

# INTERNATIONAL STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

## Outline of Regulations and Procedures

The purpose of this section is to help you become aware and follow the regulations. International Student & Scholar Services' personnel are prepared to answer your questions or check with the proper authorities. Please be aware, however, *it is your responsibility to abide by the laws and regulations affecting your status and not International Student & Scholar Services' job to keep your status in good standing.* Your status is clearly your responsibility and no one else's. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) a branch of the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of State (DOS), are responsible for enforcing the immigration regulations and not International Student Services & Scholar (ISSS). ISSS is available to assist you, when we can. You may visit the DHS website at <http://www.uscis.gov> to check the latest regulations and/or download many of the DHS forms.

DHS's system *Student and Exchange Visitor Information System* (known as SEVIS), is an internet-based system that gives DHS a real-time student tracking system. This means that DHS will know, in a very real and timely way, where students are and what academic activities they are engaged in. What this also means, is that this system will be making status determinations and not allowing ISSSS staff to determine nor intervene in your status.

As an international student, scholar, or visiting professor in F-1 or J-1 visa status, you have certain obligations to maintain your status. The regulations are outlined as follows:

- 1. Newly arriving students and scholars are required to come to ISSS office upon arrival at Loma Linda University.** To be legally present in the United States (U.S.), DHS requires that all students, scholars, visiting professors, and their families to check in with the international student/scholar office and show their visa-related documents (i.e. passport, visa, I-94, I-20, etc.) and have their arrival reported in the SEVIS system.
- 2. Report changes of address and phone number to ISSS within ten days of a change.** A change of address should be reported to DHS by completing the AR-11 Change of Address form and submitting it to ISSS for university record keeping.
- 3. Keep your passport valid at all times.** You may request a "verification of status" letter from ISSS to help in extending your passport. You need to provide ISSS with a photo copy of the new passport or extension stamp.
- 4. Other documents that ISSS is required to have photocopies of, if you have them, are your U.S. Social Security Card, U.S. Driver's License, change of marital status (i.e. you get married), change of status (e.g. from F-1 student to U.S. Permanent Resident).**
- 5. Attend the school and program you are authorized to attend (as listed on your current I-20 or DS-2019 form) at LLU.** Your I-20 or DS-2019 only authorizes you to attend LLU. If you need some courses from a school other than LLU, you must obtain a letter of permission called "Concurrent Enrollment Authorization" from ISSS **before** enrolling at any other school.
- 6. Maintain a full-time academic load for at least three of four quarters a year (summer quarter maybe taken off, if your program allows such).**

- a. **Undergraduate students** should satisfactorily complete a minimum of twelve quarter-units per quarter to fulfill DHS visa requirements. Normally, however, your program will require more than twelve units per quarter to complete your program in the recommended time frame.
- b. **Graduate students** should satisfactorily complete a minimum of eight quarter-units per quarter to fulfill DHS requirements or complete a load validation form for their research, thesis or dissertation units, when applicable, to bring a quarter's registration load to a full-time equivalent.
- c. **Exceptions to a full-time course load *must be cleared through ISSS in advance of registering.*** Some academic, family, or health reasons may allow a load variance but will require proper documentation. Failure to enroll for full-time study may jeopardize your status with the DHS, including the loss of benefits (e.g. on-campus work and/or practical training) to which you are normally entitled.

\*\*\* **Please note** that each quarter you may have an ISSS registration hold. This helps ISSS to track number of units you are registering for because the units will be reported to DHS through the SEVIS system. The hold may also inform us if you are registered for a class that requires off-campus clinical training or field practicum.

