Frequently Asked Questions from International Students regarding the effects of COVID-19 on Spring 2021

Please find below some answers to questions we have recently received. If you have other questions or concerns, please contact the Office of Global Affairs. We will do our best to assist you. Please note, the policies informing our guidance can change. The most important of these is the guidance issued from the Student Exchange and Visitor Program (SEVP or SEVIS). They have not clarified if they will be releasing updated guidance for Spring 2021. At the moment, the current guidance was released on 24 July 2020. You should check in regularly and if you have questions or concerns, please ask sooner rather than later.

TESTING & QUARANTINE

1. Is quarantine required, and if so, for how long?
   • In congruence with guidelines from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a quarantine is no longer required for those coming from abroad.
   • We recommend that you limit social contacts for a period of two weeks, wear a mask when around others and maintain social distance of six feet when interacting with others.

2. Will I be requested for a test and if so, can I be tested before leaving my home country?
   • Those not staying in ECU residence halls (off-campus) are not required to provide test results.
   • Those staying on-campus will be required to show a negative molecular/PCR COVID test dated no more than seven (7) days prior to moving into ECU residence halls.
   • Travelers may wish to test prior to leaving their home country to provide at the border, but this is not necessarily required.
   • Depending on your port of entry, you may undergo public health screening by CDC staff.

3. Where can I be tested in Greenville?
   • ECU Student Health Services can provide testing by appointment.

4. What if I need to visit Student Health Services or have questions about COVID-19?
   • SHS remains open, but please call before you come in to be connected with a medical provider. Going forward, many appointments will be done via telephone.

5. Where can I see estimated airport wait times?
   • Customs and Border Patrol is currently providing airport wait times at https://awt.cbp.gov/
   • Preclearance queue times are available at https://pqt.cbp.gov/
   • Canada and Mexico border wait times can be found at https://bwt.cbp.gov/

STUDYING ONLINE FOR PART OR ALL OF SPRING SEMESTER

1. Will ECU conduct hybrid or in-person classes for Spring 2021?
   • ECU has announced that the university is open for Spring 2021. However, SEVIS has not stated whether it will update its guidance for maintaining F-1 status. It is possible that you may be required to meet F-1 status requirements by being full-time and in-person. Students not close to OPT may choose to prioritize other factors when deciding travel.
   • Fully online study for the entire term outside of the US: Under the current guidance your F-1 will remain active in SEVIS so long as you remain full-time. However, SEVIS has not stated whether it will update its guidance and it is possible that maintaining F-1 status will require face-to-face attendance. Students with heightened travel/logistical concerns may choose to prioritize other factors over CPT/OPT eligibility.
2. My multifactor authentication is connected
   • You may need to reset your multifactor authentication through Passphrase Maintenance.
   • We suggest downloading the Microsoft Authenticator App from your app store instead of connecting your authentication to a phone number and SMS message. The Authenticator App allows you to verify your login credentials anywhere in the world with wifi access.

3. I am having trouble accessing certain ECU platforms
   • You may want to consider downloading Cisco AnyConnect to access ECU’s virtual private network. Click here for more information and instructions.

4. Will ECU conduct Block A and B 8-week classes or 16 week classes for Spring?
   • The high majority of classes will be conducted in 16 week format.
   • If you have 8 week block classes, please get in touch to discuss how this may affect you.

STUDYING IN-PERSON FOR SPRING 2021 SEMESTER

1. When do residence halls open?
   • Move-in begins 14 January 2021.

2. What are the enrollment requirements for the Spring 2021 semester?
   • Currently, normal full-time enrollment requirements for F-1 students still apply, but you may take more than one class (or three credit hours) online. However, SEVIS has not confirmed if they will change their guidance for Spring.
   • You should try to align your schedule to standard regulations if possible. Please contact your academic adviser for assistance.

3. Do I have to return to my home country?
   • No. While the University is taking precautionary measures on campus, you may remain in the US.

