



Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies

Mail Code 230-87, 1200 East California Blvd, Pasadena, CA 91125

Tel: 626 395 6346 Fax: 626 577 9246 Email: gradofc@caltech.edu

July 29, 2020

Dear incoming Caltech graduate students,

As announced in the [July 14 community update](#), we are approaching the 2020-21 Academic Year with a plan for instruction to be delivered through a hybrid model that will include a combination of remote and in-person components. Be assured that faculty are planning to deliver a full curriculum remotely, and will do so in all instances other than where specific courses require in-person participation in laboratories.

It is important to emphasize that we are still waiting for official guidance from county and state officials on higher education operations, and that as the number of positive cases increases locally and across the nation, we all must remain flexible. The Institute is prepared to adjust its plans for the fall as is required by the evolution of the pandemic. Supporting the health and wellness of all members of our community continues to be the top priority as decisions are made on how to best meet Caltech's mission to advance research and education.

I recognize that these uncertain times bring acute and specific challenges as you prepare to embark on a new academic journey. Our team is working across the Institute to bring as much clarity as we can to your individual circumstances and to the situation as a whole, and we will keep you informed going forward with updates from the Graduate Office through the Summer term.

To start, there are a few important developments for the Fall term:

- Graduate students will be able to matriculate into a degree program remotely from within the United States and into a non-degree program remotely from outside of the United States.
- Incoming international F-1 graduate students are advised to remain outside the United States. This guidance does not apply to incoming F-1 SEVIS¹ transfers from another U.S. institution or J-1 students.

We anticipate three scenarios for the Fall term; as detailed below, eligibility for these scenarios may depend on immigration status.

1: On-campus arrival at Caltech. While coursework will be primarily delivered remotely, it may be possible to begin laboratory research, depending on the Option, the advisor, and the public health situation.

2: Remote matriculation with remote coursework. Certain research may be conducted remotely, depending on the Option and the advisor.

3: Deferred admissions for up to a year, in consultation with the Option.

¹ The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) is the U.S. government program that administers the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) for F-1 international students.

Funding

Scenarios 1 and 2 would include payment of stipend described in the letter of admission, if possible. Please note that we are still working out the details, especially as it concerns students who would be residing outside of the United States during the Fall term. More details will be provided in the near future.

U.S. Citizen and Permanent Resident Students

Scenarios 1, 2 and 3 are available for incoming graduate students who are U.S. citizens and permanent residents.

International Students

Scenarios 1, 2 and 3 are available for incoming F-1 SEVIS transfers and J-1 students.

Scenarios 2 and 3 are available for incoming international graduate students with Initial F-1 SEVIS records. In view of recent SEVP¹ guidance, we ask that new incoming graduate students with Initial F-1 SEVIS records remain outside the United States. The uncertainties in evolving public health guidelines do not guarantee that these students will be able to comply with the current SEVP requirement for some in-person coursework at the start of the Fall term. Thus, we believe it is in the best interests of this group of students to remain outside the United States.

Implications of Remote Matriculation from Outside the United States

Matriculation will be to a Non-degree Program

If you are an international student residing outside the United States who wants to matriculate remotely, you may do so as a non-degree student. Non-degree students enroll as fulltime graduate students but are not considered to be in a particular graduate degree program; if and when you then arrive on campus and have made satisfactory academic progress, your status and credits would be transferred to the appropriate graduate degree program. Students may be appointed as a non-degree student for up to one year, and their status would be re-evaluated if in-person enrollment is still not an option at the end of the one-year period.

Your F-1 SEVIS Record

Under the current SEVP [guidance](#), the immigration impact of matriculating remotely as a non-degree student will be as follows:

- Initial F-1 Students (non-SEVIS Transfers)

International Student Programs (ISP) will update your I-20 program start date in SEVIS to the start of the next term, and update it term by term. Students may continue to apply for F-1 visas based on current SEVIS records so that you are ready to enter the United States as soon as SEVP guidance allows. We will report your SEVIS record as Active, after you enter the United States and start your degree program. In order to be eligible for practical training (off-campus employment) opportunities, you must complete one academic year (3 consecutive academic terms) on an Active SEVIS record.

- SEVIS Transfers

Our goal is for you to maintain the same SEVIS record, maintain your valid F-1 visa (if applicable), and not need to pay a new SEVIS I-901 Fee. However, there are a number of factors that remain unclear at the moment. Your initial I-20 from Caltech indicates the issue reason as “Transfer Pending.” We anticipate that your SEVIS record can remain as “Transfer Pending” while you are outside the United States. We anticipate that ISP will be able to request a SEVIS datafix to correct your SEVIS program start date to match the date you expect to enter the United States and start your degree program. We do not know how long

the SEVIS datafix will take, nor do we know how a SEVIS datafix will impact calculations for eligibility for practical training opportunities. Thus, we do not know whether it would be a better choice for you to start a new, Initial SEVIS record instead.

Your J-1 SEVIS Record

While J-1 students are permitted to come to campus, if you elect to matriculate remotely from outside of the United States as a non-degree student, ISP will update your program start date in SEVIS to the start of the next term, and update it term by term. You may continue to apply for J-1 visas based on your current SEVIS records so that you are ready to enter the United States as soon as your visa is issued. We will report your SEVIS record as Active, once you enter the United States and start your degree program. Eligibility for academic training opportunities will depend on your program.

For any immigration-specific questions, please contact ISP at isp@caltech.edu.

Housing

We appreciate that some of you may still be undecided on whether you intend to come to campus, and even more so, on whether you plan to live in Caltech Housing. For our Housing team to appropriately assess the availability of housing for members of the community, however, it is essential that we know your current plans, even if they can change. If you have any update to arrival dates or need to cancel please contact the Housing Office directly. Be assured that if you respond now that you need a housing space, but later need to cancel, Housing will waive any applicable cancellation fees.

For housing-specific questions, please contact Housing at housing@caltech.edu.

Orientation

Graduate student orientation will be online the week of September 21 for all matriculated students, with modules that can be taken according to the student's schedule. There will be some events, such as the faculty and student panels, that we currently anticipate will be held in real time. More information on orientation will be sent later in the summer, with updates also posted on the [Graduate Studies Office web page for New Students](#).

International graduate student orientation will be held remotely from September 17-19, with updates posted [here](#).

Next Steps and Plans

For us to better understand how many students are interested in each of the options above for Fall term, please complete by August 3 the attached short enrollment [survey](#). Questions regarding enrollment and the deferral process should be directed to the Graduate Studies Office at gradofc@caltech.edu.

Please note that these plans are being developed specifically for the Fall term; further decisions will be made regarding subsequent terms given the evolving landscape (immigration orders, health and safety orders, ability to continue remote instruction in graduate courses, etc.). As conditions improve and we return to full operations, graduate students will be invited to return and will be expected to resume on-campus activities as it is feasible to do so because graduate school is primarily an in-person activity and certain requirements may not be possible to complete remotely, particularly laboratory research.

We recognize the challenges created by the current state of uncertainty and thank you for your patience and understanding as we navigate these fraught times. I wish we could provide more certainty at this time, but we are in a rapidly changing situation, and anticipate future directives from local, state and national officials that may further impact our operations. Please be assured that Caltech is committed to supporting

our incoming and current graduate students to provide a safe and rewarding education program as we move toward a time when we can resume full activities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Douglas C. Rees". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Douglas C. Rees

Dean of Graduate Studies
Roscoe Gilkey Dickinson Professor of Chemistry