NOTE: Information in this handbook is subject to change. Links and references to websites of businesses are for informational purposes only and do not in any way constitute an endorsement of these websites/businesses.
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Immigration Information for F-1 Students
Advising & Immigration Information
The Center for Global Engagement (CGE) has advisors available to assist you with F-1 immigration-related questions. Your CGE advisors also serve as a liaison and a voice for you on campus and in the community. CGE staff and advisors work for Florida State University, and are not employees of the Department of Homeland Security.

You can see a CGE advisor daily during walk-in advising hours, or by appointment. (Please see the CGE website at cge.fsu.edu for current advising walk-in hours.) Advisors are also available by phone and email. When emailing, please send email to only one advisor or use the Cc function if copying multiple advisors. When leaving phone messages, please be sure to always clearly state your name and phone number.

The Center for Global Engagement website contains useful and detailed information regarding your F-1 status. The CGE also communicates important information to you by email, and you are automatically signed up for the CGE Immigration Listserv through your FSU student email address. Please be sure that your FSU student email account is active and able to receive messages, and check this email frequently.

The Center for Global Engagement is the only place you should receive F-1 immigration advice. Often your friends, family, professors, employers, or FSU department staff wish to be helpful and may offer you immigration advice. Please check all immigration-related information with your CGE advisor. Additionally, please refer any questions about your immigration status from others to your CGE advisor.

F-1 & SEVIS General Information
Most international students at FSU hold F-1 immigration status. The F-1 is the most basic and widely used U.S. student visa category. F-1 status is monitored by the U.S. government through an electronic database called SEVIS. Since students in F-1 status are strictly monitored, both the students and the university have reporting obligations to the government due to federal law. This handbook has been designed to help inform you of your responsibilities under F-1 status. For more detailed information regarding F-1 status, including definitions and FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions), please see the F-1 student section of the Center for Global Engagement website at cge.fsu.edu.
What is an F-1 student?
A student holding F-1 status is a non-immigrant allowed to remain in the United States for as long as he or she is:

• A full-time student making satisfactory progress toward a degree at the school he or she is approved to attend, or
• A student in a period of post graduation practical training that is directly related to his or her field of study and has been authorized by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

What is SEVIS?
SEVIS is the acronym for Student and Exchange Visitor Information System which is run by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program Office (SEVP) of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Your SEVIS record is unique. Each F-1 student has an individual SEVIS record, and a unique SEVIS number. You will keep the same SEVIS record and SEVIS number throughout your time here as an F-1 student, and this record can even be transferred to other schools.

Your SEVIS record is a dynamic record, which has a beginning and end, according to your program of study or academic choices. Your SEVIS record becomes “Active” after you first enter the U.S., report to the Center for Global Engagement, and enroll in a full course of study. Each semester, we must continue to maintain this record, and keep it “Active” by reporting on proper full-time enrollment and any changes in your personal or academic record. We report information to SEVIS simply by making an update in the SEVIS computer system. Eventually, when you have completed your academic program or post-completion practical training, your SEVIS record will also end.

Your Immigration Documents
The following documents are the basic documents needed to travel and/or maintain your F-1 status. The Center for Global Engagement requests that you provide us with up-to-date copies of all of your immigration documents for recordkeeping purposes. Please update us with any changes, such as passport/visa renewals or new I-94s.

• **Passport**: Your passport should always be valid for up to 6 months into the future. Check with the embassy of your home country for information on renewing your passport. Check the spelling on your name in your passport. Your name should appear
the same way in your passport, I-20, F-1 visa, and I-94. If these documents do not match, please talk to your CGE advisor.

- **F-1 Visa**: This is the sticker in your passport, used only for entry purposes. An expired F-1 visa stamp does NOT affect your F-1 status inside the U.S.
  This visa is allowed to expire while you are in the U.S.. However you can only re-enter the U.S. after travel abroad using a valid F-1 visa. So, if your F-1 visa is expired and you leave the U.S., you must apply for a new F-1 visa before you can return.

