



**IIE**

**COVID-19  
SNAPSHOT SURVEY SERIES**

**COVID-19 EFFECTS ON U.S.  
HIGHER EDUCATION CAMPUSES**

***New Realities for Global Student Mobility  
in Summer and Fall 2020***

**Mirka Martel, Ph.D.  
July 2020**

# COVID-19 Effects on U.S. Higher Education Campuses

## *New Realities for Global Student Mobility in Summer and Fall 2020*

Mirka Martel, Ph.D.

July 2020

### **COVID-19 Snapshot Survey Series**

The Institute of International Education (IIE) is studying the effects of COVID-19 (coronavirus) on international educational exchange at U.S. higher education institutions. Our aim in this series is to provide more information about the effects that COVID-19 has had on international student mobility, and the measures U.S. higher education institutions are taking to support international students currently on campus and those overseas, international students interested in studying in the United States, and U.S. students planning to study abroad.

#### **Report 1: *Academic Student Mobility to and from Mainland China***

The first report in the series focuses on the effects of COVID-19 on academic student mobility to and from China.

#### **Report 2: *From Emergency Response to Planning for Future Student Mobility***

The second report takes a broader look at COVID-19 realities on U.S. campuses in spring 2020 and institutional adjustments to plan for student exchange in summer and fall 2020.

#### **Report 3: *New Realities for Global Student Mobility in Summer and Fall 2020***

The third report analyzes institutional adjustments to instruction in summer 2020 and plans for fall 2020 that affect inbound and outbound options for academic student exchange.

To download these reports, visit IIE's COVID-19 page: <https://www.iie.org/Connect/COVID-19>

## Introduction

This third report in the COVID-19 Snapshot Survey Series continues to map the effects of COVID-19 (coronavirus) on U.S. higher education institutions and global academic mobility to and from the United States. As in the first two reports, the Institute of International Education (IIE) is analyzing the ways U.S. institutions have responded to the pandemic and the effects of institutional safety measures and travel restrictions on academic mobility. In summer 2020, U.S. institutions began the semester with new realities. Most colleges and universities offered virtual instruction while simultaneously supporting international students who remained on campus or who could not travel to the United States. Looking ahead to fall 2020, institutions that have traditionally welcomed U.S. and international students for the start of the academic year are facing the realities of safety and security on campus. They are exploring what in-person, virtual, and hybrid instruction may require of students, faculty, and staff, and how new or continued travel restrictions will affect international students and U.S. students studying abroad.

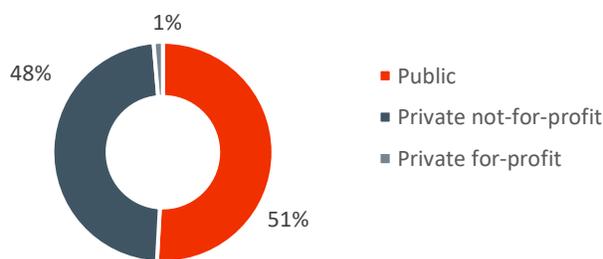
U.S. institutions place the health and safety of their students, faculty, and staff as their highest priority, ensuring they can provide a safe academic space to offer instruction. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to spread worldwide, infecting more than 16 million people globally, with over 4 million cases in the United States.<sup>i</sup> Of particular concern to higher education institutions is that a larger share of the new coronavirus infections are among the 18-49 demographic, which includes university-age students.<sup>ii,iii</sup> While evidence has demonstrated that the spread can be limited, to date the most potent defense continues to be social distancing and limiting exposure to others who may have the virus. In collegiate environments, accounting for these safety precautions will require moving to a new normal.

The three main sections of the report present data on U.S. higher education institutions and the effects of COVID-19 on 1) institutional responses in summer and fall 2020; 2) current and prospective international students; and 3) U.S. study abroad.

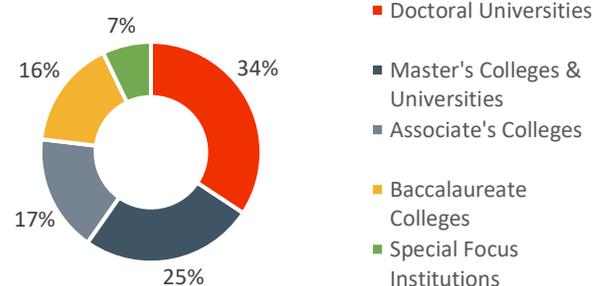
## Survey Respondent Institutions

IIE administered the third survey to U.S. higher education institutions from July 9-24, 2020. We sent the survey to the *IIE Network* and U.S. higher education institutions participating in *Open Doors*<sup>®</sup>, and 520 institutions completed the survey.<sup>iv</sup> Many of these colleges and universities (94%) also responded to the most recent *Open Doors 2019 Report on International Educational Exchange* report and hosted over 550,000 international students in 2018/19,<sup>v</sup> which represents half of all international students as of the *Open Doors 2019* report.<sup>vi</sup>

