

MAINTAINING YOUR F-1 STUDENT STATUS

August 2016 Issue

For access to forms and procedures about maintaining your F-1 visa status, see our website at:
<http://www.marquette.edu/oie/current-students/index.shtml>

Introduction

There are about sixty different United States nonimmigrant statuses and one of these is F-1 student status. The purpose of this information is to explain the main requirements for F-1 students whose F-1 status is based on a Form I-20 that was issued by Marquette University.

The United States government places requirements on F-1 students and also on the universities which have received government permission to enroll them. Each Marquette F-1 student is responsible to know the following information. More complete information is available at the Office of International Education (OIE) located in Holthusen Hall, 4th Floor. OIE advisors are happy to talk with students about their status.

Vocabulary Regarding Your F-1 Status

DSO: Designated School Official. DSOs are staff members who are appointed by the President of the university and are approved by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to act on behalf of the university in F-1 student procedures. The DSOs work for the university, not for the government. All of the DSOs at Marquette are OIE administrators.

D/S: Duration of Status. This is the ending date of your legally authorized studies. A student's D/S date is often the same as the program end date on the student's Form I-20 indicating the expected date of the completion of studies. If a student completes studies or violates F-1 regulations before the I-20 completion date, the D/S date becomes the earlier completion or violation date.

SEVIS: Student and Exchange Visitor Information System. This is a government database with information about all F-1 students and J-1 exchange visitors as well as their family dependents who have F-2 or J-2 status. You are required by law to keep your SEVIS information up to date at all times by informing your OIE advisor of any changes.

USCIS: United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. This agency is under the Department of Homeland Security and oversees the government procedures and policies for students who have entered the United States with F-1 status.

Official Communications

Your DSOs will help you understand and keep your F-1 status by sending important information to you.

- (1) You are responsible to know the information that a DSO sends to you at the United States postal mail (residence) address that is listed for you in SEVIS.
- (2) You are responsible to know the information that a DSO sends to you at your Marquette University e-mail address. You are required to activate your Marquette e-mail account and check it regularly.
- (3) You are responsible to know the printed information that a DSO provides for you such as the contents of this booklet, *Maintaining Your F-1 Student Status*. An updated copy is available at the beginning of each semester and on the website at: <http://www.marquette.edu/oie/current-students/index.shtml>

Requirements to Keep Your F-1 Status

Enroll Full Time Every Semester:

Each semester you are required to complete studies that are considered legally to be full-time. (Some exceptions to this requirement are explained below in the section titled “Receive DSO Permission in Writing before You Become Part-Time.”) For undergraduate students, full-time enrollment means completion of at least 12 credit hours per semester. For graduate students, full-time enrollment means either completion of at least 7 credit hours per semester or other full-time academic activities that justify registration for full-time Continuation courses. Audited courses (AU grades) are not counted toward F-1 full-time status.

On-line and Distance Learning classes:

If you wish to take a class that is 100% on-line or distance learning, **no more than the equivalent of one class or three credits** can count toward your requirement for full-time enrollment. (On-line or distance learning courses do not require physical attendance for classes, examinations or other purposes integral to completion of the class.) For example, if you are an undergraduate student registered for 12 credits, only one course or 3 credits can be taken as a distance learning course. If you are a graduate student registered for 7 credits, only one course or 3 credits can be taken as a distance learning course.

Enroll for the Summer Sessions before an August Graduation:

You are not required to enroll during the summer if you will continue your course of study in the fall semester. Those summers are your legally authorized “annual vacations”. However, if you will graduate in August, the summer of that graduation is not an annual vacation, and you must enroll for summer studies to complete your academic program for the August graduation.

Enroll On Time:

You must register for full-time studies or receive DSO permission to be part-time **before the end of the official registration period for the semester**. At the close of late registration, Checkmarq must accurately reflect your enrollment status. If you are enrolled only part-time without permission, you will lose your F-1 status.

Receive DSO Permission in Writing before You Become Part-Time:

There are some exceptions to the usual requirement for full-time enrollment. If you plan to complete less than the minimum 12 credits, 7 credits, or full-time studies with Graduate Continuation courses, you must **first** contact a DSO at OIE to learn whether or not an exception is legally possible in your situation. You cannot maintain your F-1 status and become a part-time student without approval **in advance** from a DSO. The DSO must enter your permission into the SEVIS database **before** you become part-time.