- **I-94**: Each time you enter the U.S. you will be issued a new I-94 number, often referred to as your “Admission Number.” Please note: You will not receive a paper copy of your I-94, but you can print a free copy by visiting [www.cbp.gov/I94](http://www.cbp.gov/I94). You will need this copy for many purposes including employment, driver’s license, social security, and banking.

- **I-20**: This is the 3-page document issued by the Center for Global Engagement. The I-20 contains biographical information, as well as information about your academic program and funding. The I-20 also contains your SEVIS Number, which is found at the top right corner of the I-20 beginning with N000--. Please note the ending date of your I-20 can be found on page 1, section 5. The I-20 will be shortened to indicate degree completion, or extended if you need more time. However, the extension must be requested before the I-20 expires! Page 3 of the I-20 contains space for off-campus employment authorization (top) and travel signatures
The I-20 is always signed in blue ink by a CGE advisor on page 1 or for travel on page 3.

Special note on Canadian student documents: Canadian students are not required to have a visa to enter the U.S, but are still required to be in F-1 status when admitted to the U.S. You must show the I-20 at the airport or border when you enter the U.S. BE SURE the stamp in your passport says F-1 status. Canadian students are governed by the same regulations as other F-1 status students. DO NOT RETURN TO THE U.S. AS A VISITOR. ALWAYS ENTER USING YOUR F-1 STATUS.

Other Documents
Below are some documents that you may need or encounter as an F-1.

- **Financial Support Documents**- These are the documents you provided as proof of your financial support- bank statement, bank letter, assistantship award letters, scholarship award letters
- **I-515A** (only if issued to you upon your entry): This form may be given to you if you have a problem at the Port of Entry or if you have not provided sufficient documents for entry. (Example: You forgot your I-20.) See a CGE advisor immediately if you receive an I-515 since you are only given 30 days to resolve this!

Travel Rules
Always be sure that you have the proper documents prepared. DO NOT EVER re-enter the U.S. using a status other than F-1. Always check you’re your passport to make sure it is stamped and marked “F-1 D/S” You’ll need to think about the following things before travelling abroad:

1. Get a travel signature from a CGE advisor on page 3 of your I-20. Signatures are valid for one year from the date of the signature to the date of your planned re-entry in the U.S.
   You can either visit your advisor during walk-in hours for a same-day signature OR drop off your I-20 at the CGE Front Desk. If you drop off the I-20, please do so at least 1 week in advance of your departure date.

2. If your F-1 visa is expired, you must make plans to apply for a new F-1 visa while you are abroad. Remember- You CANNOT renew the F-1 visa inside the U.S.!

3. **NOTE!** If you are travelling to Canada, Mexico, or islands adjacent to the U.S., it may be possible to return using an expired
F-1 visa. Please talk to your CGE advisor about this special case of “Automatic Visa Revalidation”.

4. Check your passport. It should be valid for 6 months into the future. If your passport is close to expiring, you will need to renew it before travel.

5. If you are travelling to a country other than your home country, find out if you will need a visa to enter that country. Remember- *Your F-1 status is only valid in the U.S. Other countries have their own immigration rules.*

Please remember to bring new copies of your documents to the CGE after you return- renewed passport or visa. Also, report any problem to your CGE advisor if you had difficulties at the Port of Entry, embassy, or consulate.

**Renewing Your F-1 Visa**

If you are renewing your F-1 visa, please take these documents, in addition to your passport and I-20. (Please also be sure to check the website of the specific embassy or consulate to which you’ll be applying for their specific requirements. You can find the embassy or consulate’s website here online: www.usembassy.gov):

1. FSU Official Transcript (Available from FSU Registrar)
2. Certification of Enrollment (Available from FSU Registrar)
3. Updated proof of funding (Bank statement, Department Award Letter, etc)
4. Proof of ties to your home country (Proof of immediate family or family obligations in your home country; bank accounts or property at home; job offers, or proof of need for your job field at home)

**Travel Inside the U.S.**

For travel *inside* the U.S., but *outside* of Tallahassee, please always carry your original I-20, passport and F-1 visa and a copy of your I-94 card.

