IMMIGRATION INFORMATION
FOR F-1 VISA STUDENTS

The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is a branch of the Department of Homeland Security, which is a department of the national government of the United States of America. As an international student, you are required to maintain your immigration status at all times. It is YOUR responsibility to be aware of immigration regulations. **Failure to follow these regulations, whether intentional or not, is a violation of your immigration status.** You will then need to apply for reinstatement and you run the risk of being asked to leave the country. Other consequences from loss of status include loss of legal employment and loss of certain benefits such as official signatures for travel purposes. The personnel at the Office of International Student Services are Designated School Officials (DSOs), appointed by Andrews University and authorized by the USCIS to help and advise you regarding US Immigration laws and regulations. The role of the DSO is for advising and interpreting immigration guidelines to guide you while you are student here. As stated above, maintaining status is the responsibility of the student. The Office of International Student Services was established to advise and guide international students in matters related to USCIS laws and regulations while they are studying at Andrews University.

**DEFINITION OF TERMS**

**USCIS**
The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services.

**OISSP**
Office of International Student Services and Programs.

**DSO**
Designated School Official (DSO). This refers to persons authorized to sign your I-20s for travel, certify application forms for employment, etc.

**I-20**
Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Student Status. The I-20 is needed to depart from and return to the US. It must be signed by DSO at Office of International Student Services upon your arrival to campus and before you depart from the US. It is your responsibility to ensure that the I-20 is valid at all times while you are in the US. If your I-20 is about to expire and you need additional time to complete your program of study, it is your responsibility to request for an extension of it. If you are starting a new program of study or changing your educational level, you must request for a new I-20. The student should always have an updated I-20 and keep it in a safe place.

**DS 2019**
The DS-2019 is a multi-purpose document issued by a U.S. government-approved institution (or organization) certifying that your admission into a program has been accepted and that you have demonstrated sufficient financial resources to stay in the U.S. for the length of the DS-2019 form. The DS-2019 is officially titled the "Certificate of Eligibility" because with it, you are "eligible" to apply for a J-1 visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate abroad. Your spouse or children will also each need their own DS-2019 to obtain J-2 dependent status, if desired.

**VISA**
A visa stamp (F1 or J1) is placed in your passport by a US Consular Officer abroad when you present the I-20 (F1) and DS 2019 (J1). The visa is for entry purposes ONLY. Do not confuse the validity of your visa with the validity of your I-20. B-1 visitors for business and B-2 visitors for
pleasure are prohibited from "enrolling in a course of study" unless they apply for and USCIS approves a change from B status to F-1 or M-1 student status.

**D/S**
Duration of Status. The length of time that you are allowed to legally stay in the US which is defined as the time needed to complete your degree, plus any authorized practical training after you complete your studies, plus a 60 day grace period in which to depart the country.

**I-94**
previously given in paper form, now automated and you may retrieve it from: https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html.

In addition to keeping your documents in a safe place, it is a good practice to make copies of all your legal documents for records:
- Passport (ID page and any revalidations)
- Visa
- I-20 (1st and last page)
- I-94 (front & back)
- Birth certificates (if applicable)

**PASSPORTS**
Your passport must be valid at all times. You should plan to renew your passport at least 6 months before it expires. Contact your country’s embassy or consulate office to have it renewed (www.embassy.org). Once renewed, our office will need a copy to keep in your file.

**GUEST STUDENT AT ANOTHER SCHOOL**
With an Andrews University named I-20, Andrews University is the school the student is authorized to attend. It is possible to take classes at another school (provided that the other school allows it) and also after you have attended for at least 2 consequent semesters with an Andrews University I-20. Please, stop by OISSP for more information.

**TRANSFER OUT TO ANOTHER SCHOOL IN THE UNITED STATES**
If you intend to transfer to another school for any reason during your program or after completing a degree, you will need to provide Office of International Student services, Andrews University with your admittance letter from the new school.

**DEFINITION OF FULL COURSE OF STUDY**
USCIS requires F-1 students to enroll full-time every semester at the school they are authorized to attend. Full-time class enrollment is as follows:

- Undergraduate 12 credits (minimum)
- Graduate 8 credits (minimum)
- Master of Divinity 9 credits (minimum)
- English Language Institute 12-16 credits

- Audited credits and Withdrawals do not count toward maintaining legal student status. If you are going to receive an In-complete grade or DG grade at the end of a semester, you have to fulfill the requirement/s to
receive a letter grade for these prior to the start of the next semester. If there are no classes being offered for the specific degree, “fluff” classes or additional classes must still be taken in order to reach the minimum number of credits to maintain legal student status.

