



## **SEVIS IMMIGRATION REGULATIONS**

*August 2007*

For All Union University F-1 Students

It is important to maintain a valid student status during your stay in the US and at Union University. The following is information for F-1 students and will help you better understand federal immigration regulations that affect you. Immigration rules can vary depending on your particular case or situation. For the most accurate information, please come to International Student Office to discuss your questions with the International Student Liaison.

**Please note that regulations are complex and subject to change. It is your responsibility to keep current of changes required and optional International Student Meetings and through updates sent to your Union e-mail account.**

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### **--- TERMS FOR F-1 STUDENTS ---**

#### **VISA**

A visa to enter the U.S. as a nonimmigrant is a stamped entry on a page of the passport. It allows you to request the immigration officer at the port of entry to grant you admission to the U.S. under conditions specified to the type of visa you hold. Application for a nonimmigrant visa usually requires a personal appearance before a consular office at a U.S. consulate or embassy. It must be accompanied by appropriate documentation (i.e. valid Form I-20 for F-1 students, valid passport, financial documents, etc.)

**Acts as a key to enter the country. Must be valid, not expired for entry.**

#### **PASSPORT**

Any travel document issued by a country's authority showing the person's origin, identity, nationality, allowing for entry into a foreign country. **Passport must be kept valid at all times during a person's stay in the U.S.**

#### **FORM I-20**

The Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Student Status (School Copy, pages 1-3). It is issued by the university to the student upon acceptance of the student to the university. **I-20 must be valid at all times while student is in the U.S.**

**FORM I-94**

The I-94 is an arrival and departure record. Every person entering the U.S. temporarily is issued an I-94. When a person enters the U.S., the Arrival Record portion of the form is detached and kept by the USCIS. The Departure Record should be stapled into the person's passport on the same page on which the visa has been stamped and will be removed and kept by the USCIS when the person departs from the U.S.

**ADMISSION NUMBER**

The Admission Number is the 11-digit number that is issued to persons entering the U.S. It is used as an identification number and is the basis for the USCIS arrival/departure database known as the Nonimmigrant Information System (NIIS). The Admission Number is found on the Form I-94.

**MAINTENANCE OF STATUS**

Once a person is admitted to the U.S. in F-1 status, he or she must meet certain obligations in order to maintain status. (See F-1 Regulations)

**FULL COURSE OF STUDY**

A full course of study is one of the requirements that has to be met for a student in F-1 status to maintain legal status in the U.S. For undergraduates, a full course of study is being enrolled in 12 credits hours per semester during the academic year.

**EXTENSION OF STAY**

F-1 students are admitted to the U.S. for "duration of status" which means the amount of time it takes to complete an educational program. If a student must remain in an educational program beyond the date originally estimated for completion of program, he or she must apply for a program extension. The application must be made at least 30 days before the completion date on Form I-20.

**EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATION**

An F-1 student may accept part-time employment at the university he or she is authorized to attend without prior approval from the USCIS provided that certain requirements are met. An F-1 student must apply for off-campus employment authorization and may receive authorization for off-campus only under conditions authorized practical training.

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## --- F-1 REGULATIONS ---

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### Name & Address Reporting:

- Students must notify the DSO (and INS) of new name/address within **10 days** of the change.
- Students may comply by notifying the DSO within 10 days; DSO must then update SEVIS within 21 days which takes care of the INS notification.
- Students must provide their physical home address unless it is impossible to receive mail there, in which case the students may provide a mailing address.
- If students provide a mailing address, they must also provide their physical home address to the DSO.

### I-20 Changes:

- Your current I-20 continues to be valid based upon the signature at the bottom of the I-20 (page 3). That signature is valid for one calendar year for entry and exit, though the International Student Office recommends you have it signed at least six months prior to travel.
- You must report changes in program of study, program end date, financial information, and obtain a new I-20 with your changes.

### Extensions:

- Students must apply for an extension of form I-20 **prior** to the current I-20 end date.
- No extension may be granted if students do not request on prior to their current I-20 end date.
- Extensions may be granted in a timely matter before the I-20 end date.

