CT STATE
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

MAINTAINING YOUR F-1 INTERNATIONAL STUDENT STATUS

While studying in the United States, you must maintain your F-1 student visa status. F-1 student visa status means that the purpose of your being in the United States is to study. You should not take any action that detracts from that purpose. Maintaining your status means:

- Fulfilling the purpose for receiving an F-1 visa
- Following the regulations associated with that purpose

As an F-1 visa holder, you must know and follow the rules of your immigration status as outlined by USCIS (US Citizenship & Immigration Services). If you do not comply with these regulations, you will be jeopardizing your ability to stay in the US. This is especially important because all international student information is tracked through the Student & Exchange Visitor Information System, also known as SEVIS. Although the International Student Services Coordinators/DSOs are here to support you during your stay at CT State Community College, **the responsibility for maintaining legal status is ultimately yours**. Below you will find a summary of the primary immigration regulations that you need to know.

DO NOT work in the United States without authorization. F-1 students are allowed to work on campus up to 20 hours per week when school is in session, with approval from the International Student Services Coordinator/DSO. International students may work in "Student Assistant"/ "Student labor" positions only, but there are unfortunately very few opportunities available. Working off-campus *ALWAYS* requires authorization from USCIS. Students who have studied full-time and maintained legal status for one academic year may apply to USCIS for a limited period of off-campus work permission. The International Student Services Coordinator/DSO can provide you with more information about these employment options.

You must attend the campus listed on your Form I-20.

You must complete a full-time course load (12 credits) every fall and spring semester. F-1 visa international students must register for a minimum of 12 credits every Fall and Spring semester; at least 9 credits must be taken in-person (TRAD or HYBR), while only 3 credits can be online (ONLN, OLCR, LRON, or LIVESTREAM). If you register for more than 12 credits, you can have more than one online class (as long as 9 credit hours are in-person). Under the current SEVP guidance, more than half of the credits must be offered through the home campus (the campus reflected on your Form I-20).

CT State Community College is required to report enrollment to DHS (Department of Homeland Security) within 30 days of the start of every semester. This process is called SEVIS registration. Any student who is not enrolled full-time is in violation of their status and will be reported.

Concurrent enrollment means that you take classes at another school (in addition to what you are taking at CT State Community College). If you plan to use concurrent enrollment to meet the full-time study requirement, you must get prior approval from the International Student Services Coordinator/DSO, and you must take most of your credits every semester at your CT State **home campus** (the campus reflected on your I-20). Documentation of your enrollment at the other college will be required.

Immigration regulations allow for part-time study under very few circumstances. In order to be a part-time student, you MUST receive PRIOR approval from the International Student Services Coordinator/DSO. Otherwise, you will be in violation of your F-1 visa status, even if you have a valid reason under the law for being part-time. Acceptable reasons for part-time study are listed below:

Academic Difficulty- This type of request is primarily designed for students who are newly arrived in the United States, as it focuses on "initial difficulty with the English language/reading requirements" and "unfamiliarity with US teaching methods." But it can also sometimes be used by a student who was mistakenly advised to take a class for which they were not academically prepared. To document "improper course placement", your academic advisor must certify in writing that you were misadvised. A reduced course load based on academic difficulty can only be used once per degree level.

Medical reasons- To apply, you must submit an official letter (on office stationery) from your doctor or clinical psychologist, recommending that you take a medical leave or be limited to part-time study. You are limited to 12 months total of medical leave during your course of study, which is basically the equivalent of three semesters. You must submit new documentation for every semester of medical leave that you need.

Students in the last semester before graduation- If you are in the final semester of your program and have less than 12 credits of coursework remaining, you are allowed to be a part-time student. Your academic advisor will need to verify the number of credits left in your degree program. You may only use this type of reduced course load once during your academic program.

DO NOT withdraw from a course if that action will cause you to complete less than 12 credits for that semester. Although it may not make sense academically, it is always better to fail a class or take an "Incomplete" (finishing the work at a later date), rather than withdrawing. In the case of an "Incomplete" grade, the course work should be completed before the end of the next semester, or before the deadline that the professor has given to you.

Attend your classes consistently and participate to the best of your ability. If you stop attending class or doing the work that is required, the teacher may opt to give you a grade that is the equivalent of a course withdrawal. As noted above, withdrawing from a class will cause a violation of your status if you are not taking more than 12 credits.

You must always maintain a valid passport. In fact, in most cases your passport should be valid for six months into the future. Your passport can be renewed in the United States through your country's consulate.