The legal reasons for part-time enrollment permission are based on health conditions, improper course level placement, completion of studies at the end of the semester, initial difficulties with English language, and unfamiliarity with teaching methods. If you become part-time without legal authorization **in advance**, you will lose your F-1 status even if your reason for becoming part-time is legally acceptable.

If you must withdraw completely from the university, you should request written approval from a DSO before you withdraw. In very unusual situations, a student may have to withdraw from the university for emergency reasons before the end of the term. If the student receives written approval from the DSO before withdrawing, the student will have 15 days of legal status to depart from the United States. But if the student withdraws without the DSO’s written approval, the student will lose F-1 status as soon as he or she withdraws.

To Transfer to Marquette from another U.S. School - Complete the SEVIS Transfer Procedure:

If you are a new Marquette F-1 student and transferring directly from another United States school to Marquette, your F-1 visa status can be electronically transferred from your old school to Marquette. In this case, you will maintain a continuous SEVIS record and you must register for classes and visit a DSO within 15 days after the reporting date indicated on your Marquette Form I-20.

Complete Your Authorized Program of Studies before Your D/S Date:

You must complete all of the requirements for your degree at your current level of study no later than the expected completion date indicated on your Form I-20. That is your D/S date unless you complete those studies or lose your status earlier than that date.

If you need less time to complete the studies indicated on your Form I-20, you need to provide evidence from your academic department or advisor of your new completion date. OIE will issue a revised Form I-20 showing your correct completion date.

If you need more time to complete the studies indicated on your Form I-20, you need to provide evidence of the valid academic reason for the additional time to complete your studies. OIE generally recommends that you apply for an extension with OIE within four months **before** your D/S date. You cannot apply after your D/S date. When you qualify for an extension, the DSO will issue you a new Form I-20 with the new expected completion date.

Changing Your Degree Level of Study within Marquette - Apply On Time at OIE:

If you are finishing one Marquette degree and want to continue at Marquette for another degree program, you will need a new Marquette Form I-20 from OIE for the new degree program. You should receive this new Form I-20 **within 60 days after** the completion date on your Form I-20 for your present program.

Traveling Outside the United States - Arrange for Documents and Signatures:

If you are planning to depart from the United States temporarily for a short vacation or emergency, you should contact OIE normally one or two weeks before departure. You should complete the *Travel Request Form* and bring the completed form with your passport and Form I-20 to OIE. In most cases, a DSO will sign the Travel Endorsement section on your Form I-20 to indicate that you are in lawful F-1 status as a Marquette student and eligible to continue your study at Marquette University. A travel signature on your I-20 is valid for one year, if you have otherwise maintained F-1 status.

When you re-enter the United States, you must have a valid passport, valid Form I-20 with a DSO signature in the Travel Endorsement section and usually a valid F-1 visa in your passport. Returning to the United States from Canada, Mexico, and some nearby islands may have special allowances for students who are in valid F-1 status, but have an expired F-1 visa. More information is explained on the OIE website.

Remember that you many need a visa or other documents to enter the countries that you plan to visit, including Canada. Some students may also need transit permission to travel through certain countries, such as walking through a foreign airport to change from one plane to another. You should contact the governments of those countries in advance for information about their entry and transit requirements, if any.

If You Transfer to Another U.S. University - Complete the SEVIS Transfer Procedure:

If you want to transfer your SEVIS record from Marquette University to enroll at another United States university with F-1 status, you must first inform a DSO at OIE of your intent to transfer. The transfer must be completed by the Marquette DSO **within 60 days after** the completion date on your Form I-20. SEVIS transfer procedures are necessary whether you are moving to the new school to continue studies at the same level (such as continuation of a Bachelor's degree) or beginning a new level of studies at the new school (such as graduate studies at a different university after completing a Marquette bachelor's degree).

Depart from the United States On Time after Your D/S Date:

After you complete all of your authorized academic studies and practical training, you will have **60 days** to prepare for your departure from the United States. This period of 60 days is not indicated on your Form I-20 or Optional Practical Training authorization card. It is one final time period for you to depart from the United States with valid F-1 status.

On-Campus Employment - Work Only the Permissible Number of Hours per Week:

As a Marquette F-1 student you are authorized to work on the Marquette campus. In general, jobs which are considered to be "on-campus employment" are paid from Marquette University funds and performed on Marquette University property under the supervision of regular Marquette faculty or administrators who are acting in their official university capacities. Employment is limited to 20 hours per week when school is in session and may be full-time during school vacations. In the process of arranging for an on-campus job, you may need to visit OIE for a written confirmation of your legal eligibility to work on campus.

