

Immigration 101

F-1 Students

Immigration Documents

SEVIS Record

- Electronic system that the U.S. government uses to maintain accurate and current information about non-immigrant students and their dependents
- Must always be up-to-date
- If your local address changes, you must report the change to CIE within 10 days of moving so that CIE can update your SEVIS record
- Every semester, CIE reports your enrollment in your SEVIS record

I-20:

- Shows some of the information in your SEVIS record
- Must remain valid during your entire program of study. If you cannot finish your program before the expiration date, you must apply for a new one.
- You may receive more than one I-20; keep ALL I-20s forever in a safe place
- Information should always be accurate. If you change your name, major, or degree level, you must request a new one.



Visa

- Only needed to enter the U.S.
- Can expire while inside the U.S. if your other documents are still valid
- You cannot apply for a new F-1 visa while inside the U.S.
- Always be sure that you enter the U.S. with the appropriate visa (example: If you have a B2 visa, be sure to enter on the F-1 visa to study.)

Passport

- Must remain valid at all times (be sure it is valid for at least 6 months in the future)
- If it is about to expire, contact your home government's embassy or consulate to renew or extend

I-94

- Arrival and departure record
- Found online at <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov>
- Indicates your immigration status inside the U.S., date of arrival, and length of stay permitted
- Every time you enter the U.S., be sure the officer stamps **F-1 D/S** in your passport
- Every time you enter the U.S., check the online record at i94.cbp.dhs.gov to be sure your information is correct and that you are admitted in F-1 status until D/S (Duration of Status). We recommend printing off the record and keeping a copy in your personal immigration file.

Full-Time Enrollment

As an F-1 student, you are required to enroll full-time each fall and spring semester. What is full-time?

Undergraduate Students

- Must complete at least **12 credit** hours each fall and spring semester

Graduate Students

- Must complete at least **9 credit** hours each fall and spring semester *unless* they have a 20 hour per week (50% time) assistantship position. Students with a 20 hour per week assistantship must complete at least **6 credit** hours each fall and spring semester.

Full-Time Enrollment Chart

Student Type	Minimum Credit Hours
Undergraduate Students	12
Graduate Students with assistantship of 20 hour per week assistantship (50% time)	6
Graduate Students with assistantship of less than 20 hours per week	9
Graduate Students with no assistantship	9

Which classes count as full-time?

- ✓ Classes taken for a grade (A, B, C, D, or F), Pass/Fail (P/F) or Satisfactory/No Credit (S/NC)
- ✓ One class taken online may count (up to 3 credit hours)

Which classes do not count as full-time?

- ⚠ Classes taken for audit (AU)
- ⚠ Class taken for part of the semester and withdrawn (W)
- ⚠ More than one online course or any online course that counts for more than 3 credit hours

Are there any exceptions to full-time enrollment?

Students may enroll in fewer than the minimum credit hours in the following situations:

- A student who, in the final semester of the academic program, requires less than the full-time load in order to graduate
- A student who has a medical condition that requires a reduction of course load (letter from a doctor explaining the reason(s) is required)
- A graduate student who has completed all course work and is only working on thesis/dissertation hours

Please consult with a CIE advisor before taking less than the full-time course load. If you qualify for a below full-time exception, please login to the iVols portal and submit the "Below Full-Time Request." If you have any questions, please contact a CIE advisor.

Employment

You must have authorization from CIE **before** starting work on-campus or off-campus.

On-Campus Employment

- You are eligible to work up to 20 hours per week on campus
- During official school breaks, such as summer and winter breaks, you are allowed to work over 20 hours per week on campus. Please consult with CIE about permissible dates.
- “On-campus” typically means that you receive a UT paycheck. One exception is if you work for UT Dining Services (on campus), you are allowed to receive an Aramark paycheck.
- To receive authorization to work on campus, please submit the following to CIE:
 - Employment Verification Memorandum (written by your employer)
 - Current I-20

A CIE Advisor will stamp the 2nd page of your I-20 with work permission.

Off-Campus Employment

There are three types of off-campus employment authorization. You must have authorization before working off-campus, whether the job is paid or unpaid. Timing is critical when applying for off-campus employment.

Practical Training

There are two types of Practical Training. Both must be related to your field of study and appropriate to your level of study.