You must apply for an extension of your program prior to the expiration date on your Form I-20. Updated financial documentation will be required if your source of funding has changed. It will not be possible to extend your I-20 with outdated documentation. We recommend that you start this process around three months before your I-20 is due to expire.

You must report any change of address to the school within 10 days of the change. The new address should be reported to both the International Student Services Coordinator/DSO *and* the college (through myCTState or the One-Stop Enrollment Center on your home campus). This information will then be sent electronically to DHS (Department of Homeland Security). You must supply your street address, as the SEVIS system will not accept PO Boxes.

Prior to traveling outside the US, make sure that your I-20 has been signed by the International Student Services Coordinator/DSO on page 2 within the last year. The International Student Services Coordinator/DSO should be informed every time that you leave the country, so that we can help ensure that you are maintaining legal status.

You must report to the International Student Services Coordinator/DSO any changes to the information on your Form I-20. This includes changes to your major, legal name, or financial sponsorship. Documentation of the changes will be required, and an updated Form I-20 will subsequently be issued to you.

You must notify the International Student Services Coordinator/DSO before transferring to another institution. In fact, the new school will not be able to issue you a Form I-20 until CT State Community College releases your electronic record in SEVIS.

If you need to withdraw from classes, or are asked to leave the college, you must inform the International Student Services Coordinator/DSO. Without information about your departure from the US, we will have to report to DHS (Department of Homeland Security) that you dropped out of school without permission. After you withdraw from classes, you will have 15 days to leave the United States. Remember that you may not remain in the US during a regular academic semester if you are not enrolled in classes unless you have been approved for medical leave.

After completion of your academic program, you may apply for Optional Practical Training, depart the US, transfer to another school, or apply for a change of status within 60 days.

Common Violations of F-1 Status

Registering for a part-time course load (fewer than 12 credits)

Failure to complete a full-time course load (fewer than 12 credits)

Failure to enroll for a given academic term

Failure to request a program extension before the I-20 expiration date

Failure to complete the transfer-in or transfer-out process

Working without authorization - one of the worst violations in the eyes of the immigration service

IMPORTANT: Before taking action, talk with your International Student Services Coordinator/DSO first

Your International Student Services Coordinator/DSO should be the first person you talk with if you have any questions regarding the legal requirements of your stay in the United States. Your International Student Services Coordinator/DSO can assist in answering your questions or help you find someone who can help.

Please speak with your International Student Services Coordinator/DSO if you are planning to do any of the following:

- Change your major.
- Drop a class.
- Transfer to a new school or take a leave of absence.
- Take a break from school.
- Travel outside the United States.
- Move to a new address.
- Request a program extension.

Helpful Links:

- **Study in the States** – DHS's website that explains the rules and regulations governing the nonimmigrant student process in the United States: https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/
- **USCIS** – United States Citizenship and Immigration Services: https://www.uscis.gov/

Helpful Terms:

- **International Student –** a student who is in the US specifically for the purpose of study, is not a US citizen or permanent resident ("green card" holder) and has F-1 visa status.
- **F-1 Visa** – the type of visa our international students receive to study in the US.
- **I-20 Form (Certificate of Eligibility) -** document issued by an SEVP-certified school certifying that a student has been admitted to a full-time degree program and has demonstrated sufficient financial resources to stay in the United States. The I-20 form allows foreign nationals to apply for an F-1 student visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate abroad.
- **USCIS** – United States Citizenship and Immigration Services
- **SEVIS** - Student and Exchange Visitor Information System, part of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement that maintains information on international students and exchange visitors.
- **SEVP** – Student and Exchange Visitor Program. In order to enroll international students, schools must be SEVP-certified.
- **CPT**- Curricular Practical Training – training that is an integral (i.e., required) part of the student's curriculum. It must be authorized by the DSO/PDSO.
- **OPT** – Optional Practical Training – up to 12 months of full-time work authorization in student's field of study. Students can apply for this authorization while still studying in their program (pre-completion) or after they complete their program (post-completion). The application for OPT is made with USCIS and takes a few months to approve. Once the OPT is approved by USCIS, the student may legally begin to work.
- **RCL** – Reduced Course Load – permission to enroll below the full-time requirement. It must be authorized by DSO/PDSO in advance.
- **DSO** – Designated School Official – an employee authorized to assist and oversee students who are studying at a US institution on a student visa.
- **PDSO** – Principal Designated School Official - a DSO with added responsibilities.

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