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Fall 2020 USDHS Guidance on International Students – Update for MIT - 07/29/2020

As noted in previous communications, MIT was awaiting additional governmental guidance on new international students seeking to enter the U.S. to take fully or mostly online courses. On Friday afternoon, July 24, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (USDHS) issued new guidance on this topic. The guidance indicates that that New F-1 Students who are currently outside the U.S. will not be able to enter the U.S. to pursue fully online programs. However, the guidance lacks clarity on many of the important issues for which we have been seeking additional information, including the minimum number of hybrid subjects in which a New F-1 Student must be enrolled in order to enter and study in the U.S. in Fall 2020.

Based on our current interpretation of this new guidance and the regulations that apply to international students, we wanted to provide the following update regarding international students in Fall 2020:

- Continuing Students (F-1 and J-1) may enroll in fully online/remote coursework, either inside or outside the U.S.
- New International Students (including Transfer students) currently outside the U.S., seeking to enter the U.S. for Fall 2020:
 - F-1 students: they may not enter the U.S. to pursue fully online programs. The new guidance does not provide clarity on hybrid programs. If a student's program meets the normal requirements for F-1 status (see below), they should be able to enter and study in the U.S. If the student's program is hybrid but does not meet the normal F-1 requirements, students are advised not to travel to the U.S. for the Fall 2020 semester. We continue to evaluate the July 24 guidance and will provide an updated communication if we receive additional clarity on this topic.
 - Under the normal rules for F-1 students, only 1 subject/12 credits of online learning can count towards full-time status requirements.
 - For example, students in programs requiring a minimum of 36 credits for full-time status must be enrolled in at least 24 units/credits in subjects in their degree program that have some in-person elements (examples include in-person recitations, discussion groups, and TA-led meetings, etc.). Students in programs that require 24 credits plus a RA/TA for full-time status must be enrolled in either: (a) 12 credits of in-person/hybrid coursework plus a RA/TA that also has in-person/on-campus elements; or (b) 24 credits

plus a RA/TA that also has in-person/on-campus elements, or (b) 24 credits of in-person/hybrid courses with a remote/online RA/TA.

- These in-person elements cannot be offered only to international students; at a minimum, they should be offered to any students (including domestic students) who have a need to complete the course element in-person.
- J-1 students: they may not take fully-online coursework. Based on current guidance, they are permitted to pursue hybrid programs per MIT's J-1 program.
- Latest Arrival Date to Campus for Fall 2020: New International Students eligible to enter the U.S. for in-person/hybrid coursework in Fall 2020 must arrive to MIT no later than Monday, November 9, 2020, and must be able to complete their in-person elements before the end of in-person instruction on November 20, 2020. Departments/programs could inform students if they will establish an earlier deadline for arrival. Students unable to arrive by November 9, 2020 will require an updated visa document from the MIT ISO to instead arrive for the start of the Spring 2021 semester.
- New International Students may pursue full-time remote/online coursework from outside the U.S.

Many departments/programs are asking what steps they should take in response to this evolving guidance.

For departments and programs that are already planning to offer hybrid/in-person courses this Fall, and who are planning to invite new international graduate students to campus, we recommend that their new international F-1 students be enrolled in at least the minimum number of subjects with in-person elements needed for them to meet the normal F-1 requirements (ex: 24 units with in-person elements for a student in a 36-credit program). If a department/program is offering in-person elements to students, we recommend that those elements be offered in courses/subjects that already exist at MIT and that count toward the student's degree program (including elective courses). We do not recommend that departments/programs create new courses or encourage international students to enroll in in-person/hybrid courses that would not count towards the students' degrees.

Departments and programs who were planning fully online programming for new graduate students may proceed as they originally planned. If they wish to invite new international students to campus, they should follow the guidelines above. We understand that some departments/programs will not wish to, or be able to, provide courses with in-person elements.

Because their programs will be fully online, New Undergraduate Students (and Transfers) will not be able to enter the United States to pursue these programs this Fall.

We continue to monitor developments and will provide updated guidance as soon as possible. Thank you for your understanding and patience during these challenging times.

Best regards,
David

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