



Cornell University International Students and Scholars Office

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“Leave of Absence” & “In Absentia”

Important! The explanation below does not provide complete information about “Leave of Absence” or “In Absentia” status. The ISSO cannot advise you about your eligibility for either status. Our role is to inform you of immigration related consequences for either action.

Leave of Absence:

Students who must interrupt the regular academic program may be granted a one-year leave of absence by the graduate school, your professional school or your college advising office. While you are on a leave of absence, you will **not** have student status which may affect student loan deferment and access to campus facilities and services.

- **Graduate students:** Please check with your graduate student services representative in 143 Caldwell Hall for the details and procedures.
- **Professional School Students [MBA, Law, VetMed]:** You need to check with the advising office of your specific professional school as policies vary by school.
- **Undergraduate students** should obtain information about leaves of absence from your individual college offices as policies vary by college.

What happens to my immigration status if I take a Leave of Absence?

Immigration regulations require that a student be registered in order to maintain F-1 or J-1 student status (if you remain in the U.S.). If you take a leave of absence, you are no longer a registered student, so you must do something to maintain your status or you **MUST LEAVE THE U.S.** while on leave. While there are options, each person’s situation is very specific and it is **VERY IMPORTANT** for you to speak to an ISSO advisor regarding your specific situation. Some of the options include: leaving the U.S., changing your immigration status (e.g. to B-2), transferring to another school for a semester (such as TC3), or going on F-1 OPT if you are a graduate student in advanced standing.

How do I return after a Leave of Absence?

If you are outside of the U.S. for more than 5 months while on leave, you will need to **obtain new immigration documents (I-20 or DS-2019)** in order to return to the U.S. in F-1 or J-1 status. When you contact the ISSO to request a new document, you may need to re-verify funding by providing department support letters, bank statements. Before ISSO can issue the document, you will also need to:

1. **Graduate and Professional students:** Contact your department **AND** graduate student services representative or the advising office of your professional school (JGSM, Law or VetMed). You will need to obtain permission/consent to return.
2. **Undergraduates:** Contact your college advising office and inform them of your plan to return. You will need to obtain permission/consent to return.

Will taking a leave of absence affect my F-1 OPT?

To be eligible for F-1 OPT, you must have been enrolled for a full academic year. After a leave of absence, time counted towards the full academic year starts all over again from the time you return to full-time enrollment. Therefore, if you plan to apply for OPT, you should return for no less than 2 semesters as a registered student before graduating.

What if I plan to return from a leave of absence just to defend my thesis/dissertation?

If you plan to return from an approved leave of absence for the purpose of defending your thesis/dissertation, contact your graduate student services representatives to find out the correct procedures and requirements.

In Absentia:

- **Graduate and Professional students:** “In absentia” status is a type of registration that allows you to maintain student status at Cornell while completing research elsewhere. You must discuss your particular situation with your graduate student services representative or professional school advising office to find out if you are eligible and what procedures you need to follow.
- **For Undergraduates:** “In absentia” status is NOT generally available as an option for undergraduate students. You must check with your college advising office for details.

What happens to my immigration status if I am registered “in absentia”?

If you are approved for in absentia registration status, this DOES COUNT as full-time registration for immigration purposes, so you will be maintaining your F-1 or J-1 student status.

How do I return after being In Absentia?

If you have maintained your registration with the University, no immigration procedure is required following in absentia status. However, you will need to comply with the requirements and procedures of the graduate school (graduate students), your professional school (Law, JGSM, VetMed students) or your college (undergraduate students).