



Cornell University International Students and Scholars Office

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Maintaining Your F1 Immigration Status

How to Maintain Your F-1 Immigration Status in the U.S.

To maintain your legal status in the United States as an F1 student, you must remember these important requirements:

- 1) **Report to the ISSO** no more than 30 days after start date of I-20
- 2) **Always enroll FULL-TIME during the academic year**
- 3) **Update your local address within 10 days of moving**
- 4) **Keep your immigration documents VALID and CURRENT:**
 - a) **KEEP YOUR PASSPORT VALID**
 - b) Apply for an **EXTENSION** at the ISSO **BEFORE** the "completion of studies" date in Item 5 of your I-20
 - c) Be sure your I-20 states the correct degree program and level in Item 4
- 5) **If you plan to transfer to another school**, come in to the ISSO to discuss the immigration status transfer.
- 6) **Notify the ISSO of a new degree program no later than 60 days after graduating**
- 7) **NEVER work off-campus without PRIOR authorization**
- 8) **Notify the ISSO when you leave the U.S. or change visa status**
- 9) If you **TRAVEL** outside the United States, be **SURE to have the proper re-entry documents**

1. Report to the ISSO no more than 30 days after start date of I-20

It is **REQUIRED** that you come to the International Students and Scholars Office no more than 30 days after the start date of your I-20 (listed in Item 5 of your I-20). Bring your passport, your I-20 and your I-94 card with you to B-50 Caldwell Hall.

2. Always Enroll Full Time

F-1 students must maintain full-time student status every semester. For undergraduate students, full-time is at least 12 credits each semester; as a graduate student, you must simply be registered. There are some rare exceptions to this regulation however, please talk to the ISSO staff **BEFORE** you drop below full time enrollment or take a leave of absence.

3. Update your Local Address with the Immigration Service

You must do this by notifying the ISSO. You are required to use a physical residential address and not a PO Box or a Cornell department address. You can update your address on our website at: <http://www.isso.cornell.edu/about/addresschange.php>

4. Keep your Immigration Documents VALID and CURRENT

You should make photocopies of your immigration documents and keep the copies and originals in a safe place. Photocopy:

- * the passport pages with your personal information and picture
- * the passport page containing the U.S. visa stamp
- * both sides of your I-94 Form
- * your I-20, pages 1-3

a) Keep your passport valid

You should keep your passport valid while you are studying in the U.S. Consult your country's consulate or embassy in the U.S. to renew your passport. You can find the contact information for your consulate at: <http://travel.state.gov>.

b) F-1 Extension

The end date of your immigration status is written on your I-20 as the "completion of studies" date, in item #5 (not the end date of your visa stamp).* If you need more time to complete your course of study, you must apply for an extension **BEFORE** the I-20 completion date. If you do not complete the extension before that date, you will be out of status. Pick up an F-1 Program Extension packet from the ISSO to begin the process.

c) Change of Degree Program or Level

If you are changing degree levels or programs within Cornell University, you must apply at the ISSO for a new I-20.

5. Discuss Transfer Plans with an ISSO advisor

If you plan to transfer to another school, the ISSO will need to complete the immigration transfer procedure. Discuss your plans at the ISSO.

6. Notify the ISSO of a new degree program no later than 60 days after graduating

If you plan to go on to another program of study after graduating from Cornell, either at Cornell or at another school, you **MUST** contact the ISSO and complete the appropriate immigration procedures **NO LATER THAN 60 DAYS** after graduating from the first degree.

7. Never Work Off-campus Without Prior Authorization

Employment opportunities for international students in the U.S. are restricted by law and fall in to types of employment:

On-campus Employment: Enrolled F-1 students are permitted to work on campus for 20 hours per week during academic year and 40 hours per week during summer and winter breaks.

Off-campus Employment: Off-campus employment is any type of work or services performed in exchange for money, tuition, fees, books, supplies, room, food or any other benefit that is not on the Cornell campus. A work permit is required **BEFORE** any off-campus work is allowed. See the staff in the ISSO for advice and assistance.

