Second International Student Town Hall

July 17, 2020 Zoom Webinar

Panelists

- **Steve Mull**
  Vice Provost for Global Affairs
- **Mark Rhoads**
  President, McCandlish Holton PC; Director, Immigration Practice Group
- **Richard Tanson**
  Senior International Student and Scholar Advisor & Program Manager
- **Susan Davis**
  Associate Vice President of Student Affairs, Liaison to University Counsel
- **Rachel Most**
  Associate Dean for Undergraduate Academic Programs & Professor
- **Phil Trella**
  Director, Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs

Moderator

- **Dudley Doane**
  Director of International Studies Office

Event Details: [Link](#)

Video Recording: [Link](#)
Dudley Doane

Good morning, everyone. This is Dudley Doane. I'm Director of the International Studies Office at the University of Virginia. Welcome to our second Town Hall for International Students, and other members of our international community, faculty, and staff at the University. We have with us this morning: Steve Mull, Vice Provost for Global Affairs; Mark Rhoads, Immigration Attorney; Richard Tanson, our Senior International Student and Scholar Advisor; Susan Davis, Vice President of Student Affairs; Rachel Most, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Academic Programs in the College of Arts and Sciences; and Phil Trella, who is the Associate Vice Provost for Graduate Programs and Professional Studies at the University of Virginia. We will begin with regards from Vice Provost Mull, and then ask each panelist to offer some brief remarks, and then move to our question and answer period. Please remember that if you see a question that someone poses that's of interest to you, you can up-vote it, and we will be counting those votes as we determine which questions we can respond to in this one-hour Town Hall this morning. The transcript and recording will be published later today.

Stephen Mull

Thanks very much, Dr. Doane, and good morning, good afternoon, good evening, wherever you are! Thanks so much for joining us for our second Town Hall meeting. It's been the end of a pretty eventful week. I know all of you, like us, are thrilled with the outcome in the US court system, which resulted in the retraction of what could have been a very problematic visa regulation penalizing people who study online. Fortunately, the wheels of justice move very swiftly and that rule has been withdrawn. We're continuing to work very hard here to get ready for as many of you who can come here next month. We have I think an exciting program lined up to get started for our fall semester. As I mentioned last week, it's going to be a semester, unlike any we've ever experienced in our more than 200 year history, but certainly from the International point of view, we were really heartened, when it was looking as if we would have additional barriers for our international students

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1 This audio transcript was automatically transcribed for Zoom by Otter.ai, with manual corrections and editing for clarity and brevity by the UVA China Office.
with this visa rule, all of our schools, our faculties, our deans, our Student Affairs staff rushed into guarantee that we would do everything possible to not have that requirement get in the way. So fortunately, the courts took care of that for us, but it was just a very heartening week, and once again, underscores how valuable all of you are to us here at UVA, and we're very excited for you to get here, and look forward to taking your questions.

Richard Tanson

Good morning, everyone. I'm Richard Tanson from the International Studies Office. We've seen a lot of the questions that will be posed this morning. I think most significantly from the new students wondering if this affects them in any way (the rescission of the of the original July emendation to the regulations), and also about mid-semester entry (or at least entry after the semester begins). So we will be happy to entertain those questions in the Town Hall this morning.

Mark Rhoads

Hello. My name is Mark Rhodes. I'm an immigration attorney. I'm not a UVA employee. I'm a private immigration attorney. I work with companies all over the United States, helping them process work visas and permanent resident green cards. I also work with universities nationwide, including UVA, advising on issues that impact international students.

Susan Davis

Hello, all. I'm Susan Davis. I'm extending a warm welcome to all of you on behalf of our team in Student Affairs. Student Affairs supports your life outside of the classroom, including areas such as Housing, and Student Health. And I know many of you have questions related to both aspects of your life in those areas. I'm happy to take those, and I want to emphasize, we know very well the challenges that you have faced and are facing to get here. And we are not looking to add to any of those challenges. We want to support an aid you in your arrival and are prepared to customize whatever you might need to get here and move-in well.

Rachel Most

Hello everybody, I'm Rachel Most. I'm the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Academic Programs in the College of Arts and Sciences. So I am on the
undergraduate side of the University. And I will do my best to answer your academic questions about academic life.

