



## Maintaining Valid F-1 Status

### What is SEVIS?

SEVIS (the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) is the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Web-based system for maintaining information on international students and exchange visitors in the United States.

### What is a DSO?

A DSO is a Designated School Official who has access to SEVIS and updates student records in compliance with Federal immigration requirements.

### What does SEVIS monitor?

Your name, date of birth, country of birth/citizenship, address, program dates, major/minor, course load, funding, employment authorization, entry and exit from the U.S., etc.

### Why is your SEVIS record important?

Your SEVIS record is part of your permanent immigration record in the U.S. It can never be erased, so it is important to always follow the regulations in order to maintain your status.

Falling out of status as a student could affect your eligibility for all future visa applications.

### Student Responsibilities

- Keep your immigration documents in a safe and secure place
- Keep your passport and other immigration documents up-to-date at all times
- Inform the PDSO immediately if you lose any of your documents
- Bring any new immigration documents to the PDSO so a copy can be made for your file
- **Be knowledgeable of, and abide by, all immigration regulations relating to your status, including deadlines**

### Passport

- Your passport must be valid at all times
- If your passport will expire while you are in the U.S., contact your country's nearest embassy for information on how to renew your passport
- If you are traveling outside of the U.S., your passport must be valid for at least 6 months from the date of reentry

### **I-94: Arrival/Departure Record**

Your I-94 is your record of entry and departure from the U.S. All students entering the U.S. through an airport will not receive a paper I-94. Instead, you will receive an entry stamp in your passport that should be notated with "F-1 D/S." After entering the country, you should visit [www.cbp.gov/i94](http://www.cbp.gov/i94) to print a copy of your electronic I-94. If you enter the U.S. at a land crossing, you will receive a paper I-94 that should be stapled in your passport.

### **Duration of Status (D/S)**

You were given the annotation D/S on your entry stamp and electronic I-94 (or paper I-94 for those who entered at a land crossing). This means that you are permitted to remain in the U.S. even if your visa has expired as long as you are maintaining valid F-1 status and are either:

- Engaged in a full-course of study
- Engaged in authorized practical training (employment authorization)
- In your "grace period"

### **Grace Period**

F-1 students have 60 days from the date of their program completion or final day of authorized practical training to prepare to depart the U.S. During your grace period you can:

- Prepare to depart and depart the U.S.
- Begin a new academic program (i.e. graduate school)
- Apply for Optional Practical Training (if you just completed your academic program)

During your grace period, you cannot work, study, or leave and reenter the U.S. with the same I-20.

### **I-20**

- You must keep your I-20 up-to-date at all times
- You must request an updated I-20 from the PDSO within 10 days of the change if:
  - You declare or change your major, and/or add a second major or minor
  - There is a change in your funding or name
- If you will not complete your program in the time given on your I-20, you must request an extension at least 30 days before your I-20 expires

### **SEVIS Registration**

During the first week of every semester, you are required to report to the PDSO for SEVIS registration. During this one-on-one appointment with the PDSO, all of your immigration documents are reviewed and your SEVIS record is "registered." Failure to attend your SEVIS registration appointment will result in the termination of your SEVIS record.

### **Full Course of Study**

You are required to enroll full-time in the fall and spring semesters. Full-time enrollment is a minimum of 12 credits. Enrollment is not required during the summer or winter breaks which are considered vacation periods.

### Reduced Course Load (RCL)

There are only a few reasons why F-1 students would be permitted to drop below full-time enrollment without falling out of status.

- Academic or English Language Difficulties (1 semester only- usually only first semester)
- Medical Condition (Up to 12 months)
- Last semester of study

An RCL will only be approved in accordance with SUNY Morrisville policy and in coordination with your Academic Adviser and Administrative Dean. All RCL requests are evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

### Travel Outside of the U.S.

Before traveling outside of the U.S., verify the following:

- Your passport is valid for at least 6 months from the date of your reentry
- Your visa is still valid (not applicable for Canadian citizens)
  - If your visa has expired, you will need to renew your visa for reentry to the U.S., unless you qualify for “Automatic Visa Revalidation.”
- Page 2 of your I-20 has been signed *within one year of the date of your reentry* by a DSO. This is called a “travel signature.” *Travel signatures are valid for one year.*
  - If you need to renew your visa before your reentry to the U.S., you will need a brand-new travel signature even if the previous signature is still valid.

Upon reentry to the U.S., you must bring your new I-94 to the PDSO to be verified and copied for your file.

### Renewing your F-1 Visa (Not Applicable for Canadian Citizens)

If you are traveling outside of the U.S. and are not traveling to Canada, Mexico, or the “adjacent islands” or do not qualify for Automatic Visa Revalidation, you will need to renew your F-1 visa for reentry to the country. Please note that it is highly recommended that you only apply for a visa in your home country or country of legal permanent residence. It is not recommended to try to renew your visa in Canada.

