (with or without CPT) your F-1 status will stay active. If you are doing US-based co-op with CPT, your F-1 status will remain active, even if your employer has you working from home/remotely.

Please scroll down to the section "Study Plans, Steps to Take & How Your Choice Affects your F-1 Status" to review step-by-step instructions you must do to maintain your F-1 status while on co-op.

If you have concerns about your co-op employment or enrollment in SCDC credits, contact your Co-op Advisor.

*Updated 9/25/2020*

## TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

Though inconvenient, travel restrictions are necessary to stop the spread of COVID-19. It is important for you to closely monitor the restrictions in place up through the time that you travel. It is recommended that you **review the current restrictions now** and **double check restrictions prior to your departure**. Restrictions can change, sometimes with little notice.

Here are some resources to assist you in understanding travel restrictions for the US and for other countries:

- [Travelers Prohibited from Entry to the United States](#)
- [United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance on International Travel](#)
- [US Homeland Security Arrival Restrictions](#)
- [International Air Transport Association COVID-19 Travel Regulations Map](#)

It is generally recommended that you closely monitor your health and practice social distancing for 14 days prior to your departure as well as for 14 days after your arrival in your destination. If you are sick, you should not travel.

**STUDENTS IN EUROPE/UK/IRELAND:** It was recently announced that F-1 visa holders may travel to the US from the EU Schengen area, the UK, and Ireland, despite the travel ban. That said, we strongly recommend carrying a printout of [this webpage](#) if you plan to take advantage of this exception and travel to the US from one of these countries in case you encounter a Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) agent who is unaware of this Department of State announcement. If you will be traveling/transiting through the EU, please be aware of any potential travel restrictions applicable you were in/visited previously (review the page [Travelers Prohibited from Entry to the United States](#)).

## TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

This section outlines the documents that you should carry with you when traveling to the US from abroad. You can always find general travel guidance on our web page, [Travel Information for F-1 Holders](#).

Students returning to the US in F-1 status should carry the following, *at minimum*:

- **Valid passport** (passport must be valid for at least 6 months from date of intended return).
- **Valid (unexpired) F-1 visa sticker (page)** in your passport (except for Canadian and Bermudan citizens).
- **Valid I-20 form**, with a **travel signature on page 2** from an ISSS advisor **within the last year**. If you received your most recent I-20 from ISSS via email, include the **digital I-20 support letter** that was provided to you.

There have been reports of CBP officers requesting that students produce additional documentation. In addition to the above, you may choose to travel with the following:

- Print your **course schedule** from [DrexelOne](#).
- Print your **unofficial transcript** and/or **proof of enrollment** from [DrexelOne](#).
- **Evidence of funding**; bring a copy of whatever funding is mentioned on your I-20.
- **STUDENTS TRAVELING FROM EUROPE/UK/IRELAND:** a printout of [this webpage](#).

If you experience any trouble when attempting to enter the US, it is within your right to ask CBP to contact Drexel Public Safety at 215-895-2822 and connect to the ISSS emergency contact.

## STUDENTS GRADUATING IN THE FALL TERM, OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)

Please be aware that **if you plan to apply for OPT**, you must mail your application to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) from **inside the United States**. If you leave the US before applying for OPT and you do not return before the end of the fall term to mail your application, you will not be able to enter the US with your Drexel I-20 and F-1 visa. Therefore, your fall term study/travel plans matter. Read more about OPT [here](#).

**If you do not intend to apply for OPT, you are free to complete your program from outside the US.** Your F-1 status will remain active in case you change your mind before the end of the fall term. If you prefer to end your F-1 status early, you can let US know (a benefit of ending your status early is that you are no longer bound by F-1 rules, such as full-time enrollment). If you wish to re-enter the US after the last day of fall term, you will need another visa status, like a B-2 Tourist visa, as you will not be permitted to enter with your Drexel I-20 and F-1 visa after your last day of enrollment at Drexel.

## DEFINITION OF FULL-TIME ENROLLMENT IN FALL 2020 TERM

Drexel is utilizing a Hybrid/HyFlex plan to return to campus. Almost all undergraduate programs are 100% remote while graduate program plans vary in their approach. Course delivery methods are **face-to-face (FTF)**, **hybrid (HYB)**, **remote synchronous (SYN)**, **remote asynchronous (ASY)**, and **online (ONL)**. Visit [Drexel Central's website](#) for complete details about these instructional methods. If you have questions about these course delivery codes, please consult your Academic Advisor.

You must make sure that your course schedule follows the full-time enrollment rules below. Not following these full-time enrollment regulations is a violation of your F-1 status and may result in SEVIS termination.

### UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS:

- Minimum of 12 credits total; a combination of any instructional method (FTF/HYB/SYN/ASY/ONL) is permitted.
- Most students only have remote courses (SYN/ASY/ONL) available to them.

### GRADUATE STUDENTS:

- Minimum of 9 credits total; a combination of any instructional method (FTF/HYB/SYN/ASY/ONL) is permitted.
- You may enroll 100% remote (SYN/ASY/ONL) if this is your preference.
- Please note that thesis/research credits are considered face-to-face (FTF) credits.

