

Maintaining Status: An Overview of F-1/J-1 Students

It is critical for international students to always maintain their immigration status. Global Engagement is here to advise you and help you better understand the immigration regulations governing your status, but it is your own responsibility to maintain your status. Failure to maintain the terms and conditions of your non-immigrant student status can jeopardize your ability to legally stay in the United States.

While not exhaustive, please see below some key requirements to maintain your status.

1. Maintain a valid I-20/DS-2019 and passport.

As an F-1/J-1 student, make sure your I-20/DS-2019 is always valid and accurate. Pay special attention to your program end date (*Program of Study* section on page 1 of your I-20/DS-2019). If your I-20/DS-2019 will expire before you finish your program, you will need to request an extension from Global Engagement at least a month in advance. You should discuss your new expected end date with your academic advisor, and then submit a completed extension request form to the office of Global Engagement. Additionally, if you change your degree level, program, source of funding, or number of F-2/J-2 dependents, you will need to obtain a new I-20/DS-2019 from Global Engagement. Please be aware that J-1 extensions have a limit based on the category you belong to.

Be sure you have a valid travel signature from a DSO on your I-20/DS-2019 prior to traveling outside the U.S. Travel signatures are valid for one year during your study or until the Program End Date, whichever comes earlier. *If you are on Optional Practical Training (OPT), the travel signature is only valid for 6 months!* Please request your travel signatures at least two weeks before you intend to leave the country.

If you decide to transfer to another school in the U.S., you will need to request a transfer of your SEVIS record before beginning studies at your new school.

Remember to sign your I-20 on the student attestation section on page 1, as your I-20 is not valid without this!

Note: It is your responsibility to keep all of your I-20s/DS-2019s from each of the schools you attend in the U.S. You should not throw any of your I-20s/DS-2019s away. If you lose or severely damage your current I-20/DS-2019 from The Chicago School, you may request a new I-20 from Global Engagement.

2. Maintain full-time enrollment.

In order to maintain status, F-1/J-1 students must be enrolled full-time each semester. As an international student in F-1/J-1 status, you are not eligible to study part-time, unless you meet one of the exceptions below and have an authorized Reduced Course Load. The nature of academic programs at The Chicago School requires all students to be enrolled full-time during the summer semester. Students do not need to be enrolled during official breaks between the semesters.

Exceptions to full-time enrollment:

Immigration regulations do provide some exceptions to the full-time enrollment requirement in special situations. However, all exceptions **MUST** be authorized by Global Engagement before you drop below full time. Dropping below full time without authorization is a violation of your F-1/J-1 status.

A) *Academic difficulties.* Global Engagement may authorize a reduced course load on account of a student's *initial* difficulty with the English language or reading requirements, unfamiliarity with U.S. teaching methods, or improper course level placement. This type of reduced course load is only possible during the first couple of semesters.

(B) *Medical conditions.* Global Engagement may authorize a reduced course load (or, if necessary, no course load) due to a student's temporary illness or medical condition. In order to qualify, the student must provide medical documentation from a licensed medical doctor or clinical psychologist to substantiate the illness or medical condition. Please be aware that pregnancy is not considered as a medical condition unless it is associated with complications requiring treatment.

(C) *Completion of course of study.* Global Engagement may authorize a reduced course load in the student's final term, semester, or session if fewer courses are needed to complete the course of study.

To learn more and discuss if you qualify for a reduced course load, please connect with a DSO from Global Engagement before dropping any courses.

3. Adhere to grace periods.

Be aware of the grace periods associated with your status – this is very important when the U.S. government starts to enforce the regulations on Unlawful Presence:

- F-1 Students: You have a 60-day grace period following the completion of your degree program and following the completion of your Optional Practical Training (if applicable).
- J-1 Students: You have a 30-day grace period following the completion of your degree program and following the completion of your Academic Training (if applicable).
- If you receive authorization from Global Engagement to withdraw from all classes or take a Leave of Absence (LOA), you have a 15-day grace period during which you must depart the U.S.
- If you withdraw from all classes without first receiving authorization from Global Engagement, you have no grace period and must depart the U.S. immediately.

4. Work only with authorization.

All international students must have the proper authorization before they begin working.

- F-1 students are automatically authorized to work on campus once classes start, but are limited to working 20 hours per week total (for all on-campus jobs combined) while school is in session. However, you must notify your DSO about the employment.
- To work off-campus, you must be authorized for Curricular Practical Training (CPT) or Optional Practical Training (OPT). Attend an upcoming workshop and visit the employment pages of the Global Engagement website to learn more: [International Student Employment](#)
- Prior to committing to any type of work, practicum/internship, or volunteer position, whether paid or unpaid, be sure to discuss your plans with your DSO prior to starting the position. Unauthorized employment is a violation of your non-immigrant status.

- F-2 dependents may NOT work but may study and enroll part-time with The Chicago School.
- J-1 Students: please contact your ARO for more details. Your Academic Training duration varies depends on the program and category.

5. Keep your address updated.

Immigration regulations require that we have your correct local address and email on file and updated in SEVIS at all times. You must notify Global Engagement with your updated address within 10 days of any move, even if the move is only temporary (for example, for a summer internship). You must also update your new physical locations through [SEVIS Portal](#) when you are on Post-Completion OPT.

6. Maintain a valid passport.

Always keep your passport valid! If your passport expires soon, you need to contact your embassy or consulate to inquire about the procedure to renew. When you travel abroad, your passport must be valid for at least another 6 months from the date when you re-enter the U.S.

7. Abide by Federal Law.

International students must abide by Federal Law and Regulations. If something is legal in the state where your campus is, it does not necessarily mean it is legal at the federal level. For example, medical and recreational marijuana is legal in many states in the U.S., but it is still illegal by Federal Law. Please reach out to your DSO if you have any questions.

When in doubt, ask!

If you have a question, concern, or want to discuss how something impacts your international student status, reach out to a member of the Global Engagement team. We are here to help!

Contact us: international@thechicagoschool.edu