

2020 F-1 STUDENT IMMIGRATION GUIDE

oia.osu.edu



OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

F-1 IMMIGRATION INFORMATION FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

F-1 international students are in the unique situation of being required to learn what it means to be a Buckeye and a proud member of the Ohio State community while also learning and abiding by the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations pertaining to non-immigrant student status.

Maintaining legal immigration status is very important and is dependent on the student understanding and meeting certain requirements as outlined by both the university and the U.S. government. Failure to maintain lawful F-1 student status will result in the suspension of all benefits associated with the F-1 status, such as on-campus employment and practical training, and could even lead to deportation from the United States.

Maintaining lawful F-1 status is ultimately the student's responsibility! However, we want to ensure that each student has the tools and resources necessary to succeed at Ohio State, while avoiding any problems with their immigration status. Please note that the following information is not all-inclusive and students should always consult with an immigration coordinator whenever in doubt.

Office of International Affairs (OIA) International Students and Scholars

The Ohio State University
140 Enarson Classroom Building
2009 Millikin Road
Columbus, Ohio 43210
614-292-6101 – Phone
614-292-4725 – Fax
iss@osu.edu – Email

International students can schedule a virtual appointment with an immigration coordinator Monday – Friday, 1 – 4 p.m. at go.osu.edu/oiaadvising.

Note: Please read this guide carefully for important information related to your visa status.

F-1 STATUS MAINTENANCE CHECKLIST

To maintain status, an F-1 student MUST:

- Notify OIA of your local address upon arrival and within 10 days of any address change
- Enroll in a full course of study during the academic year
- Make normal progress towards completing a course of study
- Extend the Form I-20 before its expiration, if necessary
- Obtain approval from OIA prior to reducing enrollment, withdrawing completely or taking a leave of absence
- Inform OIA and update the Form I-20 due to a change in major, degree level or financial support
- Keep the passport valid for at least six months into the future
- Follow proper procedures for transfer of schools
- Abide by the F-1 grace period rules
- Limit on campus employment to a maximum of 20 hours per week while school is in session
- Not engage in off-campus work unless specifically authorized by an immigration coordinator at OIA

F-1 RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Retain All Documents

F-1 students should make a copy of all of important travel and immigration documents and keep them in a safe and easily accessible location. **In addition, F-1 students must keep all of their original Form I-20s.** A student may receive several Form I-20s throughout their stay in the United States, and it is common for a U.S. government agency to request copies of all Form I-20s issued to a student when he or she is applying for a benefit or a change in immigration status. Therefore, students should not discard any immigration documents issued to them.

Passport Validity

A student must keep his or her passport valid for at least six months into the future. The student should contact his or her country's consulate or embassy (www.embassy.org/embassies/) for instructions on extending their passport while in the United States.

Full-Time Enrollment Requirement

OIA is required to report on each student's enrollment to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) by updating the student's individual SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) record every term. In

order to maintain lawful F-1 non-immigrant student status, international students must be enrolled for a full course of study during the academic year. Full-time enrollment is required during autumn and spring semesters. All students will automatically be issued a vacation term for each summer semester, unless it is the student’s graduating term or first term of enrollment in which the student is required to enroll full time.

Full-Time Enrollment

Undergraduate Students	12 credit hours
Graduate Students with or without a Graduate Associate position (GAA, GTA, GRA)	8 credit hours
Graduate Students with or without a Graduate Associate position - Summer	4 credit hours
Graduate Students with a Fellowship	12 credit hours
Graduate Students with a Fellowship during summer	6 credit hours
Post-Candidacy Graduate Students (with or without a GA)	3 credit hours

In addition, only 3 online credit hours count toward the full-time enrollment requirement. **Please note that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been adjustments to the online credit maximum. For the most up-to-date information, email an immigration coordinator at iss@osu.edu.

Local U.S. Address Reporting Requirement

F-1 students must inform OIA of the local U.S. address where he or she resides in order to comply with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement requirements. Students must update the address within 10 days of moving to a new location. To update the address, visit buckeyelink.osu.edu and click on “Change Address.” Update the “Current” address with your local Columbus address. Follow this format:

- Line 1:* 123 Buckeye Rd.
- Line 2:* Apt. 6
- Line 3:* Columbus, OH 43221

Please note that students **MAY NOT** use a P.O. Box or campus office address.

Extension of Form I-20

Students must obtain an extension of their Form I-20 and F-1 status at least one term prior to the program end date noted on their current Form I-20, if necessary. Students must submit a program extension form and proof of funding to an immigration coordinator. If the student is not approved for the extension and does not obtain a new Form I-20 prior to the current program end date, the student is in violation of F-1 status. **It is not possible to extend the Form I-20 after it has expired.**

Change of Major

OIA will be notified of a change of major during the semester in which the change takes effect. It is at this time that an immigration coordinator will evaluate if the change in major warrants the issuance of a new Form I-20. A significant change of major must be reported to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement within 21 days of the change going into effect, and it is the student's responsibility to ensure that his or her immigration record is updated accordingly.

