ISSS Frequently Asked Questions About Fall 2021 for Continuing International Students

Last Updated June 4, 2021 (NOTE: This document is updated weekly. Please refresh your screen or use a different browser if the document you are reading is more than a week old.)

We know that international students have a lot of questions about Fall 2021. This document has answers for students who have already completed at least one semester at the UMN. If you are a new student, review our FAQ for New International Students.

We will continue to update this document as information becomes available. We also encourage you to regularly read the ISSS Weekly Update and the emails sent to your UMN email from ISSS and other departments. If you have any questions:

- **For questions about course offerings:** Contact your academic adviser or department/program directly.
- **For questions regarding immigration, travel, or your visa:** Please contact ISSS by sending an email to isss@umn.edu or making an appointment with an ISSS advisor.

Attention continuing students who have not entered the U.S. (those who only studied online during the 2020-2021 school year): While you are considered a “Continuing” or “Returning” student by the University, you are classified as an “Initial” or “First Time” Arrival for immigration purposes. You must complete the ISSS Requirements for First Time Arrivals. Additionally, your visa regulations may be different than continuing students who have already been in the U.S. (more information is shared throughout this document). If you have questions, email isssnew@umn.edu.

Click the links below for answers grouped by topic:
- **General Questions**
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For More Information:
- **Safe Campus** (the website where the University is sharing COVID-19 related updates)
- **Office of Undergraduate Education**
- **Graduate School**
- **Housing & Residential Life**
General Questions

Q. What is the University doing to reduce the spread of COVID-19 on campus?

The University has and remains committed to ensuring the safety of all students, staff, faculty, and community members. Before the start of the spring semester, the University posted a Spring 2021 Guide, and updates will continue to be posted about Fall 2021 plans on the SAFE-U website.

Q. How can I be informed about changes and updates?

Your UMN email is the University’s primary way to contact you, so it is important that you regularly read the emails sent there including the ISSS Weekly Update.

Q. How can I talk to an ISSS staff person?

ISSS staff are working remotely and are available to answer questions from international students and scholars. To contact an advisor, please email isss@umn.edu or schedule an appointment.

Q. Who should I contact if my plans change (switching to studying in-person rather than online or the opposite)?

You should contact your academic advisor/departement as soon as possible. Also:

- If you have taken at least one semester of in-person classes at UMN, you need to check the travel signature on your I-20/DS-2019 to determine if it will be valid on the day you return to the U.S. Travel signatures are valid for one year. If your signature will be out of date, you can request a new Travel I-20/DS-2019 through MyISSS.
- If you have not yet studied at UMN in person and you plan to arrive for fall in-person classes, contact the appropriate office about your I-20/DS-2019:
  - Undergraduate students: isssnew@umn.edu
  - Graduate students: gsquest@umn.edu
  - Professional school students: isssnew@umn.edu
- If you have never arrived in the U.S. and you will study online again this semester, you will need to contact the appropriate email address above to defer your I-20/DS-2019 as well.

Q. Who should I contact if I want to take a leave of absence?

If you decide to not enroll in the fall but want to return at a later date, you will need to consult your academic advisor and ISSS about the request for a Leave of Absence.
ISSS is required to terminate a student’s SEVIS record if they do not enroll in a particular semester. If your SEVIS record is terminated, you will need to contact ISSS before you return to request a new I-20/DS-2019. We request you contact ISSS three months before your planned arrival to allow processing time.

**Note:** You should be aware that if your SEVIS record is terminated, you will not be eligible to apply for OPT/CPT until you complete 2 full-time semesters while inside the U.S. (for example, fall and spring). You will also need to pay the SEVIS fee again.

**Immigration-Related Items**

**Immigration Documents**

**Q. I have questions about my I-20/DS-2019. Who should I contact?**

Please email isss@umn.edu or schedule an appointment to talk to an ISSS advisor.