For travel within Tallahassee, we recommend that you always have photocopies of your documents at all times. The original documents should be in your personal possession at your home- not with a friend or family member. For identification purposes, you should keep a Florida ID Card or Driver’s License with you at all times. (For
information on applying for a Florida ID or Driver’s License, please see the Driver’s License Brochure on the CGE website at cge.fsu.edu.

Special Rules for F-2 Dependents
F-2 dependents are children (under age 21) and spouses of an F-1. As long as the F-1 student remains in proper immigration status, the F-2 dependents will as well. F-2’s have the same types of immigration documents- passport, F-2 visa, F-2 dependent I-20, and I-94. F-2 dependent I-20s also need to be signed for travel. Additionally, please note these rules specific to F-2 status:

• F-2 dependents are NOT authorized for ANY type of employment
• F-2 dependent children may attend school (K-12)
• F-2 dependent spouses may only engage in study which is “avocational or recreational”
• A dependent child “ages out” when he or she turns 21 years and will need to have their own status to remain in the U.S. Talk to a CGE advisor about a change of status for your dependent at least 1 year before he or she turns 21.

When renewing the F-2 visa, an F-2 will need to provide the following documents to the embassy or consulate:

• F-2 dependent I-20, signed for travel
• Copy of F-1’s documents (I-20, I-94, passport biographical pages, F-1 visa)
• Passport (valid for at least 6 months into the future)
• Copy of F-1’s FSU Official Transcript (Available from FSU Registrar)
• Certification of Enrollment for F-1 (Available from FSU Registrar) OR printout of F-1’s registration
• Updated proof of F-1’s funding (Bank statement, F-1’s Department Award Letter)
• Proof of ties to your home country (Proof of immediate family or family obligations in your home country; bank accounts or property at home; job offers, or proof of need for your job field at home)

Enrollment Rules
Your F-1 immigration status depends on your status as a student. As an F-1, your main purpose in the U.S. is study, and you are always required to
maintain a full course of study AND to make academic progress in your degree program. Making academic progress means:

- You’re enrolled full-time in your degree program, at the appropriate level
- You do not have repeated semesters of low grades or Incompletes
- You have not been academically dismissed, suspended, or expelled

**Full Course of Study (Full-time Enrollment)**
The following chart contains the definitions for full-time enrollment at Florida State University. Please note- if your academic department requires enrollment that exceeds the information below, you must also comply with the departmental policy. The enrollment minimums in the chart below are only minimums to maintain proper F-1 immigration status. *International students must enroll for the immigration minimums AND satisfy requirements of FSU and the academic department.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Undergraduates</th>
<th>12 hours - minimum enrollment is required in both Fall and Spring semesters.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Final Term</strong> - Minimum enrollment in the final semester is based on the number of hours required to complete the degree. Students must submit a Final Term Form no later than 2 weeks into the final term.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Online Classes</strong> - Only 1 on-line course or distance education class that counts toward a full course load is allowed per semester. (At least 9 credit hours must be face-to-face classes.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>For summer enrollment, unless it is your first semester in the U.S. or it is your final semester, you may enroll in as many online classes as you wish.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Summer Enrollment</strong> – Full time Summer enrollment is NOT required by immigration regulations unless Summer is your first term in the U.S. or it is your final term.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates</td>
<td>9 hours - minimum enrollment is required in both Fall and Spring semesters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 hours - minimum enrollment is considered full-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Graduates (Continued)

- time after completing 6 thesis hours (Masters) or 24 dissertation hours (PhD) and it is not the final term.
- **Final Term for graduate students completing a Thesis or Dissertation** - 2 hours of minimum enrollment (even if the final term is during the Summer). Students must submit a Final Term Form no later than 2 weeks into the final term.
- **Final Term for Masters students completing coursework (non-thesis option)** - Minimum enrollment in the final term is based on the number of hours required to complete the degree. Students must submit a Final Term Form no later than 2 weeks into the final term.
- **Online Classes** - Only 1 on-line course or distance education class that counts toward a full course load is allowed per semester. (At least 6 credit hours must be face-to-face classes.) For summer enrollment, unless it is your first semester in the U.S. or it is your final semester, you may enroll in as many online classes as you wish.
- **Summer Enrollment** – Full time Summer enrollment is NOT required by immigration regulations unless Summer is your first term in the U.S. or it is your final term.

