



EducationUSA Global Guide 2020 **Academic Mobility and COVID-19** *as of October 21, 2020*

“As we all work to emerge from the current health crisis, we are confident that an American education will continue to be valued by students and their families around the world.”

— ECA Deputy Assistant Secretary Caroline Casagrande

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to disrupt global mobility of all types and has deeply affected academic mobility within higher education sectors around the world. EducationUSA is cognizant of these serious challenges and continues to promote the United States as the top study destination for international students, while also supporting the development and implementation of new, flexible strategies for international student recruitment and retention.

In order to further support accredited U.S. higher education institutions (HEIs) in their internationalization efforts during this challenging time, EducationUSA has compiled the following key points related to the impact of COVID-19 on international student mobility globally, as well as on regional- and country-specific bases. As a special supplement to the *EducationUSA Global Guide 2020*, this information offers guidance to U.S. institutions formulating recruitment plans and developing strategies to engage prospective international students in light of the current global health crisis.

With new guidance from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued on July 24, many international students who had planned to study this fall in the United States were provided the opportunity to do so. Following the guidance of the institutions at which they were enrolled, many International students already in the United States remained here to continue their studies, whether in-person, hybrid, or remote. New students with a valid I-20 were eligible to apply for a visa as soon as consular services reopened in their home countries. Student visas are a high priority, and every effort continues to be made to assist student visa applicants in a timely fashion as Consular services resume. More information on the DHS guidance is available [here](#). Information about Consular services at embassies and consulates worldwide can be found [here](#).

At the time of the publication of this document, the EducationUSA network is fully operational through an array of virtual services and programming. However, considering variations in, and changes to, circumstances on the ground around the world, EducationUSA recommends that U.S. institutions consult the [EducationUSA website](#) and social media channels, and contact advising centers directly for the most current information about services, programs, and events.

Key recommendations:

- Provide up-to-date information on your institution's website regarding policy changes that may lower barriers for applicants, to include flexible admission criteria and increased flexibility in testing requirements. Communicate frequently with interested students to provide institutional updates and reassurance.
- International students, particularly those in STEM fields, may be reluctant to pursue offerings that are solely or largely online. Highlight how you will ensure instructional quality through temporary online offerings, and communicate plans for transitioning online instruction to on-campus instruction when safe to do so. If applicable, highlight short-term cost savings of online instruction.
- Participate in virtual recruitment events/webinars, including [EducationUSA events](#) around the world. Make an effort to ensure institutional representation at convenient times in local time zones.
- Make an extra effort to highlight current students and recent graduates from regions in which you are interested in recruiting. In particular, highlight positive examples of how your institution has supported international students during the pandemic to ensure their safety and continuity of their academic trajectories.
- With many graduation exams and standardized tests canceled around the world, students are looking at institutions with flexible application and admissions policies. Highlight flexible options your institution is offering, such as beginning studies online or overseas or deferring admissions.

Sub-Saharan Africa

While Africa accounts for only a small proportion of total reported cases of COVID-19 globally, the economic impact of the pandemic will likely make it more challenging for many families to send students overseas for study, including to the United States. Students from Africa are likely to continue viewing the United States favorably as a study destination.

U.S. HEIs should be aware that the West African Senior School Certificate Exam (WASSCE) has been delayed for 2020 in Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia. EducationUSA recommends that U.S. HEIs admit students based on transcripts and other credentials given limitations on access to the WASSCE assessment. Across East, Central and Southern Africa, almost all countries will still give final exams on their normal schedules.

U.S. HEIs are encouraged to reach out directly to EducationUSA advising centers to craft recruitment strategies to reach prospective students. Many African students access the internet via their mobile phones. HEIs are encouraged to make sure their flyers and information are easily accessible via mobile phones. Virtual learning will present challenges for many African students who remain in their countries while enrolled in U.S. institutions' online courses due to time differences and limited access to the internet via desktop and laptop computers.