7. **Apply for a program extension prior to the completion date on your I-20 or DS-2019.** An extension requires a written request for the extension from your academic advisor and a new financial declaration form with the appropriate documentation for the period being requested.
8. **Apply for a new I-20 or DS-2019 when changing from one academic level to another (e.g. from masters to doctorate) or when changing programs (e.g. microbiology to medicine).**
9. **Apply for a transfer from LLU to another school prior to completion of your LLU program.**
  - a. **F-1 students:** You must notify ISSS of your intent to transfer by showing your acceptance letter from the new school prior to the expiration of your LLU I-20 or prior to the completion of your LLU program (at least 15 days prior to your program completion date is recommended). ISSS will report a release date to SEVIS so the new school can complete your transfer and issue you their I-20.
  - b. **J-1 students:** Transferring from one exchange sponsor to another is usually discouraged by the DOS. However, if you want to transfer, you need to notify ISSS of your intent by showing your acceptance letter from the new school prior to the expiration of your current DS-2019 or prior to the completion of your LLU program (at least 15 days prior to your program completion date is recommended). The current sponsor must agree to release you to the transfer sponsor. The transfer sponsor has to determine your eligibility and status. The current sponsor will report your release date to SEVIS so the transfer sponsor can complete your transfer and issue you their DS-2019.
10. **Obtain authorization for ANY on- and/or off-campus employment for ISSS *BEFORE* accepting employment (i.e. you need ISSS authorization first).** Special note: If you have an active Optical Practical Training work permit, from a previous school, it is automatically voided and you cannot use it once you start your new program at LLU.

- 11. Limit employment to 20 hours, or less, per week while registering for courses and classes are in session during three of four quarters of a school year.** However, regulations allow you to work full time (up to 40 hours per week) during school breaks and summer vacations when school is not in session.
- 12. Obtain a re-entry signature on your I-20 or DS-2019 from an International Student Advisor BEFORE traveling outside of the U.S.** Re-entry into the U.S. requires a valid passport, valid entry visa, and an ISSS re-entry authorization signature on your I-20 or DS-2019. Each dated signature is valid for 6 months (I-20) or 1 year (DS-2019) unless the I-20 or DS-2019 is expiring before the 6 month validity. If your entry visa expires before your return to the U.S., you will need to obtain a new I-20 or DS-2019 and apply for the new visa in your home country. (Note: if your visa is still valid but lists a previous school, you should apply for a new entry visa when you return to your home country).
- 13. Keep all your visa-related documents in a secure place.** You are expected to keep all certificates of eligibility (all I-20's or DS-2019's, your I-94, and your passport) secure and together. You should immediately inform ISSS if you lose any of these documents.
- 14. F-1 post-completion Optional Practical Training (i.e. 12 months of work in field of study, after completion of studies):**
  - a. You have to have been in good F-1 status for one full academic year to be eligible for post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT).
  - b. You are required to apply for OPT before completion of all your course requirements. You are, however, allowed to apply up to 90 days before completion but never after the completion of all your course requirements.
  - c. You have to complete 12 months of post-completion OPT within 14 months of completion of your program. Therefore, if you apply less than 90 days prior to completion or if DHS takes more than 90 days to process, you may lose some of your 12 months of OPT.
  - d. You cannot start work or travel outside the U.S. until you have received the OPT work permit. Once you have your OPT work permit, you need to continue getting re-entry authorization signatures on your I-20 and have the permit with you when you travel.
  - e. You are allowed a period (up to 12 months) of OPT after each level of study (e.g. associate, bachelor's, master's, doctorate), as long as you apply before each program ends.
  - f. You are allowed 60-day grace period to stay in the U.S. after completion of your program and your last OPT. However, if you are going to continue studying at a higher degree level, you must make arrangements for the "old school" to release you before the end date of your OPT so that the new school can issue you a new I-20 before the expiration of your status.
  - g. All employment, phone and address changes are to continue to be reported to ISSS as long as you are on OPT or on LLU's I-20. The same 10-day address change reporting regulation is in effect as long as you are in the U.S.
- 15. J-1 Student (not Scholars or Visiting Professors) have Academic Training DHS instead of F-1 Optional Practical Training.** Many of the rules are similar or the same but check with ISSS for details on Academic Training.

**16. You must notify the ISSS of your final departure plans (or changes in status) just prior to your leaving or the change. This way, your SEVIS file will be properly closed.**

# WHAT IS AN I-20?

## Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) I-20:

- **Definition:** a multi-purpose government form used in connection with many F-1 procedures and benefits.
- **Page 1:** Contains program and biographical information

### **Very Important Note:**

It is your responsibility to give International Student Services Office advanced notice, if you need to make any of the following changes:

- 1) **Concurrent Enrollment** – enrolling at another school part-time (to fulfill a program requirement at LLU) while also enrolling at LLU full-time.
- 2) **Program Extension** – needing additional time to complete your program; extensions must be completed before the I-20 expires
- 3) **Change your major or add a second major**
- 4) **Change your program level (Degree)**
- 5) **Transfer schools**
- 6) **Withdraw from your program**
- 7) **Leave of Absence from your program**
- 8) **Change of U.S. home address** – changes must be reported within 10 days of move

**Note:** If any of the above changes are not updated on your I-20 in a timely manner, you will be considered out of status and will be required to go through the process of reinstatement.

