



## Immigration Basics for F-1 Students

### International Student Services Office

The International Student Services Office (ISSO) is an advocate for international students at Texas A&M University-Commerce. ISSO international student advisors are available to answer your questions related to your visa status, academics, personal matters, or other topics. It is your responsibility to know your visa status rules and regulations and it is your responsibility to maintain your visa status.

**Maintaining Your F-1 Visa Status:** Below are some of the most common F-1 regulations. Please contact the ISSO with any questions or concerns.

- 1) Keep your documents up to date:
  - a) **I-20:** Do not let your I-20 expire. **If you need an extension of your I-20 program end date (line 5 of the I-20), please contact the ISSO at least 30 days prior to your program end date on line 5 of your I-20.** Keep all information on your I-20- academic major, financial information- current at all times. To update please contact the ISSO or submit a request form by clicking [here](#).
  - b) **Passport:** **Do not let your passport expire.** Your passport must be valid for at least six (6) months beyond the date of entry into the U.S. You can renew your passport in your home country or by contacting your country's Consulate in the U.S. Please note that the renewal process for some countries may take a few months so apply for a renewal in a timely manner. If you lose your passport/visa please contact the ISSO and your local police immediately.
  - c) **I-94:** Your I-94 is your Arrival/Departure card that you receive each time you enter the U.S. and turn in each time you depart the U.S. **Keep the card stapled in your passport opposite your visa.** Your I-94 and the I-94 of any dependents must be stamped "D/S" for duration of status. If your I-94 or your dependent's I-94 has an expiration date please contact the ISSO. If you lose your I-94 please contact the ISSO immediately.
  - d) **Visa:** Your visa is permission to enter the U.S. **Your visa may expire while you are in the U.S. and it will have no impact on your status, but you will need to renew your visa if you depart the U.S.** For visa renewal information please click [here](#). It is acceptable for your visa to have another school's name on it. If you lose your passport/visa please contact the ISSO and your local police immediately. **DO NOT enter the U.S. under another visa category (B visa, visa waiver program, etc.) without contacting the ISSO.**

**Address Update:** The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) requires all F-1 international students to submit any change of address to the ISSO within 10 days of moving. The ISSO will require your current physical address where you reside and not a mailing address or alternate address. To submit any change of address please click [here](#).

**Maintain a Full Course of Study:** All F-1 international students are required by the USCIS to enroll in a full course of study each fall and spring semester. **A full course of study is a minimum of nine (9) semester credit hours each fall and spring semester for graduate students.** Web enhanced "E"

courses are considered face to face classes. Only one (1) online “W” course (three 3 hours) will count toward this full course of study requirement. **A full course of study is a minimum of twelve (12) semester credit hours each fall and spring semester for undergraduate students.** Web enhanced “E” courses are considered face to face courses. Only one (1) online “W” course (three 3 hours) will count toward this full course of study requirement. **Students in the English Language Institute will enroll in a minimum of 21.5 hours that will be monitored by the ELI staff.** For more information regarding the full course of study requirement please click [here](#).

If you need to enroll in less than a full course of study you **MUST** have the permission of an international advisor at the ISSO **BEFORE** enrolling in less than a full course of study. USCIS allows the following exceptions to the full course of study:

1. Students in their last semester before graduation may enroll in less than a full course of study. If you have only one course left to graduate this course must be face to face and cannot be an online “W” course. If you have two courses left to graduate then at least one course must be face to face and cannot be an online “W” course. If you have more than two courses the majority of your classes will need to be face to face courses.
2. Students with a full-time graduate assistantship (GA) may enroll for six (6) semester credit hours but will need to provide proof of their GA to the ISSO.
3. Students working on their thesis/dissertation may enroll in less than a full course of study.
4. Students concurrently enrolling at another school may enroll in less than a full course of study but **students enrolling concurrently MUST contact the ISSO prior to enrolling concurrently for permission.**
5. USCIS allows for limited exceptions due to medical conditions/illnesses and cultural related concerns. Students **MUST** contact the ISSO to discuss their situation and extensive documentation is required before permission will be granted.

Students who meet the exemptions to the full course of study listed in numbers 1-4 above will need to submit the Report Less than Required Hours form **PRIOR** to the semester they will enroll in less than a full course of study. Please click [here](#) to submit the form.

**On-campus Employment:** **F-1 international students are allowed to work on-campus without the permission of the ISSO or USCIS up to 19 hours per week (student worker) or 20 hours per week (GA) during the semester.** Students may work up to 40 hours per week during the semester break, holidays, and summer. For more information please click [here](#).

**Off-campus Employment:** F-1 international **MAY NOT** work off-campus without permission from an international advisor at the ISSO and/or USCIS. For F-1 international students, off-campus work authorization is provided via the last page (travel signature page) of their I-20 and/or an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). **Students without this proof of work authorization who work off-campus will be considered in violation of their visa status and their SEVIS record and I-20 will be terminated.** USCIS rules of eligibility for reinstatement state students whose SEVIS record and I-20 are terminated due to unauthorized off-campus employment will not be eligible for reinstatement. For more information please click [here](#).

**Traveling Outside the U.S.:** Prior to departing the U.S it is strongly recommended that international students review their visa, passport, I-94, and I-20 to ensure all documents are valid and correct. For more information on traveling outside the U.S. please click here and [here](#).

**F-2 Dependents:** An F-2 dependent’s visa status is directly related to the principal F-1’s visa status. If an F-1 is out of status then all F-2’s under the F-1 principal are considered out of status. F-2 dependent’s may not work on or off-campus or study except for recreational purposes only.

**Students on 12-month Optional Practical Training:** Students on 12-month Optional Practical Training (OPT) employment are still under the F-1 visa and will be required to abide by the rules and regulations of the F-1 visa. For more information please click [here](#) or go to our [website](#). The rules for students on 12-month OPT are as follows:

1. Students must be employed in a field that is directly related to their academic major listed on their OPT I-20.
2. Students on OPT must work a minimum of 20 hours a week in a paid or unpaid position.
3. Students must report any change of address to the ISSO within 10 days of moving. The ISSO will require your current physical address of where you reside. To submit any change of address please click [here](#).
4. Students must report any employment information to the ISSO when they find employment and/or if they change employers. Please submit this information via our [OPT Employment Reporting Form](#).

**Students on 17-month OPT Extension:** Students on 17-month OPT Extension employment are still under the F-1 visa and will be required to abide by the rules and regulations of the F-1 visa. For more information please click [here](#) or go to our [website](#). The rules for students on the 17-month OPT Extension are as follows:

1. Students must be employed in a field that is directly related to their academic major listed on their OPT I-20.
2. Students on OPT must work a minimum of 20 hours a week in a **paid** position.
3. All employers during the 17-month OPT Extension must be registered with [E-verify](#).
4. Students must report any change of address to the ISSO within 10 days of moving. The ISSO will require your current physical address of where you reside. To submit a change of address please click [here](#).
5. Students must report any employment information to the ISSO when they find employment and/or if they change employers. Please submit this information via our [OPT Employment Reporting Form](#).