



## Maintaining Legal F-1 Status

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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 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 Office of International Education and Programs (IEP) 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 F-1 student status.

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

1. **Report your change of address** within the U.S. to the IEP office 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 1-20** you used to enter the U.S., for at least one semester.
3. **You must be enrolled full-time each semester.** At UW-Whitewater this means that you must enroll full-time in the 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 an IEP advisor. Please note that in the case of on-line courses, only 3 credits per semester can be counted toward full-time enrollment.

4. **If you change your major** you must inform the IEP office within 10 days of making the change so that a new I-20 can be issued reflecting this change. Not informing the IEP office 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 IEP office before you begin work. You may work on-campus full-time only during spring, summer and winter breaks.
7. **You must be authorized by the IEP office 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 IEP office to discuss your transfer needs.
9. **You must never let your passport expire.** You should begin the passport renewal process at least six months prior to its expiration date. You can find contact information for embassies in Washington D.C. at: <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** within 60 days of completing your program and must attend the next available semester within 5 months of your program completion date.
  - b. **Change your status** to another immigration category within 60 days of completing your program.
  - c. **Apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT)** prior to the completion of your program if you are eligible to do so.
  - d. **Leave the U.S.** within 60 days of completing your program.
11. **If you will not complete an academic program** you must contact the IEP 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 IEP office before there is a problem so we can help you through the process.*