**Institution Sector**



**Institution Type**



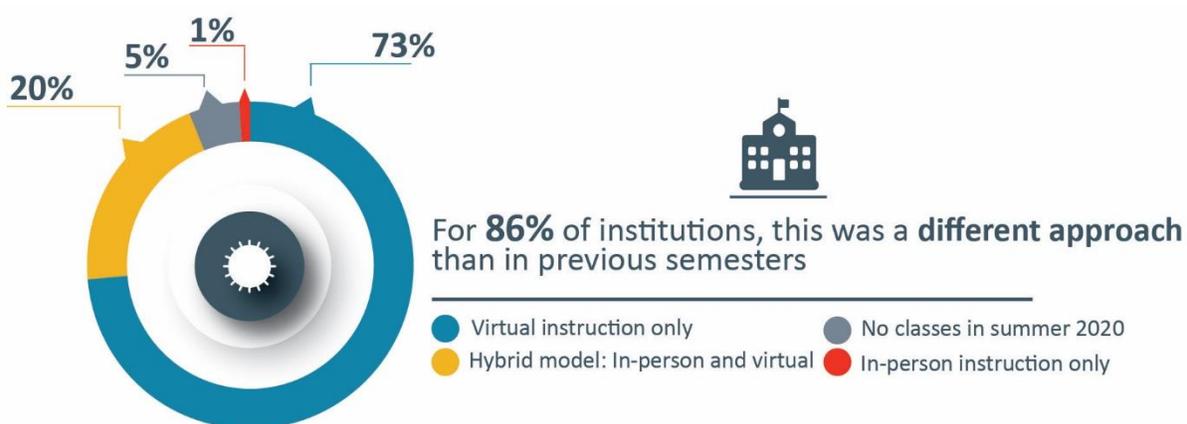
# U.S. Institutional Response in Summer 2020

86% of institutions changed their mode of instruction in summer 2020 from previous semesters.

For those offering instruction, summer 2020 was the first full academic semester or term during the COVID-19 pandemic. Planning for summer 2020 was shortened in part by the massive emergency response that institutions took in spring 2020 to temporarily close facilities and transition to a remote environment amid the COVID-19 outbreak. As a result and out of an abundance of caution, most institutions offered virtual instruction only.

This section analyzes the response by U.S. colleges and universities in summer 2020, with an emphasis on the decisions that most impacted international student mobility and U.S. study abroad.

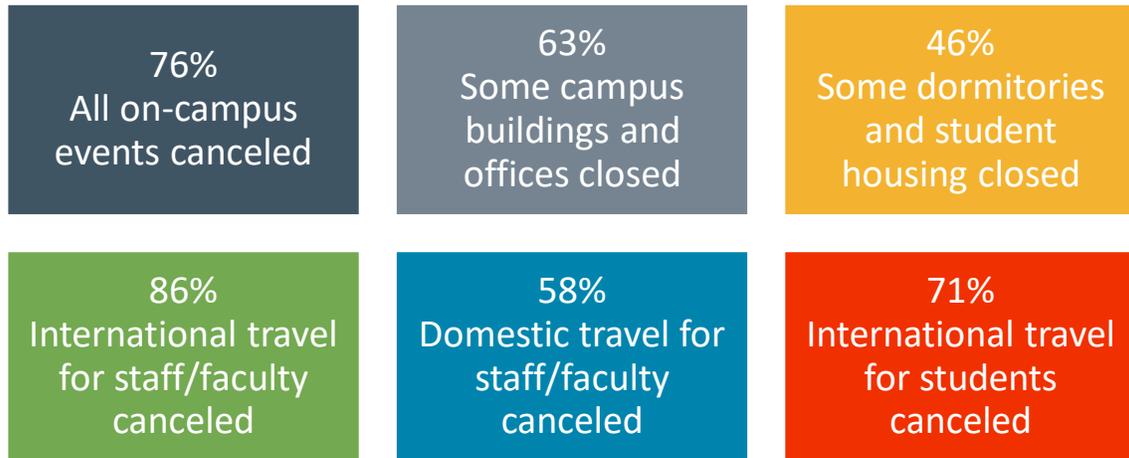
## Mode of Instruction in Summer 2020



Most U.S. higher education institutions conducted coursework online in summer 2020, with approximately one-fifth (20%) opting for a hybrid model of in-person and virtual instruction. For most of these institutions, in-person instruction included limited lab or coursework on campus, with the majority of classes online. A comparison of institutional summer plans from the second to the third report reveals that most institutions that made a later decision (moving from “no decision” in May 2020 to an answer category in July 2020) selected a hybrid model of instruction. What is particularly notable is that the vast majority (88%) of institutions that offered virtual or hybrid instruction models of instruction noted a different approach from previous semesters, meaning that they were able to transform and adapt their modes of instruction to offer students options for summer programs off campus.

A minimal number of institutions (25) indicated that no classes took place in summer 2020. Most of these institutions (84%) did not offer summer coursework traditionally; as such, this change was not significantly different from previous semesters. Only six institutions indicated that summer classes took place only in person, and these were primarily small institutions with fewer than 5,000 students.

## Institutional Operations in Summer 2020



Most institutions continued to restrict access to their buildings and offices throughout the summer. However, some institutions have relaxed access for faculty and staff, and some lab activity has resumed, particularly if related to COVID-19 research.