Phillip Trella

Hello everyone. My name is Phil Trella. I serve as Associate Vice Provost and direct the University's Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs. Looking forward to working with all of our graduate and professional students, international students who are working to get back to the United States, or may have questions if they're already in the United States. I coordinate and work with Graduate and Professional Programs all across the University. We have many of them. Some of the questions you have, I'm sure are specific, but our office does help to oversee and coordinate efforts across the University. We will answer your questions to the best of our ability.

Dudley Doane

And just a reminder to our listeners this morning: we will have another Town Hall next Friday. So if we don't get to your questions today, there will be future opportunities to interact with our panelists. First question:

"Can you comment on mid-semester start and travel?"

Richard Tanson

There are potential challenges in arriving mid-semester. I think that we are going to be looking at these on a case by case basis. So you will need to reach out both to the International Studies Office, as well as your department, because we will also need confirmation from the department, as to whether they consider it advisable, or tenable, for you to enter mid-semester. And this is largely the advice for graduate students and professional students. It's a very different situation in the College of Arts & Sciences.

Rachel Most

I would say on the undergraduate side of things, it's really critical that you start classes at the beginning. So in a typical semester (and this is not a typical semester) we tell students, they really need to get here for Fall Orientation, which is a key part of student life, and to begin their classes on time. If you are starting your classes remotely and are fully caught up
academically, then the issue really becomes one related to visa status, getting into the country, and so on.

**Mark Rhoads**

I think that's a very important point, and that is there really is no guidance right now from the US Government about how far into the semester you can enter the United States as an F-1 visa student. I think to give yourself the best possible opportunity to enter well into the semester is to make sure that you are taking your full course load online, and that you're able to demonstrate that. We are waiting for direction from the US Government on that issue about mid-semester arrivals. There is no guidance right now.

**Dudley Doane**

"Do we still need a new I-20 Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status?"

**Richard Tanson**

If you're referencing the guidance from July that directed us to issue new I-20s with specific language in the Remarks, those remarks are no longer necessary. So if you have a valid I-20 without the remarks, you're going to use that to come into the United States. Just make sure if you are a continuing students that you have a recent Travel Signature.

**Mark Rhoads**

Just one other issue with regard to that, and that is even if you have a valid I-20, in order to enter the United States, you obviously need an F-1 visa. If you do not have an F-1 visa, I'll often get questions from students, saying, "I do have a Tourist Visa, a B-visa. Can I use that Tourist Visa to enter and then go to school with my I-20?" And the answer is "No." If you enter as a 'B' Tourist using a B-visa, you are not F-1. You have to have an F-1 visa in order to enter.

**Dudley Doane**

“Do most common types of health insurance cover COVID-19 medical bills for international students?”
Susan Davis

It's hard to answer for all types of insurance, because there are so many, but what I can say, very specifically, is the Aetna Student Health Plan, which is the plan that we sponsor for our students, and which many international students are on (and many graduate students are on), provides very strong and good coverage for both testing and treatment related to COVID-19. And I would say to our international students: if you're contemplating being on a different plan, we are more than happy to help you and Student Health to understand what those benefits would be, and obviously important right now that they do have good coverage for testing and treatment related to COVID-19. As for a contact in Student Health, Kellie Gildersleeve is our Insurance Liaison in Student Health and is taking questions throughout the summer, and would be happy to guide you. The other quick thing I would say on insurance is we are about to open our Insurance Portal for the Aetna Student Health Plan, where students typically go in—and students are required to have health insurance—and this is where you indicate what plan you do have. And for our international students who will not be able to join us, or are having difficulty joining us, we are not going to enforce those requirements until your arrival.

Dudley Doane

"Could you give us more information about the 14-days self-quarantine following arrival in the United States? Where will students stay well UVA support them with things like meals? We need this information ASAP, as flight tickets will need to be booked."

Susan Davis

A lot of this will depend on where you're planning to live, and the best solution I think we have in place right now is for each of you to remain in very close contact with the International Studies Office. And let us know when you are in fact arriving, and where you intend to live, or whether you need assistance identifying where you may live. If you plan to live on Grounds, there is some isolation and quarantine housing available for on-Grounds students. Depending on whether that is full at the time of your arrival, we may need to make some other arrangements. If you're planning to live off Grounds, it's very likely you would self-isolate in your private residence off Grounds and you would be testing at the conclusion of that period. And I want to stress that the 14-days right now is a built-in requirement. That could change. That could
get shorter, or that could get longer, depending on where you're traveling from and we're watching that very closely. So again, if you're nervous about arrival dates, or how to budget that in, I would say, “Please stay in close contact with the International Studies Office (ISO) as your ‘front door,’” and Student Affairs works in close partnership with ISO, and will help advise you on your particular situation, so you can manage the quarantine requirement.

