

Statement of Regulations and Responsibilities for Students in F-1 Status

Purpose: This document has been prepared by University of Southern California's Office of International Services (OIS) to summarize some of the important rights and responsibilities you have as an F-1 student in relation to United States government immigration regulations.

Please note, however, that regulations and procedures can be expected to change. OIS will inform you of substantial changes via the OIS International Update sent by email to the USC email address you have been assigned, as well as the OIS' website at <http://www.usc.edu/ois>. We strongly advise you to contact OIS anytime you have a question about your legal status as well as any time you intend to travel and reenter the United States.

When to Contact the OIS

Contact OIS if any of the following events occur:

- *If you change your legal name, U.S. address, country of citizenship, immigration status, field of study, level of education, expected program completion, or source of funding
- *If you have dependents with you or wish to have them join you, you will need to keep OIS informed.

You will also need to contact OIS in any of the following situations:

- *For travel outside the U.S., you will need a travel signature from an OIS staff member on your SEVIS I-20 or if you will apply for a new visa before reentering the U.S.
- *Whenever any of your immigration documents are lost or stolen
- *If you intend to change your immigration status while a student at USC
- *Before you intend to study abroad, take a leave of absence, or transfer to another school
- *If you are seeking prior authorization to drop below full-time study or withdraw from the University of Southern California
- *If you wish to apply for off-campus work authorization
- *If you wish to have your dependent spouse and/or children join you in F-2 status
- *If you are facing charges for any felony or misdemeanor criminal act

Immigration Documents

The following documents are very important and must be valid at all times in order for you to maintain lawful F-1 status:

- Passport (should be valid for a minimum of 6 months into the future)
- Certificate of Eligibility for Non-immigrant Student (F-1) Status SEVIS I-20
- Departure Record (INS Form I-94; white card usually stapled in passport)

Please keep the originals in a safe place. We recommend that you make photocopies of these documents and store them in a location separate from the actual documents. If any of these documents are damaged, lost or stolen, you must have them replaced as quickly as possible. **You should bring the above-mentioned documents with you each time you visit OIS to speak with a counselor or immigration advisor.**

Please keep in mind that the F-1 visa stamp in your passport does not need to be valid at all times; but it must be valid when wish to re-enter U.S. You should contact OIS if you have any questions about the documents or if you need to replace them.

SEVIS - Electronic Reporting System

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and its functions, has been divided into three bureaus: Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

The CIS, ICE and CBP all have access to the SEVIS-Electronic Reporting System. USC, like all U.S. schools, is required to report information on F-1 students and their F-2 dependents to SEVIS through secure, encrypted Internet transmissions.

The University of Southern California is required to report all the information on your SEVIS Form I-20 and information on "reportable events" that affect your immigrant status. These events include but are not limited to:

- Registration/enrollment each school term;
- Leaves of absence, suspensions, or withdrawals from school;
- Authorized and unauthorized drops below a "full course of study
- Resumption of a "full course of study" after an authorized drop;
- Employment off-campus;
- F-2 dependent information;
- U.S. residential address changes;
- Completion/termination of studies,
- Changes in major, program of study, degree, completion date, etc.
- School or program transfer.

Since SEVIS is an electronic reporting system, it is very important that your information on file at OIS be completely up-to-date. Failure to maintain accurate records with the University may result in technical violations of your F-1 status resulting in your F-1 status being invalidated and the loss of all F-1 status benefits.

Registration, Attendance and Course of Study Requirements

Registration and attendance – You must register for classes and attend the University of Southern California each fall and spring semester. You do not need to enroll for classes during the summer, unless you have been initially admitted to begin your program during one of the summer sessions or, you will complete your degree during the summer.

You must register for and complete a “full course of study” each fall and spring semester. Full time is 12 units for an undergraduate student and 8 units for a master’s student, 6 units for a master’s student with a teaching assistantship or a research assistantship and 6 units for a Ph.D. student. "Audit" courses do not count toward the required unit hours. Although F-1 students may enroll in on-line or distance education courses, only one such course (or 3 units) per semester may count in the units required to maintain full-time status.

Undergraduate Students - F-1 students are required to register for at least 12 units each fall and spring semester. Under SEVIS, prior OIS authorization is required for all legitimate drops below full time (see the "Registration Exceptions" listed at the end of this section). Taking less than 12 units without prior authorization from an OIS advisor, will be reported to SEVIS and will jeopardize your immigration status.

Graduate Students - Although you have the right to register for as many classes as University policy allows, you must register for at least 8 units for a master’s student, 6 units for a master’s student with a teaching assistantship or a research assistantship and 6 units for a Ph.D. student (or the number of units your school/college determines to be full-time status) each fall and spring semester.