- **Events:** The vast majority of on-campus events remain canceled (76%); however, institutions mentioned that some small gatherings are now allowed with proper social distancing, while most large-scale events are canceled or held virtually.
- **Campus buildings, offices, and dorms:** A much smaller proportion of institutions (approximately 25%) indicated that *all* campus facilities or dorms were closed. Most institutions noted that while facilities were closed to the public, the administration is allowing essential staff (e.g., maintenance staff, technology support) and faculty to return to campus. All individuals on campus need to adhere to safety precautions and practice social distancing. Some institutions continue to offer limited student housing for international students or students who do not have housing options outside their college or university.
- **Faculty and staff travel:** Most institutions canceled staff travel, both international (86%) and domestic (58%), though some institutions reported that “essential” domestic travel could be authorized if approved separately by institutional leadership.
- **Student travel:** Most institutions confirmed that travel for U.S. students, both international (71%) and domestic (48%), was canceled. This complements our second COVID-19 report finding that 93% of study abroad programs were canceled entirely or in part in summer 2020.

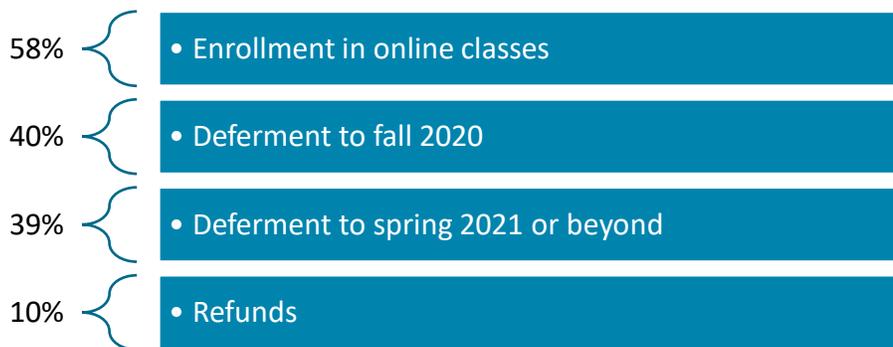
## International Students Enrolled in Summer 2020

Our survey inquired about the number of international students enrolled at U.S. higher education institutions in summer 2020. The following section provides data on two types of students: those who were physically on campus and those who were enrolled but could not make it to the United States in time for the summer semester.



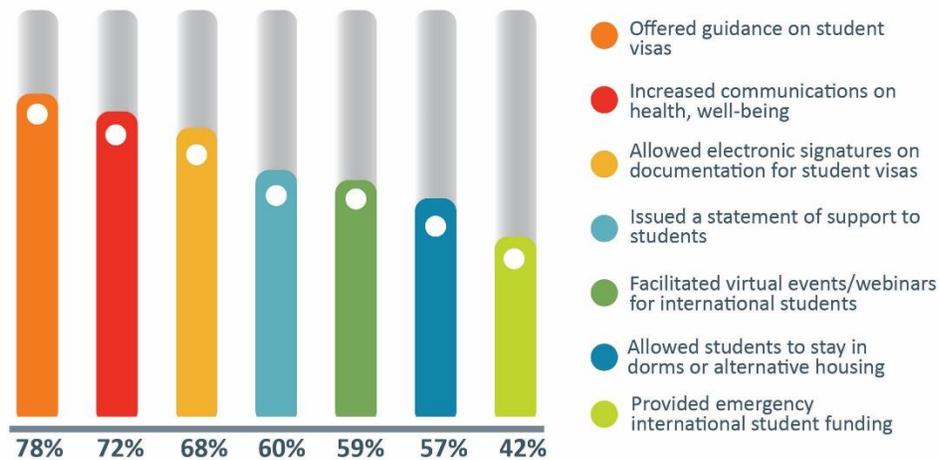
- International students on campus in summer 2020.** 302 institutions reported over 40,000 international students enrolled in classes and on campus in summer 2020. Most of these students had continued enrollment in courses from the spring 2020 semester. It is important to note that this total does not reflect international students who may have stayed in the United States over the summer on their student visa but were not on campus.
- International students unable to come to campus in summer 2020.** In addition to the international students already on campus, institutions estimated an additional 7,297 new or continuing students enrolled for the summer semester were not able to come to the United States to attend classes. To best support these students, colleges and universities offered them a range of options, including enrolling in classes online (58%), deferment to the fall (40%) or spring (39%) semesters or beyond, or refunds (10%).

**What is your office offering enrolled international students who cannot come to your campus?**



Since the release of our report on COVID-19, U.S. higher education institutions have begun to shift their approach in working with students unable to travel to the United States. Earlier in the COVID-19 pandemic, colleges and universities were more likely to offer a leave of absence, deferment, or refunds to students. As institutions have developed virtual courses for all students, more colleges and universities have pivoted to offering virtual enrollment. The preparations for virtual enrollment and potential effects on international students in fall 2020 are discussed in the next section.

## Support to International Students on Campus in Summer 2020



U.S. higher education institutions are proactively working to support international students through several initiatives. Institutional respondents noted increases in international students seeking guidance on their status for the summer and fall semesters due to changes in U.S. guidelines regarding international students over the past month. As a result, three out of four institutions (78%) provided guidance to their international students on student visas. Many institutions also supported their international students with necessary paperwork by allowing electronic signatures on documentation and visa forms (68%).