- Distance Education/online classes limit: No more than the equivalent of one on-line/distance education class or 3 credits per semester (for Undergraduate) or 2 credits (for Graduate student) may count towards the "full course of study" requirement.

- You will automatically lose your legal status if you fall below the above-mentioned minimum fulltime requirement. Consequently, you may have to apply for reinstatement (restoring one’s legal status).

- The consequences of losing your legal student status are: 1) You will not be able to study and 2) you cannot apply to the USCIS for such privileges as CPT, OPT or program extension.

- Summer semester is your vacation semester (if you have been enrolled as fulltime student for 2 prior semesters). You do not have to enroll or you can enroll for a lesser course load during this term. However, if summer semester is your first semester of attendance, then you have to be enrolled for full study load.

- If you have completed all requirements for your degree (marching in graduation is irrelevant), you are required to leave the country within a grace period of 60 days. You are not allowed to stay in the country to finish any Incompletes or DGs. Students who do not register for the following semester will be considered out of status. Taking the semester off is not applicable for those who do not have any more classes (required or elective) to register for their degree. You cannot take fluff classes in order to stay in the country after you have registered for all required and elective classes for your degree.

- Exceptions to the full course-of-study requirement (appropriate documentation is required):
  1. Medical problems—you must provide a statement from the health-care practitioner requiring or recommending the interruption or reduction in studies.
  2. Formal course-work completed—If a graduate student is engaged in comprehensive exam preparation, project thesis, or dissertation, they should be enrolled as such or obtain documentation from their academic advisor stating that formal coursework is complete, that the student is engaged in these projects or dissertation, and that they are considered as pursuing a full course of study.
  3. Completing program during current semester—if a student has less than the minimum to complete, the student should provide documentation from an academic advisor that the student is completing their final credits in the current semester.
  4. Optional Practical Training (OPT)—Students engaged in Optional Practical Training (after you have graduated) are considered as maintaining their status. A student in full-time curricular practical training is considered pursuing a full course of study. A student engaged in part-time curricular practical training or optional practical training would be required to enroll concurrently.

**PROGRAM EXTENSION FOR F-1 STUDENTS**

F-1 students are allowed to stay in the US until the completion of a degree program or the completion date stated on No. 5 in your I-20, whichever comes first. However, if you will not complete your program by the date stated in section #5, you must apply for an extension of your I-20 no more than 30 days BEFORE the current expiration date. Extensions cannot be given after the I-20 expires. If your I-20 expires and you have not extended it before the date stated in #5 of your I-20, you are in violation of your student status and will have to request USCIS for reinstatement to student status if you plan to continue studying.
NEW I-20

International students are required to get a new I-20 every time they change their major, program and/or academic level. Students have 60 days after completing a degree to get a new I-20 for a new program, as long as the student is still in the US.

TRACKING SYSTEM

The USCIS uses a web-based system called SEVIS to monitor international students. This system collects the following data from all universities and colleges that is required to be submitted electronically to the USCIS:

A. Date of commencement of studies. This means that within 30 days of the enrollment period, the school must inform the USCIS of any international student’s failure to enroll or attend classes.
B. Degree program and field of study.
C. Curricular Practical training and Optional practical training (beginning/ending date).
D. Termination date and reason, if known.
E. Current academic and program status of the student.
F. Any failure to enroll, maintain status or complete the program.
G. Any disciplinary action taken against the student due to criminal conviction (domestic violence, sexual harassment, etc).

General requirements for maintaining status:

1. Have a valid passport at all times.
2. Attend the school you were authorized to attend.
3. Continue to carry a full course of study.
4. Leave the United States by the anticipated completion date shown on Form I-20, or, by that date, apply through the OISSP office for a program extension.
5. Apply through the OISSP office to continue from one educational level to another at the same school.
6. Limit employment to a total of 20 hours per week on campus while school is in session.
7. Refrain from off-campus employment (unless you have authorization from the US government).

Required SEVIS I-901 Fee:

You are required to pay the $200 SEVIS fee while you are in the US under the following conditions:

1. Renewing expired US visa in the passport.
2. If you lose your student status and need to apply for reinstatement.
3. Being out of the US for more than 5 months.

EMPLOYMENT

Immigration laws are very strict about employment. If you need to work, make sure you comply with these laws. UNAUTHORIZED OFF-CAMPUS EMPLOYMENT CAN LEAD TO DEPORTATION.