- **Curricular Practical Training (CPT)**
 - CPT is designed for students who must complete an internship as part of a class or degree requirement.
 - The training must be an “integral part of an established curriculum.”
 - If the training is unpaid, you still need to apply for CPT.
- **Optional Practical Training (OPT)**
 - OPT is training that allows you to gain experience in your field of study.
 - 12 months are available per degree level. If your major is considered a STEM field, you may be eligible for an additional 17 months of OPT.
 - OPT may be used before or after completion of study.
 - A job offer is not required to apply, but it may take up to 4 months to receive approval.

Before you can apply for CPT or OPT, you are required to complete an online seminar. To learn more about Practical Training and to register for the online seminar, please visit our website at <http://international.utk.edu/practical-training/>

Economic Hardship

If there has been a serious and unexpected change in your financial situation since your arrival, you may be eligible to apply to USCIS for Economic Hardship. Speak with CIE if you believe you may be eligible.

Social Security Number (SSN)

- As an F-1 student, you must have a job offer in order to be eligible for a SSN.
- Please see the SSN handout for additional information.

Travel

Travel Inside the US

While in Knoxville, keep your documents in a safe place. When you travel outside of Knoxville, take your passport and current I-20 with you. Always take a scanned paper copy or digital copy in your cell phone.

Travel Outside the US

If you travel outside the US, you will need the following documents to re-enter the US:

- Valid Passport
- Valid F-1 Visa
- Valid I-20 with valid travel signature

If you are on OPT, you should have all of the documents above and:

- Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
- Job offer letter

Travel Signature

If you do not already have a valid travel signature on your I-20, submit a Travel Request in the iVols portal at least two weeks prior to your trip. Don't wait until the last minute! Travel signatures are valid for one year, unless you are on OPT, in which case they are valid for 6 months.

If your F-1 Visa is Expired

- Apply for a new F-1 visa while you are outside of the US
- Speak with a CIE advisor if you have questions about applying for a visa
- It is best to apply in your home country, but it might be possible to apply in another country
- You can never apply for a US visa inside the US

Travel to Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean Islands (Except Cuba)

You may be able to re-enter the US with an expired F-1 visa after a trip to Canada, Mexico, or the Caribbean Islands (except Cuba). You must meet all of the following criteria:

- Your trip is for 30 days or less
- You do not apply for a new visa during your trip
- You have a copy of your most recent I-94
- You have all of the other documents required for re-entry to the US in F-1 status
- You are not a citizen of Cuba, Iran, Syria, or Sudan

Dependents

If you have an accompanying dependent(s), CIE will issue them an F-2 I-20. Your dependent(s) may stay in the U.S. with you as long as you maintain legal immigration status. If your spouse or child stayed at home but will join you later, please submit an Add Dependent request through the iVols portal when you are ready for them to join you at UTK. Speak with a CIE advisor if you have questions.

Immigration regulations allow F-2 dependents to attend elementary, middle and high school on a full-time basis. However, F-2 dependents cannot work but may enroll in college or university study on a part-time basis. More information is available at <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/dependents>.

What if...



I need more time to finish my degree?

If you have a compelling academic or medical reason, such as a change of major, change of research topic, or a documented illness you can request a program extension. Be sure to request the extension **before** the expiration date on your I-20.

I want to drop a class after the drop/add deadline?

During the drop/add period, you can drop and add classes without contacting CIE. After the last day of drop/add, send an email to international@utk.edu with your student ID, course number, and CRN number of the class you want to drop.

I want to change my major?

Speak with an academic advisor for guidance on how to change your major. Once your major officially changes in MyUTK, CIE will issue an updated I-20 with your new major.

I want to transfer to a different school?

First, gain admission to the other school. Next, submit your admission letter and Transfer Out Request in the iVols portal. Certain deadlines will apply depending on your specific situation. Contact a CIE advisor to make sure you understand these deadlines.

I finish one degree and want to start another one?

First, gain admission to your new program. Next, submit a Change of Program Form and financial documentation to CIE. CIE will issue an updated I-20.

I want to take a semester off?

First, talk with your academic advisor. Next, you must meet with a CIE advisor to discuss your options. You cannot stay in the United States for an entire semester without being enrolled in classes. You don't have to enroll in the summer unless it is your first or last term of enrollment or your academic department requires you to enroll.