As noted in our previous COVID-19 reports, colleges and universities continue to prioritize the health and well-being of their international students (72%) and provide support, including housing (57%) and emergency student funding (42%). Furthermore, 60% of institutions have now released a written statement or letter in support of international students on their campus, which is an increase compared to our prior report.

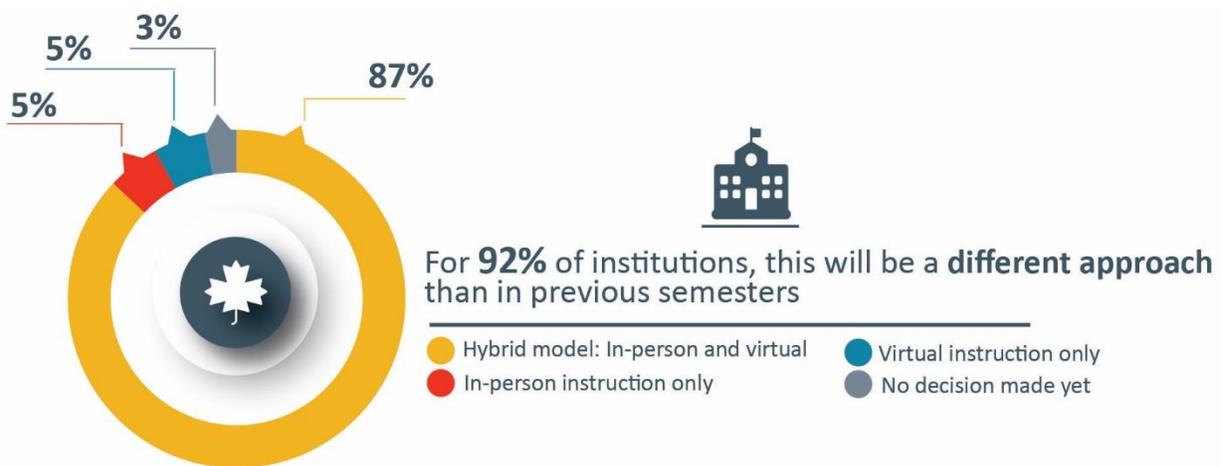
In addition to the assistance reported by institutions, there has been a groundswell of support and advocacy for international students by institutions and organizations throughout the United States. For example, IIE has launched an Emergency Student Funding opportunity that has committed over \$2 million in aid and provided over 600 students with funding for their necessary living expenses.<sup>vii</sup>

# U.S. Institutional Plans for Fall 2020

92% of U.S. higher education institutions are prioritizing reopening their campuses in some capacity in fall 2020.

The considerations that institutions are making for fall 2020 — from offering virtual instruction to providing options for in-person classes, events, housing, and student services on campus — will affect both U.S. and international students. Most institutions are also reconsidering the academic calendar and planning for the realities of COVID-19 in fall/winter 2020. In this section we also provide a summary of resources that institutions are prioritizing when making decisions regarding COVID-19 response on their campuses.

## Mode of Instruction in Fall 2020

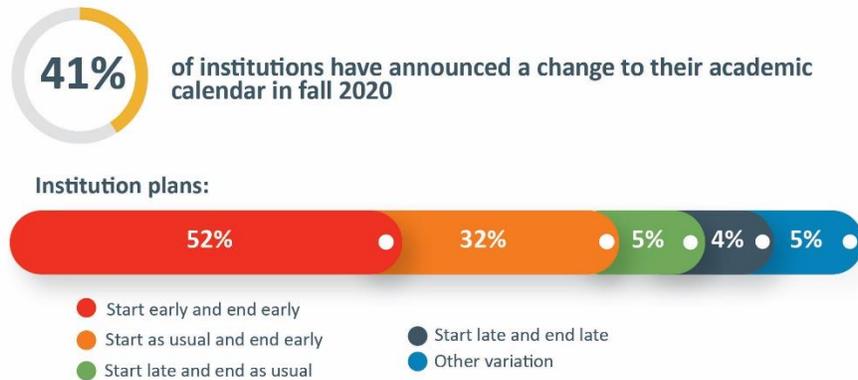


A majority of colleges and universities (87%) plan to offer hybrid instruction in fall 2020. When asked to describe the hybrid model, descriptions ranged from leaving decisions of whether to hold classes in person or online to departments and faculty, to others implementing institution-wide standards, such as 1) limiting in-person instruction to a certain percentage (e.g., 20% of classes will be held in person); 2) restricting in-person instruction to class size (e.g., maximum eight students or fewer for in-person instruction); 3) offering in-person instruction until a specific date, such as Thanksgiving, after which instruction will be online; or 4) only allowing in-person instruction for certain types of classes, such as labs or practicums.

Over 90% of institutions indicated that their approach to the fall semester (whether virtual-only or a hybrid model) would be *new* and different from previous semesters. Most institutions are preparing for both the knowns and unknowns of the coming semester, particularly regarding the rate of COVID-19 infection across the United States and on U.S. campuses, emergency response if there is a COVID-19 outbreak on campus, and preparations for continuous instruction.