**Q. Can you send me an electronic copy of my I-20 or DS-2019?**

For documents issued by the UMN:

- **I-20:** Yes, ISSS is issuing electronic I-20s through Spring 2022.
- **DS-2019:** We can send an unsigned, digital copy of the document for information and visa scheduling purposes. The digital copy cannot be used during the visa interview or to enter the United States. You will need to receive the signed, original DS-2019 in the mail before your visa interview.

**Q. Can I apply for a visa to enter the U.S. for a hybrid program?**

Yes, students enrolling in a program that includes in-person and online components are eligible to apply for an F-1 visa.

**Visa Interviews**

**Q. I am a current student who is outside the U.S. and needs a visa renewal. Am I eligible for a visa if I am taking all of my credits online?**

You are expected to enroll in courses taught in person if you are able. However, if your SEVIS record is active, the SEVP guidance continues to support this situation.

**Q. I'm having difficulties scheduling an appointment for my visa interview. What can I do?**
We recommend checking whether appointments are available at another consulate. Some consulates have begun scheduling visa appointments while others have not, so while the consulate nearest you may not have appointments available, another one in your country or nearby may.

**Q. Will I need a physical form (versus an electronic copy) of my I-20 or DS-2019 when I go for my visa interview?**

- **F-1 Students:** For the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, F-1 students are allowed to use the electronic signature and delivery of Form I-20. You must print the I-20 and sign and date the bottom of page 1 for it to be valid. Bring the printed, signed I-20 to your visa interview.
- **J-1 Students:** For those on a J-1 visa, ISSS is not allowed to send you an electronic DS-2019 with an electronic signature. We will need to print and mail your DS-2019 before you go for your visa interview.

**Arrival Information**

**Travel Restrictions**

**Q. How do I know if the U.S. has issued travel restrictions for my country?**

To ensure you have the most up-to-date information, please review the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s website. This website has a list of the included countries and links to the specific Presidential Proclamations. Countries not on the list of Presidential Proclamations do not have travel restrictions at this time.

We encourage international students to regularly check the CDC’s website and this FAQ as new travel restrictions may be announced before the start of classes.

**Q. The U.S. has issued travel restrictions for my country. What can I do?**

If you wish to travel to the U.S. now you must either 1) travel to a third country or 2) determine if you are eligible for a National Interest Exception, and more information is below.

**Q. What do I need to know about traveling to a third country first?**

Individuals coming from one of the listed countries have the option to travel to and stay in a third country for 14 days before coming to the U.S. When deciding whether to do this, you should check the visa requirements of that country along with any quarantine requirements in that country.
Fall 2021 FAQ for Continuing International Students

National Interest Exception

Q. What is the National Interest Exception? How do I know if I am eligible?

The Department of State announced individuals “who are seeking to provide vital support for critical infrastructure; journalists; students and certain academics covered by exchange visitor programs” (emphasis added) may be eligible for a National Interest Exception (NIE). The eligibility and application process varies based on your visa type, so continue reading for more information.

Q. What do I need to know as an F-1 student?

International students on F-1 visas traveling from or through Brazil, China, India, Iran, Ireland, the Schengen area, South Africa, and the U.K. may be eligible for a National Interest Exception (NIE), however, it could depend on when you will arrive in the United States.

If you are traveling from the Schengen Area, the United Kingdom, or Ireland

Students on F-1 visas after being in any of these areas are automatically eligible for an NIE now. You can travel to the U.S. without waiting 14 days in another country.

If you are traveling to the U.S. from Brazil, China, India, Iran, or South Africa

Before August 1

The NIE is not in effect, students traveling on F-1 visas after being in these countries will need to 1) stay in a third country for 14 days before entering the U.S., or 2) apply for and be granted an NIE “for purposes related to humanitarian travel, public health response, and national security.”

You should be aware that it is not guaranteed you will be granted an NIE to travel to the U.S. before August 1 even if you have classwork that starts before this date. If you apply, we recommend you continue planning for the possibility that you will not receive the NIE.