### Reductions in Course Load

Immigration regulations only allow reductions in course load (below the minimum full-time enrollment) for the following 5 specific reasons. Authorization for a reduced course load must be requested from your CGE advisor in advance.

1. Initial difficulty with the English language or reading requirements
2. Unfamiliarity with U.S. teaching methods
3. Improper course level placement
4. Medical condition (Requires a letter from a licensed U.S. physician, Psychologist/psychiatrist, or osteopath)
5. Final Semester

Reduced enrollment for academic reasons (options 1-3) must consist of at least 6 (six) credit hours in the Fall and Spring semesters or at least half of the normal full course load for that term. Full-time enrollment must
resume the following term. Only one type of academic reduction is allowed during your degree program.
A reduced course load for **medical reasons** may allow as little as 0 (zero) enrollment hours. Medical reduced course load authorization can be renewed each term as needed for a maximum of 12 months for each degree level.

Withdrawal or Leave of Absence
Sometimes circumstances in your academic or personal life may prevail over your academic pursuits so that you need to stop schooling before you complete your program. If you are considering withdrawing from FSU or taking a leave of absence, please contact your CGE advisor as soon as possible to discuss the immigration issues. Simply informing your academic department of your intentions does NOT take care of your immigration obligations. In order to appropriately "end" your SEVIS record, your CGE advisor will need to speak with you about your plans so that he or she can provide you with the appropriate advice for your specific situation.

If your academic or personal difficulties are due to a more serious situation, such as a mental or physical health problem, you may be eligible for an authorized reduction in course load. Please talk to a Center for Global Engagement advisor as soon as possible for more information.

*If this is your case- please realize that you can seek treatment immediately at Thagard Health Center (644-6230 / tshc.fsu.edu ) or the University Counseling Center (644-2003 / counseling.fsu.edu )*

Employment Rules
On-Campus Employment
In general, as an F-1 student, you are only authorized to work **on-campus** at FSU for up to **20 hours per week** during Fall and Spring semesters. (20 hours per limit is the total limit for ALL positions held on-campus. For example- if you work 15 hours at the FSU Library, you would only have a remaining 5 hours available for another on-campus position.) You may work more than 20 hours on-campus only during university breaks, or in the summer, if a Summer session is not your very first or very last term. You do not need any special authorization to work on campus.

Working “on-campus” means that you are performing the work on the campus of FSU and your paycheck comes from FSU (example: FSU
departments, the library, etc). You may also work on-campus for a company in direct contract with FSU (like the FSU Bookstore, or campus dining services). If you have any doubt that your position is considered “on-campus”, please contact a CGE advisor before beginning employment. If you are looking for on-campus jobs, see the FSU Employment webpage at [jobs.fsu.edu].

NOTE: Automatic authorization to work on-campus ends as of your graduation date. Any work done on or off campus after graduation requires special authorization.

Off-Campus Employment
Your F-1 status does NOT allow you to be employed off-campus without special authorization from the CGE and/or United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). If you do not have a notation on page 3 of your I-20 or an employment authorization card from USCIS you are NOT authorized to work off-campus. Unauthorized off-campus employment is a very serious violation of your F-1 status.

You may be eligible to apply for Curricular Practical Training (CPT), Optional Practical Training (OPT), Severe Economic Hardship, or Employment with an International Organization. Eligibility to apply for CPT, OPT, or Severe Economic Hardship employment authorization only begins after you have completed at least 1 academic year of study in the U.S.. Application forms can be found on the CGE website at [cge.fsu.edu].

