Office of International Services (OIS)
Information Session for New F-1 and J-1 Degree Students

Intended for students who have entered the United States as an F-1/J-1 student

Revised 02/23/2024

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Overview

I.   Introduction to the Office of International Services (OIS)
II.   Maintaining F-1/J-1 Status
III. F-1/J-1 Employment Options
IV. Immigration Status Verification (ISV)
V.   Life in the U.S.
VI. OIS Contact Information

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Introduction to the Office of International Services (OIS)

Office of International Services (OIS)

OIS supports international students and scholars as they strive to achieve their educational, professional, and personal objectives. Recognizing the many benefits of international educational exchange, OIS advocates for these benefits on campus, locally and nationally.

OIS is a resource center to help members of the USC international community make the most of their USC experience:

- Answer any questions F-1/J-1 students and scholars may have regarding their immigration status or benefits
- Provide one-on-one and group advising and support
- Assist students with navigating life in the U.S.

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Maintaining F-1/J-1 Status

Full-Time Enrollment Requirements

To maintain F-1/J-1 immigration status, students must enroll full-time in courses that apply to their degree requirements during each fall and spring semester.

Students admitted for Summer Session are required to enroll full-time during their first summer at USC.

Full-Time Enrollment Requirements

Students are considered full-time when enrolled in a minimum number of units, based on their degree level:

- Undergraduate students – *12 units*
- Master's students – *8 units*
- Graduate Certificate students – *8 units*
- Ph.D. students – *6 units*
- Master's/Ph.D. students with an assistantship – *6 units*

Online Course Restrictions

- No more than one online course (up to 3 units) are applicable to the full-time enrollment requirement
- After meeting the full-time enrollment minimum for each level as described below, any additional units of coursework may be either in-person or online

Degree Level	Course Enrollment
Undergraduate *12 unit minimum*	9 units of in-person course(s) + 3 units of in-person or online course(s)
Master's or Graduate Certificate *8 unit minimum*	5 units of in-person course(s) + 3 units of in-person or online course(s)
Master's/Ph.D. with an assistantship or Ph.D. *6 unit minimum*	3 units of in-person course(s) + 3 units of in-person or online course(s)

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Reduced Course Load (RCL)

F-1/J-1 students may qualify for exception(s) to the full-time enrollment requirement for the fall and spring semester if they meet certain criteria for a Reduced Course Load (RCL) category:

1) Academic Difficulty
2) Medical Reason

Reduced Course Load (RCL)

RCL due to Academic Difficulty (first semester ONLY)

- A student may qualify for an academic difficulty RCL if they meet one of the below criteria:
    - initial difficulty with reading requirements;
    - initial difficulty with the English language;
    - unfamiliarity with US teaching methods; or
    - improper course level placement
- Students who file an RCL must be enrolled at least part-time (6 units for undergraduate, 4 units for masters, and 3 units for doctorate)
- An academic difficulty RCL can be used only *once per degree level*

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Reduced Course Load (RCL)

RCL due to Medical Reasons

- OIS may authorize a medical RCL due to a temporary health (physical or mental) condition(s) with an appropriate doctor's letter recommending the RCL for medical reasons
- To submit a medical RCL, F-1/J-1 students must provide a doctor's letter with their RCL submission to OIS
- No more than 12 months total of a medical RCL is permitted per degree level
- Must receive treatment from a US doctor while remaining in the US
  - Students who need to take a semester off to receive medical treatment from outside the US will need to apply for a Standard Leave of Absence (LOA) instead of a Medical RCL.

Reduced Course Load (RCL)

Students who meet criteria for an RCL must submit their RCL request to OIS via Trojan International by the end of the second week of the classes.

SEVIS Final Semester Check

Students who are in their final semester of study and only have a few units remaining to meet academic program requirements are exempt from the full course load requirement. For example, if you only have 4 units remaining in your degree program, you do not have to enroll in additional units to maintain your immigration status.

Students who are in their final semester and are taking less than a full course load must submit a SEVIS Final Semester Check eForm through Trojan International.

Program End Date – Program Extensions

Students who maintain status by enrolling full time every semester but are still unable to complete their program in time (i.e. change of major), must request a program extension BEFORE their program end date (i.e. at least one month before the I-20/DS-2019 expires). Please check your program end date on your I-20/DS-2019.

Paid internships (i.e. CPT/Pre-completion OPT) will not be permitted in the extended semesters unless it's a degree requirement

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Additional Requirements for Maintaining F-1/J-1 Status: Address Updates

Immigration regulations require all international students to **report any change in their local address to OIS within 10 days of moving**.

Students must submit the SEVIS U.S. Address and Contact Update in Trojan International to ensure their U.S. address gets updated in SEVIS. The submission of this form only updates your U.S. address in SEVIS. It does not update any other university system.