If neither is an option, you will need to delay your travel until August.

On or after August 1

Students on F-1 visas will automatically be granted/considered for the NIE to travel to the U.S. if they are arriving on or after August 1. You do not need to contact an embassy or consulate unless you need to get a new visa or renew an existing visa.

Q. What do I need to know if I have an F-2 dependent?
F-2 Dependents traveling from a country with travel restrictions should be prepared to travel with the F-1 Student.

Q. **What do I need to know as a J-1 student?**

- **Students needing a J-1 visa to begin or resume classes** this fall should request an NIE from the U.S. consulate nearby when applying for their J-1 visa, if necessary.
- **Students already holding a valid J-1 visa** should confirm with the U.S. consulate nearby whether they will need an individual NIE in addition to their visa to enter the U.S.

**General Travel Information**

Q. **Am I required to show a negative COVID test before flying to the United States?**

Yes, the U.S. is requiring all international travelers to get a viral test. Please review the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website](https://www.cdc.gov) for the most accurate information.

Q. **Is the UMN requiring individuals to quarantine after arriving at the UMN?**

The University of Minnesota is following the U.S. Center for Disease Control’s recommendations. Please review the CDC’s website for updated [travel recommendations](https://www.cdc.gov).  

Q. **How can students prove to an immigration officer that they are enrolled in courses that are not 100% online?**

There has not been an official announcement stating what documents visa officials or immigration officers may ask to see regarding a student’s enrollment in online classes. Based on the systems used at the University of Minnesota, we recommend you do the following:

1. Go to the [Academics tab](https://myu.umn.edu) of MyU.
2. Click on registration and then the button to register for classes (it states “Register (Shopping Cart)”)
3. Select Fall 2021 and click “Continue”.
4. You will then be shown a list of your courses.
5. Take a screenshot of your classes (the directions for how to do this varies by computer)
6. Print out your screenshot and [this PDF](https://www.example.com).

You should bring these documents **in your carry-on luggage** when you enter the U.S. These documents are not required but could be helpful if you are asked questions about your courses.
Q. What is the latest date that I can arrive at UMN and still attend for Fall 2021?

If you will be delayed, email your academic adviser or department as soon as you are aware of the delay. They can share specific information about your program and discuss what you need to do.

Enrollment Questions

General Enrollment Questions

Q. I have a question about my degree program and/or what classes I should take. Who should I contact?

You should also consult with your Academic Advisor/department about University policy and program-specific requirements and online course availability. ISSS can only advise on your immigration-related requirements.

Q. I heard that SEVP issued more guidance for fall 2021. What do I need to know?

Yes, on April 26, 2021, SEVP issued a continuation of the guidance from July 2020. Because the University of Minnesota is offering both online and in-person classes in fall 2021, the temporary rules remain the same for international students. The answers in this FAQ are based on University of Minnesota policies and SEVP guidance.

Students Who Are Studying Inside the U.S. for the First Time (Those Who Started Classes in Fall 2020 or Spring 2021 While Studying Outside the U.S.)

Although you are considered a Fall 2020 or Spring 2021 admit for academic purposes, you are considered an initial international student for immigration purposes because Fall 2021 will be your first semester studying within the U.S. on your current student visa. Therefore, if you are entering the U.S. to study at the University of Minnesota and do not currently have an active SEVIS record, immigration regulations require that you enroll full-time. You will be expected to enroll in courses taught in person, but immigration regulations only require that you enroll in at least one hybrid or in-person course.

Continuing Students Who Have Previously Taken In-person Courses

You must enroll full-time to maintain your immigration status. However, the limitations on online enrollment have been lifted again for Fall 2021. You will be expected to enroll in courses taught in person, but immigration regulations allow you to enroll in as many or as few online courses as needed for your program.
Studying While Inside the U.S.