Graduate Students Who Have Completed All Required Course Work - If a thesis or dissertation is required of your program of study and you have completed all required course work, you need to register only for the number of hours of thesis or dissertation research required by your academic program.

Registration Exceptions - There are some circumstances that permit a reduced course of study, such as illness or needing fewer than the minimum units required in your final semester in order to graduate. Before registering for a part-time course load or dropping below full-time, an F-1 student must gain prior authorization from an OIS advisor through a Reduced Course Load (RCL) approval. If you are considering reducing your course load you must make an appointment with your OIS immigration advisor or counselor to discuss your situation prior to dropping below full time. You must resume a "full course of study" in the following semester unless you obtain renewed authorization by the OIS advisor for medical reasons.

Length of Time You May Remain in the United States on your University of Southern California SEVIS Form I-20

Your SEVIS Form I-20 is issued for the expected duration of your program of study. F-1 students admitted to the U.S. generally receive a "D/S" notation on their Form I-94 arrival/departure card, indicating permission to remain in the U.S. for "duration of status." The duration of F-1 status ends as soon as the completion date listed on the SEVIS Form I-20 (see #5 on your SEVIS Form I-20) or as soon as you complete your program of study, whichever is earlier. Upon completion of study and any authorized practical training, you are allowed an additional 60 days for departure from the U.S. or to transfer.

If you need more time to complete your studies than is given on your SEVIS Form I-20, you must contact OIS before the expiration date to request an extension. Before completing your program of study, you may want to make an appointment with an OIS advisor to discuss options for extending your lawful status in the U.S. (see section on "Completion of Studies").

Study Abroad

As an F-1 undergraduate student planning to study abroad while at University of Southern California, you should contact the OIS. In some cases, you may need a new SEVIS Form I-20 to return to the United States.

Course Work at or Transfer to a Different School

If you wish to take one or more courses at another university or college temporarily, you should first consult with the OIS to determine if any special procedures must be followed to authorize this study. If you wish to transfer to a different school, you must inform your advisor at the OIS and follow the SEVIS transfer procedures before you will be issued a new I-20 by the new school.

Leave of Absence, Suspension or Withdrawal

While in the United States in F-1 status, you must remain continuously enrolled for a full-course of study at the University of Southern California until you have completed your academic program (see "Registration, Attendance and Course of Study Requirements" above). If you interrupt your studies, your SEVIS Form I-20 will become invalid and you will not be eligible to remain in the United States in F-1 status. Important: If you are working on- or off-campus, you must cease employment immediately upon suspension or withdrawal.

You must contact OIS before you interrupt your studies for any of the following reasons:

- 1) You are planning to request an official leave of absence from the University (for Study Abroad, Medical Leave or personal reasons) during the fall or spring semester. Applying for and obtaining an official leave of absence from University of Southern California does not preserve your lawful F-1 status.
- 2) You are being suspended (or are under review for suspension) OR
- 3) You are planning to withdraw from all of your classes at any point during the fall or spring semester (or summer term if it is your initial or final semester of study).
In the event that a medical condition requires you to interrupt your studies at the University of Southern California, you can request authorization for a medical leave of

absence from OIS. Such authorization will enable you to maintain valid F-1 status during the time you are not enrolled and are going through medical treatment.

If you withdraw from school (due to suspension or personal reasons), you may be granted a 15-day grace period in which to leave the country if, and only if, you are granted prior authorization. Only an OIS advisor may authorize this benefit. If you do not gain prior OIS authorization before withdrawing, the SEVIS system will be informed of your action of withdrawing without authorization. You will have violated your status and must leave the country immediately. If you are granted the 15-day grace period, you may discuss options such as a Change of Status or School Transfer with an OIS advisor.

If you fail to register for a semester, yet remain in the U.S., you have violated your status and must leave the country immediately or seek reinstatement to F-1 status. In such a case, we also encourage you to discuss reinstatement procedures with an OIS advisor.

Employment

Off-Campus Employment - F-1 students are eligible for limited off-campus employment. Please see an Advisor for complete information before taking any employment off-campus.

On-Campus Employment - F-1 students may be employed at most on-campus jobs. On-campus employment may not exceed 20 hours per week during fall and spring semesters (or during summer sessions if it is your first or final term). Full-time (more than 20 hours per week), on-campus employment is allowed only when classes are not in session – during winter break, spring break and summer vacation. Authorization for on-campus employment may begin no more than 30 days before the start of classes. On-campus employment during summer vacation and academic breaks is permissible only if the student is eligible and intends to continue attendance at University of Southern California following the break.

Please contact OIS for additional information regarding employment options. You must be maintaining valid F-1 immigration status in order to be authorized for on- or off-campus employment.

