

# Visa Status & Travel Concerns

*Any decisions about whether to stay or leave—and whether to continue courses or withdraw—should be done in close consultation with your home university, your professors and your family.*

## **Since I am now taking all remote courses, will my F-1 visa status be affected?**

No, the Department of Homeland Security's Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) has confirmed that student visa status will not be impacted by the emergency transition to distance learning for classes normally held in person. As your in-person classes are offered remotely due to the coronavirus, your F-1 visa status will be okay. To maintain your F-1 status, you are expected to fully participate in all assignments and activities required by your courses.

## **I wish to stay in the Huntsville area or travel within the U.S. for the rest of the semester.**

Yes, we welcome you to stay in the Huntsville area (or elsewhere in the U.S.). The Office of International Programs (OIP) will continue to support your experience here. Our recommendation is that you limit your movement and abide by all Stay-at-Home orders while you continue to focus on your courses.

## **I wish to travel to my home country to continue courses and then return before the semester ends.**

If your plan is to be in the Huntsville area at any point this semester, we strongly advise against any international or non-local travel. New travel restrictions, quarantines, flight unavailability or other causes may prevent you from returning. In short, if you plan to travel outside the Huntsville area, please plan to stay in that location for the remainder of the semester.

Also, please note that you cannot enter the U.S. after the program end date of your I-20 (there may be an exception for students who have applied for OPT—please consult the OIP about your travel restrictions).

If you do decide to leave the U.S. and want to continue your courses remotely, please contact the OIP at [qip@shsu.edu](mailto:qip@shsu.edu).

### **I wish to go home and finish the semester from there.**

Yes, you may do this. Courses, including exams, will continue to be offered remotely through the end of the semester, so you have the option of continuing your courses from home.

If you decide to leave the U.S., please contact the OIP at [oiip@shsu.edu](mailto:oiip@shsu.edu).

### **I wish to withdraw from the semester and return home.**

Technically, you can do this, but we recommend against it unless it is absolutely necessary. Contact the OIP at [oiip@shsu.edu](mailto:oiip@shsu.edu). Your visa will be canceled and your courses withdrawn. You must then leave the U.S. within 15 days of withdrawing. Please understand you will not receive a grade for any work you have completed this semester.

### **I would like to travel to my home country, but can't find a flight. What do I do?**

Flight availability is changing from week to week. Students who are struggling to find a flight home should reach out to their country's [Embassy or Consulate in the U.S.](#) Many countries are arranging special travel for international students in the U.S. trying to get home.

### **Can I come back in another semester if I decide to withdraw from my program right now? How does that impact my visa? Can I get a discount?**

If you withdraw now and think you will want to return in a future semester, please consult with the OIP ([oiip@shsu.edu](mailto:oiip@shsu.edu)). Graduate students may also need to consult with their academic program. Remember, if you withdraw, you must consult with the OIP to complete the withdrawal process and leave the U.S. within 15 days. Students planning to return should work very closely with the OIP to manage their F-1 visa status to avoid any problems with future re-entry.

### **How long can I stay in the U.S.?**

As long as you maintain your F-1 status, you are granted a 60-day grace period after the I-20 program end date. If you want to stay longer, please contact the OIP at [oiip@shsu.edu](mailto:oiip@shsu.edu) as soon as possible to discuss options.

## **I want to stay longer in the U.S. and not go home, what should I do?**

International students are eligible to take summer courses and apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT) upon completion of their program. If you want to stay longer, please contact the OIP at [qip@shsu.edu](mailto:qip@shsu.edu) as soon as possible to discuss options.

## **I have applied for the Fall 2020 semester. Will it be offered in person or remotely? Will I be able to get a visa? Can I defer to Spring 2021?**

We are optimistic that the Fall term will be offered in person as expected. The OIP will inform all Fall 2020 students if that changes. For new students who have been admitted to Fall 2020, we are eager to welcome you! Right now, visa appointments are not available, however, we hope that they will open as soon as the situation improves. If, for any reason you are unable to attend the Fall 2020 semester, we can work with you to defer to the Spring 2021 semester with no additional application fees.