Students must enter their U.S. address in the correct format for their information to be updated in SEVIS.

Within 10 Days

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Additional Requirements for Maintaining F-1/J-1 Status: International Travel

Traveling Abroad

- Students may travel internationally during scheduled [university breaks](#)
- Students returning to the U.S. from a temporary break should ensure they have the required documents to re-enter the country

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Additional Requirements for Maintaining F-1/J-1 Status: International Travel

Required Documents for Re-entry to the U.S.
- Valid Passport (valid for at least 6 months beyond the date of the re-entry to the U.S.)
- Valid F-1/J-1 visa in passport (except students from Canada)
- I-20/DS-2019 with a valid travel signature from OIS

Recommended Supporting Documents
- Financial support documents (proof of funding)
- USC acceptance letter
- Paper receipt of Form I-901: SEVIS fee payment
- Copy of USC transcript and/or proof of course registration

Employment Options for F-1 & J-1 Degree Students

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F-1/J-1 Employment Options

Types of Employment

1) On-campus Employment   (F-1 & J-1)
2) Curricular Practical Training (CPT)   (F-1 only)
3) Optional Practical Training (OPT)   (F-1 only)
4) Academic Training (AT)   (J-1 only)

On-Campus Employment (F-1 & J-1)

- Does not require separate work authorization
- Limited to 20 hours per week during the fall and spring semesters
- May work up to 40 hours per week during summer and vacation breaks, if approved by the hiring USC department
- Review the OIS website for additional information

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F-1 Employment Options

Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

- Authorization for paid off-campus internships
- Requires separate work authorization from the student's academic department and OIS
- Authorized during a student's degree program
- Review information on the [OIS website for eligibility requirements](#)

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

- Authorization for employment after the student graduates
- Requires OIS and USCIS authorization
- Employment can be paid or unpaid and needs to be related to the student's field of study
- Review information on the [OIS website for eligibility requirements](#)

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J-1 Employment

<u>Academic Training (AT)</u>

- Pre-Completion AT: Authorization for employment before the student graduates
- Post-Completion AT: Authorization for employment after the student graduates
- Requires authorization from the student's academic department & OIS
- Employment can be paid or unpaid and needs to be related to the student's field of study
- Review information on the [OIS website for eligibility requirements](#)

F-1/J-1 Employment Options: Social Security Number (SSN)

- If a student finds a paid job in one of the categories mentioned under F-1/J-1 employment options, they are eligible to apply for the SSN

- SSN is 9-digit number issued to citizens, permanent residents and temporary (working) non-residents by the Social Security Administration (SSA)

- Primary purpose on an SSN is to track individuals for taxation purposes; it is not intended to be used for identification purposes

Students and scholars who are not eligible for an SSN may be eligible for a Tax Identification Number (ITIN) to use for filing taxes during tax season reporting.

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Trojan International

The Office of International Services uses [Trojan International](), an immigration compliance and case management tool, to streamline how students request documents and services from OIS. Trojan International is fully integrated into the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) SEVIS system and USC's Student Information System (SIS).

Students will need their USC NetIDs to access Trojan International.

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Immigration Status Verification (ISV)

Immigration Status Verification (ISV)

ISV is a mandatory online check-in procedure for international students that verifies their entry to the U.S. as well as their immigration status to ensure the student is eligible to start an academic program at USC for their upcoming start date. Once all documentation is submitted, OIS will validate the SEVIS record.

Upon arrival to the U.S., all new international F-1/ J-1 students are required to complete Immigration Status Verification (ISV) via Trojan International. Refer to the [ISV webpage for instructions](#).

Failure to complete ISV in a timely manner will affect their eligibility to legally remain in the U.S.

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Immigration Status Verification (ISV) Immigration Documents

Passport

- F-1/J-1 students are required to always maintain a valid passport
  - Should be valid for at least 6 months into the future, especially for re-entry into the U.S. and when applying for a visa
- Students must contact their local embassy or consulate for instructions on renewing their passport
  - Students may continue to use the expired passport with the valid visa, along with the new passport, when traveling

Immigration Status Verification (ISV) Immigration Documents

F-1/J-1 Visa

- Students may stay in the U.S .on an expired F-1/J-1 visa if they maintain their immigration status by being in possession of a valid I-20/DS-2019 and an [I-94 Arrival/Departure record](#)
- **Visas cannot be renewed inside the U.S.**; they must be renewed at a U.S. embassy/consulate abroad
    - Review the [U.S. embassy/consulate](#) website for details on the visa renewal process including required documents
    - Check [visa wait times](#) prior to renewing to ensure you have enough time to renew and re-enter the U.S.
        - Due to security checks, it is not recommended students use the period of winter or spring breaks to renew since they may be unable to return by the first day of classes

Immigration Status Verification (ISV) Immigration Documents

SEVIS and the Form I-20/DS-2019

- The Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) is a web-based system of the federal government that maintains information on international students (F-1/J-1 visa holders) while in the U.S.