Completion of Studies

The date you officially complete your program is very important because USCIS regulations state that your lawful F-1 status automatically ends 60 days after you complete your academic program unless you take some action to remain lawfully in the United States.

If you are interested in beginning a new program of study at the University of Southern California or another college or university you will need to do an immigration transfer. This process must be completed before the end of the 60-day grace period. Students must begin studying in the new program within 5 months from the date of transferring out of

University of Southern California or from the date of program completion (whichever date is earlier).

Note that you are not permitted to depart the U.S. and return in F-1 status during the 60-day grace period following program completion. The grace period ends when you depart the U.S.

Holidays and Vacations

You may remain in the United States and still maintain F-1 status during holidays and vacation periods observed by USC, including summer vacation, provided you are eligible and intend to register for the next academic semester and all of your immigration documents remain valid.

Travel

We encourage you to contact the OIS anytime you plan to travel outside of the U.S. This is particularly important as regulations and practices concerning reentry into the United States continue to change and new visa issuance procedures are much more time consuming at all U.S. embassies or consulates.

Travel Within the U.S. - You may travel within the U.S. provided you maintain your lawful F-1 status and have a valid passport, SEVIS Form I-20, AND Form I-94 in your possession. You need not travel inside the U.S. with actual documents; photocopies will be sufficient.

Travel outside the U.S. before Completion of Studies – You may leave the U.S. at any time. You are permitted to return in F-1 status if you have a valid passport, valid visa stamp and a current SEVIS I-20, that has been signed on page 3 by an OIS staff member. Only a Designated School Official (DSO) at the OIS is authorized to sign or reissue a Form I-20. A travel signature is valid for six months.

Procedures for returning to the University of Southern California are different from those for returning to attend a different school. If you are returning to USC, an OIS advisor must sign page 3 of your SEVIS Form I-20 (or issue a new SEVIS I-20 to reflect any important changes) before you leave the U.S. If you wish to attend a different school upon your return to the U.S., you should notify OIS of your intention before leaving. You must obtain a new SEVIS Form I-20 from your new school and present it to a CBP officer to re-enter the U.S.

Travel outside the U.S. after Completion of Studies - The date you officially complete your studies (see "Completion of Studies" section) is very important to your ability to travel and re-enter the U.S. If you attempt to return to the U.S. in F-1 status, you may be denied the right to re-enter the U.S. unless you have been authorized to engage in Optional Practical Training (work authorization usually issued after a student graduates) and have received your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card.

Application for New F-1 Visa during Travel – All F-1 students are allowed to remain in the U.S. with an expired F-1 visa, provided they are maintaining their status and that their passport and SEVIS I-20 are valid. Although a student may remain in the U.S. with an expired F-1 visa, it will be necessary to apply for a new visa during the next trip abroad. A valid F-1 visa is always required to reenter the U.S. from all countries, except in certain circumstances where a student is eligible for Automatic Revalidation (AR) to countries such as Canada and Mexico. You can inquire about AR at OIS.

Students needing to apply for a new visa should inform OIS prior to traveling abroad. New security checks and supplemental visa application forms could cause delays in the visa application process in many countries. Students planning to apply for a visa in Canada, Mexico or in any country other than their home country should first consult with an OIS immigration advisor.

Dependents and Other Family Members

If you are married and/or have children, you may be eligible to have your spouse (husband or wife) and/or children, under the age of 21, enter with you for the duration of your studies. Under SEVIS, dependent spouses and children who accompany or follow-to-join an F-1 student must each be issued an individual SEVIS Form I-20 in order to apply for an F-2 dependent visa. F-2 dependents are allowed to remain in the U.S. as long as the F-1 student maintains legal F-1 status, but may not engage in any form of employment. F-2 spouses may not engage in full-time study and an F-2 child may only study full time in elementary or secondary school (kindergarten through 12th grade). F-2 dependents must change to F-1 status in order to study full time at the college level.

If other members of your immediate family (parents, siblings, etc.) wish to visit you temporarily, the OIS will be pleased to issue an invitation letter to assist with their applications for visitor visas.

Change of Address

If you move within the United States, you must inform the OIS of your change of address within 10 days by updating your local address in OASIS or by completing a change of address form and submitting it to the OIS.

Failure to Comply with Responsibilities

Immigration laws in the United States may issue severe penalties if you fail to comply. Maintenance of accurate records at OIS is especially important since the SEVIS system will automatically report details of your status to the Department of Homeland Security. You should work closely with the OIS staff to make certain that you comply with all F-1 regulations. The staff of the OIS is always pleased to provide you with information, counseling, and assistance so that you may achieve your educational goals while at the University of Southern California.