I lose my I-20?

Try your best to find it. If you still cannot find it, notify CIE so that we can re-issue an I-20 for you. Make every effort to keep all your I-20s, and all other immigration documents, in a safe and secure place so that you do not lose them.

I want a social security number?

You are only eligible for a social security number if you are working in the United States. If you have a job or an assistantship, your employer will need to write an employment verification letter for you to submit to CIE. CIE will then provide instructions on how to apply for a social security number.

I want to apply for a driver's license?

First, a CIE advisor needs to register you in SEVIS. Then, refer to our How to Obtain a Driver's License Handout for instructions on how to apply for a driver's license. You should also go to https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/safety/documents/DL_Manual.pdf to download a copy of the driver's license manual.

Glossary of Immigration Terms and Abbreviations

Academic Advisor - An academic advisor is a student's principal point of contact for academic issues that impact progress toward the degree. An academic advisor can assist a student with course planning, registration and academic counseling.

ARO/RO – Responsible Officer and Alternate Responsible Officer, the person at the University authorized to issue, update and sign DS-2019s. This person is also responsible to maintain the SEVIS record for J-1 exchange scholars and students at the University of Tennessee.

Change of Status – someone with legal immigration status in the U.S. can apply for a change in immigration status if the purpose of the stay will change. For example, if someone entered the country as a student (F-1) but now wishes to change to a dependent status (F-2) of the spouse who is a student (F-1). There are two methods to change status: Applying to USCIS for a change of status while remaining in the U.S. (takes 9-12 months) or by departing the U.S., applying for a new visa and reentering the U.S.

CBP - U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is responsible for immigration inspections at U.S. ports of entry, for the Border Patrol, and for the Customs Service.

CIE – The University of Tennessee **Center for International Education** located at 1620 Melrose Avenue. Responsibilities include: developing and managing international partnerships, welcoming and assisting international students and scholars, providing study abroad opportunities for students, and creating international and inter-cultural programming for the campus and broader community. With a staff numbering more than thirty-five individuals, CIE is organized into six major units: Confucius Institute, English Language Institute, International House, International Students and Scholar Services, Office of the Peace Corps, and Programs Abroad Office.

CIE Advisor – International student advisors who deliver on-going advising services, workshops, and seminars on immigration and non-immigration-related inquiries to students, scholars, campus and community. They also maintain compliance with U.S. regulations, issue and/or file immigration documents for students and are responsible for required SEVIS reporting and record keeping. CIE advisors are available to meet with individual students Monday – Friday from 1pm to 4pm.

CPT – Curricular Practical Training.

Dependent – a spouse or child (F-2 or J-2) of the primary F-1 or J-1 student.

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) - Formed in 2002 from the combination of 22 departments and agencies, the Department of Homeland Security works to improve the security of the United States. The Department's work includes customs, border, and immigration enforcement; emergency response to natural and manmade disasters; antiterrorism work; and cybersecurity. CBP, ICE and USCIS are three bureaus within DHS, primarily concerned with immigration issues.

DSO/PDSO – Designated School Official/Primary Designated School Official: In order for a school to be SEVP certified, it must designate employees who will assist and oversee enrolled F-1 students. Federal law requires DSOs to update and maintain student records in SEVIS. CIE advisors fulfill this role at UTK in addition to their other responsibilities.

EAD – Employment Authorization Document: the card that grants permission to work off campus. You must obtain this card before you can begin work off campus.

F-1 Student – an international student in “F-1” immigration status who is enrolled in a full course of study. F-1 students are governed by F-1 immigration regulations under the jurisdiction of ICE. All F-1 students are issued an I-20 form and have a SEVIS record.

ICE - U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is responsible for immigration enforcement, investigations, detention, removal, intelligence, and SEVIS.

I-House – International House: building at 1623 Melrose Avenue that through its staff and facilities seeks to educate and engage all students in order to help them participate as members of a global society. The I-House staff is composed of the Director of International Support Services, I-House Coordinator, Graduate Assistants and Student Assistants. The I-House offers many cultural events, international student support services, and international student associations.

Immigration Regulation – Rule governing what nonimmigrants, such as F-1 students or J-1 exchange visitors may do during their stay in the United States.

Immigration Status – Given to nonimmigrants at the port of entry (usually the arrival airport). Full-time degree-seeking students should be F-1 status and exchange visitors should be J-1 status.