- **Curricular Practical Training (CPT)** - CPT is ONLY used for internships, practicums, or field studies that are an integral part of the established FSU curriculum. CPT almost always requires enrollment in internship course hours or enrollment with the FSU Career Center’s CEO program. CPT may also be used for employment that is necessary to gather data for the completion of thesis or dissertation. CPT is generally authorized one semester at a time. CPT is NOT intended for ongoing employment, or to bridge a gap between graduation and OPT. Your CGE advisor can authorize CPT, and processing normally takes 1-2 weeks. Please see the Curricular Practical Training Form for more information on eligibility and rules.

- **Optional Practical Training (OPT)** - OPT is 12 months of employment authorization during or after the course of study. OPT
employment MUST be in the field of study and can begin only after an Employment Authorization Document (EAD card) has been received from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Applications usually take 2-3 months to be processed. Most F-1 students use OPT after graduation. Please see the Optional Practical Training Form for more information. NOTE: Students in certain Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) majors may be eligible to apply for a one-time only, 17-month extension of their OPT. Students applying for this STEM Extension must meet certain eligibility and employment criteria.

- **Severe Economic Hardship** – This type of employment authorization must be recommended by the CGE and can begin only after an EAD card has been issued by USCIS. This is only for hardship cases arising from sudden, unforeseen circumstances beyond the student’s control. Applications usually take 2-3 months to be processed. Examples: Unforeseen loss of financial aid or on-campus funding, loss of funding from sponsor or family member, sudden changes in home country’s economic system or currency, severe illness or medical bills, natural disasters. Please talk to your CGE advisor for more information.

- **Employment with an International Organization** - You are eligible to apply for this type of employment authorization as soon as F-1 status begins. However, you must have an offer of employment from a qualifying international organization. Employment can only begin after recommendation by the CGE and can begin only after you apply for and receive an EAD card from USCIS. Applications usually take 2-3 months to be processed. Please talk to your CGE advisor for a list of qualifying international organizations.

**Unauthorized Employment**
Unauthorized employment is a very serious violation of your F-1 status and can have severe consequences. Some examples include:

1. Work off-campus (employee at a gas station, restaurant, store, or other business)
2. Babysitting, private tutoring, private language lessons
3. Home or internet business
4. Paid internship with no CPT authorization
5. Working before or after the authorized dates on your I-20 or EAD card
6. Working over 20 hours per week on campus during Spring or Fall semester

Social Security
If you will be employed in the U.S., you must apply for a U.S. Social Security Number (SSN). Students who are not working or receiving income in the U.S. are not eligible for a Social Security number, and should NEVER use their FSU identification number (999 or 899 number) in place of the SSN outside of the FSU campus. For detailed information, please see the Social Security Brochure found on the CGE website at cge.fsu.edu. To obtain your U.S. Social Security number, you will need to do the following:

1. If working on-campus, you will need a letter from your employing department, printed on letterhead with the details of the employment. This letter must also be signed by a CGE advisor at the Center for Global Engagement. The required letter can be found on the CGE website in the Social Security section.

2. If you have off-campus authorization for employment, a letter from your employer is not necessary. You would only need to provide either your new I-20 with employment authorization noted on page 3 and/or your USCIS issued EAD card.

3. Apply in person at the Social Security Administration office. (See CGE website and Social Security Brochure for address and directions to the office.) You will receive a receipt for your application.

4. The Social Security card will be mailed to you usually within 2-4 weeks. Please provide your department or employer with a copy of your receipt or other proof that you have applied for the Social Security card. When you receive the Social Security Card, please provide a copy to your employer and the FSU Registrar.

Reporting Changes & Making Requests
During your time here as an F-1, you may make changes to your personal or academic record. When changes occur, we may need to update your SEVIS record and/or I-20. Please see the F-1 Forms section on the CGE website or ask your CGE advisor for the proper way to report changes.