IMMIGRATION AND STUDENT VISAS

Regarding enrollment

1. How is my F-1 visa compliance affected?
   • The normal full-time enrollment requirements for F-1 students still apply, but you may take more than one class (or three credit hours) online under the current guidance. SEVIS has not confirmed if they will change their guidance for Spring. This means in-person and no more than three online hours could become required.

2. If I take a hybrid or face-to-face class and that class moves to online only during the Spring 2021 semester, will that impact my status?
   • Under the current guidance no, if you are in a face-to-face class and it moves to online only it will not negatively impact your F-1 status. Again, we will inform you if the SEVIS guidance changes.

3. I would like to enroll part-time for Spring 2021. Is that possible and if so, what are the considerations?
   • F-1 students are still expected to enroll full-time unless they qualify and are approved for a Reduced Course Load for medical reasons or if it’s your final semester of study.

4. If I am allowed to take a fully online course load, may I reside elsewhere in the US while I do so?
   • We do not recommend that you do this. As a reminder, students are required to report the address where they are living in the US to the Office of Global Affairs and we are required to report this information in SEVIS. Our recommendation is to protect your F-1 status by complying with the spirit of the law which expects students to reside near the location of the school they attend. If you have specific questions related to this, please contact Dr. Mallett at mallettw@ecu.edu. Please ensure to update your address through this online form.
Regarding I-20s and visas

6. I received my I-20 via email, how can I get my original?
   • Please email Dr. Mallett or book a Current student - in-person meeting to collect your I-20.

7. How can I update my US address or my address?
   • ECU expects all F-1 students to complete the US local address online form at the start of each term.

8. What if my visa is expired or expiring soon?
   • You can stay in the United States with an expired visa provided you maintain your student status and your I-20 has not expired. If you are outside the US, you must have a valid visa to return to the United States. It is not possible to renew your visa from inside the US.

Regarding travel

10. I am currently in an area under a covid-related regional travel ban. Am I able to travel?
   • Students in the Schengen/EU area, UK, and Ireland are allowed to travel to the US without applying for permission to travel, per the US Department of State.
   • Those in Brazil or Iran must email their local US Embassy or Consulate to apply for permission to travel prior to travel. Please note, the success rate of these requests has been very low.
   • To apply, students must email the US embassy in their home country requesting National Interest Consideration from the relevant Presidential Proclamation and provide their passport ID page and valid visa sticker in the email. Students should confirm instructions with the US embassy or consulate directly. This is not a guarantee and subject to the individual embassy to which each student applies. Students who attempt this should immediately inform ECU’s Office of Global Affairs of the outcome.

Other factors to consider

• SEVIS Record: Under the current guidance, your SEVIS record can remain Active so long as you remain full-time, even if you are enrolled from abroad and in all online courses, per the SEVP guidance issued on 24 July 2020. Again, this could change and we advise students to consider the possibility of following F-1 standard rules.
• Returning to the US: If you want and are able to travel to the US, please reach out to the Office of Global Affairs in advance of your travel so we can advise on proper documentation to carry while traveling.
• Optional Practical Training (OPT) and Curricular Practical Training (CPT) Eligibility: You cannot apply for OPT from abroad. You must be inside the US with a SEVIS record that has been Active for at least one (1) academic year to be eligible to apply for OPT. Please get in touch with Dr. Mallet to discuss OPT and/or CPT eligibility.

STUDENT ATHLETES

• Immigration inquiries should be directed to international@ecu.edu, 252.737.4378 (phone), +1.252.737.5412 (WhatsApp message), or Book a virtual appointment.
• NCAA eligibility queries and scholarship/funding questions should be directed to Compliance.
• Class scheduling and timetabling queries should be directed to your assigned athletic academic adviser, coach, and/or sport administrator.

OTHER RESOURCES

• Please find ECU’s library of resources for returning to campus here.

WHO TO CONTACT

Dr. Bill Mallett, Assistant Director for International Student Advising
Email: mallettw@ecu.edu | Phone: 252-328-1939

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