In very unusual situations, "on-campus employment" can include certain jobs which occur away from Marquette property if they are educationally affiliated with the school's established curriculum or are related to contractually funded research at the graduate level and are an integral part of the student's educational program. If you have one of those unusual job opportunities, you should receive a written confirmation that the proposed job is considered to be "on-campus" although it will be performed on property that is off campus. This confirmation must be received in advance from a DSO at OIE.

A student who is transferring from one United States school to another may be employed only on the campus of the school which has access to the student's SEVIS record. Normally this will mean that a student can work on the campus of the "old" school only until the end of the student's final semester at that school. A student cannot begin employment at the "new" school until the student's SEVIS record has been electronically transferred to the new school.

Understand Your Opportunities for Practical Training Authorization:

Practical training authorization allows you to accept part-time or full-time employment that is directly related to your major area of study. You first need to be enrolled for at least two semesters unless you are a graduate student in a program that requires such training earlier than the completion of two semesters. There are two general categories of practical training:

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) allows for employment that is a required part of the official curriculum which you have chosen to complete for your degree. This kind of authorization is available only in the special situation when the employment is an integral part of the established curriculum such as the Engineering Co-op Program, a business internship, or the clinical phase of a health program.

Curricular practical training employment must be offered by a sponsoring employer who has an agreement with the university to provide these educational experiences for Marquette students. CPT authorization is not limited in duration, but a student who receives 12 months or more of full-time CPT authorization may not be eligible for the Optional Practical Training (OPT) which is explained below. To apply for CPT, complete the application process that is explained on the OIE website at <http://www.marquette.edu/oie/current-students/cpt.shtml> and discuss your application with a DSO. Marquette DSOs are authorized to grant permission for curricular practical training if the legal requirements are met.

Optional Practical Training (OPT) allows employment which is directly related to a student's major field of study. You may receive up to 12 months of authorization for OPT at each level of studies. For example, a student who uses 12 months of OPT related to a Bachelor's degree program will be eligible for another 12 months of OPT related to a Master's degree program. You do not need a specific job offer before applying for OPT authorization.

In general, you should begin to plan for Optional Practical Training authorization at least two to three months before you want your training to begin. You can learn about the process on the OIE website at <http://www.marquette.edu/oie/current-students/opt.shtml> or from a Marquette DSO. After completing the procedures at OIE, you will send your application to the USCIS service center for its decision. You must receive your OPT authorization in writing from USCIS before you can begin OPT employment.

If a student with practical training authorization transfers to another school or begins study at another education level, the practical training authorization is automatically terminated.

There are three times during your F-1 status that you may be eligible for Optional Practical Training:

Pre-completion OPT

You may apply for part or all of your OPT period to be used before you complete your Marquette course of study. This could be full-time or part-time employment during a school vacation. Pre-completion OPT can also be used part-time (20 hours per week or less) while you are taking classes and school is in session. Graduate students who have completed all course requirements except thesis or equivalent may be eligible to apply for Pre-completion OPT to be full-time or part-time.

Post-completion OPT

You may apply for OPT to be used upon completion of your Marquette course of study. If you want to participate in OPT after completing your studies, you must apply for OPT **no later than 60 days** after the completion date on your Form I-20.

During Post-completion OPT, maintaining your F-1 status is dependent upon employment. You may not accrue an aggregate of more than 90 days of unemployment during the initial 12 months of your post-completion OPT. Although part-time employment is allowed during post-completion OPT, current government guidelines state that you must be employed for a minimum of 20 hours per week.

Your OPT employment can take place anywhere in United States, but you are still legally connected to Marquette as an F-1 student status during Post-completion OPT. You are legally required to continue contact with the Marquette DSO, and the DSO is required to update your information in SEVIS until the end of your Marquette F-1 status. These updates include any changes to your name, residence address and the name and address of your employer.

24-month OPT Extension for STEM studies

Some F-1 students who have received degrees in certain areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) are able to apply for a 24-month OPT extension beyond the initial 12 months. More information is available on the OIE website at <http://www.marquette.edu/oie/current-students/opt.shtml#stem> or from an OIE advisor.

Contact a DSO Promptly if You Encounter Severe Financial Problems:

In some unusual situations a student can apply to USCIS for permission to work off campus because of severe economic hardship. These applications are possible only if the financial need is caused by an unforeseeable change in the student's financial support.

