

## F-1 GRADUATE STUDENT OVERVIEW

### Student and Exchange Visitor Program

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) acts as the bridge for varied government organizations which have an interest in information on foreign students. SEVP uses web-based technology, the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), to track and monitor schools and programs, students, exchange visitors and their dependents throughout the duration of approved participation within the U.S. educational system.

To acquire F-1 status, a student needs to receive Form I-20, produced in SEVIS and signed by the Designated School Official (DSO) in Admissions. There is a number in the upper right hand corner called a SEVIS number. This is an identification number for the student and will be associated with the student for the entire duration of that particular I-20 and SEVIS Record.

Upon receiving the I-20, students then apply for an F-1 visa at the US Consulate, usually in their home country. This visa provides them entry into the United States in student status. (Exception: Citizens of Canada need a passport, but not a visa.)

**NOTE:** If a student is studying in a potentially “sensitive” field, it is helpful if the department writes a brief letter describing in lay terms the nature and application of the student’s field of study. The Department of State has an unpublished “technology alert list” that can trigger a sometimes lengthy security check, causing delays in the issuance of a visa. This letter is not guaranteed to prevent such delays, but in some cases it has been helpful.

### Brief summary of F-1 student regulations:

- **Initial Admission to the US:** Students can be admitted to the US no earlier than 30 days before the first day of classes.
- **Class Registration:** Pursuing a full course of study is one of the cornerstones of maintaining F-1 status. Each semester until graduation, students must either be registered for 9 credit hours or enrolled in thesis or dissertation research such as 748, 749 or 767 (equivalent to fulltime). During this time of research it is essential that departments make sure their F-1 students are enrolled each semester, as failure to do so would place a student’s legal status in jeopardy.
- **Reduced Course Load:** In very limited cases, a reduced course load may be permitted and the student will still be considered in status. Students must receive *prior approval* of both the Designated School Official (DSO) in 215 Bradley Hall and their DGS before reducing their course load. A student who drops below a full course of study without this approval will no longer be in legal status.

A reduced course load should consist of at least six semester hours or half the clock hours required for a full course of study, unless it is the final semester of coursework.

### Acceptable reasons for reduced course load include:

- *(One semester only)* Initial academic difficulties due to unfamiliarity with American teaching methods, difficulties with the English language, or improper course level placement.
- The final semester of course work for courses required for their degree completion, not prerequisites for another degree.

- Medical problem certified by a US physician or clinical psychologist, with the number of course hours determined by the health care provider (maximum aggregate of 12 months allowed).

**Extension of stay:** Students who will not complete their degree in the time allotted on the I-20 must apply for an extension prior to the ending date. The DSO in 215 Bradley Hall must certify that the delay is “caused by compelling academic or medical reasons, such as changes of major or research topics, unexpected research problems or documented illnesses.” This requires a letter from the DGS explaining the compelling reason for requesting the extension. Delays caused by academic probation or suspension are not acceptable reasons for an extension.

## Employment

**On-Campus work:** “This is limited to no more than 20 total hours per week while school is in session *inclusive* of any work undertaken pursuant to a scholarship, fellowship, assistantship, or postdoctoral appointment. The exception to this regulation is during official university breaks and holidays. During these periods, on-campus employment may be full-time for students who are eligible and intend to register for the subsequent academic term.” 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f) (9) (i)

For students transferring to UK from other US schools, on-campus employment can occur only after they receive their I-20 from UK.

For students newly arrived in the US, employment may begin no more than 30 days prior to the actual commencement of classes.

**Note:** The limitation of 20 hours per week continues to apply to students, even during their thesis or dissertation research. Once they have completed all the requirements for the degree, **Optional Practical Training is the only employment authorization students have while in F-1 status.**

**Optional Practical Training:** OPT is defined as “temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student’s major area of study.” Students can use it during or after their studies. There are 12 months of OPT given for each *higher* degree. To be eligible, a student must have been enrolled for classes for at least one academic year (fall and spring semesters). This employment is authorized by USCIS (US Citizenship & Immigration Services) and carries with it an application fee.

**Curricular Practical Training:** CPT is part-time or full-time training that must be undertaken before students complete all the requirements for their degree. This can be a paid or unpaid internship or any other form of cooperative education that is an *integral* part of an established curriculum in their course of study. Independent study courses will not be accepted for CPT authorization unless they fulfill a portion of the credit hours required for the degree. Students must register for their CPT course *prior* to the beginning of the semester. This employment is authorized by the Designated School Official (DSO) in 215 Bradley Hall and there is no fee.

The use of *full-time* CPT for one year or more eliminates eligibility for OPT. The use of *part-time* CPT does not affect eligibility for OPT. (Anything over 20 hours per week is considered full-time.)

**Off-campus Employment for Severe Economic Hardship:** Students must have completed two semesters in school before they may apply for permission to USCIS to work off-campus due to severe economic hardship. If permission is granted, employment is limited to 20 hours per week when school is in session and full time during holidays or school vacation. Students write a letter explaining their financial situation and showing the need for this employment based upon unforeseen circumstances beyond their control. (These must be substantiated by supporting documentation.) This employment is authorized by USCIS (US Citizenship & Immigration Services) and carries with it an application fee.

**A MORE COMPREHENSIVE EXPLANATION OF THE F-1 REGULATIONS CAN BE FOUND ON THE OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS WEBPAGE AT:**  
[http://www.uky.edu/IntlAffairs/current\\_student/f1\\_immigration.htm](http://www.uky.edu/IntlAffairs/current_student/f1_immigration.htm)