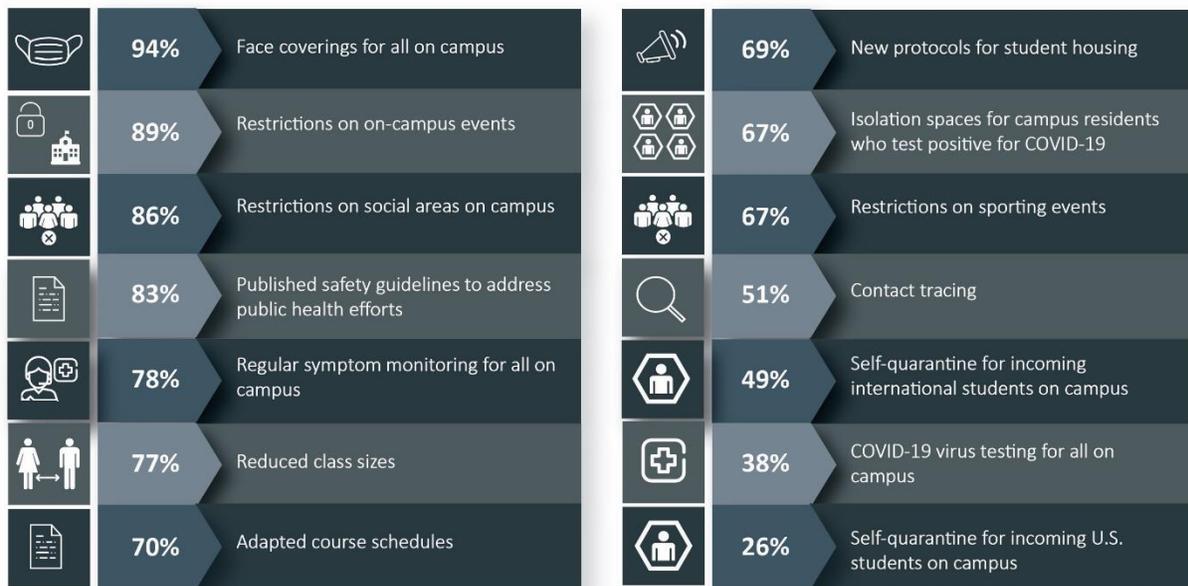
## Changes to the Academic Calendar in Fall 2020

In addition to changes in the mode of instruction, 41% of respondent institutions indicated that their institution had announced a change to the academic calendar. Among these institutions, 84% anticipate ending the semester early, preparing for a possible second wave of COVID-19 infections in winter 2020. Most institutions plan to either start the semester early and end early (52%) or begin the semester at the usual time and shorten the semester (32%). Institutions who did not respond to this question may keep the calendar the same or have not yet decided on calendar changes.



## Safety Measures on Campus in Fall 2020

As most institutions plan to have some form of in-person instruction during the fall semester, colleges and universities are taking precautions to ensure the safety and well-being of everyone on campus. Institutions are considering multiple measures to ensure that campus life, while limited, will continue.



83% of institutions are planning to publish safety guidelines to address public health efforts. As institutions work to prepare their COVID-19 institutional protocols, respondents noted using resources from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (85%), their state government (84%), their local government (73%) or the federal government (52%). Many institutions are also looking for guidance internally, specifically through an institutional coronavirus task force (80%) or faculty public health experts (43%), to help with decision-making moving forward.

### **Sharing COVID-19 Institutional Response with International Students**

Institutions are prioritizing sharing their COVID-19 response and plan not only with U.S. students but also with current and prospective international students. Information regarding COVID-19 is critical for students to make informed decisions on returning to campus or selecting which institution to attend this fall. When asked how institutions are sharing information about COVID-19 with international students, most colleges and universities noted that they are sending direct emails (95%) or posting updated information on their website (85%). Approximately half of the institutions indicated that they also share information via webinars (53%) or on social media (51%). A smaller proportion of institutions sent direct mail or have shared this information in college fairs.

# International Students in Fall 2020

The fall semester is traditionally a time to welcome new and continuing international students to campus. As institutions prepare for a new normal in fall 2020, they are also preparing for changes in their international student populations.

While some international students will be able to continue their studies in person or virtually from the United States, a new class of international students will very likely begin their international experience through online enrollment. Despite this challenge, most institutions are committed to welcoming these students on campus as soon as possible. This section outlines the possibilities for international students to enroll in classes, in person or virtually, this fall semester.

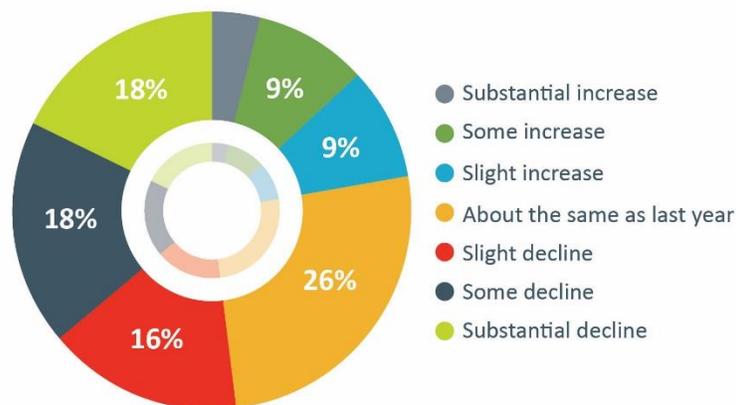
## Will International Students Currently on Campus Remain?

