

# MAINTAINING STATUS: F-1 STUDENT ENROLLMENT REQUIREMENTS

Office of International Student Services



# WHAT IS IMMIGRATION STATUS?

- Admission to the United States is granted by US Customs and Border Protection. Immigration status is obtained upon entry to the US, depending on the type of visa (i.e.; F-1, M-1 or J-1, which are all nonimmigrant visa types).
- Some visa types are issued an expiration date of their status, but F-1 students are a bit different. F-1 students are granted “Duration of Status,” which means they are permitted to remain in the US for as long as they continue to “maintain status.” That could be one semester or many years.
- DSOs only advise and report according to immigration regulations. Immigration status can only be determined by Department of Homeland Security.

# BASICS OF MAINTAINING STATUS

- “Maintaining status” simply means following all immigration regulations governing a particular status type
- In order to maintain status, F-1 students are required to (including, not limited to):
  1. Check in with ISS upon arrival to the US
  2. Maintain a full course of study for each semester school is in session.
  3. Attend class and make progress in the program each term.
  4. Request to extend the I-20 prior to the I-20 end date if additional terms are needed to complete the program.
  5. Update the I-20 when changing majors or academic levels.
  6. Apply for the appropriate work authorization for off-campus employment, as necessary.
  7. Within 60 days following the completion of the program, F-1 students must prepare to depart the US, apply for OPT, apply to change status, or obtain a new I-20 for a new program of study.
- **Status violations result in loss of immigration status and require the student to leave the US or apply US Citizenship and Immigration Services (part of DHS) for reinstatement to F-1 status.** Regaining status can be expensive and time consuming for students and can impact their plans for employment opportunities.

# WHAT IS A FULL COURSE OF STUDY?

- A full course of study is often referred to as a “full course load.”
- Per immigration regulations, a full course of study depends on a student’s academic level:
  - **English Language Institute** students are required to maintain 18 clock hours per week if the majority is classroom instruction, or 22 hours per week if the majority is laboratory work.
  - **Pathway** students are required to enroll in no less than 12 semester hours per term.
  - **Undergraduate** students are required to maintain at least 12 credit hours per term when school is in session.
  - Per immigration regulations, full course of study for **graduate students** is determined by the DSO. The Office of International Student Services bases the full course of study requirements for graduate students on University policy which states 9 credit hours per term when school is in session.

# ONLINE AND DISTANCE COURSES

- **Definition of online or distance course**: An on-line or distance education course is a course that is offered principally through the use of television, audio, or computer transmission including open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, or satellite, audio conferencing, or computer conferencing.
- **'Virtual' courses**: Virtual courses allow students to complete course requirements remotely as an alternative to attending classroom meetings. Since course requirements may be completed entirely via Blackboard, these courses are considered to be online or distance courses for immigration purposes.
- **English Language Training programs (English Language Institute)**: Zero hours of online or distance courses may count toward the full course of study requirements. There is no limit to the number of online or distance courses that can be taken, only on the amount that can apply toward the full course of study requirements.
- **Undergraduate / Graduate programs**: Three hours or one online or distance course may count toward the full course of study requirements.



# SUMMER TERM (ANNUAL VACATION)

- F-1 students are required to maintain a full course of study for each fall and spring term.
- If a student is admitted to a new program beginning summer term, they are required to maintain a full course of study for summer term.
- Undergraduate students are required to enroll in 9 hours to be full time for summer term.
- Graduate students are required to enroll in 6 hours to be full time for summer term.
- Online course limitations still apply, depending on program level.
- Students on an earned annual vacation are permitted to remain in the US during annual vacation.

# FULL COURSE OF STUDY FOR FINAL TERM

- Students in their final term prior to graduation may choose to take only the courses needed to graduate, as long as one credit hour is classroom-based.
- The Office of International Student Services may reach out to academic advisors or the student to verify if the student is in their final term.

# INTERNSHIPS & EMPLOYMENT

- On-Campus Employment
  - F-1 students permitted to work on-campus, no more than 20 hours per week while classes are in session (Fall and Spring semesters). Student can work on-campus more than 20 hours per week during semester breaks.
  - No authorization from ISS or United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is required.
- Off-Campus Employment & Internships
  - Any off-campus employment, internship, or practicum (paid or unpaid) must be authorized by ISS or USCIS as either Curricular Practical Training (CPT) or Optional Practical Training (OPT).



# CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING

- Eligibility
  - Student must be in valid F-1 status.
  - Student must be certificate or degree-seeking at the Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctoral level.
  - Student must be enrolled full-time for one academic year by the time of application.
  - Employment must be directly related to major area of study.
  - Student must be enrolled in a practicum or internship course within the student's major.
  - Student must continue to be enrolled for a full course of study during the CPT.
- Authorization
  - CPT is authorized by the Office of International Student Services and requires Advisor certification.
  - CPT can be approved within 1 – 3 business days once all required documentation is received.

**F-1 students may not engage in off-campus employment, internships, or practicums until authorization has been granted.**

# OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

- Eligibility
  - Student must be in valid F-1 status.
  - Student must be certificate or degree-seeking at the Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctoral level.
  - Student must be enrolled full-time for one academic year by the time of application.
  - Employment must be directly related to major area of study.
  - Student must not have been authorized for OPT at the same degree level.
  - Student must not have used OPT at a higher degree level.
- Type of OPT
  - Pre-Completion OPT
    - Takes place prior to program completion.
    - Employment is limited to 20 hours per week while classes are in session.
  - Post-Completion OPT
    - Takes place after program completion. Student must have completed all degree requirements (except thesis, dissertation, or final project for graduate programs).
  - STEM OPT Extension
    - Students with qualifying STEM degrees may extend their Post-Completion OPT for up to 24 additional months.
- Authorization
  - OPT is authorized by USCIS and does not require Advisor certification.
  - OPT can take up to 90 days for adjudication.

**F-1 students may not engage in off-campus employment, internships, or practicums until authorization has been granted.**

# COMMON ISSUES

- Many students will have an immigration related hold which states they must not drop below full time.
- As with any student, F-1 students do end up in situations where they need to withdraw from a single course or an entire course of study.
- **It is crucial that students speak with a DSO in the ISS office PRIOR to withdrawing.**
- Withdrawing from courses prior to receiving authorization from the DSO is a violation of immigration status.
- Engaging in unauthorized employment is a violation of immigration status.
- Marshall University is required to report any violation of status by terminating the SEVIS record within 21 days.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE RESOURCES

- English Language Institute's Learning Resource Center
  - Service available to all international students.
  - Tutors can help with assignments, research, citation, grammar, pronunciation, and more.
  - <https://www.marshall.edu/eli/learning-resource-center/>
- International Conversation Partner program
  - Marshall's International Conversation Partner Program pairs international and domestic participants to improve English language acquisition and build cross-cultural relationships. This program is built on a foundation of conversation, cultural exchange, and friendship.
  - The English Conversation Partner program is a voluntary commitment.
  - <https://www.marshall.edu/conversationpartners/>

# QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

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