

# Pursuing Higher Education In US In 2021

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22 December, 2020 by [Namita Mehta](#) , [Raj Chinai](#)

Certainly 2020 has been an unusual year. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted all industries, with a significant impact on education. Online learning has become the new normal, but it is likely that universities across the US will soon start physical classes in a staggered manner. This will depend on the vaccine, its administration and the number of cases in a given region. Now that the Food and Drug Administration approved the vaccine last week, let's consider the implications for 2021.

## **Campuses Reopening**

When the pandemic first hit the US, universities switched to remote learning and eventually shut down campuses. With over 4,000 universities and colleges in the US and over one million international students enrolled last year, widespread reopening is challenging. Currently, 87% of US universities, such as Carnegie Mellon and Cornell universities, offer hybrid models, with 5%, including Claremont McKenna College, remaining fully online. Ishaan Jaffer, a Carnegie Mellon senior, says, "I have been on campus since the fall term. I was very impressed with how the university managed the labs. They sent every student whatever was needed to do the labs remotely." At the postgraduate level, business schools, such as Harvard Business School, will continue with predominantly remote learning and restricted on-campus activity. Certain programmes, such as the MSc in Business Analytics degree at Carnegie Mellon, are making a permanent shift to online. On the other hand, the University of California, Santa Barbara and Ohio

State University have already started offering in-person courses at the graduate level, which is likely to continue in the upcoming semester. However, universities remain optimistic that by fall 2021, campuses will open completely.

**Visa Policies** As of this writing, universities are still following the July 24, 2020, government guidance, whereby new students must take at least one in-person class to remain in the US. Continuing international students are allowed to take all classes online and maintain their F-visa status as long as they follow all regulations. This also makes them eligible for the CPT (curricular practical training) and OPT (optional practical training). However, as the vaccine progresses, new rules and regulations will likely be released.

This scenario has significantly affected the number of new admissions. In a survey of 700 US colleges, Open Doors Fall 2020, shows a 16% overall decrease in international students and a 43% decrease in new international students this semester. Most are Chinese and Indian students, who together make up 53% of the international students in the US.

As for the OPT visa and its STEM extension, there will probably be no change for 2021 graduates. Yash Matai, a fall 2021 applicant says, “The strong financial market in the US makes it a fantastic place to start a career in investment banking. I also choose the US because of the STEM certification, which will allow me to work in the US for three years.”

However, the reduction in new international students will likely affect the job market and future career opportunities. Companies will hire fewer graduates, possibly leading to workforce shortages, particularly in the IT sector, which relies heavily on qualified recent graduates. On the other hand, in following years, competition to be accepted among the percentages allotted to international students may get fiercer for college admissions, internships and graduate work placements.

The bright side is that the newly elected Biden-Harris administration seems to be open to immigrants on many levels and can tackle these challenges well in upcoming years. For example, one plan under consideration is that every PhD student would receive a green card upon graduation, to prevent individuals with world-class US educations from emigrating elsewhere instead of contributing to the US economy and society.

## **Fees**

As of this writing, no university has explicitly announced that it will reduce its 2021 tuition fees. There seem to be no untoward spikes in either direction, even if programmes remain predominantly online. However, if there is a mandatory industry immersion that has been cancelled, as is the case with Harvard Business School, then tuition fees may be adjusted accordingly.

## **Changes in Fall 2021 Applications**

The Common Application, the most popular centralised application platform for undergraduates, provided students with a dedicated space to explain how the pandemic has affected them. Even some graduate schools, such as the University of Southern California, now have a COVID-19-related question built into their supplemental information section.

In terms of standardised tests, this year SAT/ACT scores were not mandatory at many universities, whereas for postgraduates, waivers were provided for the GMAT and GRE. Most notably, MIT Sloan School of Business decided to accept applications without a GMAT score. And when it came to deadlines, some colleges, such as the University of Virginia, even delayed their Early Action/Early Decision undergraduate deadlines to give students more time to complete applications.

The only certainty about what 2021 will bring is uncertainty. Most US universities have provided for students to come on campus next year, but they will update and adapt their policies based the latest government guidelines.

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