ISSS – International Student and Scholar Services: The office within the University of Tennessee Center for International Education that advises international students, scholars and exchange visitors in their arrival, stay and departure in the U.S. CIE international student and scholar advisers work in this office, located in Melrose Hall.

iVols Portal - iVols is the online portal for international students, faculty, visiting scholars, UTK departments and academic advisors working with international students and scholars. iVols is used to submit various requests, updates and applications for a variety of immigration purposes.

J-1 Student – an exchange visitor in the United States for the purpose of studying.

Nonimmigrant - an alien who wishes to be admitted to the United States for a limited, temporary purpose, and who plans to depart the United States after completing that purpose.

OPT – Optional Practical Training.

Out of Status - You are responsible to understand and follow the requirements to maintain your lawful immigration status. If you fail to do so, your lawful status will be terminated as is required by law. If you are out of status for more than five months, you may be removed from the U.S. by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and/or subject to a bar from re-entering the U.S. in the future. If you think you are out of status, contact CIE immediately to review your situation. If you are out of status, you will not be eligible for a travel signature, change of status, employment or other F-1 or J-1 benefits.

Port of Entry – a place where someone may lawfully enter a country. F-1 and J-1 students normally enter through international airports that are staffed with CBP immigration and customs inspectors. I-94 records are issued at the Port of Entry.

Reinstatement – students who are out of status may apply for reinstatement to legal status. In some cases, students may also regain legal status by departure and reentry to the United States with a new I-20 or DS-2019 and a new SEVIS record.

Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) – SEVIS stands for Student and Exchange Visitor Information System. It is a nationwide, Internet-based system that the U.S. government

uses to maintain accurate and current information on non-immigrant students (F and M visa), exchange visitors (J visa), and their dependents (F-2, M-2, and J-2).

Student Exchange and Visitor Program (SEVP) - On behalf of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), SEVP manages schools, nonimmigrant students in the F and M visa classifications and their dependents. SEVP uses the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) to track and monitor schools and F-1 nonimmigrants while they visit the United States and participate in the U.S. education system.

Terminate (SEVIS Record) – To close out a student or exchange visitor’s SEVIS record. When a status violation occurs, ISSS may be required to terminate a student’s SEVIS record. Termination of a SEVIS record (i.e. an I-20) is serious and can have negative consequences for a student and his/her ability to stay in the U.S. Grounds for termination of a SEVIS record include but are not limited to: Unauthorized employment, Unauthorized withdrawal from classes, Unauthorized drop below full course of study, expulsion or suspension, Failure to enroll in classes. In most cases, the termination of a student’s SEVIS record results in the student’s immediate departure from the US. The departure is necessary to avoid more severe consequences. Additionally, in cases of terminations, a student forfeits the 60 day grace period. If your SEVIS record is terminated, you can only regain your status by travel or reinstatement.

U.S. Department of State (DOS) - is the United States federal executive department responsible for international relations of the United States, equivalent to the foreign ministry of other countries. The immigration functions of the Department of State are shared by two Bureaus. The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) manages the J Exchange Visitor Program. The Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA) contains the **Visa Office**, which recommends and administers legislation, regulations, policies, and procedures relating to **visa issuance** and refusal at U.S. consular offices overseas. DOS uses the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) to track and monitor schools, exchange visitor programs, and J nonimmigrants during their stay in the United States.

United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) - The bureau of the Department of Homeland Security that is responsible for most application and petition adjudications, such as change of status, reinstatement and employment authorization.

VISA - A citizen of a foreign country who seeks to enter the United States generally must first obtain a U.S. visa, which is placed in the traveler’s passport, a travel document issued by the traveler’s country of citizenship. Having a U.S. visa allows you to travel to a port of entry, airport or land border crossing, and request permission of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Customs and Border Protection (CBP) inspector to enter the United States. You can only obtain a visa by applying to a U.S. embassy or consulate located outside the United States, usually in the home country.

Glossary Sources:

- **NAFSA: Association of International Educators Adviser’s Manual**
- **CIE web pages at www.utk.edu**
- **www.dhs.gov**
- **<http://travel.state.gov>**
- **www.studyintstates.org**
- **[Thefreedictionary.com](http://thefreedictionary.com)**