East Asia and Pacific

Given the disruptions to academic calendars in 2020, globally mobile students are anxious about the timeline and requirements for higher education applications and enrollment. U.S. HEIs are encouraged to develop messaging targeted to students facing these uncertainties. Where possible, this communication should address country- or region-specific concerns. For example, in order to recognize foreign degrees, the Chinese government requires students to demonstrate physical presence in the degree-issuing country. While the Ministry of Education recently announced exceptions for seniors graduating in spring 2020, uncertainty remains as to how long those exceptions will continue. Institutions may wish to remind potential applicants that classes and other academic activities will likely have returned to normal by the time they graduate.

In recent years, positive trends in student mobility - especially in Vietnam and China - have depended heavily on the steady rise of the middle class, which is likely to be disrupted for several years to come. In addition to economic concerns, students and families have expressed apprehension about discrimination against students from Asia. HEIs should consider efforts to ensure both the physical and mental well-being of international students on campus and utilize promotional materials and messaging to highlight any proactive measures taken to address discrimination. Reluctance to engage in long-distance travel and the time difference between the region and the United States will also present challenges to student mobility, with many students and families already considering closer study destinations within the region. Given these challenges, U.S. institutions will need to redouble their marketing efforts to communicate to prospective students the unique value and benefit of studying in the United States. U.S. HEIs are encouraged to engage with advising centers in the region to explore opportunities for virtual recruitment.

Note that a [Presidential Proclamation](#) is currently in place suspending entry into the United States of foreign nationals who were physically present in China within 14 days preceding entry or attempted entry into the country. Separately, another [Presidential Proclamation](#) that restricts entry into the United States of a relatively small subset of Chinese students and scholars who have ties to entities that implement or support the People's Republic of China (PRC)'s Military Civil Fusion strategy took effect on June 1, 2020. HEIs should also be cognizant of [restrictions](#) on international travel to and from Australia.

Europe and Eurasia

Decisions regarding academic calendars and adjustments to graduation requirements vary by country throughout Europe. As of late summer, Austria was undertaking a phased re-opening of schools, while Italy plans to re-open secondary schools in September with alternating in-person and virtual classes. Other countries in the region are considering similar approaches. While most European countries had planned to start the fall semester in person, summer spikes in infections have complicated these decisions. A significant portion of student mobility from Western and Northern Europe is achieved via institutional exchange agreements; as a result, European students and their home institutions are closely monitoring the reopening plans of partners in the United States.

As in most world regions, the full economic impact of COVID-19 on European economies is not yet clear. Economic uncertainty and instability may prompt some students and families to consider a gap year before enrollment in higher education programs. European students remain interested in, and motivated to, study in the United States. Throughout the spring, record numbers of students participated in EducationUSA virtual programming, making this an important tool for U.S. HEIs looking to continue or expand recruitment in Europe.

Note that a [Presidential Proclamation](#) is currently in place suspending entry into the United States of foreign nationals who were physically present in the Schengen Area, the United Kingdom, or Ireland within 14 days preceding entry or attempted entry into the country. However, an [exception](#) exists for students traveling from these areas on F-1 or M-1 visas.

Two resources from the European Commission may be particularly useful for U.S. HEIs:

1. [Report](#) on the Impact of COVID-19 on education systems in Europe
2. [Guidance](#) on changes to travel and transportation systems in Europe

Middle East and North Africa

Countries in the region are relying primarily on distance learning for secondary students at this time, although quality and accessibility vary by country. Schools in Qatar have adopted a hybrid model, but have offered the option to continue fully virtual study or to attend in-person classes. In early October, Jordan announced the suspension of in-person instruction across the Kingdom starting October 9 until further notice. Saudi Arabia administered high school completion testing earlier this year, while the UAE put graduations on hold. Following a pause, the UAE Ministry of Education began offering the Emirates Standardized Test (EmSAT) in June, with enhanced safety protocols in light of the pandemic. Institutions should be aware that some transcripts may be missing test scores as delays continue.