Dudley Doane

"I’m a continuing graduate student who is currently outside the US. If I don’t return to the US for fall, and continue my semester online, will by funding continue?"

Phillip Trella

This, of course, first and foremost, requires an academic discussion with your department on what the nature of that funding is. So, I can't guarantee that your department will provide you funding, whether or not you're going to be in the US. What we have done is we've looked at preparing guidance for students who are in this scenario. If you are a current returning student who has a valid US work visa; has established presence in the United States; has a US bank account; and has work authorization, then we feel it's possible for us to continue to fund you for a period of up to six months. By funding in this circumstance, I'm really talking about payment for activities as a Graduate Teaching Assistant or Graduate Research Assistant. Funding can also come in the form of tuition and fees alone. If you're a GTA (Graduate Teaching Assistant) or a GRA (Graduate Research Assistant), usually tuition and fees is always part of that that package, including Health Insurance. If you have not established presence in the United States; if you don't have, as of yet, a valid work visa; if you don't have a US bank account; if you haven't established presence here, then it's not possible for us to provide you wages, if you are working as a GTA or GRA. Your school, however, may still be able to provide funding in the form of paying for tuition and fees on your behalf. So that would be a payment that the school or the department would make to fund your tuition and fees. For all of these questions, I would also just say, because we're also getting questions on mid-semester arrivals for graduate students and professional students as well: I would encourage students to think about answering questions kind of in three different bins or three different areas. One of those sets of questions would be about the funding issues, as the student is asking, "Can I receive funding?"—the financial issues. A separate set of questions might be on the immigration issues,
regarding the visa questions. And another set of questions is really about the academic issues. Each of those would require that you're really coordinating closely with your department and your advisor, with ISO on the immigration questions, and certainly we're happy to help coordinate questions on all of those areas. But I just want the graduate and professional students to keep in mind that it is a complex area, and that the guidance we produced on financial questions is specific to that, and that they should be coordinating also with their department and their advisors on any of those academic questions and those academic issues. I hope that helps to clarify. If not, feel free to reach out to me directly, and I'll be happy to point you to resources and connect you with folks in your school and department, if that would be helpful.

**Dudley Doane**

"If I have received an F-1 visa, but decide not to come to UVA in the fall, can I come to UVA later for spring semester?"

**Richard Tanson**

The important things to bear in mind is that if you're a new student and you're not coming when originally intended, then you do need to ask your department or school of admission for a deferral of your admission. Once that deferral is approved, then if it's just for a semester, we can reissue the I-20 for the spring semester start. If it's for a year—that is 'till next fall—we cancel the I-20 and then you would apply again next year.

**Dudley Doane**

"For new students who cannot arrive on Grounds this fall, is it still required to submit the visa stamp and I-94 Arrival/Departure Record in the Immigration Check-In Form?"

**Richard Tanson**

The Immigration Check-In process on the ISO website asks for your visa stamp, signed copy of the I-20, and so forth, and none of those things obviously are possible until you enter the United States. So our guidance is: do as much of the Immigration Check-in as you can, because the Online Orientation and the Orientation Quiz are embedded in that request, but you're not required to fulfill the entire request and submit it until you've entered the
US. Just to be clear, we're talking about an ISO process here. We are just collecting information that we need to share with the Government, but the question the student is asking about has nothing to do with arrival at an airport of entry or an immigration thing. We're talking about a process that lives on our website, which completes what we need in order to activate the student's status for the first time.

Dudley Doane

"What may happen to international students if they cannot get their visas by January?"

Mark Rhoads

They obviously can't enter the United States without the F-1 visa. I will leave it to Mr. Tanson to discuss the impact on their I-20.

Richard Tanson

As I just stated, if we can't issue the I-20 for the spring semester—we can't extend the I-20 for a year—plus our funding requirements will change for the following academic year. So we would cancel the I-20, but at the same time, you should be reaching out to the department or the school that admitted you and ask for permission to defer your admission, if that fits in with your personal plans, to the following academic year.

