



Homeland
Security

STUDY in the STATES

Maintaining Your F-1 Status

<http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/maintaining-your-status>

While studying in the United States, it is important to maintain your F-1 student status. Your status relates to the purpose, or reason for why you want to come to the United States. The U.S. [Department of State](#) issues you your visa based on your intended purpose.

If the Department of State issues you an F-1 student visa, this means that you are coming to the United States **to study**. You should not take any action that detracts from that purpose. Maintaining your status means:

- Fulfilling the purpose for why the Department of State issued you your visa; and
- Following the regulations associated with that purpose.

Below are actions to take in order to properly maintain your status.

Arrival

When arriving to the United States, F-1 students must:

- Enter the United States **no more than 30 days** before your program of study begins.
- Immediately contact your **designated school official (DSO)** when you enter the United States.
- When you arrive at school, you need to report to school by the **orientation date** listed on your admission letter.

Education

While studying in the United States, F-1 students must:

- **Attend and pass** all your classes. If you have academic or financial difficulties, **talk to your DSO immediately about your options**.
- You must take a **full course of study each term (12 hrs for undergraduate and 9 hours for graduate)**; if you cannot study full-time, contact your DSO immediately. Please realize that you may be told to leave the U.S. Students on F-1 visas are required to study full-time each semester.
- **If you do not enroll, you will not be allowed to remain in the U.S. on your F-1 visa.**
- If you believe that you will be unable to complete your program by the end date listed on your Form I-20, talk with your DSO about requesting a possible program extension. Your I-20 will not be extended until you are within 30 days of the end date listed.
- Online coursework – only 3 credit hours of online coursework can count toward your required hours for immigration.

Your DSOs: Office of International Affairs
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Work and Practical Training for F Students

An F-1 student may only work when authorized by a DSO (for OPT and CPT) in some cases, and [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services \(USCIS\)](#) in others. OPT and CPT are only available once you are enrolled in a degree program. OPT is available only at the completion of a degree program and only once at each level of completion. CPT is available after a full-year of academic enrollment. OPT and CPT employment must be related to your major area of study. On campus employment is available to F-1 students, but only if you are enrolled in a degree program (undergraduate or graduate). If you choose to work without authorization from your DSO and/or USCIS, you will be in violation of your visa status and you may not be able to re-enter the United States at a later date.

Upon Program Completion

As an F-1 student, you must take action to maintain legal status or depart the United States after completing your program of study.

Once you complete your program of study and any authorized period of practical training, F-1 students have 60 days after completion of your program (the program end date on your Form I-20) to leave the United States. If you wish to extend your stay in the United States, talk with your DSO as soon as you can to learn more about doing one of the following:

- [Transferring to another school](#)
- Changing your education level (e.g. bachelor's to master's)
- [Applying to change to another visa status](#) (e.g. H-1B-temporary worker; F-2 dependent of F-1, etc.) **Please note that you may not be allowed to take classes if you change your visa.** Documentation will need to be submitted to your DSO.
- Apply for permanent residency, asylum, etc. Documentation will need to be submitted to your DSO.

Talk with your DSO first

If you are an F-1 student studying in the United States, your DSO should be the first person you talk to if you have any questions regarding the legal requirements of your stay in the United States. Your DSO can assist in answering your questions or help you find someone who can help.

As an F-1 student, you should speak with your DSO if you are planning to do any of the following:

- Change your major or program
- Change your education level
- Transfer to a new school
- Return to your home country permanently OR temporarily
- Travel outside the United States
- Move to a new address
- Request a program extension