- **Page 2:** Contains employment authorization data and provides space for travel authorizations.

**Note:** This page will be updated by our office to reflect any type of permitted employment. Each re-entry signature by our office on this third page is valid for 6 months only. Make sure you have this page signed by our office if you think you will pass the six-month limit by the time you will be returning.

- **Page 3:** Consists pre-printed instructions and information.

**Note:** It is your responsibility to read and understand this page. By signing Page 1 of the I-20, you are acknowledging that you have read and understand the information printed on the whole I-20.

## Dependents

- Spouses or children, accompanied by the F-1 student, will be issued their own SEVIS I-20 that will indicate they will be in F-2 (Dependent) status.

## Applying for F-1 Student Visa

- An I-20 by itself is only a “certificate of eligibility” and does not grant F-1 status by itself To obtain F-1 status, you will need to do one of the following:
  - If currently in the U.S. on another status, apply for a change of status using a LLU I-20 and filing the I-539 form (found on the USCIS website - [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov))
  - If currently out of the U.S., apply for an F-1 visa using a LLU I-20 at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate and enter U.S. with the I-20 and the F-1 visa
    - Natural Born Canadians will only need to cross the U.S. border with their I-20; they are not required to obtain an F-1 visa from the Embassy

## Duration of Status (D/S)

- An F-1 student is normally admitted to the United States for “*Duration of Status*” which is noted as “D/S” on both the form I-94 and the student’s I-20
- “*Duration of Status*” is defined as the time during which an F-1 student is pursuing a full course of study, at the school which has issued the SEVIS I-20, or engaged in authorized Optional Practical Training (OPT) following completion of their program
  - This means that a student is allowed to stay in the country even after the F-1 visa (located in the passport) has expired as long as they are maintaining their F-1 status
  - If traveling outside the U.S., a new visa (if expired) will be needed to re-enter

## Maintaining F-1 Status

- If you are maintaining your status, your visa has expired, and you wish to go out of the country, you need to make sure you make arrangements to apply for a new visa before re-entering the U.S.
- Please visit International Student Services Office for documentation you will need to take with you to the visa appointment

## Other very Important Notes

- You are in F-1 status as long as your I-20 and passport are accurate and valid, and you have not completed your program
- Your “*Program Completion Date*” will not necessarily match the “end date” recorded on your I-20, since it is usually an estimated date; therefore, the following situations may arise:
  - If your I-20 is going to expire before you finish your program, you will need to request an I-20 extension from International Student Services Office
  - If you will complete your program before the expiration date of your I-20, you need to notify International Student Services if you will transfer to another school, apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT), or leave the U.S. within

- your 60 day grace period
- “*Program Completion Date*”: the day you turn in your last paper or assignment, take your last exam, finish your last rotation (internship, clinical or field practicum), or last program (degree) requirement

## **EXTENDING YOUR I-20**

### **Extension on an I-20**

Although an F-1 student is admitted to the United States for “*Duration of Status*” to complete an educational program, the student must actually finish all program requirements before the completion date indicated on Page 1 of their current I-20.

- If a student will not complete the academic program by this completion date, prior to reaching this date, they must comply with procedures for program extension

### **Eligibility for I-20 Extension**

An F-1 student is eligible for program extension if:

- They apply to the DSO for the extension **prior to the program completion date**, and the
- DSO updates the SEVIS record to reflect the extension before the completion date
- They have “continuously maintained status”
- The delay in completion is “caused by compelling academic or medical reasons”
- Submit the following documents:
  - A letter or email from an academic advisor or program director listing the reason why an extension is necessary and propose a new program completion date
  - A bank statement(s) to show funding is available to cover your tuition, fees, and living expenses during the extended period

**\*\*Legal Note:** Delays caused by academic probation or suspension are not acceptable reasons for program extension.

A student who fails to complete their program within the time listed on Page 1 of their I-20 and cannot meet the eligibility criteria for program extension, or does not return the required documents to the DSO in a timely manner, is considered out of status and must apply for reinstatement. The student’s reinstatement must be approved before they may be able to complete the remainder of their program.