Changes may include:

- Personal information- Legal name change, personal or sponsored funding change, changes in dependent information
• Financial information- Change in your source of funding (adding or losing personal, sponsored, scholarship, or assistantship-based funding), or a significant change in the amount of funding
• Address – You must report a change of address to the CGE within 10 days of your move. To report a change of address: Submit a “Change of Address” on the F-1 Forms section of the CGE website. Do not forget to also update your address in myFSU.
• Academic information- Changes of major and changes of level are automatically reported to the Center for Global Engagement. Other academic changes that you should report might include graduation or early program completion, withdrawal from your program, readmission to another degree at FSU, admission and/or transfer to another U.S. school or leave of absence.

Many changes in personal, financial, or academic changes record simply need to be reported and updated. However, at other times you may need to request an adjustment to your immigration record or make a request to receive a benefit of your F-1 status. Most requests have associated forms, which are available on the CGE website. Please be sure to **submit forms and requests 2 weeks in advance**. Requests may include:

• Travel signature
• Reduced Course Load (RCL) Authorization
• I-20 Extension (This must be requested before your I-20 expires!)
• Employment authorization (CPT, OPT, Economic Hardship, International Org.)
• Adding an F-2 dependent child or spouse to your record
• Transfer to another U.S. school
• Withdrawal from FSU
• Taking courses at a school other than FSU

**Transfer to Another U.S. School**
You may transfer to another U.S. school, while still maintaining the same SEVIS record and F-1 status. FSU must release your SEVIS record and transfer it electronically to the school of your choice. Your SEVIS record can only be transferred to ONE school, so you must decide which school you will attend before requesting a transfer. In order to request a transfer of your SEVIS record, you must complete the **FSU SEVIS Transfer Out Form** and provide proof of your admission to your new school. Be sure that you inform your new school that you are currently in F-1 status with
FSU, and check if your new school will require your FSU CGE advisor to complete any information about your immigration record. (It is common for schools to require a “Transfer-In” form.)

Completion of Studies & Graduation
Your current F-1 status is valid for the duration of your current degree program. However, when you complete your degree program and studies, the validity of your I-20 also ends. The CGE will shorten your I-20 and SEVIS record to your graduation date to reflect your degree completion. Your Program Completion Date will depend on the exact semester and term that you finish your degree. You can check the graduation or diploma date for your final semester on the FSU Registrar’s website: registrar.fsu.edu.

All F-1 students have the benefit of a 60-day grace period following the completion of a degree program. You may use this 60-day period to choose any of the options listed below, if you have not already done so. Please note that the choices require you to inform the CGE of your plans by completing the necessary processes and forms. Be aware – If you do not apply for OPT, request an extension, transfer to another school, or continue with another degree program at FSU, your F-1 record will automatically complete 60 days after your Program Completion Date OR on the date you exit the U.S. (whichever comes first).

IMPORTANT: Once you exit the U.S. after program completion, you are no longer in F-1 status and cannot re-enter as an F-1 student.

1. **Apply for or begin your Optional Practical Training (OPT) employment.** Please see the information on OPT in the Employment section. FORMS: OPT Application Packet.
2. **Be readmitted to FSU for a new degree program.** You must complete the application and Change of Level process and receive a new I-20 for your new degree program BEFORE the end of your grace period. In order to receive a new I-20, you must be admitted to a new degree program, and provide proof of funding for your new degree or level. Please contact the CGE Student Services

NOTE: All on- and off-campus work authorization ends as of your newly shortened program completion date.
Coordinator concerning information on the necessary readmission/funding forms and procedures.

3. **Transfer to another U.S. school.** You must arrange for the release of your SEVIS record to your new school before the end of your grace period. FORM: SEVIS Transfer-Out Form

4. **Apply for a Change of Status to another immigration status.** If you will be applying for a change of your immigration status, please be sure to make an appointment with your CGE advisor for important information regarding the timing of the change of status application and the ending of your F-1 status. Note: Applications for change of status during the grace period carry a high risk of denial. It is recommended that you apply before your program completion or I-20 expiration.

   FORM: *Ending Your F-1 Record Form*

5. **Exit the United States.** If you do not choose any of the other options, your F-1 status will end 60 days after your program completion OR on the date you exit the U.S. (whichever comes first). You must exit the U.S. before the end of your 60-day grace period.

   FORM: *Ending Your F-1 Record Form*