Q. *If I have a class with an online lecture and in-person lab, would it count as an online class or as in-person?*

Please contact your Academic Advisor/Graduate Program Coordinator for questions related to individual classes.

Studying While Outside of the U.S.

Q. *Will I be able to study online from my home country this fall?*

We hope you will be able to join us in person this fall. As the majority of the University of Minnesota’s classes will be held in person, studying on campus will mean you will have access to the widest variety of classes. We also believe this will give you the best experience. The University of Minnesota, however, understands that some international students may not be able to come to the U.S. due to visa or travel difficulties.

This updated visa guidance states international students can enroll in classes online from outside the U.S. You must continue to enroll in a full course load (review F-1 student or J-1 student information) to keep your SEVIS record active (this means that you are eligible to maintain your F-1/J-1 status with a full-time course load). Your visa (the stamp in your passport) will not be canceled if you are studying full-time from your home country.

You should consult with your academic adviser to determine if the classes you need will be offered in an online format.

Q. *Will there be enough online courses for international students who are unable to travel to the U.S.?*

Decisions about course offerings are generally made at the college and program level. Please contact your Academic Advisor/Graduate Program Coordinator to talk about the challenges you are facing and your need for online courses. ISSS and the GPS Alliance have also communicated with departments and colleges to ask that they give international students options and flexibility, but your academic advisor/department will be able to answer questions about your program’s courses and options.

Q. *I am studying from my home country. If there are not enough online courses for me to be a full-time student, can I take below the full-time requirement?*
You are not required to follow F-1/J-1 rules while you are studying from outside the U.S. You can continue to be a UMN student and take the classes that are available. Please contact ISSS to tell us if this is your case.

ISSS is required to terminate a student’s SEVIS record if they do not enroll full-time in a particular semester. If your SEVIS record is terminated, you will need to contact ISSS before you return to request a new I-20/DS-2019. We request you contact ISSS three months before your planned arrival to allow processing time.

**Note:** You should be aware that if your SEVIS record is terminated, you will not be eligible to apply for OPT/CPT until you have completed 2 full-time semesters while inside the U.S. (for example, fall and spring). You will also need to pay the SEVIS fee again.

**Q.** I plan to graduate at the end of Fall 2021. Can I take all my remaining classes and exams online and graduate as scheduled at the end of the fall term?

You should consult with your academic adviser/department to determine if the classes you need to meet your graduation requirements will be offered in an online format. Regarding the implications for your immigration status, continuing international students are allowed to take classes remotely within and outside of the U.S.

**Q.** Does studying while outside of the United States during the COVID-19 emergency affect when I can apply for CPT/OPT/AT?

- **F-1 students** accrue eligibility for CPT and OPT (practical training) whether they are inside or outside of the United States during the COVID-19 emergency if the student is in Active status in SEVIS.
- **J-1 students** are eligible for Academic Training for up to 18 months (36 for doctoral students) if their SEVIS record has been kept active, whether they were inside or outside the U.S.

**ISSS Requirements for First Time Arrivals**

**Q.** I am arriving to the United States for the first time this fall after studying online during 2020-2021. What do I need to do to have the AI Hold removed from my account?

All international students arriving at the University of Minnesota for the first time (including those who have already completed one or two semesters online while outside of the U.S.) must complete two new student requirements to have this hold removed:
1. The International Preparation Course should be completed before you arrive in the USA, and
2. Complete an ISSS Check-In and upload your immigration documents through MyISSS as soon as possible after arriving in the USA.

We also encourage you to attend Global Gopher Events, but this is not required. If you have any questions about new student requirements, email isssnew@umn.edu.

Q. I studied online while outside the U.S. during Fall 2020 and Spring 2021, and I completed the International Student Preparation Course last summer/fall. Do I need to do it again?

No, you do not need to complete the course again. Your completion was recorded at that time. You should review the course to ensure you have completed all of the requirements and to review the applicable information.