The UAE's largest scholarship granting organizations have reaffirmed their intention to fund 2020-2021 scholarships at levels planned before the pandemic. However, Qatar's government scholarship program has made significant budget cuts for the upcoming year. U.S. HEIs should continue to engage with their points of contact for sponsored students, offer flexibility on application and admissions requirements where possible, and publicly reaffirm their institutions' commitment to international students.

EducationUSA in the MENA region is well-prepared for virtual engagement, with full-time virtual advisers for Iran, Libya, and Syria working to expand offerings and best practices in this area. Participation in virtual advising sessions, virtual meetings with U.S. HEIs, and Competitive College Clubs remains high and attests to sustained interest from students in studying in the United States.

South and Central Asia

Policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic vary across countries in South and Central Asia. Postponement and cancellation of some or all of the spring semester as well as graduation exams has presented challenges to students seeking higher education opportunities abroad, including in the United States. In addition to health and safety, students and families are concerned about the economic fallout of the pandemic and an inability to afford the high cost of U.S. tuitions. Many governmental and non-governmental organizations are concerned with the

associated implications for student mobility from the region for years to come. Uncertainty over securing visas, the prospect of an online-only fall semester, future OPT options, and the high cost of tuition absent the benefit of an on-campus experience has prompted some students to defer enrollment for at least a year and consider studying in other English-speaking countries. Students have also expressed concerns regarding the possibility of starting online classes without being able to secure a visa in advance of when in-person classes resume. Nonetheless, interest in higher education opportunities in the United States remains high, and U.S. HEIs should consider targeted messaging that addresses these concerns and offering creative solutions such as 2+2 programs in partnership with community colleges, as they are able.

U.S. HEIs are encouraged to clearly communicate the deliberate steps they take to ensure student well-being and safety on campus and highlight key response measures undertaken by their institutions to support current students. HEIs that proactively adopt and communicate flexible application, virtual learning, and admissions policies also will be at an advantage in recruiting students from the region in the coming year. In addition to standard social media channels, U.S. HEIs should consider platforms that may be more popular in the region, including Telegram, WeChat, and WhatsApp.

Western Hemisphere

The impact of COVID-19 on academic readiness and mobility will be predominantly reflected in: 1) access to education, as students may miss a year of school due to disruptions and closures across academic programs at all levels and 2) the economic repercussions for a region heavily reliant on agricultural products and natural resources. COVID-19 is likely to affect families of students currently in the United States as well as prospective applicants to U.S. HEIs. Varying degrees of quality in national educational systems, a growing digital divide due to lack of internet access and capacity and training to implement online education have hampered students' completion of the school year. These challenges have had an outsized impact on students from marginalized Afro-Latino and Indigenous communities. Exit exams and graduation dates are subject to changes and delays throughout the region.

The economic impact of the pandemic will be severe throughout the region and may limit the ability of the middle class to study abroad. In some countries, the currency devaluation is so severe that some students who are already enrolled in U.S. HEIs will not be able to continue their studies. While economically stable families may still consider education abroad for their children, weakening local currencies may influence decisions on educational investments. Students able to receive generous funding and full-paying students considering highly ranked, well-recognized institutions will continue to prioritize the United States as a study destination. However, students and families continue to consider other destinations and express concerns about security opportunities for work/study and professional training, as well as cost. Note that a U.S. [Presidential Proclamation](#) is currently in place suspending entry into the United States of foreign nationals who were physically present in Brazil within 14 days before entering the United States.

EducationUSA advising centers have increased online offerings in order to continue providing current and updated information to students through means such as webinars and a Western Hemisphere virtual fair in September. EducationUSA advisers can also facilitate opportunities to engage and explore partnership opportunities with local HEIs that are addressing challenges in developing and implementing online education. Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) is an example of a program offered through partnerships between U.S. HEIs and local

universities in several countries in the region. U.S. HEIs are encouraged to connect with EducationUSA to join these events.