

Maintaining Your F1 Immigration Status

How to Maintain Your F-1 Immigration Status in the U.S.

To maintain your legal status in the United States as an F1 student, you must remember these important requirements:

- 1) **Report to the OISS** no more than 7 days from your arrival in the USA and definitely no more than 30 days after start date of I-20
- 2) **Always enroll FULL-TIME during the academic year. Full-time is 12 units or more for ESL, Certificate, & Undergraduate; 8 for Graduate.**
- 3) **Update your local address within 10 days of moving**
- 4) **Keep your immigration documents VALID and CURRENT:**
 - a) KEEP YOUR PASSPORT VALID
 - b) Apply for an EXTENSION at the OISS BEFORE the "completion of studies" date in Item 5 of your I-20
 - c) Be sure your I-20 states the correct degree program and level in Item 4
- 5) **If you plan to transfer to another school, come** in to the OISS to discuss the immigration status transfer.
- 6) **Notify the OISS of a new degree program no later than 60 days after graduating**
- 7) **NEVER work off-campus without PRIOR authorization**
- 8) **Notify the OISS when you leave the U.S. or change visa status**
- 9) If you **TRAVEL** outside the United States, **be SURE to have the proper re-entry documents**

1. Report to the OISS no more than 7 days after entering the country and definitely no more than 30 days after start date of I-20

It is REQUIRED that you come to the Office of International Student Services no more than 7 days after you enter the country if you are a new student and definitely no more than 30 days after the start date of your I-20 (listed in Item 5 of your I-20) if you are entering the U.S. to begin a program of study. If you are transferring your immigration status to La Sierra from another U.S. institution, we will then register you in the SEVIS database and complete the transfer process when you check in.

2. Always Enroll Full Time

F-1 students must maintain full-time student status every semester. For ESL, certificate, and undergraduate students, full-time is at least 12 credits each quarter; as a graduate student, you must be register for at least 8 units. There are some rare exceptions to this regulation; however, please talk to the OISS staff BEFORE you drop below full time enrollment or take a leave of absence.

3. Update your Local Address

You must do this by updating your local address Self-Serve AND notifying the OISS. You are required to use a physical residential address and not a PO Box or a La Sierra department address.

4. Keep your Immigration Documents VALID and CURRENT

You should make photocopies of your immigration documents and keep the copies and originals in a safe place. Photocopy:
* the passport pages with your personal information and picture
* the passport page containing the U.S. visa stamp
* both sides of your I-94 Form
* your I-20, pages 1-3

a) Keep your passport valid

You should keep your passport valid while you are studying in the U.S. Consult your country's consulate or embassy in the U.S. to renew your passport. You can find the contact information for your consulate at: <http://travel.state.gov>.

b) F-1 Extension

The end date of your immigration status is written on your I-20 as the "completion of studies" date, in item #5 (not the end date of your visa stamp). * If you are unable to complete your course of study by that time, you must apply for an extension BEFORE the I-20 completion date. If you do not complete the extension before that date, you will be out of status. Pick up an F-1 Program Extension packet from the OISS to begin the process.

c) Change of Degree Program or Level

If you are changing degree levels or programs within La Sierra University, you must apply at the OISS for a new I-20.

5. Discuss Transfer Plans with an OISS advisor

If you plan to transfer to another school, the OISS will need to complete the immigration transfer procedure. Discuss your plans at the OISS.

6. Notify the OISS of a new degree program no later than 60 days after graduating

If you plan to go on to another program of study after graduating from La Sierra, either at La Sierra or at another school, you **MUST** contact the OISS and complete the appropriate immigration procedures **NO LATER THAN 60 DAYS** after graduating from the first degree.

7. Never Work Off-campus Without Prior Authorization

Employment opportunities for international students in the U.S. are restricted by law and fall in to types of employment:

On-campus Employment: Enrolled F-1 students are permitted to work on campus for 20 hours per week during academic year and 40 hours per week during summer and winter breaks.

Off-campus Employment: Off-campus employment is any type of work or services performed in exchange for money, tuition, fees, books, supplies, room, food or any other benefit that is not on the La Sierra campus. A work permit is required **BEFORE** any off-campus work is allowed. See the staff in the OISS for advice and assistance.