Reduced Course Load

The federal regulations list very few situations in which an exception to the full course of study, or typical full course enrollment requirement, may be deemed appropriate. The F-1 student must meet with an immigration coordinator and seek approval PRIOR to dropping or withdrawing from courses when the drop would put the student below the required minimum. If the student does not follow proper procedures, he or she will lose lawful F-1 student status. A student authorized for a reduced course load based on the following options must resume a full course of study at the start of the next available semester, excluding an authorized vacation term:

Academic Difficulties

An F-1 Student may only be authorized to reduce his or her course load to no less than six credit hours once due to academic difficulties. The following reasons are acceptable academic reasons for a student to reduce his or her course load:

- Placement an inappropriate course level
- Initial difficulty with the English language
- Initial difficulty with reading requirements
- Unfamiliarity with American teaching methods

Final Term of Study

- To complete course of study in student's final term

Medical Reason

- Documented illness or medical condition

In the case of a reduced course load request based on a medical necessity, the student must provide medical documentation from a licensed medical doctor, doctor of osteopathy or licensed clinical psychologist to OIA to substantiate the illness or medical condition.

The regulations state that students experiencing a “temporary illness or medical condition” may reduce their course load “for a period of time not to exceed an aggregate of 12 months while the student is pursuing a course of study at a particular program level.” If the student’s medical condition does not permit him/her to pursue a full course of study beyond these 12 months, the student may be required to return to his or her home country.

Travel

F-1 international students may choose to travel outside the United States during the course of study at Ohio State during the annual vacation term, during school breaks or for long weekend trips to other countries, such as Canada. Students may leave the United States at any time, and it is the student’s responsibility to ensure that he or she has all the required documentation to return to the United States in valid F-1 status:

- Required:
 - Passport valid at least six months into the future
 - Valid F-1 visa (except for Canadian citizens)
 - Valid I-20 with a travel endorsement signed by an immigration coordinator on the second page
- Recommended:
 - Copy of financial support documentation
 - Enrollment verification (copy of online advising report)

If your visa will not be valid upon re-entry, you will need to renew your F-1 visa with the documents listed above. Students renewing the visa should also obtain an official transcript and/or letter from the academic adviser as enrollment verification. Students must also take the receipt from paying the SEVIS I-901 fee.

To obtain a travel signature a student must complete the electronic form at go.osu.edu/f1travelsig. A travel signature is required as it indicates that the F-1 student is in good standing at Ohio State and is eligible to return to the university. **The signature is valid for one year (except for when the student is on OPT, in which case they are valid for six months).**

Please note that any personal or business-related travel must adhere to university health and safety guidelines during this pandemic.

Employment

A student holding lawful F-1 status is in the United States for the primary purpose of engaging in a full course of study. To qualify for employment, an F-1 student must be eligible based on one of the following options:

On-campus employment

As a benefit of F-1 status, an F-1 student may work on the premises of Ohio State for a maximum of 20 hours per week while school is in session, provided he or she has a valid Form I-20 issued by Ohio State. F-1 students may work more than 20 hours per week on campus during official term breaks and the annual summer vacation term. An F-1 student may not begin on-campus employment more than 30 days prior the actual start date of classes. Any other type of employment requires authorization by OIA and/or U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS).

The F-1 student must consult with an immigration coordinator at OIA if he or she is not certain if the employment qualifies as on-campus employment.

Unauthorized employment is a violation of F-1 non-immigrant status.

For an F-1 international graduate student with a 50 percent full-time equivalency (i.e. 20 hours per week) assistantship, the work component of the assistantship counts as on-campus employment, and no additional employment may be taken.

Off-campus employment

An F-1 student may be eligible to engage in temporary off-campus work based on either economic need or practical training. For more information regarding employment based on economic hardship, Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT), please visit the OIA website or schedule an appointment with an immigration coordinator. Strict eligibility requirements apply to all of the above, and students must receive approval from OIA and USCIS **prior** to commencing any type of off-campus employment.

Grace Period

F-1 international students have a 60-day grace period following the completion of study (commencement date) or completion of Optional Practical Training (OPT). Before the end of the grace period, F-1 international students must depart the United States, change educational level, transfer to another U.S. institution, apply to change status or apply for OPT. Students may travel within the United States during the grace period, but **may not** leave the United States and return on the basis of the current F-1 SEVIS record.

Change of Educational Level

A student who will start a new program of study at Ohio State (for example a student moving from a master's degree to a doctorate degree) must contact an immigration coordinator as soon as they have decided to pursue a subsequent program. An F-1 student must receive an updated Form I-20 prior to the semester in which he or she is beginning a new level of study (and at the very latest by the end of the grace period of the current program of study). In addition, students who originally planned on graduating with a PhD but instead are going to graduate with a master's degree also must update their Form I-20 accordingly.

Transfer to Another U.S. Institution

For immigration purposes a student is considered to be a transfer student when he or she leaves one U.S. institution (during or after a program of study) to begin attendance at another SEVIS-approved U.S. institution, while following the proper transfer procedures as outlined by the U.S. Federal Regulations. **Please note that this does not refer to the transfer of academic credits.** At the very latest, F-1 students must initiate the transfer process of the F-1 SEVIS record before the end of the 60-day grace period following the current program of study. A student should contact an immigration coordinator as soon as he or she has decided to transfer to another U.S. institution for instructions and options.