As mentioned in a previous section, 302 institutions reported over 40,000 international students on their campus as of summer 2020. When asked whether these international students will remain through the fall 2020 semester, **91% said they anticipate that the majority of their students will stay through fall 2020.** This is a positive indication that many institutions are confident that international students who were enrolled as of 2020 and remained in the United States may continue with their studies.

## Applications and Enrollment of New International Students in Fall 2020

Since spring 2020, U.S. higher education institutions have prioritized recruitment of new international students, ensuring that international students can apply and accept admission at their institutions once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. While some institutions are still accepting student decisions, this is the first indication of the potential impact COVID-19 will have on international student enrollment in the coming semester.

### How did international student application numbers for academic year 2020/21 compare to the previous year?



Approximately half of the institutions (50%) noted that their application numbers are lower than in previous years, while one-quarter (26%) indicated application data that was about the same as last year. Decreases in application

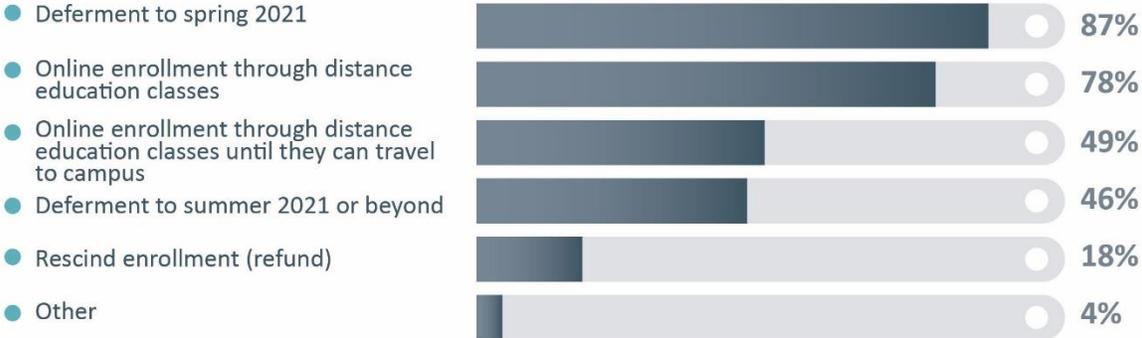
numbers may be the case for both U.S. and international students, as the COVID-19 pandemic and economic and social realities may drive students to consider their academic options or gap years. Further, given the uncertainties of the upcoming fall and spring semesters, applications also may have declined due to students choosing to wait to submit their application.

U.S. colleges and universities have offered flexible options for enrollment for admitted international students, with some students planning to begin studies in fall 2020 and others indicating their intention to defer to a future semester. Among 286 reporting institutions, 57,555 international students have accepted enrollment thus far in fall 2020, and an additional 4,488 have deferred to the spring semester and beyond.

**International Student Decisions in Fall 2020**



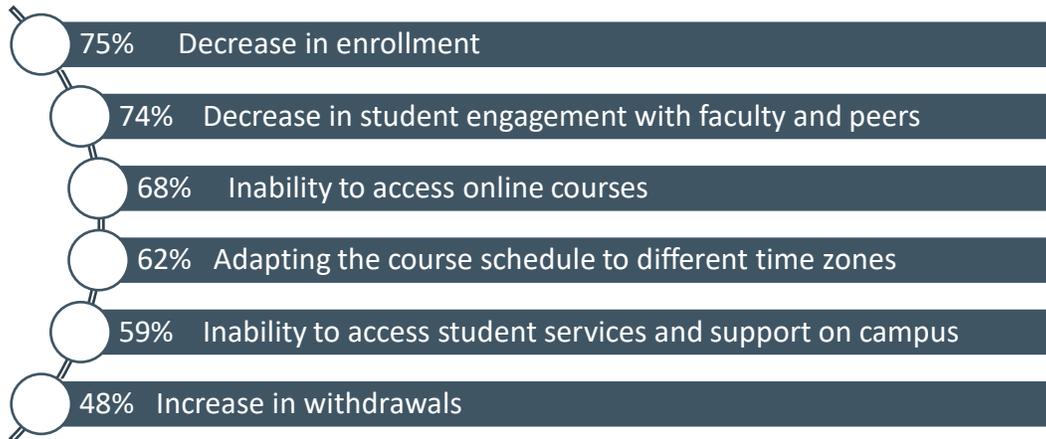
**If students cannot make it on campus they will be offered:**



Even if students accept enrollment in fall 2020, the question remains whether they will be able to come to the United States by the start of the academic semester and whether their institution will be providing in-person instruction. As a result, institutions are already offering options to students enrolled for fall 2020 who are not able to make it to campus by the start of the semester. Most institutions are offering students the ability to defer their enrollment to spring 2021 (87%) or online registration in classes (78%). Institutions are proactively working with students to provide several enrollment alternatives and thereby prevent withdrawals.