Rachel Most

Just one clarification: undergraduate should contact the Office of Admissions directly, because for undergraduates it's the Office of Admission that manages all deferrals for new students, whether they're coming in as a first year student or a transfer student.

Stephen Mull

From a policy perspective for the University, all of you should know that the very first policy principle that President Ryan laid out, when making plans for the fall back in May, was that we would do whatever it took to make sure that all of our international students would be able to get their education online. That was the first principle, if they're not able to come to the United States, and so that was the very first principle we adopted back in May. We've not
made decisions yet for the spring, but I'm absolutely confident that is going to continue to be a guiding principle for us. You all are really integral members of our community, and if for whatever reason you're not able to come to the United States, we will work with you to make sure you can continue to get your education in some way.

**Dudley Doane**

"How do I inform the school my school of enrollment that I changed my mind about my intention to come to Charlottesville, after taking the survey distributed by the International Studies office last week, and I’m now deciding to study online from home?"

**Rachel Most**

If you are an incoming student and you sign up for housing, you have until August 5 to back out of that contract at no penalty. If you are returning students, we are working out a process by which you will inform the University where you are if you are taking courses, so that should be available sometime in early August, so that we know a student taking all of their courses remotely is either in Charlottesville, in the United States, or outside of the United States. So more information on that will be coming soon.

**Dudley Doane**

Phil, anything to add for the Graduate and Professional programs?

**Phillip Trella**

I would say, as in all cases, be in touch with your specific department in your school.

**Dudley Doane**

"A few of my friends in Singapore joining other universities in the US submitted their visa applications as Emergency Appointments today. The I-20 forms issued by their schools did not contain remarks stating that their programs were hybrid. With this, the embassy has put their visa applications ‘on hold’ and asked them to submit updated I-20s with remarks stating, ‘hybrid programs.’ This is happening even after the US Immigration and
Customs Enforcement (ICE) guidance has been rescinded. Currently UVA's updated I-20s do not have remarks for 'hybrid programs.' Is International Students & Scholars Program (ISSP) at UVA looking to reissue the reissued I-20s? Could we please get more clarity on this?"

Richard Tanson

We were not planning on reissuing all the I-20s for all of the incoming students. What we can do—and what we have prepared—is a standard letter containing the original language from the July guidance for those Consulates that are still insisting on seeing that language, but Mark, you'll have to help me out here. I've seen nothing in the March through May guidance, certainly, and with the rescission, I think it's right to assume that that language is no longer required.

Mark Rhoads

The language is definitely not required any longer for a continuing student. If you need to get a new visa, there is no question that you should be able to get a visa without language regarding "hybrid programs." Now, whether or not the embassy officer who is reviewing the application understands that (embassy officers make mistakes all the time). So, I think that if you if you get a letter, such as Mr. Tanson mentioned from UVA, then that should cover the issue. You don't need a new I-20 if you are an initial student. My own sense is that embassies are still waiting for instruction from the US Department of State as to whether or not they can even issue a visa for an initial student. So that could be part of the holdup, or it could just be that the officer doesn't understand that the July guidance has been rescinded.

Dudley Doane

Any advice for UVA students who might encounter what this person just described?

Richard Tanson

Yes, they can reach out on that to us. We were just in the process of providing a letter. We have the letter ready, and anyone who wants it can get it, making the statement (well actually it's the original language) that we are not entirely online, and so forth. Contact the ISO if you get a response like this from a consular officer. It's easy for us to provide the letter.
Dudley Doane

"Will my reissued I-20 (hybrid classes and start date of classes on August 24) have the same Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVIS) ID number that the original form had?"

Richard Tanson

The SEVIS number doesn't change.

Dudley Doane

"I'm an international student. Can my wife travel alone with her F-2 twenty days after me?"

Mark Rhoads

Yes. I see no reason why not. The F-2 visa is valid for the duration of the visa, and for as long as you maintain your F-1 status.

Richard Tanson

As long as you come into the United States, you fulfill the Immigration Check-In process, you verify that we have activated your SEVIS record, then as Mark has said, I see no issue with the dependent coming in afterwards.

Dudley Doane

"I flew from the US to my home on the 16th of March. Does that mean I have to come back on or before the 16th of August to not lose my F-1 visa?"