### Entry and Exit:

- Students may enter the U.S. up to 30 days before the start date on the I-20.
- Students who withdraw from school with approval from the International Student Office have a **15 day** grace period to leave the U.S. before they fall out of status.
- If the ISO did not authorize the withdrawal, the student has no grace period to leave the U.S. and is immediately out of status.
- The normal grace period to remain in the U.S. following degree completion is 60 days for F-1 students.

### Distance Education:

- Students may only take one class (3 credits) of distance learning (i.e. online course) per term if that class does not require physical attendance for classes, exams or other purposes on the campus where it is offered.

### Concurrent Enrollment:

- Students who are also enrolled at a second university in addition to Union University must provide the International Student Office with copies of their class schedules from both schools to verify combined full-time enrollment each term. ISO must receive the class schedule no later than 15 days after the Union semester has begun.

### Reduced Course Load:

- While students are required to maintain a full course of study (12 hours at the undergraduate level), students may reduce their course load full time for the following reasons:
  1. Medical: Students who fall ill or need to take maternity leave may be authorized by the ISO to reduce their course load or take no classes at all for up to 12 months per academic level. Students must provide the DSO with a letter from a licensed Medical Doctor before dropping courses.
  2. Academic: Initial difficulty with the English language or reading requirements, unfamiliarity with American teaching methods, or improper course level placement, allow the DSO to reduce the student's course load to 6 hours for one term only per academic level. The student must resume a full course load the next term, including summer.
  3. Final term: Students may take a reduced course load in their final term if only one or two classes are needed to complete the degree – but may not continue to be enrolled only for administrative purposes if all degree requirements are met.

### Transfer:

- Upon completion of a degree program, students may remain in the U.S. for up to 5 months maximum when transferring to a new degree program. The 5 month period begins on the completion date of the first degree program.
- Students who have fallen out of status are ineligible for transfer; they must either apply for reinstatement from INS or depart and re-enter the U.S. with an initial entry I-20 for a new program.
- Students wishing to transfer should notify the DSO of the date they wish to transfer and the name of the school – see “Transfer Out” form.

### Employment:

- F-1 students have a broad range of employment options, but they are not permitted to work at will in any job they choose. All F-1 employment must be approved by either the DSO or USCIS, depending on the kind of employment. Any work outside those parameters is unauthorized work and is in violation of student status, thus making the student ineligible for the normal benefits attendant to F-1 status. In particular, unauthorized employment makes a student ineligible for reinstatement.
- **On-campus employment:** may not begin earlier than 30 days prior to classes starting. Students may work up to 20 hours on campus while school is in session, and may be full-time on campus while school is not in session.
- **Off-campus employment:** students enrolled in an institution whose training program is “an integral part of an established curriculum” may apply for Curricular Practical

Training (CPT) authorization. Student must have F-1 student status for 9 months before he/she can be eligible. See CPT information for further details.

- Students may apply to get 12 months of Optional Practical Training (OPT) at each degree level after his/her completion of studies. Students must apply for OPT **before** completion of all degree requirements (thesis/dissertation defense date). Make an appointment 90 days **before** graduation. OPT is automatically terminated when students transfer to another school or begin study at a different academic level. See OPT information for more details.
- Students on OPT must report any change of name/address and interruption of employment to the DSO for the duration of authorized OPT or fall out of status.

#### Reinstatement:

- Reinstatement applications to INS must be filed within 5 months of the status violation, unless exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated by the student.
- The status violation must have resulted from circumstances beyond the student's control – which may include injury, illness, closure of school, natural disaster, or oversight or neglect on the part of the International Student Office.
- If the student has been employed without authorization, no reinstatement is possible.

#### Travel:

- Prior to traveling outside the U.S. make sure that your I-20 has been endorsed for travel by a DSO in the last six months.
- When you wish to temporarily leave the U.S. and return to Union to continue your studies, you must secure the necessary documents to allow re-entry into the United States.
- Generally to re-enter the United States after temporary absence of less than 5 months, an F-1 student must have the following documents.
  - A valid passport
  - A valid visa
  - An endorsed I-20 signature
  - Financial documentation (bank statements, sponsor's guarantees, scholarships, etc.)
  - Proof of enrollment