While virtual enrollment will likely be the reality for both U.S. and international students in fall 2020, 90% of colleges and universities expect that there will be difficulties associated with implementing virtual enrollment for international students. Most institutions are frank in reporting the challenges of virtual enrollment, including concerns about decreases in enrollment, less student engagement with faculty and peers, and access and ability to attend online classes.

**What are some long-term challenges of virtual enrollment for international students?**

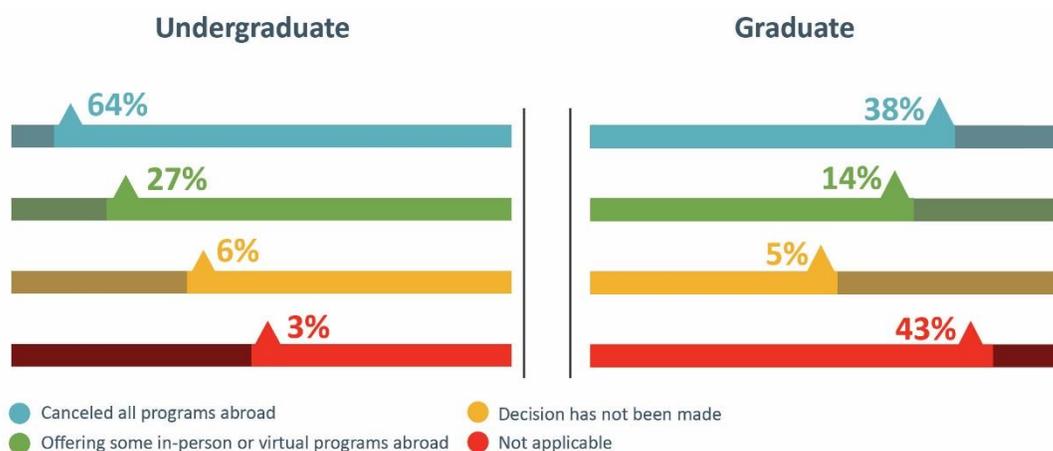


# Study Abroad in Fall 2020

Most study abroad programs will be canceled in the fall semester due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and institutions' decisions to restrict outbound student and scholar exchange.

This section focuses on the likelihood of study abroad programs and graduate learning overseas opportunities happening in fall 2020, and how this may affect study abroad options for the academic year. Looking to the future, we also analyze the how study abroad programs are preparing to resume programs once it is safe to do so.

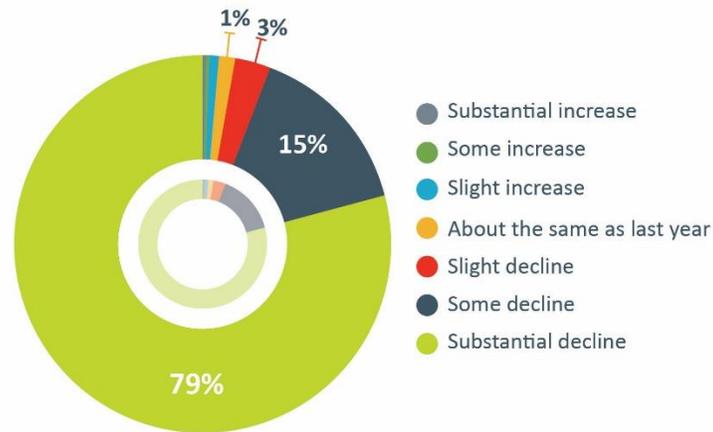
## Study Abroad Programs in Fall 2020



Study abroad programs for undergraduate students in the fall largely remain canceled. However, some institutions are offering options for in-person study abroad on an individual basis or through a virtual study abroad program. Some institutions also reported offering domestic study away programs, allowing students to study at another institution in the United States. While representing a smaller proportion of programs, graduate programs overseas are also canceled, particularly group or faculty-led programs. The decision to cancel study abroad programs has likely been driven by several factors, including the safety and security of students and faculty. As such, 66% of institutions reported that they are not accepting any exceptions to their policy and are canceling all study abroad programs. Approximately 14% of colleges and universities indicated that the decision had not been made whether to allow students to request a study abroad exemption.

Due to widespread cancellations, institutions indicated that the effects on study abroad numbers in the 2020/21 academic year would be significant. Over 79% of colleges and universities expect a substantial decline in study abroad numbers for the academic year, while 18% expect some decline. Only 1% of institutions expect study abroad numbers to remain the same and 2% indicate an expected increase.

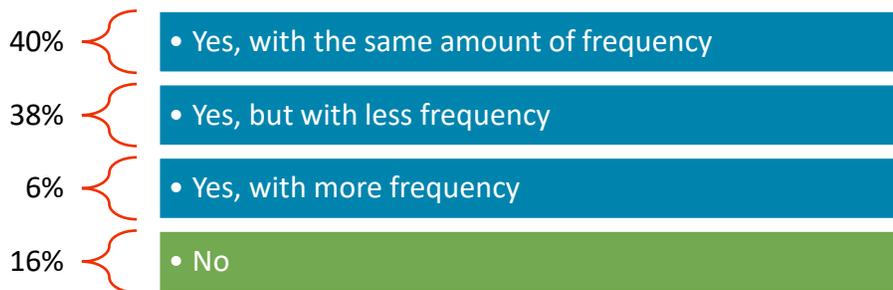
## How will COVID-19 impact U.S. study abroad in academic year 2020/21?



