

F-1 Visa Holders

Introduction

As an international student preparing to embark on an academic journey to the United States under the F1 visa program, it's crucial to familiarize yourself with the pivotal rules and regulations governing your experience before arrival and throughout your stay. This guide serves as a compass, navigating you through obtaining your F1 visa and providing insights into maintaining a secure F1 status within the U.S.

It's important to emphasize that while this guide offers valuable guidance and practical tips, it is not a legal document or a substitute for official legal advice. It's imperative to acknowledge that abiding by the law is a fundamental aspect of your journey as an international student. Always prioritize compliance with the law, follow official guidelines, and consult legal authorities when needed to ensure you stay within the legal boundaries set forth by the U.S. government.

Failure to adhere to these rules and regulations, outlined in this guide and the official legal statutes, may have serious consequences, including termination of your I-20 and, in some cases, deportation. Therefore, it is in your best interest to understand the advice provided here and diligently follow the law, as it is the foundation for your academic pursuit in the United States.

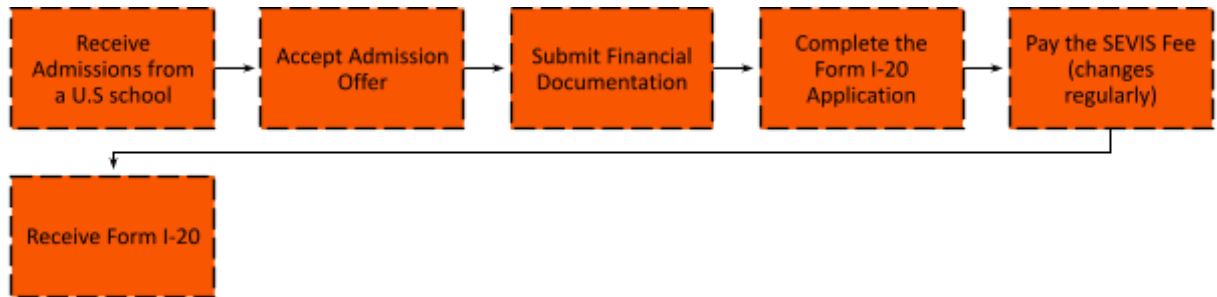
Remember, staying informed about the legal requirements and abiding by them will ensure a smooth academic journey and safeguard your rights and privileges as an international student. Let us delve deeper into the specifics, bearing in mind the importance of adhering to the law while embarking on this exciting chapter of your life.

F-1 Visa

The F-1 visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows international students to study in the United States at accredited academic institutions. F-1 visa is intended for individuals seeking academic studies (such as a degree program) or language training programs in the United States at recognized educational institutions. The F-1 visa is for any international student who plans to pursue academic studies or language training in the United States, whether at the undergraduate or graduate level. Maintain an entire course of study and make academic progress during their stay.

Form I-20

The Form I-20, officially known as the "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status," is a critical document issued by U.S. academic institutions to eligible international students who have been admitted to their programs. This document is essential for obtaining an F-1 student visa and maintaining legal student status while studying in the United States. Getting a form I-20 will include, but not be limited to



(Travel.State.Gov, n.d.)

Note: This is not the guaranteed process (Student Visa, n.d.) for getting your F-1 Visa. Countries have different methods and policies. Contact your country's U.S. embassy for up-to-date information and policy changes.

The Form I-20 will contain:

- i. Identification Information
- ii. Program Details
- iii. School Information
- iv. Financial Information
- v. SEVIS Fee Payment Confirmation
- vi. Designated School Official (DSO) Information
- vii. Student Attestation and Signature

Form I-20 serves several crucial purposes, such as:

- **Visa Application:** You will need the Form I-20 to apply for an F1 student visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate in your home country.
- **Entry into the U.S.:** It serves as your entry document when you arrive in the United States. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers will review and endorse it upon your arrival.

- **Maintaining F1 Status:** You must keep your I-20 current and follow the regulations outlined on the form to maintain your legal F1 student status in the U.S.
- **Work Authorization:** If you are eligible for Optional Practical Training (OPT) or Curricular Practical Training (CPT), your I-20 will be used to request work authorization.
- **Travel Authorization**

It's crucial to keep your Form I-20 safe and up to date throughout your stay in the United States. Suppose you experience changes in your academic program, financial situation, or personal details. In that case, it is essential to notify your Designated School Official (DSO) promptly so that they can update your I-20 as needed.

- **Address Change**

As an F student, you must regularly report changes to your designated school official (DSO) to ensure that your information is correct in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). Federal regulations require that you report a change of Address to a DSO to maintain your student status.

