

F1 Visa Immigration Basics

# Maintaining Your Immigration Status

1. **Pursue a full course of study**

International students must enroll full-time (at least 12 credit hours for undergraduates) in fall and spring semesters. Students are not required to enroll during school vacation periods, including summer and winter vacation. Students that are in their final semester are not required to enroll in 12 credit hours if fewer than 12 credits are required to graduate.

***Always consult the ISSS Office before dropping a class.*** *Professors and other staff may not be familiar with immigration regulations.*

1. **Make normal progress toward degree completion**

International students should only take courses that count toward a degree requirement (major, general education, elective, etc.). Classes that don’t meet any degree requirement should not be taken. If you are not sure, check DegreeWorks or ask your advisor. The time of study should also not be extended due to an excessive number of failed or repeated courses.

1. **Never work off-campus without proper work permission**

International Students MUST have authorization from the ISSS Office (and in some cases, USCIS) before working off campus. This includes internships, practicums, and student teaching. There are NO exceptions!

1. **Keep your passport valid at least 6 months into the future**
2. **Keep your I-20 valid at all times**

Your I-20 should not expire before you have completed your degree. Be sure to know your Program End Date and request an extension prior to the End Date if you will not be graduating by that date. The I-20 should always reflect the correct information (name, major, school, etc.) Report any changes of name, major, minor, address, and program dates to ISSS as soon as possible.

1. **Do not overstay your visa**

Upon completion of your degree, international students have a 60-day grace period to either depart the U.S., begin Optional Practical Training, or begin a new academic program.

1. **Have your I-20 signed prior to traveling outside the U.S.**

The ISSS Office must sign your I-20 before you travel outside the U.S. In order to receive a signature for travel, you should be enrolled in the current semester, or if traveling during a break, you should be pre-enrolled for the next semester.

1. **All documents should match**

Your name should be the same on your Passport, I-20, I-94, Visa, Geneseo ID, SSN, credit card, etc.

# Important Terms

**SEVIS:** Student and Exchange Visitor Information System. The internet-based system that holds up to date information on SEVP certified schools, F1 and M1 visa holders, Department of State Certified Schools, and J1 visa holders. SEVIS is how Universities communicate up to date information to the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and US Department of State (DoS).

**SEVP:** The Student and Exchange Visitor Program. SEVP manages SEVIS on behalf of DHS and DoS.

**I-20:** The document issued after you are admitted to a university and pay your deposit. This document proves that you are eligible to be issued an F1 visa.

**DS-2019:** Similar to an I-20, the document issued to short-term exchange students and visiting scholars that proves eligibility for a J1 visa.

**I-94:** An electronic record of your entry in to the U.S. as well as your departure. Your I-94 can be viewed or printed by entering your passport information at https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov

**PDSO / DSO:** Primary Designated School Official and Designated School Official; The school officials that are authorized to enter information in SEVIS. At SUNY Geneseo, the staff members in the ISSS Office are PDSO and DSOs and can assist you with any questions you have about your immigration status.

**Visa:** A document that you obtain at the U.S. Consulate or Embassy that is stamped in your passport and tells the Port of Entry that you are eligible to enter the United States as a student in F1 status. The visa must be valid at the time you enter the U.S., but can expire during your studies as long as your passport and I-20 are valid. Canadian students do not receive visa stamps, although they are still considered F1 visa holders.

**I-901 Fee/SEVIS Fee:** Currently, $200 paid to SEVP before applying for your visa. It is strongly recommended that you print and keep a copy of your I-901 fee receipt with your I-20.

**D/S:** Duration of Stay; D/S means that you may remain in the U.S. as long as you maintain F1 status by pursuing a full course of study and making normal progress toward degree completion.

**USCIS:** U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service. The government office that reviews certain applications including work authorization.

# Work Authorization

## On-Campus Employment

All F1 students are permitted to work on-campus up to 20 hours per week. If hired, you must apply for a social security card. Students may apply for an SSN starting ten days after entering the U.S. It is the responsibility of the student to obtain an SSN as soon as possible after being hired for an on-campus job, although the ISSS Office will provide at least one trip per semester to the SSN office.

## Off-Campus Employment

Off-campus employment opportunities including Curricular Practical Training (CPT), Optional Practical Training (OPT), and Off-Campus employment for Economic Hardship all require you to be enrolled for a full academic year before applying**. OPT and Economic Hardship** both require permission from USCIS. The application has a fee and requires up to three months for processing. **CPT** includes any employment that is part of your academic program (such as student teaching or internships). The ISSS Office and your academic advisor must approve CPT. ***Please see the ISSS Office for more information about off-campus employment.***

# Travel

Students may travel outside the U.S. during vacation times if they carry the following documents:

1. Valid Passport
2. Valid Visa
3. Valid I-20 with signature on the 2nd page from DSO in the ISSS office

Valid Passport: Your passport must be valid at least 6 months in the future. If your passport will expire within 6 months, please contact your embassy or consulate in the U.S. for instructions to renew it. Passports can be renewed within the U.S. or you can travel home to renew your passport.

Valid Visa: Your visa stamp must be valid at the time that you enter the U.S. Your visa may expire during your studies and this is not a problem. However, if you plan to travel outside the U.S. and your visa has expired it must be renewed before you return to the U.S. Visas cannot be renewed from within the U.S. They must be renewed at a U.S. embassy or consulate outside the U.S.

Valid I-20 with signature: Your I-20 should **not** expire during your studies. Be sure to find and remember your “program end date” and be aware of it. If you will not complete your studies by that date, it must be extended before the end date. To travel outside the U.S., you must also have a signature on the 2nd page of your I-20 that is less than one year old. Please see an adviser in ISSS if you plan to travel so that we can verify your enrollment and sign your I-20.

***Additional recommended documents:*** Geneseo Student ID card, a good standing letter, a current financial statement, and enrollment verification or an unofficial transcript for good measure. **If you will be renewing your visa during your travels, you must carry a current financial statement and an official transcript.**

# Tips and Reminders

1. **Always maintain your F1 status**
   1. Register in at least 12 credits each semester. Attend class and complete your courses. Do not drop courses without consulting ISSS first!
   2. Get your I-20 signed (if needed) before leaving the U.S.
   3. **NEVER** work off-campus without authorization
   4. Update ISSS with any changes to your address, name, major, minor, or program dates
2. **Never assume that other students, faculty or staff outside ISSS, or the internet understand your immigration status.** While others may be well-intentioned, it is not their job to know the ins and outs of your legal status. Don’t get yourself in to trouble because “my friend said….”! Always ask an advisor in ISSS if there is something you do not understand or are not sure about. We are here to help you!!
3. **Always keep extra copies of your immigration documents**

We keep copies of your documents in ISSS, but we recommend that you also keep copies of your I-20, passport, visa, I-901 fee payment, driver’s license, and financial statement in a safe place.

1. **Keep the contact information of your advisor in ISSS**
2. **Get involved on campus!** It’s the best way to meet new people!
3. **Don’t be afraid to speak up or ask questions in class!** Professors in the U.S. expect students to ask questions and participate. It is not considered rude. It is encouraged! If you find yourself confused about an assignment or subject, make an appointment to speak with your professor after class or during office hours. Don’t wait until it is too late!

**It is your responsibility to maintain your legal F1 status in the United States.**

**ISSS provides information and guidance, but it is your responsibility to know and follow the rules.**

**It is always better to ask FIRST if you are not sure!**

**We are here to help!**

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