

Maintaining Status: An Overview of F-1/J1 Students

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It is very important for international students to maintain their immigration status at all times. International Programs and Services (IPS) 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 nonimmigrant status can jeopardize your non-immigrant student status and ability to legally stay in the United States.

While not exhaustive, please see below the major steps required in order to maintain your non-immigrant status.

To Stay In Legal Status a Student Must:

1. Maintain a valid I-20/DS-2019 (F1/J1 Students) 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 IPS at least a month in advance after you discuss with your academic advisor and fill out the [Extension Request Form](#) and collect a signature from your Academic Advisor. 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 IPS. Please be aware of that J-1 extension has limit based on the category you belong to. Please contact your advisor for more details.

Be sure you have a valid signature from IPS 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 Post Optional Practical Training, the travel signature is only valid for 6 months!* Please request your travel signatures at least 1 month 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.

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 IPS.

2. Maintain full-time enrollment (F1/J1 Students):

In order to maintain status, F-1/J-1 students must be enrolled full-time each semester. *A full time enrollment is when you enroll total credit hours required by your academic program in order to graduate within the normal length of study.* See the Student Handbook for additional information on enrollment requirements. As an international student in F1/J1 status, you are not eligible for Reduced-Load. Depending on your program, you may have different enrollment requirements. Although immigration regulations do grant provisions for F-1/J-1 students to take a break

during the institution's vacation period (typically the summer), the lock step nature of the academic programs at The Chicago School requires all students to be enrolled full time during the summer. 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 IPS before you drop below full time. Dropping below full time without authorization from IPS is a violation of your F-1/J-1 status.

A) *Academic difficulties.* IPS 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 only applies towards the first couple of semesters.

(B) *Medical conditions.* IPS 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 an IPS advisor to substantiate the illness or medical condition. Please be aware of that pregnancy is not considered as a medical condition unless it associates with some complications requiring treatment.

(C) *Completion of course of study.* IPS 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 about these exceptions or see if you qualify for a reduced course load, please make an appointment to see an advisor in IPS before you drop any classes.

3. Adhere to grace periods-F1/J1 Students

Be aware of the grace periods associated with your status – this is very important when 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 IPS 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 IPS, you have no grace period and must depart the U.S. immediately.

4. Work only with authorization

All international students must have permission either from IPS or USCIS before they begin working.

- F-1 students are automatically authorized to work on campus once classes have begun, but are limited to working to 20 hours per week total (for all jobs combined) while school is in session. However, you must notify your DSO about the employment.
- To work off-campus, you must apply and receive authorization before beginning to work. Check out the [employment section of the IPS website](#) for information related to off-campus employment.
- Prior to committing to any type of work, practicum/internship, volunteer position, paid or unpaid, be sure to discuss your plans with your DSO prior to starting the position. Unauthorized employment is violation of your non-immigrant status.
- F-2 dependents may NOT work but may study and enroll part-time with TCSP
- 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 IPS has your correct local address and email on file at all times. You must update your 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 Post-Completion OPT.

6. Maintain a valid passport:

Keep your passport valid at all times! If your passport will expire 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 at least for 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. It is legal in the state where your campus is, it doesn't mean it is legal for an international student. 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.