A student must complete two semesters of study before receiving authorization for this kind of employment. In addition to proving unforeseen economic hardship, the student must demonstrate that he or she cannot meet the financial need by working on campus and that the employment will not interfere with completion of the student's full course of study. Off-campus employment can be authorized for no more than one year at a time.

Students who encounter unforeseeable financial hardship should contact OIE as soon as possible. The total hours of student employment are still limited to 20 hours per week when school is in session although employment may be full-time during school vacations. The employment authorization, if approved, requires continual good academic standing and valid F-1 status.

Plan Ahead to Continue Your Health Insurance:

All Marquette F-1 students are required to have health insurance as a condition of enrollment. Most students fulfill this requirement by participating in the international insurance program that is provided by Marquette University.

A full explanation of the amount of coverage and what is covered under the plan is described in an insurance brochure which is available at: <http://www.marquette.edu/oie/current-students/health-insurance.shtml> . International insurance information is also available at OIE.

In general, each student in the international plan pays for insurance at the beginning of each semester. OIE charges the insurance cost to your Bursar account and the amount can be viewed in CheckMarq. The spring semester charges are for seven months of coverage (January through July) and the fall semester charges are for five months of coverage (August through December). Payment for these charges is subject to the deadlines set forth by the Bursar.

The insurance rates for the international plan can change each year. The rates may depend on how much money the insurance company must pay for the medical care of our F-1 group members. To help keep down the price of this international plan, please visit the Marquette University Medical Clinic first for care whenever appropriate in non-emergency situations.

If you end your legal status as a Marquette student before the end of your expected insurance period, no refunds are issued for unused months of coverage.

Students may be eligible to continue enrollment in the international insurance plan after they graduate. Marquette F-1 students with family member who have F-2 status may also enroll their family members in the plan. You can learn more about these special coverages at OIE and at <http://www.marquette.edu/oie/current-students/health-insurance.shtml>.

Keep Your SEVIS Record Up to Date at All Times:

Government regulations require universities to maintain and to report certain information about all F-1 students. Universities must enter some of this information into SEVIS. Information is available to numerous government agencies such as United States embassies and consulates, Ports of Entry, and USCIS offices.

Your SEVIS record must be updated promptly for all of those agencies to see when you receive a visa, enter the United States, enroll at a university, change an address, change a field of study, change to a different level of study, receive employment permission or practical training authorization, etc. To fulfill these record-keeping requirements, you must inform a DSO at OIE **within ten days of any changes** in the following information. (Students who have F-2 spouses or children must also report changes for those dependents within the same ten-day period.)

- Change of residence address where you are living in the United States
- Change of postal address if you cannot receive mail at your U.S. residence address
- Change of address outside the United States
- Change in legal name
- Change in nationality
- Change in legal status in the United States
- Changes in official major field of study
- Change in expected graduation date if it will be earlier or later than the present end date on your Form I-20
- Change in fundamental sources of financial support

In brief, please plan to inform a DSO at OIE about any change that is related to the data about you in SEVIS. If you are not sure about a change in your situation, please contact a DSO.

<http://www.marquette.edu/oie/current-students/forms-procedures.shtml#Address>

Keep Your Passport Valid at All Times:

You are required by United States regulations to keep your passport valid at all times, and in some cases it must be valid for at least six months into the future. The procedures for renewing a passport vary from country to country. For correct information, contact your country's embassy or consulate in the United States. Some countries have agreements with the United States which assure that their passports will be considered valid for the purpose of return to that country for six months beyond their expiration dates. Plan in advance to renew your passport.

Arrange Documents for Any Family Dependents with F-2 Visa Status:

If you are an F-1 student who has an F-2 spouse and/or children, you must also maintain SEVIS records for those F-2 dependents. Notify a DSO at OIE in writing of any changes in the SEVIS information for your F-2 dependents including any legal change of an F-2's name or nationality, early departure from the United States, or change of dependent status as in cases of divorce, death, or a child's attainment of age 21.

Keep Your Old Documents:

If you receive more than one Form I-20 or other official documents during your status as an F-1 student, keep all original forms in case they are needed in the future for evidence of status.

Please Plan Ahead:

Please remember to make plans in advance for your legal needs and other arrangements. Plan your money for bills as they will come each month, each semester, or each year. Plan to contact your government early for arrangements such as passport renewal, currency exchange authorization, or military deferment, because these may require more time than expected. United States government procedures and Marquette procedures also take time, so plan ahead for certification letters, confirmation forms, practical training applications and other assistance you may want. You are always welcome to visit an OIE advisor if you have questions about your F-1 status.