- School create and issue the Form I-20 for F-1 students and Form DS-2019 for J-1 students via SEVIS

Immigration Status Verification (ISV)
Immigration Documents

Form I-20

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Immigration Status Verification (ISV) Immigration Documents

Form DS-2019

Immigration Status Verification (ISV)
Immigration Documents

I-94 Arrival Record

https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home

Immigration Status Verification (ISV)
Immigration Documents

I-94 Travel History

https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home

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Immigration Status Verification (ISV) Registration Holds

STU50 Hold – *Removed by OIS*

- Placed on graduate student records
- Restricts course registration

STU60 Hold – *Removed by OIS*

- Placed on undergraduate student records
- Does not restrict course registration

ALI01 Hold – *Removed by [USC American Language Institute (ALI)](#)*

- Placed on all students who have not met the USC English proficiency requirement
- Restricts course registration
- Questions? Email askali@usc.edu

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Immigration Status Verification (ISV) Registration Holds

ADM40 Hold – *USC Registrar*

- Placed on students who are required to submit their previous degree documents to IERF
- Does not restrict course registration
- Deadline to submit is by end of student's first semester
- Contact: https://ierf.org/uni-evaluation/usc/, usc@ierf.org

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Life in the U.S.

Life in the U.S.: Punctuality

Being on time is very important

What is "on time"?
- About 5 minutes early

Consequences of tardiness
- Lose appointments, negative impact on reputation

Proper notification
- Call/email if you are going to be late

Life in the U.S.: Cultural Adjustment

After arrival in the U.S., it is common for students to experience a period of cultural adjustment

STAGE 1 — **HONEYMOON**

STAGE 2 — **CONFLICT (CULTURE SHOCK)**

STAGE 3 — **CRITICAL (ADJUSTMENT)**

STAGE 4 — **ADAPTATION**
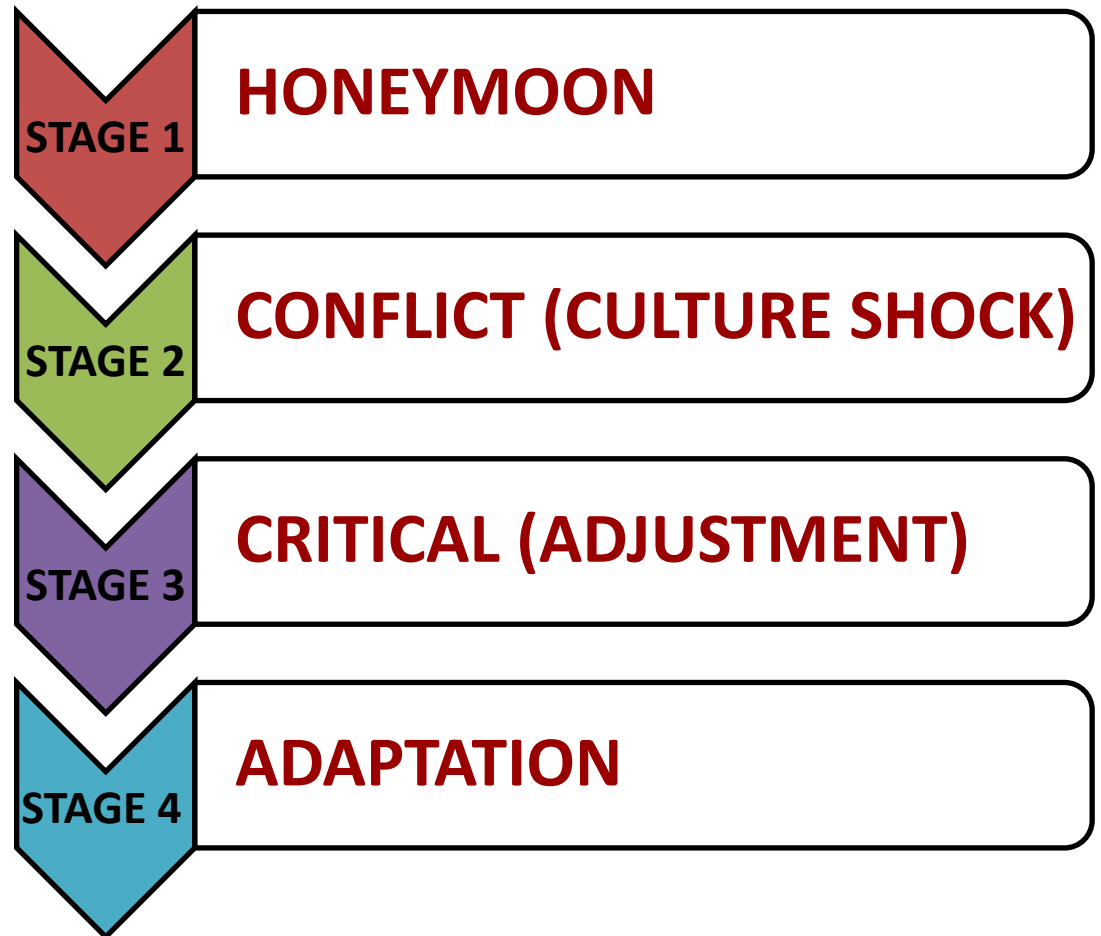
Life in the U.S.: Cultural Adjustment