Richard Tanson

It's pretty clear from the March through May guidance that the Five-Month Rule, which is being referenced here, does not apply. So, you have not tolled any time against this Five-Month Rule that I know a lot of students are concerned about this. I would not be. If you are a continuing student that left in March, or thereabouts, and you're returning for August fall semester, you're fine. This issue of the Five-Month Rule is addressed in the FAQs on the ISSP webpage.

Dudley Doane
"Is there an expectation that job and internship recruiting in the fall will be done virtually?"

Richard Tanson

I know Darden is doing that. I don't know about anyone else.

Susan Davis

I can speak to that. So our Career Center, which does operate in the Division of Student Affairs, is largely planning virtual career fairs, and certainly able to accommodate Career Counseling virtually, as well. And frankly, we anticipate a good bit of those services, even for our students who are here in-person, will likely remain virtual. There would certainly be some in-person advising happening, but the large career fairs that that we host in the fall and again in the spring (certainly for the fall), the plan is to do that virtually.

Dudley Doane

I believe they had fairly extensive experience with that in the late spring, correct? Because there were events that were to be in-person that were very quickly moved online.

Susan Davis

Correct. And many of our large employers who participate in those fairs, recall, they're also working remotely, and so you can anticipate that a lot of those services will be remote.

Phillip Trella

If there’re any graduate students who are kind of asking the same questions about professional development programs for graduate students, all of our PhD Plus programs, we’re planning on having them online this semester. If you go to our website, there’s a lot of stuff happening right now. International students are absolutely welcome to participate in all those programs. We have stuff all through July and August. We anticipate that over the course of fall, pretty much all of our programs are going to remain online. We’re also coordinating internships online, so you can schedule appointments with Sonali Majumdar or Yi Hao, who are taking Career Advising appointments for
graduate students. So all that is happening in a virtual environment. I encourage all of our international students to interact with it.

Dudley Doane

"As internationals, we need to self-isolate. It's mandatory for 14-days, once we get to the US, according to the CDC guidelines for travelers coming into the US from outside the US. What if I won't be able to make it 14-days before classes begin, due to when I have my visa interview scheduled?"

Susan Davis

I'm happy to field these questions with our ISO colleagues, depending on your arrival, so we can ensure that you individually are supported and how you're going to complete the quarantine requirement, but what I would envision in that situation is that you may, say you were going to be living off Grounds and you were going to be self-quarantining and your private residence, that you would perhaps begin your instruction remotely from your apartment, before you begin any in person classes.

Dudley Doane

"I'm currently in a country from which I'm not allowed to enter the US. Yesterday, it was announced that European students with the F-1 visa will be exempted from the Proclamation placed in March and will be able to enter the United States, according to the National Interest Exception (NIE). If I travel from my country to the EU and quarantine for 14 days, will I be able to enter the United States from there, with my F-1 visa from my current country? Thank you."

Mark Rhoads

That is a strategy that many people are pursuing: go to an area that you are able to enter the United States. I have heard anecdotally that it has been successful, but I don't think anybody can offer a guarantee on that. I mean, what if you go from a country that has a flat-out band? You go to an area that you are permitted to enter as an F-1 student. I think the best that you can do is just make sure that you are able to fully document that you've been there for at least 14 days and then make your entry to the United States. But again, I don't think anybody can offer a guarantee that you will be admitted. But that is the best that you can do.
Dudley Doane

"Considering the difficulties of online study for international students (online study based in the US), will the University still provide the flexibilities regarding grading policies, which were provided last spring when we move to online instruction in March?"

Rachel Most

The reason for the grading option changes in spring is that there was a very fast pivot to online in the middle of the semester. Faculty are developing their courses now, either entirely online, hybrid, synchronously, or asynchronously, and so because of that, and because they have had time to plan and develop a course for that environment, there has been no discussion of changing grading options for the fall. We return to our regular grading options in the summer, and that's the plan for the fall as well.

Dudley Doane

"Assuming 100% of international students come in as an F-1 by the start of school, if we have to then go virtual (say two weeks into the semester or eight weeks into the semester) are they guaranteed that they will not have to leave the country?"

Mark Rhoads

All we can say is that currently the information from the Immigration Service is that 100% online is acceptable for an F-1 student. Whether that guidance changes, there's no way to know.

Dudley Doane

Allen Groves spoke to this last week, somewhat, but if we did move to online in mid-October, what does that mean for students in University Housing? And then also we have the long break between the end of classes at Thanksgiving and start of spring semester, or J-term for students who do J-term.

