

# Syracuse University

## International Immigration and Enrollment FAQs | as of 4.5.2020

### What is the status of visa processing for international students?

Usually at this time of year, new international students are preparing for visa interviews at U.S. embassies and consulates around the world. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most embassies and consulates are closed for visa interviews and processing.

Fortunately, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is now permitting electronic distribution of the immigration documentation, normally delivered to new students in hard-copy format. Given this new allowance, Syracuse University is now providing admitted international students with the electronic documentation. This will help our new international students to make an appointment for their visa interview as soon as they are able to do so.

When the embassies and consulates reopen, we anticipate that student visa appointments will be given priority over other appointments. That said, consulates will face a massive processing backlog once the COVID-19 crisis abates. The timing of the reopening of the consulates will be critical. The closer that is to the start of the fall semester, the greater number of students who will be unable to obtain visas in time for the start of the academic year.

### Will all international students be affected by visa delays and travel restrictions?

There are a variety of factors that may affect certain groups of international students.

- **Currently Enrolled Students- Valid Visa.** Currently enrolled Syracuse University international students who have remained in the U.S. and have an active immigration record will be able to continue with their programs of study. Those currently enrolled students who have left the U.S. and have a valid visa can return to the U.S. to continue their program.
- **Currently Enrolled Students- Invalid Visa.** If a currently enrolled student's visa is not valid and they are presently outside of the U.S., they will be unable to return to the U.S.

- **Newly Admitted/Enrolled Students in the U.S.** Newly admitted international students who are currently in the U.S. finishing their studies at U.S. high schools, colleges or universities, or are on visas for dependents and spouses can begin their studies at Syracuse University.
- **Newly Admitted/Enrolled Students Outside of the U.S.** Another group of international students are those who are currently living in their home country or elsewhere abroad and have not yet been able to secure a student visa. These students may face significant delays due to the impacted visa process and travel restrictions.

**If new international students are unable to get their visas in time for the start of the academic year, what are their enrollment options?**

Options to accommodate new international students impacted by visa delays or travel restrictions include the following:

- **Online.** International students may enroll in Syracuse University programs offered online from their home country or residence abroad. Visas are not needed for online study for students living and studying outside of the U.S.
- **Late arrival.** Typically, we have a small number of international students who arrive on our campus after the start of the academic term due to visa processing delays or other matters. Under normal circumstances, late starts are discouraged, but may be allowed for up to one week. We anticipate the number of late arrivals to be significant this year, increasing the potential for an impacted student experience.
- **Deferrals.** While not ideal and if no other options (online, late arrival, etc.) are currently available, students may join their program in the next term available. Others may be allowed to defer their enrollment up to one year due to extenuating circumstances. Some programs have rigid, 'lock-step' curricula that may necessitate a one-year delay in matriculation.

**Can a new student begin the fall semester online and then come to campus for on campus classes immediately after they receive their visa?**

We do not know if the U.S. government will declare a cutoff date for visa issuance or arrival in the U.S., prohibiting students from arriving on campus in time for the start of the new term. We are in the process of determining the University's last date of arrival for the start of the new term, after which a student will have to continue taking classes online for the remainder of the term. This will result in a student's

deferral of their on-campus arrival for the next available term for the program (spring, summer, or fall).

### **Are there other implications for an international student starting their studies online?**

Yes, there are a number of factors that may affect an international student's experience and opportunities if all student immigration and NYSED regulations remain the same.

- **Immigration and Online Restrictions.** Normally, once on campus, international students are only allowed to take one online class towards full-time enrollment each semester. Currently enrolled international students have been allowed to finish out the spring 2020 semester online. At this time, we do not know if such allowances will be made specifically for continuing international students who are unable to arrive on campus for the start of the 2020-21 year.
- **NYS Department of Education Approval for Online Instruction.** NYSED has relaxed regulatory requirements for the delivery of residential courses to all students via an online format for the remainder of the spring term, as well as through all summer 2020 terms. The need to extend this flexibility beyond summer 2020 will be determined depending upon the COVID-19 emergency time frame. Also, NYSED's current requirement for residential programs dictates that no more than 50% of coursework can be completed online. Thus, a student in a Master's program normally requiring two semesters of full-time study will need to be careful not to take more than 50% of the credits required for the program online.
- **CPT/OPT Impact.** Students in one-year programs taking a full course load online for one semester may lose their eligibility for Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and/or Optional Practical Training (OPT); both require one academic year of full-time enrollment in the U.S.
- **Full-time Status.** Student visa status requires full-time enrollment on campus. Programs requiring 18 or fewer credits (i.e., Certificate of Advanced Study programs) will need to ensure students plan for a full-time course load for the on-campus portion of their program.

**Are there CPT implications for international students who wish to defer until spring 2021 as an alternate entry term?**

Many students use CPT for summer internships. Under current guidelines, if the student will not begin their full-time enrollment in the U.S. until spring 2020, they will not be eligible for permission to engage in off-campus internships, practicums, field experience, and other opportunities until after completing two consecutive terms. (spring/fall, fall/spring, if available).

**Will we be able to adjust start/end dates and compress/extend our terms to accommodate international students who will not be able to arrive on campus at the start of our standard terms?**

A possible scenario that poses great challenges in our planning is that of mixed arrivals on our campus. Domestic and international students who are already in the U.S. may have the ability to begin their programs on campus, on time, while international students now outside of the U.S. cannot. In parallel, the effects of COVID-19 on countries may be staggered, impacting and delaying some international student populations, but not all. Adjusting our academic calendar or compressing terms is problematic for a number of reasons, including our ability to be financial aid compliant. Nevertheless, we are monitoring the situation closely and studying any possible alternatives.

**Is it possible the U.S. government will change student immigration regulations to provide more flexibility for students to complete classes online and still gain eligibility for immigration benefits beyond what the current regulations allow?**

It is possible. We do not know if or when such changes may occur. As such, our planning must be done with current rules and regulations in mind. If our on-campus operations resume for fall 2020:

- International students will be expected to be on campus by August 31
- If unable to arrive on time, students are able to begin their programs by taking classes online from outside the U.S. Once they enter the U.S. in student visa status, they are limited to one online class per semester
- Late arrivals may be able to be accommodated, but in compliance with the allowed absences as specified by the course(s) syllabus(syllabi).
- International students will need to be in the U.S. as full-time students for one academic year (fall and spring or spring and fall) before they are eligible for benefits such as CPT and OPT

## **Are there ways to help our admitted international students or encourage applications?**

Welcoming our international students is critical at this time of uncertainty. For admitted students, creating ways to begin student engagement earlier is an imperative and can provide you with a gauge of the students' commitment to enrolling. It's also a way to highlight your community and articulate the value-add of your programs. Look for ways to offer virtual pre-academic engagement activities focusing on team and community building.

If your school or college is continuing to encourage additional student applications or yielding those admitted (we're processing as usual), consider ways to reduce challenges for students without adversely compromising accreditation requirements. When appropriate and allowable, waive GREs or other standardized tests and deposits, and consider waiving application fees with replacement funds provided through your school or college. With great uncertainty about their financials, securing visas, and OPT/CPT regulations for fall 2020, recognize students and their families may be questioning their abilities for spring 2021, as well.

Communicating in an empathetic approach to the students' situation and providing options that offer flexibility may be a way to mitigate withdrawals or deferrals. Consistently caring, reassuring, and thoughtful communications at this time is key. While we remain uncertain, as well, one constant message we need to confidently relay in all we do is 'welcome'.