8. Notify the ISSO When You Leave the U.S. or Change Visa Status

When you finish your program and leave the U.S. permanently or you change to another visa status (for instance if an employer plans to do an H1B visa application for you after you graduate or finish your OPT), come to the ISSO or email us to notify us of your plans.

9. Traveling outside of the United States

Re-entering the U.S. after a Temporary Absence

To re-enter the U.S., you need to have the following documents:

- valid passport (except Canadians unless entering from outside the Western Hemisphere)
- valid F-1 or F-2 visa stamp (except Canadians)
- current I-20 with a valid travel signature (see I-20 Endorsement)
- proof of financial support (bank statements and/or scholarship, financial aid or TA/RA letter)
- proof of enrollment (certificate of enrollment or transcript). You can obtain a certificate of enrollment from the registrar's office or, if you have an SSN, at their web site: <http://certification.cornell.edu>

Traveling to Canada

Before traveling to Canada, check visa requirements and download a Canadian visitor visa application at <http://www.cic.gc.ca> . You can re-enter the U.S. from Canada with an expired U.S. visa stamp if **ALL** of the following apply to you:

- You have a valid passport with an expired non-immigrant visa stamp, a valid I-20 or DS-2019, and you keep your I-94 card when leaving the U.S. and entering Canada
- Your visit to Canada will be less than 30 days
- You do NOT apply for a U.S. visa stamp while in Canada
- You are NOT a national of one of the following countries: Iran, Syria, Sudan, Cuba, or North Korea.

Renewing Your Visa Stamp

If you or your dependents need to renew your visa stamps in order to re-enter the U.S., you must apply in person to a U.S. embassy or consulate abroad. Applicants are normally required to submit the following documentation:

- valid passport
- current passport-size photographs
- valid Form I-20 (complete three-page form)
- proof of financial support (bank statements and/or scholarship, financial aid or TA/RA letter)
- proof of enrollment (certificate of enrollment or transcript). You can download a certificate of enrollment from the registrar's web site at: <http://certification.cornell.edu>

I-20 Endorsement (Travel Signature on page 3 of I-20)

You need to have a valid travel signature from ISSO staff on page 3 of your I-20 in order to re-enter the U.S. The signature is valid for 12 months.

I-20 Endorsement for Canadians or students on OPT

Canadians and students on Optional Practical Training need a travel signature from ISSO staff within the last six months to be valid for re-entry to the U.S..

F-2 Dependents

The spouse or child of an F-1 student enters the U.S. in F-2 status. Any student wishing to bring a spouse and/or child to the U.S. should visit the ISSO to have the necessary documents prepared. People in F-2 status are not eligible for employment and may not enroll in a course of study. For traveling and re-entering the U.S., F-2 dependents need all the same documents as the F-1 would need as outlined above including an I-20 that is produced with the F-2's biographical information.

****Notes on Visa Stamps and Immigration Status**

Visa Stamp

The visa stamp in your passport was obtained at a U.S. embassy or consulate abroad and is used for entering the U.S. The visa stamp functions as a key to enter the U.S. Once you are here in the U.S., you do not need to keep your visa stamp current. It is only when you are leaving the U.S. and need to return that you must be sure that you have a valid U.S. visa stamp to re-enter the U.S. [**Note:** Canadian citizens are not required to have a visa stamp, but they must show their I-20 and proof of Canadian citizenship at the U.S. port of entry.]

Immigration Status

Immigration status is granted at the U.S. port of entry. Most of you have F-1 student status. In most situations your visa type and immigration status are the same, unless you have changed your immigration status after entering the U.S. For instance, some F-1 students have changed their status to F-2 (the dependent of F-1 student) or to another temporary immigration status. To maintain your legal status in the U.S., check your I-20 (not the visa stamp in your passport). For F-1 students, the "completion of studies" date under item 5 on your I-20 Form is the end date of your immigration status.

Immigration Questions? Come visit us at the ISSO.

If at any point you have questions about your immigration status or plans you have that may be impacted by immigration regulations, please contact the ISSO. The ISSO has the most current and accurate immigration information and we are dedicated to helping you achieve your educational goals while here at Cornell University.

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Advising Hours:
Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday: 9-12:00; 1:00-4:30
Wednesday 1:00-4:30