Susan Davis

Yeah. And so we've committed, and I believe this is now up as an FAQ on our Return to Grounds site, but that residence halls will remain open to you if, in
fact, we find ourselves like we did last spring needing to close mid-semester, and certainly over the break that we are planning, which runs from after our Thanksgiving recess up through January, you will have access to residence halls. Now, the one thing I would say is, as was the case last spring, if you remain on Grounds, there’s a chance you might have to move to a different residence hall, if we have to sort of coordinate that, we would try to avoid that, but I just want students to understand that could be a possibility. And then certainly, as occurred in the spring, once we get into more of a closed environment, our services will not be as robust as they would be if we were open. So, for example, dining halls. You may have down to one, as opposed to several being open, but, yes, we are contemplating that possibility and prepared to accommodate international students through those breaks.

Dudley Doane

"In the email sent on Tuesday, it was mentioned that students can maintain F-1 status by doing online courses from their home country. Is this applicable for new students? Also, if applicable, will it be counted for Optional Practical Training (OPT) and Curricular Practical Training (CPT)?"

Richard Tanson

As I had mentioned, and it certainly bears repeating: if you've never come into the United States, you do not have F-1 status. You have not established F-1 status, so you can certainly pursue your studies from your home country. The University has made that very clear, and Steve has very astutely reminded us that this is one of President Ryan's top priorities. You can indeed pursue your education, but you do not have F-1 status. So if the ancillary question is, "Does the time that I've spent outside in my first semester studying online or studying remotely, does that contribute to OPT or CPT eligibility?" It does not. So the student in this case matriculated at the University, begins his or her eight semesters (if an undergraduate in the College of Arts and Sciences), but does not establish F-1 status.

Dudley Doane

"Most international students would land at Dulles Airport, before moving to Charlottesville. Does the quarantine period begin after reaching Charlottesville or Dulles itself?"

Susan Davis
I'm happy to speak to quarantine. I may also ask Mark or Richard to jump in because I am not as up to speed on any governmental requirements that might apply upon entry. But certainly from the University standpoint, it's beginning upon your arrival. And so if there was going to be a gap, for example, in your arrival for between Washington DC and Charlottesville (if you were going to be staying in the DC area, for example, for a period of time), these are the kinds of questions that we want to be able to field on a student by student basis through ISO, because ideally we want to be able to count all those days for you, and so what that could mean is it's better for you to stay put and self-quarantine in DC before coming, or it may be better for you to arrive and not have a stay in DC. And so again, we would look to help define that for you once we know what your travel plans are. There's going to be an app that that all students and employees will be using to do what we're calling a “daily attestation” to report their health if they're experiencing elevated temperature or COVID-related symptoms. But, that will be on a daily basis after your arrival, but it's not specifically connected to the quarantine requirement. And faculty and staff are subject to that as well, if they're working on Grounds.

Dudley Doane

"How will the testing before coming to Grounds take place for international students?"

Susan Davis

We're using a testing vendor that has mail-in kits, and so for our international students, we will not be using that vendor, because the kits cannot be mailed to international addresses. So if you are in the United States already, you will participate in the same pre-arrival testing processes as any students who are currently in the United States, and more information about how to request that test, and where to have it mailed within the US, will be forthcoming in a matter of about a week. If you remain abroad, we are not able to send the kit to your international address. We're just not licensed to do that through the vendor, and so we will be managing your testing after arrival, as you complete the quarantine period. And we don't have all those details known yet, but my sense is that very likely will occur through Student Health. Or, frankly, we may use the mail-in kit after your arrival, and have it delivered to you at your local address, and allow you to complete the same process that students who are already in the US are completing.
Dudley Doane

"What can you UVA do to help pressure embassies and consulates to open?"

Stephen Mull

We're in regular contact with various embassies around the world, but what decides whether or not embassies or consulates are open isn't so much a question of pressure. It's a question of staff and resources that they have for performing routine visa operations. So, remember back in March, large percentages of every embassy and consulates around the world sent most of their staffs home. And for that reason, they were unable to provide routine visa services. So now—I used to work in the State Department (many of my friends are still there)—they are beginning now to return to overseas operations, and back to embassies and consulates, and one by one those embassies and consulates are opening as soon as they can. We know, for example, there are a number of embassies in Europe that are already open and accepting appointments. Others are a bit farther behind. So we're in regular contact with that, but really the best way to get the most up-to-date information is for you to contact your nearest US embassy or consulate, regularly, to find out, because it's not all on a fixed date. It's going to depend on each individual post. So please do be in touch with your local consulate or embassy and we'll continue to do the same as well.