## STUDY PLANS, STEPS TO TAKE & HOW YOUR CHOICE AFFECTS YOUR F-1 STATUS

We have outlined several possible study -- and travel -- plans that students are pursuing to either maintain their visa status or seek termination and apply for a new visa status in the future.

**Unlike our guidance for the spring/summer terms, we are not able to comment on visa status maintenance for the following term (winter quarter/spring semester).** As we progress through the fall and SEVP releases new updates, we will provide our own updated guidance to help you transition from one term into the other.

Please review the options and consider each of them for yourself. Follow the ISSS instructions of your preferred plan. If you have questions, please email [iss@drexel.edu](mailto:iss@drexel.edu).

## STUDY IN-PERSON ON CAMPUS

If you are currently inside the US or can arrive to the US before the fall term begins, **take the following steps to maintain your visa status:**

- Be sure that your DrexelOne account is updated with your on-campus or off-campus residential address.
- Enroll in any combination of course delivery methods (FTF/HYB/SYN/ASY/ONL).
- Enroll in a full-time course load (12 credits for undergraduates, 9 credits for graduates).

If you are currently outside the US and plan to re-enter the US to attend courses on campus, please be sure to review the sections above, “Travel Documents” and “Travel Restrictions” for additional guidance.

## STUDY REMOTELY FROM OUTSIDE US

We understand that many students are experiencing difficulties securing a flight to the US due to travel restrictions, flight shortages, etc., and others feel it is safer to remain in their home countries and study remotely. Fortunately, SEVP’s recent guidance update permits you to study remotely from outside the US and maintain your F-1 status.

**In order to maintain your F-1 status, take the following steps:**

- Enroll in any combination of remote course delivery methods (SYN/ASY/ONL).
- Enroll in a full-time course load (12 credits for undergraduates, 9 credits for graduates).

## COMPLETE CO-OP CYCLE/REQUIRED INTERNSHIP *INSIDE US*

If you are scheduled to complete co-op; or a required internship, clinical rotation or practicum that will appear as credits on your fall term schedule; and your visa status will remain active. Take the following steps to maintain your visa status:

- Be sure that your DrexelOne account is updated with your on-campus or off-campus residential address.
- Complete the co-op/internship registration process with your Co-op Advisor (or your Academic Advisor, for some graduate students). Obtain Curricular Practical Training (CPT) employment authorization on your I-20 from ISSS.
- Check to make sure that your co-op/internship/etc. credits appear on your fall term schedule, and that you are enrolled in a full-time course load (12 credits for undergraduates, 9 credits for graduates).

If you experience difficulties finding co-op employment, participation in SCDC coursework instead of co-op employment will also allow you to maintain your F-1 status.

## COMPLETE *INTERNATIONAL CO-OP/REQUIRED INTERNSHIP*

If you are eligible to participate in International Co-op or you can complete a required internship, clinical rotation or practicum with an overseas company:

- Complete the co-op/internship registration process with your Co-op Advisor (or your Academic Advisor, for some graduate students).
  - You do not need CPT for an international co-op/internship if you are **outside the US working for a foreign company**.
  - If you will remain **inside the US, working remotely for the foreign company**, CPT is required.
  - If you are **outside the US but work for a company located inside the US**, please contact [iss@drexel.edu](mailto:iss@drexel.edu) so that we may determine if CPT is needed.
- Assuming you completed the first step above, your international co-op is registered at the SCDC, and no further action is needed. We will receive a report from the SCDC, and your F-1 status will remain valid.
- **GRADUATE STUDENTS:** If you are doing an international internship that contributes to your full-time enrollment, please provide information about the internship and your physical location to ISSS so that we can determine if you are maintaining F-1 status. Failure to do so may result in SEVIS termination.

## TAKE A LEAVE OF ABSENCE FROM COURSEWORK

First, please consult your Academic Advisor about taking a Leave of Absence so that you can discuss your long-term academic plan and how it is affected if you take a break for one or more terms.

Additionally, discuss your financial aid/scholarship package with [Drexel Central](#). ISSS cannot advise on how/if your financial aid is affected if you choose to take a leave of absence.

If you will only take a leave during the fall term, and you have been enrolled full-time in the past 3 quarters or 2 semesters, you may be eligible to take an International Break Term by completing the [Less Than Full Time \(LTFT\)](#) form. If you are eligible for LTFT, your F-1 status will not be terminated. You must enroll for full-time courses for next term (winter 2021 quarter/spring 2021 semester) in order to protect your status in 2021.

If you are not eligible for LTFT, your visa status would need to be terminated. **In order to avoid violating F-1 status, take the following steps:**

- Send an email to ISSS that you want ISSS to terminate your SEVIS record for Authorized Early Withdrawal.
- Leave the US within 15 days from the day of SEVIS termination.
- Request a letter from your Academic Advisor that you are eligible to return to Drexel in a specific term.
- Request an I-20 application by emailing [iss@drexel.edu](mailto:iss@drexel.edu) at least 3 months before your planned return.
- Return to the US up to 30 days before the Program Start Date on your new Form I-20.