



THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
INTERNATIONAL CENTER

IMMIGRATION HANDBOOK FOR FSU DEPARTMENTS

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Tips for Advising F-1 International Students

The International Center (IC) has immigration advisors available to assist F-1 international students with immigration issues and questions or concerns with academic and/or cultural issues.

F-1 students can see an IC Advisor daily during walk-in advising hours, or by appointment. F-1 advisors are also available by phone and email for students and FSU faculty and staff.

If you encounter an F-1 international student who needs immigration-related advising, please refer them to the International Center. For answers to frequently asked questions from FSU faculty and staff, please see the FAQs below. For more detailed F-1 status information, please refer to the International Center website at www.ic.fsu.edu.

F-1/F-2 General Information FAQs (SEVIS & Immigration Documents)

What is F-1/F-2 status & SEVIS?

Most international students at FSU are in 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 US 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. For instance, IC advisors must report changes in a student's academic program, such as a change of major or level in SEVIS.

An F-1 status holder 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 US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

An F-2 status holder is a child or spouse of an F-1. 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"



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What types of F-1 immigration documents might FSU departments encounter?

The following are the basic documents needed for F-1 travel and/or to maintain F-1 status:

- **Passport:** An F-1 student's passport should always be valid for up to 6 months in the future. F-1 students should check with the embassy of their home country for information on renewing his/her passport.
- **F-1 Visa:** This is the sticker in the student's passport, used only for entry purposes. An expired F-1 visa stamp does NOT affect a student's F-1 status while inside the US. *Special note: Canadian students do not require a visa to enter the US, but must get the I-94 card stamped F-1 & D/S.*
- **I-94:** Arrival/Departure record. This is the small white card, usually stapled to the passport. It is proof of the student's legal entry and/or exit from the US. The I-94 should always be stamped and marked Status: "F-1" Until: "D/S" (Duration of Status)
- **I-20:** This is the 3-page document issued by the International Center. It contains personal/biographical information, as well as information about the student's academic program and funding. Please note the ending date of a student's I-20 can be found on page 1, section 5.

F-1 Travel FAQs

How should departments best direct F-1 students with travel questions?

F-1 students should always be directed to the International Center if they have questions about travelling abroad. An IC advisor will need to inform the student of all necessary travel documents and visa renewal procedures.

If an OPT student is working at FSU or if an F-1 student must renew his/her visa, what information should the employer letter/department award letter include?

A departmental letter should include the student's name, job title, salary, employment dates & hours per week worked. If the student has an assistantship, the letter should include the student's stipend as well as matriculation & out-of-state tuition waiver amounts.

F-1 Enrollment & Academic FAQs

F-1 students are always required to maintain a full course of study AND to make academic progress in his/her degree program to maintain legal F-1 immigration status.

Making academic progress means that the student:

- Is enrolled full-time in a degree program, at the appropriate level
- Does not have repeated semesters of low grades or incompletes
- Has not been academically dismissed, suspended, or expelled



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What is considered full-time enrollment for an F-1 student?

The following chart helps clarify minimum enrollment requirements that enable an F-1 student to meet federal immigration regulations. **Note: If a student’s academic department requires additional enrollment, the student must also comply with the departmental policy.**

<p>Undergraduates</p>	<p>12 hours - minimum enrollment is required in both Fall and Spring semesters.</p> <p>Final Term - Minimum enrollment in the final semester is the number of hours required to complete the degree. Students must submit a <u>Final Term Form</u> to the International Center no later than 2 weeks into the final term.</p> <p>Online Classes - 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.) During the summer, students may enroll in as many online classes as desired, except when summer is the student’s first or last semester. In the student’s final term, enrollment cannot be 100% online.</p> <p>Summer Enrollment - Summer term enrollment is NOT required by immigration regulations unless Summer is the <i>first</i> semester at FSU or if it is the <i>final</i> semester. (Students must fulfill the FSU summer term requirements, unless exempt.)</p>
<p>Graduates</p>	<p>9 hours - minimum enrollment is required in both Fall and Spring semesters except in cases described below.</p> <p>3 hours - minimum enrollment is considered full-time after completing 6 thesis hours (Masters) or 24 dissertation hours (PhD). Students with assistantships or special fellowships that may stipulate higher enrollment must enroll in hours determined by department or fellowship.</p> <p>Final Term for graduate students completing a Thesis or Dissertation – To satisfy immigration requirements, F-1 students are only required to take the number of credits required to complete the degree, and are not required to enroll full time. FSU requires a minimum of 2 hours enrollment for thesis or dissertation in the final term of study (even if the final term is during the summer). Note that students with assistantships must enroll in 9-12 hours, and students with special fellowship should enroll as specified in the terms of their fellowship. All F-1 students should submit a Final Term Form to the International Center no later than 2 weeks into the final term.</p> <p>Final Term for Masters students completing coursework (non-thesis option) - To satisfy immigration requirements, F-1 students are only required to take the number of credits required to complete the degree, and are not required to enroll full time.</p>



