FAQs from International Students regarding COVID-19

Please find below some answers to immigration-related 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.

1. How does switching to alternative delivery of classes affect my immigration status?

U.S. universities received guidance from the Department of Homeland Security that allows students to continue this semester’s alternative delivery classes (online) without jeopardizing their immigration status. This means that you must continue to be enrolled full-time and be making normal progress toward the degree. Regardless of where you are participating in online classes, your immigration status will remain active. Please note that this is a temporary accommodation in place until this health crisis ends and in-person classes resume.

2. Will I be able to maintain my immigration status if I go back home and stay away from ECU until the Fall 2020 semester, which is nearly five months?

In the case that classes do not resume in person until the Fall 2020 semester, then yes: you are considered full-time enrolled until the end of spring semester and then you are entitled to your annual vacation. According to the immigration regulations, an F-1 or J-1 student is in status during the annual (or summer) vacation if the student is eligible and intends to register for the next term.

3. Will I be able to come back to the U.S. next month, in May, or later this summer?

As you all know, we are in uncharted territory regarding international mobility. Foreign nationals who have visited China or Iran in the past 14 days may not enter the United States as announced in the Presidential Proclamation on Novel Coronavirus and Presidential Proclamation on Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting Coronavirus.

[Update 1] Effective 11:59 pm on March 13, 2020 all foreign nationals who were physically within the Schengen Area (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland) during the 14-day period preceding their entry or attempted entry into the U.S. may not enter the U.S. for 30 days as announced in the Presidential Proclamation on Certain Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting Coronavirus.

[Update 2] Effective 11:59 pm on March 16, 2020, the ban now includes the United Kingdom and Ireland.

It is impossible to predict if or when further restrictions will be put in place by the U.S. Administration for travelers returning from high risk countries. We recommend that you continue to monitor travel updates by the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

4. I still need to apply for OPT as an F-1 graduating student. Can I do this remotely from elsewhere in the U.S.? Can I do this from outside the U.S.?

You must be physically in the U.S. at the time you submit your Optional Practical Training (OPT) application. Dr. Mallett will continue to process OPT applications. If you have not applied for OPT yet, please plan to do so as soon as possible.
5. I will graduate in May 2020 and my plan was to return to my home country. After I graduate, I would prefer to stay in the United States for now. What are my options?

You have three options:

a. Remain in the U.S. and apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT) for F-1 students or Academic Training for J-1 students.

b. Remain in the U.S. during the grace period after your program end date (which you can find on your I-20 or DS-2019). The grace period is 60 days for F-1 students and 30 days for J-1 students.

c. Pursue another degree at ECU or at another institution in the United States and transfer (if eligible) your SEVIS record to another institution within 60 days.

6. My visa is expiring, and I am currently unable to travel to my home country. What should I do?

You may stay in the U.S. on an expired F-1 or J-1 visa (sticker) as long as you maintain your immigration status by being in possession of a valid I-20 or DS-2019 and by meeting normal enrollment requirements. Canadian and Bermudian citizens do not need a visa (sticker) to enter the U.S.

If you have further questions, please see below:

- J-1 students please contact Katie Erickson at ericksonk@ecu.edu
- F-1 students please contact Bill Mallet at mallettw@ecu.edu