USCIS permits F-1 students to work on-campus up to 20 hours per week while school is in session, and full-time during vacations, breaks, and holidays. You must present your passport and USCIS documents to the Office of Human Resources, 2nd floor of Administration Building. In addition, you are required to complete Form I-9 (Employment Eligibility Verification Document) and have a social security number before beginning
any work or assistantship on campus. On-campus employment is not permitted by the USCIS after completion of a degree unless you have a new I-20 for another program of study at Andrews University, another institution or permission from USCIS.

Permission for off-campus employment is given for 1) severe economic hardship, 2) curricular practical training (CPT), and 3) optional practical training (OPT). If approved for severe economic hardship or optional practical training, employment authorization card (EAD) will be mailed to you in an average of three months after application. You MUST have an EAD card before you can begin working.

Severe Economic Hardship: The USCIS grants off-campus employment authorization for economic necessity if the student can prove financial need due to unforeseen changes in financial circumstances since arriving in the US. You must be in F-1 student status for at least nine months to be eligible for employment due to economic necessity.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT): Employment authorization for curricular practical training is given to students who need to have off-campus work experience as required of their degree program, or course credit is given for the work experience. This should be outlined in the AU school bulletin. You may NOT begin working until the CPT has been authorized and entered on the 3rd page of your I-20. CPT is limited to twenty hours per week if you are required to take classes while doing your practicum. If clinical work is full-time, your I-20 must be authorized for Full-time CPT. There is no limitation on the length of time you may participate in full-time CPT but if you participate for twelve months or more of full-time CPT, you will not be eligible for Optional Practical Training. Clinicals, Practicums, or Internships: If you have a required clinical, practicum or internship as part of your degree program, you MUST apply for curricular practical training with OISSP and receive the CPT authorization on the 3rd page of your I-20. Failure to do so may cause problems at your internship site.

Optional Practical Training (OPT): Optional Practical Training is an optional work benefit for F-1 students intended for practical work experience in their major field of study. Upon USCIS approval, you will have work authorization to do OPT anywhere in the US for a total of 12 months. The Office of International student services holds OPT orientation session during each of the fall, spring and summer semesters. You are strongly encouraged to attend these OPT orientation workshops if you plan to apply for OPT.

SPOUSE & CHILDREN IN THE US

If you have an F-1 student visa, your spouse and children will have “F-2 dependent” visas. Their status is entirely dependent upon your status. If you change your status, please include your family in the application. If you leave the country for more than a temporary period of time (30 days), your family must leave with you. It is illegal for F-2 dependents to work in the US. Any children turning 21 years of age can no longer be dependent on your status. If they will be studying in the States, they must apply for a change of status to F-1. They should start this process six months to a year before they turn 21 years old.

ACCEPTING PUBLIC BENEFITS IS ILLEGAL

Often hospital or medical clinic personnel encourage international students to accept Medicaid or other government benefits. DO NOT ACCEPT PUBLIC BENEFITS. USCIS considers this a violation of your non-immigrant status. You may be required to pay back the money you received. Accepting public benefits may lead to deportation.
TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE UNITED STATES

In order to leave the US temporarily and return, you must present certain documents to the immigration inspector at the port of entry in the US. To reenter the country, you must have a valid passport, F-1 student visa, and I-20. The 3rd page of your I-20 must be signed within the last year by DSO in the Office of International Student Services. Without this signature you may experience difficulty, or be denied entry into the US. The US embassy in your country originally stamped a visa in your passport for a specific period of time and a specific number of entries into the US. If your visa has expired and you plan to leave the US, you must apply for a new visa at a US Embassy in your home country. You cannot obtain a new visa within the US.

IMMIGRATION QUESTIONS AND/OR ISSUES

The Office of International Student services is the only authority on matters of immigration. Therefore, should you have any questions or need clarification on these matters, please consult this office. We would be glad to answer your questions or advise you on how you should maintain your legal status as an international student.

OISSP’S METHOD OF COMMUNICATION

The preferred method of communication by the Office of International Student services is by email. Should there be any updates on immigration matters, alerts, timely reminders etc., we will send emails to your Andrews University email account. Please note you need to pay special attention to any emails that you receive from this office. Should you need to contact this office, please email to: iss@andrews.edu or call us to: (269) 471 6395 / (269) 471 3310.

Office of International Student Services and programs
Campus Center, Department of Student Life
Andrews University