## **I have or plan to apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT). How does this impact my OPT?**

Students must be in the U.S. to apply for OPT. If you are planning on completing your program in Spring 2020 and were planning on applying for OPT, but haven't yet, please contact the OIP at [qip@shsu.edu](mailto:qip@shsu.edu) immediately.

If you've applied for OPT already, we recommend that you remain in the U.S. while your application is pending. However, if you need to leave, please contact the OIP at [qip@shsu.edu](mailto:qip@shsu.edu) immediately for advising.

# Health and Safety

## **How do I stay healthy?**

Follow the recommendations from the CDC website:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.

- Follow CDC's recommendations for using a face mask.
  - CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a face mask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19.
  - Face masks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others. The use of face masks is also crucial for health workers and people who are taking care of someone in close settings (at home or in a health care facility).
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
  - If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.

### **What should I do if I think I'm sick?**

Please follow the [CDC recommendations](#). If you think you might have the coronavirus, call your doctor or urgent care before coming in so they can prepare for you. Contact the OIP and your professors if you are unable to attend or participate in classes.

## Health Insurance

### **Does the [AHP International Student Insurance](#) cover the coronavirus?**

Yes, hospital stays, doctor visits and medications are covered at the same rate no matter what illness you have. If you have not already done so, now is the perfect time to [create an account](#) on the AHP website and [download your electronic ID card](#). You can also use the UHCSR app on your mobile device.

### **Does the AHP International Student Insurance cover me outside Texas?**

Yes. Your AHP International Student Insurance plan covers you anywhere in the U.S. You are covered wherever you travel in the U.S. Please use the “[Find a Doctor or Hospital](#)” search feature if you need medical help while traveling.

# Resources

Check your email for messages from campus, the OIP, and your academic programs. At the time of writing, the OIP is sending COVID-19 email updates to all international students 1-2 times/week. Please make sure you read these emails carefully.

## Where can I get information?

- [Sam Houston State University COVID-19 website](#)
- [City of Huntsville](#)
  - If you are living outside of Huntsville, please check the city in which you reside
- [Walker County](#)
  - If you are living outside of Walker County, please check the county in which you reside
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)
- [Travel Advisories \(U.S. Department of State\)](#)

## How do I maintain connections with my classmates and community?

SHSU is offering multiple virtual opportunities for you to continue to engage and connect. Check out the following SHSU offices on social media (FB= Facebook; T= Twitter; I= Instagram) for fun daily activities:

- **Center for Diversity & Intercultural Affairs** (FB/T/I= @SHSUDiversity)
- **Program Council** (T/I= @shsu\_pc; FB= @SHSUProgramCouncil)
- **Rec Sports** (FB/T/I= @SHSUSports)
- **Leadership Initiatives** (T/I= @shsu\_leadership; FB= @SHSULeadershipInitiatives)
- **Student Activities** (FB/T/I= @SHSUSuAct)

# Student Services

**Is the Office of International Programs still open? How do I talk to an advisor?**

Yes. While the Farrington Building is currently closed, the OIP continues to offer services remotely. Advisors/DSOs are available via email or virtual (Zoom) appointment Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. Please email the OIP at [oiip@shsu.edu](mailto:oiip@shsu.edu) to set up an appointment, or email your individual advisor: Justin Ball ([jrb021@shsu.edu](mailto:jrb021@shsu.edu)), Dana Van De Walker ([djv013@shsu.edu](mailto:djv013@shsu.edu)), Ricardo Williams ([rlw062@shsu.edu](mailto:rlw062@shsu.edu)), Malin Hilmersson ([malin@shsu.edu](mailto:malin@shsu.edu)), Carleen McIlvain ([cmm071@shsu.edu](mailto:cmm071@shsu.edu)), or Nikki Dziuk ([nld015@shsu.edu](mailto:nld015@shsu.edu)).

### **Is the Newton Gresham Library open?**

No. The library is currently closed, but is offering remote services. Please visit the library website for more information: <https://library.shsu.edu>.

### **Is the Student Health Center open?**

Yes. The Student Health Center is open for appointments only. You can make an appointment by calling (936) 294-1805. You can visit their website for more information: <https://www.shsu.edu/dept/student-health-center/>.

### **Is the Counseling Center open?**

Yes. The Counseling Center is open for appointments only. You can make an appointment by calling (936) 294-1720.