Q. I studied online from outside the U.S. during Fall 2020 and Spring 2021, but I previously took classes in person at the University of Minnesota. Do I need to do the International Student Preparation Course or ISSS Check-in?

No, continuing students do not need to complete these requirements again. Students should have completed the new international student requirements during their first semester in-person at the UMN. If you have any questions, please email isssnew@umn.edu.

Health Care

Go to the Student Fees section for information about the Health Insurance Fee

Health Insurance

Q. Am I required to have health insurance if I am studying within the United States?

Yes, all international students who are in the United States are required to have the Student Health Benefit Plan or the Graduate Assistantship Plan.

Q. Does the student health insurance cover me if I were to get sick?

Yes, please review the Office of Student Health Benefits website for more information about the Student Health Benefits Plan or the Graduate Assistant Health Plan. You can also email umshbo@umn.edu if you have additional questions about your insurance plan.

Q. Am I required to have health insurance if I am studying online while outside the United States?
If you are studying outside of the U.S. in your home country, you will need to waive the University-sponsored insurance (SHBP). Every semester you will have to submit the following to the Office of Student Health Benefits in person, by mail, email, or fax:

- A completed waiver form
- One of the required forms of documentation, if you have previously traveled to the U.S. on your UMN visa

Once approved, your health insurance waiver will be valid for one semester.

(“Residence in your home country” means you’re physically studying remotely in your home country.)

COVID-19 Vaccine

Please review General Travel Information for questions about quarantine and testing requirements during travel

Q. Will I be required to have the vaccine before arrival to attend the University of Minnesota?

At this time, there is no requirement to have the COVID-19 vaccine before arriving at the University of Minnesota. It is possible that a requirement may be announced before the start of the school year. Please regularly check your UMN email and reference the University's Safe Campus page and Student FAQs for any updates.

Q. Will I be eligible for a vaccine upon arrival?

Vaccines are becoming widely available. All individuals in the MN ages 16 and older are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. For the most up-to-date information on vaccine eligibility, review this Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document and check your UMN email regularly for vaccine availability updates.

Student Fees

Q. Where can I find information about student fees?

You should review the One Stop website and/or contact One Stop if you have questions about your student fees.
Employment

Q. **Is it possible for me to have a job as an international student and work outside the U.S.?**

Some students will be able to be hired and continue/start new jobs while being outside the U.S. during the fall semester.

- **Graduate and professional degree students** should contact their academic department where they can assist in the next steps to determine if you are eligible for employment.
- **Undergraduate students**, for ongoing employment, should contact their previous supervisor to learn about their options. For those starting new positions, you should tell the hiring department that you are hoping to work remotely from another country when you are applying for the position.

Q. **As a student, what paperwork do I need to complete before starting employment?**

You should talk to the Human Resources/I-9 Administrator for your department about the process to complete your Form I-9. You will need to present several documents to complete this form. All new UMN employees must complete their I-9 on or before their first day of employment.

Housing

On-Campus Housing

Q. **I have questions about living on-campus. Who should I contact?**

For questions about on-campus housing, please review the [Housing and Residential Life website](https://example.com) for more information. To read more specific information for international students, please visit the Housing’s webpage for [International students](https://example.com).

Off-Campus Housing

Q. **I have questions about living off-campus. Who should I contact?**

For questions about living off-campus, please review the [Off-Campus Living website](https://example.com). It provides an overview of the neighborhoods surrounding the university and some things to be aware of when you are renting in the U.S.

You will need to contact a landlord or apartment manager directly to get information about renting a specific property. Check the reviews of a specific rental property for you to know whether it is suitable for your needs.
Q. I’ve found a place off-campus where I want to live, and I’m now being told I will need to sign a lease. What should I do?

It is important that you fully understand the lease before signing. We strongly recommend asking Student Legal Services to review your lease and/or to provide advice on negotiating with your landlord. SLS’s support is free for all UMN students who have paid the Student Services Fee.