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However, students with assistantships must enroll in 9-12 hours, and students with special fellowship should enroll as specified in the terms of their fellowship. All F-1 students should submit a Final Term Form to the International Center no later than 2 weeks into the final term. **Note:** F-1 students **MUST** be enrolled in the semester in which they complete their degree requirements, even if completing an exam for which they enrolled in a previous semester.

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.) During the summer, students may enroll in as many online classes as desired, except when summer is the student's first or last semester, In the student's final term, enrollment cannot be 100% online.

Summer Enrollment - Summer term enrollment is **NOT** required by immigration regulations unless Summer is an F-1 student's *first* semester at FSU or if it is their *final* semester. Note: Departmental policies may dictate summer registration and students working on their degrees and using university resources should be enrolled. Doctoral students should also be aware of enrollment required to meet the FSU residence requirement.



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How should academic advisors advise F-1 students who want to drop below a full course of study?

Immigration regulations only allow reductions in course load (below the minimum full-time enrollment) for a few specific academic reasons, medical reasons, and a student's final term. Authorization for a reduced course load (except in the final term when a student should submit the Final Term Form to the International Center) must be requested from the IC advisor in advance, so please refer these students to the International Center.

What are some other options to protect a student's F-1 status and/or GPA if he/she is not eligible for a Reduced Course Load (RCL)?

An F-1 student may not be allowed to go below the required immigration minimums without jeopardizing his or her immigration status. But, there still might be some "creative" solutions available to avoid damage to the GPA without causing F-1 status problems. An F-1 student could consider the following options:

- **Equal add/drop** - If a student can add an equal number of hours to the schedule, we could allow the drop with the equal hours added to keep the registration at the immigration minimum.
- **Incomplete** - Receiving an Incomplete grade in a course does not jeopardize the student's F-1 immigration status, as it doesn't change the enrollment hours. **A student should meet with the instructor to discuss whether an "I" would be an appropriate grade in their situation.** Incompletes given for classes must be removed by the end of the next semester that the student is enrolled. Failure to do so will result in an "IE" that counts as an "F" The "F" will remain until a Grade Change changing the "F" to a letter grade has been submitted. An Extension of an Incomplete Form is needed if the "I" cannot be removed by the deadline.
- **Retro-Active Withdrawal** - In this case a student must continue to attend classes, complete the course, and receive a grade. With recommendation from the professor and approval of the Academic Dean the course can be retro-actively dropped. This will not affect the immigration record, as the student was fully enrolled during the semester and only dropped the credit afterward.
- **S/U Grade** - In a few cases, a professor agrees to make the course into an S/U grade, rather than a letter grade, which saves the drop in GPA. This also requires approval from the course professor and the Academic Dean. This could cause future problems if the course is a degree requirement.

It is past the add/drop period of the semester, and an F-1 student wants to drop or add a course. As an academic advisor, I cannot just drop or add the course for an international student. What extra procedure must the F-1 student follow to make changes to his/her schedule?

The F-1 student must acquire the necessary departmental signatures on the Drop/Add Permit and then get a signature from an IC advisor before taking the Drop/Add Permit to the Registrar's. The IC will check the F-1 student's schedule to make sure that he/she does not drop below a full-course load. This is to ensure that the F-1 student does not violate his/her legal F-1 immigration status.



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What if an F-1 student wishes to withdraw from FSU or take a leave of absence?

In such cases, please refer the student to an IC advisor as soon as possible to discuss the immigration issues. If an F-1 student's academic or personal difficulties are due to a more serious situation, such as a mental or physical health problem, the student may be eligible for an authorized reduction in course load. Departments should also notify the IC of the student's plans.

