

*Prepared by the New Zealand Embassy in Washington in cooperation with Education New Zealand*

## Summary

- The COVID-19 pandemic has been a significant challenge for the US education sector, including those students who were studying abroad.
- While most US institutions have not made a final decision on whether they will return to face to face learning at the beginning of September, many have indicated that some sort of distance learning or hybrid/blended model will likely be put into effect. Students craving in-person interaction in the absence of campuses fully reopening may look to an immersive experience in another country instead.
- Due to New Zealand's increased coverage in the media, expect US universities and students seeking a study abroad experience to see New Zealand as a safe and attractive destination given New Zealand's successful response to fighting COVID-19 relative to other parts of the world.
- US operators of study abroad programmes will be looking for extra assurances from partners once travel restrictions lift to be confident of the educational measures and precautions put in place as well as the safety and well-being of students sent overseas.

## Report/findings

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a significant challenge for the US education sector, including those students who were studying abroad and forced to return home or hoped to study abroad for the US fall semester (typically August/September through to December) or academic year of 2020-2021. American universities and the study abroad provider organisations that service them suddenly had to bring home American students scattered around the world. With little prospect of when they can send students out again, many study abroad providers are beginning to offer [virtual programmes and internships](#) in an effort to keep their businesses running. Most study abroad provider organisations in the US were forced to lay off or furlough a large number of their workforce. One of the largest, the Council on International Educational Exchange, suspended its operations in 28 of its 59 locations around the world, reducing its staff numbers by 650 in March 2020.
2. However, it is anticipated that high demand for studying abroad will remain because face-to-face provision of education within the domestic education sector has been severely restricted by the pandemic too. Almost all US universities moved to conducting courses online for the conclusion of the 2019-2020 academic year. This coming September will be the beginning of the new academic year and most universities have not made a final decision on whether they will re-open for face to face learning. The California State University system, which is the largest university system in the US, has already announced its August–December 2020 semester will be conducted completely online. Many others are likely to follow suit for at least some of their students.

Students craving in-person interaction in the absence of US college campuses reopening may look to an immersive experience in another country instead.

3. Demand for study abroad experiences in New Zealand is high given New Zealand's successful response to fighting COVID-19 relative to other parts of the world. According to information gathered from Education New Zealand, US universities and study abroad providers report there has been a steady or increase in interest from students wishing to study in New Zealand for the semester beginning February 2020. Meanwhile, at the start of June there were still almost 900 US students who had chosen to remain in New Zealand rather than return to the US and despite advice from the US Department of State, their home institutions, and study abroad providers. A number of these students are further electing to stay in New Zealand to study an additional semester, with some electing to transfer to their New Zealand institution to complete the remainder of their studies.
4. Once our borders reopen, the New Zealand education industry will have an opportunity to add to the just over 3,000 US students that came to New Zealand out of the 350,000 that studied abroad pre-pandemic. Many US universities were already looking to diversify study abroad destinations and get away from traditionally popular places in Europe. With New Zealand's unique bicultural heritage and well-recognised response to COVID-19 there will be an even greater incentive for US institutions to try and expand and establish connections with New Zealand universities. Exposing more students to study in New Zealand should also help overcome the mistaken view that English-speaking New Zealand is too similar to America to offer a different cultural experience.
5. US operators of study abroad programmes will be looking for extra assurances from partners to be confident of the safety and well-being of students sent overseas. According to information gathered from Education New Zealand from study abroad provider organisations and university study abroad staff, crisis management protocols for study abroad students have been escalating over the past ten years, and COVID-19 is going to shift these again. US providers are now thinking about logistical issues of pastoral care related to study abroad during a pandemic, for example how to maintain safety in student housing, how to navigate government-imposed self-isolation periods, and how to service vulnerable students.
6. Education New Zealand has been informed that, in order to overcome hesitancy, institutions will need to know about: quarantine procedures; what education options will a student have if they need to be quarantined mid-semester; whether remote learning will be available during quarantine or if a student is unable to attend class; refund policies; and what contingency plans are in place for further outbreaks.

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