MAINTAINING F-1 STATUS

There are hundreds of immigration laws that impact international people in the United States. It is important to know and follow the laws for your status. Following the laws keeps a student “in status” and violating a law can make a student “out of status.” There are five basic law concepts that impact F-1 students.

1. Be a full-time student
2. Keep your immigration documents up-to-date
3. Be employed only when, where and for how long you are authorized to be employed
4. Keep your address up-to-date
5. Carry immigration documents with you

Be a full-time student
This means that F-1 students must pursue a full course of study and make normal progress toward completing their program of study at the school having jurisdiction over their I-20. For undergraduate students, this means taking at least 12 credits per fall and spring semester – and at least 6 credits if summer is their first semester at UIS. For graduate students, it means taking at least 9 credits per fall and spring semester (8 credits if they have a GA or GPSI) – and at least 6 credits if summer is their first semester at UIS. For ESL students, being full-time means going to all classes unless they are sick. There are some exceptions to this law, for example during a student’s first or last semester, but students and their advisors must complete a Reduced Course Load form prior to being registered part-time. Additionally, students must be registered prior to the 10th day of classes in order for Immigration Advisors to properly update your records in the SEVIS system. Additionally, only 3 credits of the required 9 or 12 during a required semester can be online. All the rest must be in-person classes.

Keep your immigration documents up-to-date
This law can get quite complicated, so it is important to pay attention to official web and email information regarding your documents. Students should report to International Student Services upon arrival in the U.S. so that the office can copy immigration documents.

- Passport – don’t let your passport expire while you are outside your country. If you are outside your country and your passport will expire within the next six months, read your embassy/consulate web information regarding passport extension procedures.
- Visa – Visas are only used for entering the U.S. After you have entered, you have different documents that tell you what you can do and how long you can stay. If your visa expires while you are inside the U.S., it doesn’t really matter. The only time you have to think about your visa is if you plan to travel outside the U.S. and plan to return. Then you should check to see if you need a new visa in order to re-enter. Some international travelers are exempt from getting U.S. visas.
- I-94 card/form – In this age of computerized monitoring, I-94 cards are becoming less important. As of summer of 2013, students no longer receive an I-94 card upon entering the U.S., but they still need this form for various other processes during their stay in the U.S. We recommend that students access https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home after they arrive in the U.S. to retrieve their I-94 form and number and print a copy of it. This form will indicate that the student’s stay in the U.S. is valid until “D/S.” D/S means “duration of status” which means that the student can stay and nothing expires early as long as the student maintains their status.
• **I-20** - If any information changes or needs to be updated on the I-20, the student must contact an Immigration Advisor prior to the change taking effect. There is usually some sort of immigration process required in order to make an update to I-20s. Areas commonly in need of monitoring and updates are:
  
  o **Transfer**: Section 2 indicating the name of the school the student is authorized to attend and that has jurisdiction over the student’s SEVIS record. If the student is transferring to a different institution, please follow instructions regarding “immigration transfers.”
  
  o **Change of Level**: Section 4 indicating level of study. If a student is changing from one level of study to another, they will need to get a new I-20 indicating the new level.
  
  o **Change of Major**: Section 5 indicates major. Students who change or add a major must contact an immigration advisor in order to process that.
  
  o **Extension**: Section 5 also indicates the beginning and ending dates of study. A change to the beginning date is called a “deferral” and is processed through our Admissions office. A change to the ending date, meaning that the student needs more time in order to complete their program of study, is only permitted for certain academic reasons which must be verified by an academic advisor. Extensions also require proof of additional funds. Students needing an extension must process it before the program end date listed on their I-20. Extensions initiated after the I-20 expiration will require an application for “reinstatement to status” since the student will be considered as having violated their F-1 status.
  
  o **Grace Period**: Students who do complete their program of study by the end date listed in Section 5 of their I-20 have a 60-day grace period after completion of their program during which they can stay in the U.S. to pack up their belongings and tour around before leaving the U.S., transferring to another institutions or changing status to something else.
  
  o **Funding**: Significant changes to sections 7 and 8, estimation of costs and student financial support should be updated on the I-20.
  
  o **Travel Signatures**: It is required that students who plan to travel outside the U.S. during their studies obtain a signature on page 3 of their I-20 once per year (every six months during STEM OPT).

**Be employed only when, where, and for how long you are authorized to be employed**

Employment is restricted for F-1 international students. When F-1 students first arrive at an institution, they are generally only permitted to work on campus up to 20 hours per week. Any other employment, like off campus, internships, may not be permitted or will require special application and processing. Please read the instructions on our website regarding employment options, attend employment workshops, and contact an international advisor. Students who engage in unauthorized employment cannot be reinstated to status.

**Keep your address up-to-date**

F-1 students are reminded to enter the address where they live and sleep updated in their Enterprise account. This address is reported to SEVIS and must be updated within 10 days of moving.

**Carry immigration documents with you**

Immigration requires that international students carry their immigration documents with them at all times. Since losing these documents can be quite problematic, most immigration advisors suggest that students carry copies with them daily on campus but carry the originals when they travel out of town.

*Violations of status may subject a nonimmigrant to deportation, and some violations will subject them to 3- and 10year bars to re-entry to the U.S.*