Maintaining F-1 Status

After acquiring a visa from your home country to come to the United States, you must maintain your status. Each year, F-1 students lose their status because of mistakes that could be avoided. These mistakes include but are not limited to Failure to maintain full-time enrollment, Unauthorized Employment, Failure to report a change of address, academic disciplinary issues, overstaying authorized duration, and last but not least, failure to obtain proper authorization for travel abroad. Most of these issues can be avoided by regularly meeting with your DSO or visiting websites like [Study in the States](#) or [USCIS](#). These websites offer comprehensive step-by-step ways to avoid any issues with immigration services and maintain your student status. Here are some ways to keep your status.

1. Maintaining Full-time Enrollment

- To maintain status, international students must enroll in at least 12 credit hours per semester. At the graduate level, a minimum of 6 credit hours is required.
- Before withdrawing from a course, you must meet with your DSO and obtain their approval.
- Even though approval for requests to drop below-required credit hours is only sometimes guaranteed. Students can request if they are on medical leave, on a final term, and a full course load is not required to complete the program, or if they have a reduced course load (RCL) where students face unforeseen academic difficulties.
- Dropping below the minimum required credit hours without prior approval from DSO is considered a violation of your F-1 status that could lead to a termination of your I-20

2. Online Classes

F1 students can only take one online course per semester.

3. Employment (U.S DHS - Study in the States, 2023)

Unauthorized employment is a significant issue for F-1 students studying in the United States. F-1 visa holders can only work under certain conditions and with proper authorization. Violating these rules can have serious consequences, including loss of F-1 status, deportation, and future difficulties obtaining visas to re-enter the U.S. or pursue further studies. Here are some ways to work legally while on F-1 status.

- On-campus Employment:** F-1 students are generally allowed to work on the school's campus for up to 20 hours per week during the academic year and full-time during breaks. However, they must receive proper authorization from their designated school official (DSO) before beginning on-campus employment.
- Off-campus Employment:** Off-campus employment is generally **not allowed** for F-1 students unless authorized by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) under specific circumstances, such as **Optional Practical Training (OPT)** or **Curricular Practical Training (CPT)**.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

International Students at WV Wesleyan College may apply for an Internship (see below).

- Allows you to work off-campus
- It can be full-time or part-time
- If you have a 12-month CPT, you will be ineligible for OPT. However, if you have part-time CPT, you will be eligible for OPT no matter how many months you've used it.
- The work you do when on CPT must relate to your major or course of study.
- To obtain a CPT from your DSO, you will need the following:
 - I. Obtain a letter of employment from your employer that clearly shows the following:
 - i. Start and end date of the employment.
 - ii. Company info (name, address, title,.)
 - iii. Full-time or part-time
 - iv. Job Responsibilities
 - v. The letter has to be signed and on the company's letterhead.
- Bring this letter along with your immigration documents to your DSO.

Internship Application

The Internship Application begins with an online form. It can be found under the Academic Services's web page "Forms-Students" or at this direct link:
<https://forms.wvwc.edu/201184927756968>.

Complete the steps for submission and approval:

1. Students may complete the online form, attach their syllabus and learning contract created with you, and submit everything for approval.
2. As the faculty sponsor, it will arrive to you via email next. You may revise the form or ask the student to do so by selecting "Needs Revision/Deny."
3. Once you approve, it will follow along that chain to the site supervisor, school director/department chair, experiential learning coordinator, and registrar in that order.
4. After the registrar approves, you will receive an email notification.

International students may require additional documentation. If you have any questions or concerns throughout the internship, please contact the experiential learning coordinator, bowers.j@wvwc.edu, or the Registrar's Office, registrar@wvwc.edu.

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

- Allows students to work off-campus in a job directly related to their field of study.
- Available for up to 12 months full-time per degree level.
- Available for 24 months for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) students
- To get an OPT, you will need the following:

1. DSO to change your OPT status to requested (you will need to do this first)
2. After you sign your new I-20 from your DSO, you will need to complete the [form I-765](#) online. Be aware the fee is currently \$410.

F-1 students should carefully follow the regulations and guidelines set by the U.S. government and their academic institutions to avoid issues related to unlawful employment. If in doubt, students should seek guidance from their DSO before engaging in any employment activities.

Drivers License Required Documentation

When you apply for a driver's license at your local DMV, make sure to bring original copies of the following documents:

- I. For I-94
- II. Social Security Number
- III. Letter from your DSO proving that you are a student here.
- IV. Other immigration papers that they may want.

NOTE: It is a good practice to call the SSA or the DMV to make an appointment and to be certain which documents they require.

- ***Study for the Driving Test, both written and practice. The [Driver's Licensing Handbook](#) contains all the information about driving rules and regulations in WV. [Here](#) is a sample written test.***

Social Security Administration, Elkins, WV 26241

<https://www.ssa.gov/https://www.ssa.gov/>

Department of Motor Vehicles, Elkins, WV 26241

<https://transportation.wv.gov/DMV/Drivers/Pages/Drivers-Licenses.aspx>

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