Maintaining Legal F-1 Status

If an international student is admitted to the U.S. in F-1 student status, this implies that the purpose of being in the U.S. is to be a full-time student. As such, U.S. law requires that the international student comply with immigration regulations for the duration of their F-1 student status. Many other activities, including employment, are considered a privilege and strict immigration regulations are in place, which must be adhered to.

Usually international students are admitted to the U.S. for “Duration of Status” noted as D/S on the I-20 form and I-94 card. This implies that the student may remain in the U.S. as long as legal F-1 student status is maintained, which can very well differ from the completion date on the I-20.

It is the international student’s responsibility to inform themselves of immigration rules and regulations and to be aware that these rules and regulations can change during their stay in the U.S. It is very important that the student understands their legal responsibilities because there are penalties for violating immigration laws that can be as severe as making the student ineligible to re-enter the U.S. for 10 years or life. The Center for Global Education is here to assist international students and help provide them with pertinent information to keep students in legal F-1 student status, but it is ultimately the student’s responsibility and obligation, and not the university’s, for the student to maintain legal status.

The following are a few basic things an international student can do to maintain his/her legal F-1 student status:

1. **Report your change of address** within the U.S. to the Center for Global Education within 10 days of your move so your current address can be updated in the real-time web-based electronic information system called SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System).

2. **Make certain that you enroll at the institution that issued the I-20** you used to enter the U.S., at least for one semester.

3. **You must be enrolled full-time each semester.** At UW-Whitewater, this means that you must enroll full-time in spring and fall semesters (12 credits for undergraduate and 9 credits for graduate students each semester). There are very few exceptions where under-enrollment is permitted and must be **authorized in advance** by your international student advisor. Please note that in the case of on-line courses, only 3 credits per semester can be counted towards full-time enrollment.

4. **If you change your major**, you must inform your international student advisor within 10 days of making the change so that a new I-20 can be issued reflecting
this change. Not informing the Center for Global Education can have unfortunate consequences if the major listed on your I-20 does not match the major listed on your transcripts.

5. **You must complete your academic program by the end date on your I-20.** If you are unable to complete your program by that date due to documented medical reasons or valid academic reasons, you can apply for a program extension before your I-20 expires.

6. **On-campus employment is limited to a total of 20 hours per week** when school is in session and must be authorized by the Center for Global Education before you begin work. You may work on-campus full-time during spring, summer and winter breaks only.

7. **You must be authorized by the Center for Global Education for all off-campus employment** prior to beginning work.

8. **If you choose to transfer to another institution** you must request to have your SEVIS records transferred from your current institution to your new institution. A request to transfer your SEVIS records to another institution should only be done after you have been accepted to the new institution. Contact the Center to discuss your transfer needs.

9. **You must never let your passport expire.** You should begin the passport renewal process at least six months before its expiration date. You can find contact information for embassies in Washington D.C. at: [http://www.embassy.org/embassies/index.html](http://www.embassy.org/embassies/index.html).

10. **Before the end of your academic program or within 60 days of completing your program (as indicated) do one of the following:**

    a. Apply to **begin a new program** and attend the next available semester within 5 months of your program completion date.

    b. **Change your status** to another immigration category.

    c. **Apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT)** if you are eligible to do so.

    d. **Leave the U.S.**

11. **If you will not complete an academic program** you must contact the Center for Global Education office to discuss your situation and you will have 15 days to leave the U.S.

*If you think you may have problems meeting these requirements, please contact the Center for Global Education office before there is a problem so we can help you through the process.*