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Staying in Status: An Overview of F-1 Students

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It is very important for international students to maintain their immigration status at all times. The Center for Student Achievement, Resources and Enrichment (CARE) is here to advise you and help you better understand the immigration regulations governing your status, but it is your own responsibility to maintain your status.

Failure to maintain the terms and conditions of your nonimmigrant status is a ground for removal from the United States (deportation).

To Stay In Legal Status a Student Must:

1. Maintain a valid I-20

As an F-1 student, make sure that your I-20 is always valid and accurate. Pay special attention to your program end date (item #5 on page 1 of your I-20). If your I-20 will expire before you finish your program, you will need to request an extension from your Designated School Official (DSO) in CARE at least a month in advance. Additionally, if you change your degree level, program, source of funding or number of F-2 dependents, you will need to obtain a new I-20 from a DSO.

Be sure you have a valid signature from your DSO on your I-20 prior to traveling outside the U.S. Travel signatures are valid for one year. However, if you are on Optional Practical Training (OPT), travel signatures are only valid for 6 months. Please request your travel signatures at least a month before you intend to leave the country.

If you decide to transfer to another school in the U.S., you will need to request a transfer of your SEVIS record before beginning studies at your new school.

Note: It is your responsibility to keep all of your I-20s from each of the schools you attend in the U.S. You should not throw any of your I-20s away. If you lose or severely damage your current I-20 from Pacific Oaks College, you may request a new I-20 from CARE.

2. Maintain full-time enrollment:

In order to maintain status, F-1 students must be enrolled full-time each semester. The number of credit hours required to be considered full time varies depending upon your program of study and the semester (see your program catalogue for additional information on enrollment requirements).

3. Exceptions to full-time enrollment:

Immigration regulations do provide some exceptions to the full time enrollment requirement in special situations. However, all exceptions **MUST** be authorized by your DSO before you drop below full time. Dropping below full-time without authorization from a DSO is a violation of your F-1 status!

A) *Academic difficulties.* A DSO may authorize a reduced course load on account of a student's *initial* difficulty with the English language or reading requirements, unfamiliarity with U.S. teaching methods, or improper course level placement.

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(B) *Medical conditions.* A DSO may authorize a reduced course load (or, if necessary, no course load) due to a student's temporary illness or medical condition. In order to qualify, the student must provide medical documentation from a licensed medical doctor or clinical psychologist, to an international advisor to substantiate the illness or medical condition.

(C) *Completion of course of study.* A DSO may authorize a reduced course load in the student's final term, semester, or session if fewer courses are needed to complete the course of study.

To learn more about these exceptions or see if you qualify for a reduced course load, please make an appointment with CARE before you drop any classes.

4. Adhere to grace periods

Be aware of the grace periods associated with your status:

- You have a 60-day grace period following the completion of your degree program and following the completion of your Optional Practical Training (if applicable).
- If you are dismissed from the school, you have a 21-day grace period beginning the day you are dismissed. During this time you must either apply for a change of immigration status, transfer to a different school, or depart the U.S.
- If you receive authorization from an international advisor to withdraw from all classes, you have a 15-day grace period during which you must depart the U.S.
- If you withdraw from all classes without first receiving authorization from an international advisor, you have no grace period and must depart the U.S. immediately.

5. Work only with authorization

All international students must have permission either from a DSO or the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) before they begin working. Below is an overview of some of the limitations of employment for F-1 students

- F-1 students are automatically authorized to work on campus once classes have begun, but are limited to working to 20 hours per week total (for all jobs combined) while school is in session. During vacation periods (spring, summer, and winter breaks), you may work full-time on campus.
- To work off-campus, you must apply for and receive authorization before beginning to work.
- Keep in mind that tutoring, internships, and working for your professor a few hours a week are all considered employment and require authorization in most cases!
- F-2 dependents may NOT work.

6. Keep your address updated:

Immigration regulations required CARE has your correct local address on file at all times. You must update your address within 10 days of any move, even if the move is only temporary (for example, for a summer internship).

7. Maintain the validity of your passport:

Keep your passport valid at all times! If your passport will expire soon, you need to contact your Embassy to inquire about the procedure for extension.

Credits: Indiana University, Office of International Services (www.iub.edu)