## **CHANGE OR ADD MAJOR**

An F-1 student is admitted to the United States to work towards “the attainment of a specific education or professional objective.”

The DSO (the advisor at International Student Services) indicates the subject matter of the objective in SEVIS and on the form I-20. Should a student wish to change or add to their major field of study, they must comply with the procedures required by the regulations to remain in status.

If, by changing the majors, a student will need more time to complete their program than originally estimated, the procedures for Program Extension should be followed.

**\*\*Legal Note:** As a practical matter, a student should have their major field of study correctly reflected on their most current I-20, as it will have implications for their status.

## **CHANGE PROGRAM LEVEL (NEW PROGRAM AT LLU)**

Like extension of stay, changing levels or changing degree programs at the same school is a notification procedure, which requires an update in the SEVIS by International Student Services.

If you complete your program at LLU and then plan to complete an additional full-time educational level, you will need to do one of the following:

- 1)** If you want to do this new program at LLU, you will need to go through the process of issuing a new I-20 (you have to follow the steps you initially followed to be eligible to obtain an initial I-20).
- 2)** If you want to pursue this education objective at another SEVIS approved school, you need to go through the process of transferring you to that school. (See the “Transferring Schools” information enclosed).

# **CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT**

Effective January 1, 2003, regulations allow an F-1 student to be enrolled in two different SEVIS-approved F-1 schools at the same time, as long as the enrollment in both schools amounts to a full time course of study, this is called a Concurrent Enrollment.

The Concurrent Enrollment provision requires the school from which the student will earn his or her degree or certificate to issue and maintain the I-20 form, to handle all SEVIS and other reporting requirements, and to ensure that the student is pursuing a full course of study.

## **In order to do this, our office needs to obtain the following information from you:**

- 1) The name and address of the school you will be taking additional classes at.
- 2) The Course Title and the number of units of class(es) you will be registering for outside of Loma Linda University.

## **What our office will do with the above information:**

Based on the information you provide our office as far as the classes, number of units and location in which you will be doing the Concurrent Enrollment, we will issue a letter giving you permission to take those classes at the locations specified.

The Concurrent Enrollment provision is applicable only to those who will be registered less than full-time at the school that has issued their I-20 and who are relying on enrollment in another school in order to maintain a full time status.

As long as a student is enrolled full-time in the institution that issued their I-20, they do not need special permission to take additional classes at another school (unless this second school wants a letter from LLU giving you permission to do this).

# **PROGRAM WITHDRAWAL OR ACADEMIC DISMISSAL**

## **Approved Withdrawal**

An F-1 student who has been granted an authorized withdrawal by the DSO (by notifying International Student Services prior to ceasing class attendance), may remain in the United States for up to 15 days following the withdrawal noted in SEVIS, to prepare to depart from the United States.

**\*\*Legal Note:** Immigration regulations refer to “preparation for departure” as the only permissible activity during the 15 days grace period following the authorized withdrawal. No employment is permitted. The provision granting the 15 days grace period does not refer to preparation for transfer, as a permissible activity during this time frame.

## **Unapproved Withdrawal**

If a student fails to maintain status, or withdraws from school or otherwise terminates or interrupts their course of studies without first obtaining DSO (International Student Services), approval, in SEVIS, the student is not eligible for any grace period and is considered out of status, immediately.

## **I-20 Termination Procedure**

- Your leave of absence, program withdrawal, or academic dismissal will be processed by University Records
- Once it is processed our office will receive a notification
- When we receive the notification we must terminate your I-20
- On the day your I-20 is terminated your 15 day grace period clock will start
- You will have 15 days to put your affairs in order before you should exit the U.S.

# **TRANSFER TO ANOTHER SCHOOL**

You are required by immigration law to notify International Student Services of your intent to transfer to another school as soon as you are notified of your acceptance, before you finish your program here at LLU or if you don't plan on not registering because of your intention to transfer, whichever is earlier.

In order to successfully transfer your I-20, please provide a copy of your acceptance letter and transfer request form (if required by your new school) in a timely manner.