STAGE 1: Honeymoon Stage

- Taking care of practical matters
- Observing new culture/environment
- Meeting new friend/staff/professors
- Seeing/trying new things
- Able to understand/be understood (if English is not first language)

STAGE 2: Conflict (Culture Shock) Stage

- Negative feelings (isolation, frustration and depression)
- Homesickness
- Problems with subtleties of language
- No time to make new friends/time spent with friends from home culture
- Complain about host culture/blame for problems

Life in the U.S.: Cultural Adjustment

STAGE 3: Critical (Adjustment) Stage

- Choose to explore a new culture
- Accept the challenge of self-reflection
- Assume responsibility for own cultural adjustment

STAGE 4: Adaptation Stage

- Language skills improved
- Better understand actions of the members of the host culture
- Made friends in the host culture
- Developed greater tolerance for strange and new environment
- Become a mediator between two cultures

Life in the U.S.: Health and Wellness

- Medical centers and other health administrators may ask personal questions to gather information in order to provide you with better, individually-tailored health services – *this is a normal part of the intake process*
- In the U.S., medical information is legally required to remain confidential and private
- In the U.S., it is common and encouraged to seek professional help if you need help with a medical or mental health issue
  - Counselors and therapists are trained to listen to you and offer help; they can provide treatment for issues such as homesickness, stress, depression, social anxiety, and more
- Are you worried about a fellow Trojan are unsure how to help? Submit a Trojans Care for Trojans (TC4T) report to connect them with important resources
- Review comprehensive list of USC Health and Wellness Resources

Life in the U.S.: California Driver's License

- Students are encouraged to obtain a California Driver's License from the [Department of Motor Vehicles](#) (DMV) if they plan to drive a car in the US
- California **does not** recognize an International Driving Permit (IDP), International Driver's License or an International License as a valid form of driver's license
- A California driver's license is required to purchase a car and obtain auto insurance
- Apply for the driver's license after the add/drop deadline of 1st semester at USC
- Social Security Number (SSN) is not required to apply for a driver's license
- Must pass written and driving exams

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Life in the U.S.: Beware of Scams
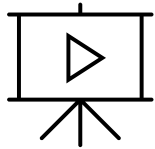
Watch the [OIS video](#) for information on how to protect yourself from scams

Beware of scammers!

Know the facts.
Follow safety tips.

If you've been the victim of a scam or suspect you've been scammed, contact:

USC Department of Public Safety (DPS) (213) 740-6000

Know the Facts

IRS or other government agencies will never:

- Ask for money over the phone or online
- Request or accept payments in the form of gift cards or Bitcoin

Law enforcement agencies will never:

- Request payment of citations, warrants, etc., via the phone

Safety Tips

- Never provide your credit card information or your Social Security number over the phone or online to someone you don't know
- If you visit a website that asks for your Social Security number, don't provide it
- If you receive an email from a stranger or company asking you to click on a hyperlink and/or open an attachment and enter your financial information, delete the email
- Do not respond to friend requests from strangers
- Hang up on telemarketers

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Life in the U.S.:
Resources for International Students

Campus Involvement and Student Organizations

- Get involved with various nationality-based or interest-based student organizations for community support
- For more information, see Campus Activities

Los Angeles (LA) Activities

- Explore LA museums, visit amusement parks and enjoy the numerous beach/hiking trails

International Update (IU)

- Stay up-to-date with the weekly OIS e-newsletter
- Subscribe today

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OIS Contact Information

Contact OIS

The Office of International Services provides assistance to our international community via email, one-on-one advising via Zoom, or through online group advising/webinar sessions.

OIS Live (Virtual Front Desk/Drop-in Advising via Zoom)
OIS Advisors are available for one-on-one consultation Monday through Friday via Zoom. Advising hours and Zoom meeting link are posted on the OIS website. Appointment not required.

Zoom Group Advising
OIS will offer group advising sessions via Zoom. Refer to the OIS eCalendar to view upcoming session topics.

Email
For all F-1 student related inquiries: ois@usc.edu
For all J-1 student related inquiries: J1student@usc.edu