### Looking Ahead to Future Semesters

Despite the anticipated decrease in study abroad until travel and institutional restrictions lift, institutions are looking ahead to future semesters when U.S. study abroad resumes. Positively, 84% of institutional respondents indicated that they have continued to promote future U.S. study abroad programs. The promotion of study abroad on campuses will continue to be a priority for institutions due to a number of factors, including student interest and the designation of study abroad as a high-impact practice that improves student outcomes.<sup>viii</sup>

### Is your office promoting U.S. study abroad for future semesters?



While institutions remain committed to offering study abroad programs, many colleges and universities are reconsidering and updating their safety and emergency protocols. 51% of institutions indicated that they had updated their future protocols as a result of COVID-19, taking into consideration numerous updates: travel and health insurance policies; waivers and release forms; institutional evacuation plans and support to students in host universities if they shut down; and revised refund policies. A considerable number of respondent institutions also noted that they would be revisiting faculty-led programs and ensuring that their procedures and guidance align with the institution's broader study abroad policies. For many institutions, strengthening their data collection processes and measures will also improve their preparation for emergency response and decrease risk and liability in emergency situations.

## Key Takeaways and Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic has required U.S. higher education institutions to make flexible and timely changes to the instruction and services they offer to both domestic and international students. Our research series explores this response longitudinally and provides a comprehensive analysis of the impacts of the global health crisis on university administration and higher education delivery more broadly.

Four takeaways can be highlighted from this report:

- 1. Institutions are facing new opportunities and challenges in their modes of instruction and service delivery.** While approaches to instruction may have been expanding to include virtual and hybrid modes, the COVID-19 pandemic has propelled a majority of institutions to consider their pivot to virtual instruction. For 92% of institutions, their approach to teaching in the fall will be unlike any other semester previously, providing an opportunity to expand their instruction methods in the future and learn new instruction practices. However, institutions also understand the new challenges of virtual instruction and will need to plan for these to succeed in this new normal.
- 2. Institutions are prioritizing the safety and security of everyone on campus and planning extensively for fall 2020.** The higher education community is taking an informed and united approach to safety and security, considering the various measures necessary to make students, parents, faculty, and staff feel comfortable about returning to campus. The evolving nature of COVID-19 will also require institutions to continue to be flexible and pivot, if necessary, as the COVID-19 pandemic evolves.
- 3. International student enrollment will be affected by student decisions and options for virtual enrollment for new students.** Promising findings indicate that over 40,000 international students remained enrolled on campus in summer 2020, and most of these will continue their education in the United States. We also anticipate that additional international students may continue to enroll in fall 2020. Decision-making for new international students in the fall will be closely tied to the options institutions offer to students who may not be able to make it to the United States by the beginning of the semester.
- 4. Study abroad looks to future semesters.** The resilience of U.S. study abroad shows that while programs are currently canceled, institutions are prioritizing promotion of study abroad programs in future semesters. Once travel restrictions in the United States and other countries lift, U.S. higher education institutions will need to prioritize study abroad options for U.S. students and scholars, filling the temporary decrease that may have been created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

With the fall 2020 semester quickly approaching, U.S. institutions are in planning mode to prepare their campuses and coursework for all students. Our analysis indicates that while flexibility will be critical, institutions have considerations and plans in place to successfully enroll students in the coming semester and provide ongoing academic excellence that makes the United States a top destination for international students.

- 
- <sup>i</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). *Cases, Data, and Surveillance* <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/index.html>
- <sup>ii</sup> Bosman, J. & Mervosh, S. (July 23, 2020). As virus surges, younger people account for ‘disturbing’ number of cases. *The New York Times* <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/25/us/coronavirus-cases-young-people.html>
- <sup>iii</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). *Key Updates for Week 29, ending July 18, 2020*. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/covidview/index.html>
- <sup>iv</sup> The *IENetwork* is a membership-based community of over 1,300 higher education institutions and other organizations in the United States and abroad. *Open Doors 2019*. For more information, visit [www.opendoorsdata.org](http://www.opendoorsdata.org).
- <sup>v</sup> 30 respondents branched out of the survey because they were not affiliated with a U.S. higher education institution.
- <sup>vi</sup> *Open Doors 2019*. For more information, visit [www.opendoorsdata.org](http://www.opendoorsdata.org).
- <sup>vii</sup> IIE. (2020). *Assisting International Students in the COVID-19 Crisis*. <https://www.iie.org/en/Donate/Where-to-give/IIE-Emergency-Student-Fund/IIE-COVID-19-Response>
- <sup>viii</sup> National Survey of Student Engagement, *High-Impact Practices*, <https://nsse.indiana.edu/nsse/survey-instruments/high-impact-practices.html>; and The Consortium for Analysis of Student Success through International Education, *Results*, <https://www.usg.edu/cassie/results>