

## Staying Legal in the U.S. as F-1 Students

### Acronyms Used:

IPSO = International Programs & Services Office

DSO = Designated School Official (F-1 International Student Advisor)

SEVIS = Student and Exchange Visitor Information System

USCIS = United States Citizenship and Immigration Services

### Students can maintain their legal F-1 status by doing the following:

- Students must **report to the school** they are authorized to attend. On their first entry to U.S., the school noted on the visa and the I-20 must be the same. The school on the visa/I-20 is the school students must report to after their first entry into the US. Students must plan to attend the I-20/visa school.
- Students must report to the DSO to have their **SEVIS record registered** in a timely fashion. DSO's must register students in SEVIS no later than 30 days after the **Program Start Date** (new students) or **Next Session Start Date** (continuing students). DSO's get this information during orientation for new students and course enrollment records for continuing students.
- Students must **enroll in a full course of study** (generally 12 credit hours undergrad/9 credit hours grad) every academic semester. Students do not have to be enrolled as a full-time student during summer. Summer enrollment is not required unless it is the students' first term. The following items are important points related to course enrollment:
  - Enrollment in distance education or on-line courses is limited to no more than 3 credit hours per semester if the hours are applied toward the full course of study requirement.
  - Enrollment in classes taught by distance education, independent study, or another institution that will be applied toward the full course of study requirement must be approved by an IPSO DSO before enrolling in the courses.
- Students must **get permission** from an IPSO DSO **before enrolling in less than a full course of study** or dropping courses that drop students below a full course of study. There are certain approved academic and medical reasons:
  - Final semester of program of study.
  - Temporary medical conditions.
  - Specified academic difficulties, mainly during students' first semesters. See a DSO for what these academic difficulties are.
- Students must see an IPSO DSO to **keep their I-20 valid** by following proper procedures for :
  - Getting an *extension of the program dates* from an IPSO DSO. The I-20 Program end date must be extended if students need more time to complete their program. The extension must be done before the program end date is reached.
  - Changing educational levels or programs of study properly.
  - Transferring schools. Contact an IPSO DSO within 60 days after completing your PSU program to establish a SEVIS release date to the new school.
  - Changing programs or study or degree levels before the effective date of the change.
  - Getting travel signatures if students will travel outside of the US and will need to return to continue their course of study.
  - Getting new I-20s for extended absences of an entire semester or more than 5 months.

- Students must follow F-1 ***grace period rules***:
  - F-1 students may be admitted up to 30 days before the program start date listed on their I-20.
  - F-1 students may remain in the United States for up to 60 days beyond:
    - the completion date of the program of study.
    - the completion date of any authorized post-completion optional practical training.
  - F-1 students who have been granted an authorized early withdrawal by a DSO may remain in the United States for up to 15 days following the withdrawal noted in SEVIS.
- Students must ***follow any special requirements***, such as Special Registration. If students are subject to Special Registration, they must also notify an IPSO DSO within 10 days of an address change on Form AR-11SR. See *Immigration Forms* at the website: <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis>  
For more information about Special Registration, see: <http://www.ice.gov/pi/specialregistration/index.htm>
- Students must ***report any change of name or address*** on the PSU web site through the Gus System within 10 days of the change so that SEVIS can be updated.
- Students must ***follow employment rules***:
  - Never working more than 20 hours per week on campus except during summer or periods when school is not in session.
  - Never working off-campus during or after completion of academic programs without obtaining prior authorization from an IPSO DSO.
  - Not having more than 90 days of unemployment during post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT).
  - Reporting changes in name, address, and employer during post-completion OPT.
- Students must ***keep their passport valid*** at all times.
- Students should ***keep all of their old original I-20s*** for their records.

There are almost always exceptions to these rules. See an international student advisor (DSO) in IPSO if you have ANY questions BEFORE you do something different.

**REMEMBER — It is always easier to stay in status than to get back into status!**

Important additional notes regarding F-2 dependents

- F-2 dependents may only take classes that are recreational or avocational (not job or major related) in nature (unless the dependent is a child in elementary or secondary school). Otherwise, before an F-2 may go to school full time in degree-related courses, the dependent must first obtain F-1 status.
- F-2 dependents are not allowed to work in the U.S. (or receive any compensation for services provided).
- Any change in address or name of an F-2 dependent requires notification to an IPSO DSO.
- All F-2 dependents must possess their own SEVIS I-20s.