In order to renew your visa, be sure to:

- Make sure that your I-20 is up-to-date and gives accurate information about your current program and funding
- Get a new travel signature on your I-20 regardless of if the previous signature is still valid
- Bring proof of your current studies and progress towards your degree (transcripts, class schedule, letter from academic adviser, etc.)
- Bring proof of financial support (financial aid letter, bank statement, etc.)
- Follow the procedures of the US Embassy/Consulate in regard to your nonimmigrant visa application very carefully to avoid delays/denials

Upon reentry to the U.S., it is extremely important that you report to the PDSO so that your new visa and I-94 can be verified and copied for your file.

### **Automatic Visa Revalidation**

If your visa is expired and you are traveling to Canada, Mexico, or the “adjacent islands,” and will be outside of the U.S. for less than 30 days, you can reenter using your expired F-1 visa unless:

- You applied for a new visa and it has not been issued
- You applied for a new visa and were denied
- You have a terminated SEVIS record indicating that you are out of status
- You have been out the United States for more than 30 days
- You are a citizen of Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Sudan, Syria

If you plan to travel using Automatic Visa Revalidation, it is recommended that you meet with a DSO *before* departing the U.S.

### **On-Campus Employment**

International students are permitted to work on campus up to 20 hours per week. Students must receive a Social Security Number (SSN) through the Social Security Administration to do so. Speak with your PDSO as soon as you consider on-campus employment.

### **Off-Campus Employment**

International students are not permitted under any circumstance to work off-campus without prior authorization. Working off-campus without authorization is a major violation of your immigration status. There are three options for off-campus employment authorization: Economic Hardship Employment, Curricular Practical Training, and Optional Practical Training.

#### **1) Economic Hardship Employment**

This type of employment authorization is difficult to obtain. You must be able to prove to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) that employment is necessary due to severe economic hardship caused by circumstances beyond your control that arose after obtaining F-1 status, and you must have been in F-1 status for at least one full academic year. If granted, you would be permitted to work off-campus part-time while school is in session and full-time during breaks.

#### **2) Curricular Practical Training (CPT)**

CPT is employment authorization for a specific employer that is directly related to your field of study and forms an integral part of the established curriculum of your program. CPT requires the recommendation of your academic adviser and must be tied to your enrollment in a related course. You become eligible for CPT after your first year of enrollment at Morrisville. While the amount of CPT you can apply for is unlimited, using more than 365 days of full-time CPT will cause you to be ineligible for OPT.

#### **3) Optional Practical Training (OPT)**

OPT is employment authorization for any employer in your field of study granted by USCIS. There are three types of OPT: Pre-Completion, Post-Completion, and STEM Extension. You become eligible to apply for OPT after your first year of enrollment at Morrisville. You have the opportunity to have a total of one year of OPT unless you qualify for a STEM Extension. You must file an application (Form I-765) with USCIS for which the processing time is approximately three (3) months. Upon approval, you will be issued an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) which will indicate the period of approved employment.

- **Pre-Completion OPT** can be taken only before you graduate and may be part-time or full-time. If you choose to apply for Pre-Completion OPT in order to work during the fall or spring semesters, your employment must be approved by Morrisville and you must continue to maintain full-time enrollment. In most cases, Curricular Practical Training can be used instead of Pre-Completion OPT.
- **Post-Completion OPT** can be taken upon your graduation. As long as you are otherwise eligible, you may apply for Post-Completion OPT as early as 90 days before you graduate and until the end of your grace period. Post-Completion OPT must be full-time (20 hours or more per week).
- **STEM Extension** is a 24-month extension of Post-Completion OPT available for students with a DHS-approved STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) major. The STEM Extension application must be filed within the 90 days before your Post-Completion OPT period, as indicated on your EAD, ends.

### Public Charge

International Students are NOT permitted to take part in any public assistance programs, such as, but not limited to, welfare, government health programs (Medicaid, etc.), food stamps, and subsidized housing/heating/phone. Receiving government assistance could negatively impact your application for a visa renewal, an H-1B visa, or Permanent Residency.

### Taxes

You are required to complete the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Form 8843 every year, regardless of if you have worked in the U.S. If you have worked or have a taxable financial aid award, you will also need to file the 1040NR or 1040NR-EZ. If you are employed on-campus, you will receive a tax packet from Accounting with instructions on how to complete your taxes. If you worked off campus (CPT or OPT), you should receive a wage statement (W-2) from your employer and will need to use that to file your own taxes. The deadline to file all tax forms each year is April 15.

***Whenever considering or experiencing a change in program, degree completion, employment, contact information, address, etc., contact a DSO!***

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