8. Notify the OISS When You Leave the U.S. or Change Visa Status

When you finish your program and leave the U.S. permanently or you change to another visa status (for instance if an employer plans to do an H1B visa application for you after you graduate or finish your OPT), come to the OISS or email us to notify us of your plans.

9. Traveling outside of the United States/Re-entering the U.S. after a Temporary Absence

To re-enter the U.S., you need to have the following documents:

- valid passport (except Canadians unless entering from outside the Western Hemisphere)
- valid F-1 or F-2 visa stamp (except Canadians)
- current I-20 with a valid signature (see I-20 Endorsement)
- proof of financial support (bank statements and/or scholarship, financial aid or TA/RA letter)
- proof of enrollment (certificate of enrollment or transcript). You can obtain a certificate of enrollment from the OISS web site.

Traveling to Canada

Before traveling to Canada, come to the OISS to check

visa requirements and to pick up a Canadian visitor visa application if one is required (or on the web at <http://cicnet.ci.gc.ca>). You can re-enter the U.S. from Canada with an expired U.S. visa stamp if **ALL** of the following apply to you:

- You have a valid passport with an expired non-immigrant visa stamp, a valid I-20 or DS-2019, and you keep your I-94 card when leaving the U.S. and entering Canada
- Your visit to Canada will be less than 30 days
- You do NOT apply for a U.S. visa stamp while in Canada
- You are NOT a national of one of the following countries: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Sudan, Cuba, or North Korea.

Renewing Your Visa Stamp

If you or your dependents need to renew your visa stamps in order to reenter the U.S., you must apply in person to a U.S. embassy or consulate abroad. Applicants are normally required to submit the following documentation:

- valid passport
- current passport-size photographs
- valid Form I-20 (complete three-page form)
- proof of financial support (bank statements and/or scholarship, financial aid or TA/RA letter)
- proof of enrollment (certificate of enrollment or transcript). You can ask for certificate on our web site.

I-20 Endorsement

You need to have a valid signature from OISS staff on your I-20 in order to re-enter the U.S. The signature is valid for 12 months.

I-20 Endorsement for Canadians or students on OPT

Canadians and students on Optional Practical Training need a signature from OISS staff within the last six months to be valid for re-entry to the U.S.

F-2 Dependents

The spouse or child of an F-1 student enters the U.S. in F-2 status. Any student wishing to bring a spouse and/or child to the U.S. should visit the OISS to have the necessary documents prepared. People in F-2 status are not eligible for employment and may not enroll in a course of study. For traveling and re-entering the U.S., F-2 dependents need all the same documents as the F-1 would need as outlined above including an I-20 that is produced with the F-2's biographical information.

****Notes on Visa Stamps and Immigration Status**

Visa Stamp

The visa stamp in your passport was obtained at a U.S. embassy or consulate abroad and is used for

entering the U.S. The visa stamp functions as a key to enter the U.S. Once you are here in the U.S., you do not need to keep your visa stamp current. It is only when you are leaving the U.S. and need to return that you must be sure that you have a valid U.S. visa stamp to re-enter the U.S. [**Note:** Canadian citizens are not required to have a passport (if entering the U.S. from within the Western hemisphere) or visa stamp, but they must show their I-20 and proof of Canadian citizenship at the U.S. port of entry.]

Immigration Status

Immigration status is granted at the U.S. port of entry.

Most of you have F-1 student status. In most situations your visa type and immigration status are the same, unless you have changed your immigration status after entering the U.S. For instance, some F-1 students have changed their status to F-2 (the dependent of F-1 student) or to another temporary immigration status. To maintain your legal status in the U.S., check your I-20 (not the visa stamp in your passport). For F-1 students, the "completion of studies" date under item 5 on your I-20 Form is the end date of your immigration status.

Immigration Questions? Come visit us at the OISS.

If at any point you have questions about your immigration status or plans you have that may be impacted by immigration regulations, please contact the OISS. The OISS has the most current and accurate immigration information and we are dedicated to helping you achieve your educational goals while here at La Sierra University.

Office of International Student Services

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Advising Hours:

Monday - Thursday: 9-12:00; 1:00-4:30

Friday 9:00-11:30am