Dudley Doane

"If a PhD course starts in August, can I then come in October with the same I-20 Form? The appointment dates in Italy are available only in October. Should I defer?"

Richard Tanson

The thing to watch on the I-20 is the start date. So all I-20s have start dates and end dates. The start date is the date by which you should be in the United States. So there is that. If you have agreement from your department to come mid-semester, we can certainly begin a discussion about that. The I-20 would have to be changed, if that's the strategy that's going to be adopted, but the SEVIS number won't change, only the start date. And for the process of issuing a new I-20, they would have to work with the ISO directly. We would need confirmation from the department that this mid-semester entry is allowed by the department, but there may be strong academic reasons to
take the whole semester remotely. It’s very difficult to come midstream. In terms of our needs and the ISO, we are looking at a timeline that’s at least 72 hours because of the workload.

Phillip Trella

I was just going to reiterate what Richard said about the academic considerations. This is a really good example of the kinds of calculations that graduate students need to make, again referring to those three different areas: the immigration considerations, academic considerations, and perhaps funding considerations. I think on the academic side, you need to work really closely with your Faculty Advisor and your Director of Graduate Studies. Different fields and departments will handle this in different ways. Some fields have curricula, where it’s really important for students to stay on track. Others are much more flexible in terms of the student, say arriving mid-year, or beginning in the spring semester, rather than in the fall semester. A lot of it depends on whether you’re in the research phase, whether you’re taking heavy coursework, does that coursework really require you to be here in person, or can it be done remotely. So it’s so specific to your field that I think the best thing that you can do is be in very close contact with your Director of Graduate Studies, if you have one, and with folks in your department, your Graduate Advisor. If you need any help with this, again, feel free to reach out to me directly, and I’m happy to help coordinate this discussion, but on the academic considerations, please coordinate closely with your Director of Graduate Studies, your department, and with your school, and we’re all here to try to help you come to a conclusion on what would be best for you, help figure out what is the appropriate course of action in those three different areas, working with our partners across the institution.

Richard Tanson

I would like to amplify something that Steve Mull said to all of us. I think this is very important. And I say this to all the students who have tried to make appointments at consulates around the world, especially when the consulates were closed. I think it’s important to remember, you should consider the appointment system to be uncalibrated until the consulates actually open. So if you tried making an appointment in May, let’s say, and all you could get was October, I wouldn’t rely on that, because it is calibrated to nothing. There are no slots open, frankly, until a consulate reopens. So if you know your consulate is reopening by a certain date, as Steve Mull said, you’re constantly checking the website of the nearest consulate; you find out about consular
reopening; this NIE Exception for the Schengen Area, Ireland and UK. You should try to make a new appointment, and if you can't make a new appointment, simply through the appointment system, then go back on the consular website and look up how to make an Emergency Appointment.

Dudley Doane

"I have a valid F-1 visa from a US high school I attended. Can I come to the US with this visa and afterwards, when the embassy opens, change it to a UVA F-1 visa?"

Richard Tanson

You don't need to change it. So if you're transferring in (and by "transfer" I mean just from an Immigration perspective), you're transferring your SEVIS record from your high school to the University to begin your undergraduate career. It doesn't matter who issued the visa. It's valid until it's not. So, you can keep using that visa, along with the UVA I-20, and there is no reason to get it changed until it expires.

Phillip Trella

You know we get that same kind of question from incoming graduate students who are transferring from a US-based college.

Richard Tanson

It's the same.

Dudley Doane

"I'm an international student currently in my hometown in Pakistan. I'm on an F-1 visa. If I stay in Pakistan, will I be able to TA online and take a class online, and still maintain my visa and full-time students status?"

Richard Tanson

If you are a continuing student, then yes, you can maintain your status, even if you're studying remotely.