What does an F-1 student need to do if he/she cannot complete the program before his/her I-20 expiration date?

In this case, a student must request an I-20 extension BEFORE the I-20 expires by completing the [I-20 Extension Request Form](#). The student's academic advisor must complete part of the form. If the student will receive departmental funding, the department will also need to include the student's funding information on pg. 2 of the extension form.

How does a student report a change of major or change of degree level to the IC?

Changes of major and changes of level are automatically reported to the International Center. IC advisors no longer need to sign Major Change Request Forms. The department will need to complete and submit a major change form to the FSU Registrar's Office. Such academic changes usually require a student to receive an updated I-20.

Employment/Social Security/Funding FAQs

Can F-1 students work ON-CAMPUS at FSU without special authorization?

Yes, F-1 students are only authorized to work **on-campus** at FSU for up to **20 hours per week** during Fall and Spring semesters without any special authorization. F-1 students may work more than 20 hours on-campus only during university breaks, or the summer semester if the summer semester is not the student's *very first* or *very last* term. All employment authorization ends once the student completes his/her degree program.

Can F-1 students work OFF-CAMPUS without special authorization?

No, F-1 students must have special authorization. If an F-1 student does not have a notation on page 3 of his/her I-20 or an employment authorization card from USCIS, he/she is NOT authorized to work off-campus. Unauthorized off-campus employment is a very serious violation of F-1 status.

What are the two most common types of off-campus work authorizations for F-1 students?

The two most common types of authorization are Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT).



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What is 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. *Please note that the student's academic advisor must complete part of the CPT forms, explaining the goals and objectives of the internship and how it is an integral part of the student's academic program. If the employment is for completion of a thesis or dissertation, the academic advisor must also include a letter.*

What is 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's use OPT after graduation. Please note that the student's academic advisor must confirm the student's expected semester of program completion in one section of the OPT form.

How should departments advise F-1 students who are having funding problems?

If an F-1 student is worried that he/she will be unable to register full-time due to lack of funds, please refer them to an IC advisor for possible funding opportunities. Some general information is available on the IC website at: <http://ic.fsu.edu/currentstudents/financialassistance.cfm>.

Can all F-1 students apply for a social security number?

No, F-1 students who are not working or receiving income for services in the US are not eligible for a Social Security number.

If an F-1 student will be working on-campus, how should department staff assist the student in applying for a social security card?

If working on-campus, the F-1 student will need a letter from his/her employing department, printed on departmental letterhead with the details of the employment. This letter must also be signed by an IC Advisor at the International Center and then taken to the Social Security Office along with the student's original immigration documents. The required letter & additional information can be found on the IC website in the Employment section at: <http://ic.fsu.edu/currentstudents/employment.cfm>).

How does an F-1 student who is authorized to work off campus apply for a social security number?

If an F-1 student has off-campus authorization for employment, a letter from the employer is not necessary. The F-1 student would only need to provide either his/her new I-20 with employment authorization noted on page 3 and/or his/her EAD card.



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Completion of Studies & Graduation FAQs

When exactly does a student's F-1 status end following program completion?

A student's F-1 status is valid for the duration of his/her current degree program. The student's F-1 status & work authorization ends on the Program Completion Date (the diploma date of the term the F-1 student completes his/her degree). The diploma date for each semester can be found on the FSU Registrar's website: registrar.fsu.edu.

Can an F-1 student delay the end of his/her F-1 status by simply failing to apply for graduation?

No. If an F-1 student completes all degree requirements and no longer requires enrollment the next semester, his/her F-1 status ends on the program completion date of the last semester of enrollment.

What is an F-1 student's 60-day grace period?

F-1 students have a 60 day grace period to remain in the U.S. following the program completion date. This does NOT include work authorization (on or off campus).

What options exist for F-1 students following their program completion date?

Students may use their 60-day grace period to choose any of the options listed below:

1. **Apply for or begin Optional Practical Training (OPT) employment**
2. **Be readmitted to FSU for a new degree program**
3. **Transfer to another U.S. school**
4. **Apply for a Change of Immigration Status**
5. **Exit the United States**

Please note that the choices require the students to inform the IC of their plans by completing the necessary processes and forms.