Dear Colleagues,

On July 6, 2020, the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) issued a broadcast message modifying exceptions to the online study rule that it put in place for the spring and summer semesters.

According to this new guidance, students attending universities operating entirely online this fall may not take a full online course load and remain in the United States. Students attending universities adopting a hybrid model—that is, a mixture of online and in person classes—will be allowed to take more than one class or three credit hours online. They must take at least some courses in person.

The language in the memo is ambiguous but I’ve outlined below what we know as of today.

- Since Lehigh is following a hybrid model for the fall, international students will be allowed to remain in the United States as long as they maintain a full course of study that is not entirely online.
- All Lehigh programs that are offered fully online this fall should include an in-person option for international students.
- An academic program’s failure to offer in-person classes to international students could result in students’ loss of immigration status, unless they transfer to another university, change programs or leave the U.S.
- If Lehigh pivots to remote learning in the middle of the fall semester due to COVID-19, international students will need to leave the U.S. or transfer to another university with in-person academic instruction.
- Currently enrolled students continuing their studies outside the U.S. this fall will not be permitted to participate in online classes unless Lehigh’s fall semester instruction is entirely remote, in which case students can take courses remotely from overseas.
- Lehigh’s Office of International Students and Scholars must issue new form I-20 immigration documents to all current and incoming students to reflect the changes in program enrollment within 21 business days or no later than August 4, 2020.

To ensure compliance with this rule we recommend that half or more of the classes taken by students are substantially in person. As further information becomes available we will update this recommendation. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me directly at ssad416@lehigh.edu.

Thank you,

Samba Dieng
Director, Office of International Students and Scholars