Change status to another immigration status such as an F2, H1 or H4

As soon as an F-1 student decides to change status, he or she should see an immigration coordinator for eligibility requirements and instructions. Students should not stop attending classes without consulting with an immigration coordinator first.

Early Withdrawal or Leave of Absence

OIA is required to report on each student's enrollment every semester to DHS; therefore, an F-1 student must inform OIA if he or she decides to leave Ohio State and not return to resume study for the current or following semester. As such, if a student is not going to be enrolled due to withdrawal from the university or leaving for a prolonged period of time (for example, military service), informing an academic advisor is not sufficient. The student must also inform OIA.

Dependents

For immigration purposes, dependents are defined as spouses and children (under the age of 21) who are issued a dependent Form I-20 to obtain an F-2 visa to join the F-1 status holder in the U.S. for the duration of the student's studies. An F-2 status holder may not engage in any type of employment. F-2 dependents may study part time in any certified program, so long as the study does not amount to what regulations define as full time for an F-1 student. Therefore, F-2s may enroll in less than 12 undergraduate credit hours or nine graduate credit hours each term. However, F-2 children may be enrolled on a full-time basis in elementary and/ or secondary school (kindergarten through 12th grade). F-2 dependents may not work.

Important Reminder

The information contained in this handout is not all-inclusive and is only intended to educate students regarding their basic rights and responsibilities while in the U.S. on F-1 non-immigrant student status. When a student has questions, he or she should always consult the OIA website or seek advice from an immigration coordinator by email, phone through a virtual appointment. OIA is here to answer questions.

Additional resources

Office of International Affairs:	oia.osu.edu
Department of Homeland Security:	dhs.gov
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services:	uscis.gov
U.S. Customs and Border Protection:	cbp.gov
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement:	ice.gov
Department of State:	state.gov
Safe and Healthy Buckeyes:	safeandhealthy.osu.edu

F-1 IMMIGRATION STATUS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a Form I-20?

A Form I-20 is a certificate of eligibility for non-immigrant status, and it is issued by a university to enable a student to apply for a visa and come to the United States to engage in a full course of study. An F-1 student must report to the school that is listed on the Form I-20 that he or she used to enter the United States. The student must also keep the Form I-20 valid by keeping the information updated at all times.

What is an I-94?

The Form I-94 is the official record of a student's lawful arrival into, and departure from, the United States. It is also the immigration document showing the status in which an individual has entered the country. Once you arrive in the United States, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) will create an electronic I-94 record for F-1 students. Please visit www.cbp.gov/I94 after you arrive in the United States to print your I-94. You will need to do this each time you enter the United States.

What does the D/S on the I-94 stand for?

D/S stands for 'Duration of Status'. The notation allows an F-1 student to complete his or her course of study and any subsequent educational levels or series of programs. An F-1 international student's admission stamp and I-94 should read "F-1" and "D/S" to show that the student was lawfully admitted to the United States. In F-1 student status for the duration of his or her program of study. The student should consult with an immigration coordinator immediately if he or she notices a problem with their admission stamp or I-94.

What is SEVIS?

The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System is an electronic system that allows universities to issue immigration documents for F-1 students and J-1 students and scholars.

It also aids the U.S. government in facilitating and upholding the integrity of international exchanges. According to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) collects, maintains and provides the information so that only legitimate foreign students or exchange visitors gain entry to the United States.

The result is an easily accessible information system that provides timely information to the Department of State, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Each student is issued a SEVIS ID number starting with “N,” which is located in the top left corner of the Form I-20.

Who can sign a Form I-20?

Only a designated school official (DSO) at the Office of International Affairs can sign a Form I-20. Immigration coordinators in our office are DSOs. Students should plan ahead and complete the electronic form at go.osu.edu/f1travelsig well before their anticipated travel dates.

Can F-1 students seek immigration advice from the department and academic advisor?

No. The only personnel at Ohio State authorized to provide F-1 students with immigration advice are the immigration coordinators at OIA. No one else at the university has access to student immigration records, nor has the authority to give immigration advice. It is the student’s responsibility to know the F-1 status maintenance requirements, and, as such, students should always consult with an immigration coordinator if in doubt.

A student asks, “My friend says he was able to do this last year, so can I do the same, without consulting OIA?”

NO. Friends may give advice on adjusting to the United States, Columbus, and even to classes; however, due to the complexity of ever changing immigration regulations students should not rely on friend’s advice concerning anything that may impact his or her own lawful F-1 status. In addition, OIA recommends being wary of immigration information on the internet. Contact an immigration coordinator at OIA to confirm the validity of this type of information.

When does a student need to contact an immigration coordinator?

Below are some topics for which a student may contact OIA:

- Address change
- Program extension
- Course load reduction
- Travel signature
- Off-campus employment (CPT/OPT)
- Adding or removing a dependent
- Change of education level
- Change of immigration status
- Transferring out of Ohio State
- Early withdrawal or leave of absence
- Loss of an immigration document, such as the Form I-20
- Academic probation, suspension or expulsion from the university



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