Phillip Trella
On the GRA/GTA question, the guidance on this in terms of receiving the funding (so Richard just answered the immigration bucket): be in contact with your department about the academic considerations. There may be academic considerations about your teaching, specifically, about your research, your coursework that I can't speak to here, because it's all individual regarding a department. On the funding guidance, I would say that for the guidance that we have issued is that for those students who are continuing, who have already established presence in the United States: if you have a valid US work visa; if you have a US bank account; if you will not be in an Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) barred country; if you have an Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN); and you've completed the I-9 Employment Eligibility Verification paperwork, then you may, for a period of up to six months, which coordinates with the fall semester, so I'll just say that for fall, you could receive wages for conducting those teaching duties. Again, I'm not speaking to the academic consideration of whether your department is allowing you to teach online—that's a different consideration—but in terms of what we're able to do from a finance and compliance perspective, you could continue to receive funding for the period of the fall semester, if you meet the criteria that I just mentioned: the work visa, the bank account, your location, the ITIN, the I-9 paperwork.

Dudley Doane

"I'm a fourth-year PhD student in Economics taking only research classes. My advisors say they will do everything online for the semester. My question is whether it is okay to stay outside of the US during the fall semester, although the research class is regarded as offline. How does this affect my visa status?"

Richard Tanson

You're fine. Because, from the guidance that we have reverted to, a continuing student can be entirely remote and maintain their status. So even though we've assured graduate students in the past that research classes are "in-person" and there are apparent contradictions the student is seeing here and concerned about, let's bear in mind that all of our classes are in-person classes. It's just that some of them are being taught remotely. So these are not specifically—by design—online classes. These are residential classes taught remotely.

Dudley Doane
"I'm a rising Fourth-Year student, wondering if I can do fall 2020 from my home country and still get an OPT when I graduate after spring 2021?"

Richard Tanson

The answer is "Yes." I mean, to follow up on what I just said to the previous question: if you are a continuing student, then "yes," you do have permission to remain home, take classes remotely, and maintain your F-1 status, which—because of this continuity of status—would still allow you to be eligible for OPT or CPT.

Mark Rhoads

But that answer is that answer is different for an initial student. If you are an initial student outside the United States, the time that you're taking classes does not count towards the time to accrue for CPT or OPT.

Richard Tanson

One other point that one of my colleagues just pointed out, and it's a valuable reminder: you still maintain your status when you're outside the United States. However, if it's your last semester, bear in mind that you do have to be in the US to file an Application for Employment Authorization (Form I-765) for an OPT application. Is that correct?

Mark Rhoads

The answer is: that is correct. But recognize that everything right now is relatively fluid. If you're outside the United States, and you're in your last semester, the only thing you have to lose by filing and I-765 for your OPT work card is the filing fee. The worst thing that happens is they deny it. The best thing that happens is they issue it.

Dudley Doane

"So when we will know which classes are entirely online? Are there guidelines for all of the fall semester?"

Rachel Most

We'll know after August 1. The University Registrar is going to load that information into Student Information System (SIS) on or after August 1. So
students will be able to see that in the class listing and SIS. There are there are some noted now. There have been some decisions made already. For example, all discussion sections at the undergrad level in Arts and Sciences are going to be online, but they'll be able to see all that information on hopefully a little before August 1, but aim for August 1.

Dudley Doane

This will be our last question this morning:

"The US-Canada border is closed to non-essential travel until August 21, as of yesterday. Is coming back to school considered essential or not essential in this case? Will US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) allow entry into the US from Canada for a person with an F-1 student visa?"

Mark Rhoads

Currently F-1 students are considered to be essential travelers, so you should be able to enter as an F-1 student.

Dudley Doane

Is there any guidance we can offer on how a student should present himself or herself to the CBP agent at the border, in this case specifically for Canada?

Richard Tanson

As we stress to our Canadian students, always, you have to make sure that you present the I-20, that you are stamped into the country as F-1 (you want to make sure that you're not inadvertently admitted as a tourist). If you're coming to the United States for the first time, because you do not have to get a physical visa stamp in the passport, you should also carry the Receipt Notice for your SEVIS Fee (or I-901 SEVIS Fee payment).

Dudley Doane

Thank you very much. Thank you to our panelists for your time this morning and your expertise. We'll continue this conversation next Friday at 9:00 am EDT. Please feel free to contact us at the International Studies Office via email as well. So thanks again and have a great weekend, everyone.
Thank you for joining us for the Town Hall. For any inquiries, write to:

issp@virginia.edu