

How to Change Status to F-1 Student

If you are currently in the U.S. on a non-immigrant visa (i.e. B-1/B-2, H-1B, H-4, F-2. etc.) there are two ways to change your status to F-1 Student. Before you can apply to change your status, you must first receive an I-20 (**F-1 Student** visa application document) from the LLU International Student & Scholar Services Office. Please refer to the **LLU I-20 Procedures** guide on how to obtain an I-20. Once you receive an LLU I-20, you may change your status through one of the following options:

1) Consular Processing:

- a. Exit the U.S.
- b. Make an appointment at a U.S. Embassy/Consulate.
- c. Apply for F-1 Student entry visa stamp.
- d. After you receive the F-1 visa, you may reenter the U.S. up to 30 days before your program start date.
- e. Average Processing Time – varies between U.S. Embassies/Consulates (check processing times on the Embassy/Consulate website you will visit).
- f. Advantages compared to USCIS processing:
 - i. Faster processing time (i.e., a week or more)
 - ii. You receive an F-1 entry visa stamp in your passport that allows you to travel in and out of the U.S. during your program of study
 - iii. Obtaining an F-1 Student visa may not automatically void your previous visa if it is still valid. So you need present your I-20 to U.S. Customs and Border Protection at the time of your entry to the U.S. and request admission into the U.S. as an F-1 Student
- g. Disadvantages compared to USCIS processing:
 - i. The time and money you will spend to travel out of the U.S. and apply for the F-1 Student entry visa at the U.S. Embassy/Consulate

2) USCIS Mail-in Processing:

- a. Allowed to remain in the U.S., as long as your current visa remains active, during the whole processing period.
- b. Submit form **I-539 Change of Status** application with USCIS.
- c. Receive your **Approval Notice** from USCIS that your status has been changed to F-1, you will be allowed to start classes at LLU, if on time.
- d. Average Processing Time – 3 to 12 months or more!
- e. Advantages compared to Consular processing:
 - i. Allows you to stay in the U.S. and save travel money
 - ii. If denied the change to F-1 Student status, you do not lose your pre-USCIS application immigration status, if it is still valid
- f. Disadvantages compared to Consular processing:
 - i. Slower processing time (i.e., months)

1. If your USCIS **Approval Notice** is not received by your program start date, you will not be allowed to start your program until the next program intake date.
 2. If the next intake date is more than 5 months into the future, then you will have to exit the U.S., apply for and receive an F-1 entry visa and then return to the the U.S. within 30 days of the new program start date.
- ii. You will not receive an F-1 Student entry visa stamp in your passport as a result of this mail-in processing
1. Normally, you are allowed to stay in the U.S. legally without needing the entry visa stamp.
 2. If you exit the U.S. at any time, you will need to allow time to go to the U.S. Embassy/Consulate and apply for an F-1 Student entry visa stamp in order to return to the U.S.

References & Resources

<https://www.uscis.gov/i-539> {form and instructions on the mail-in process for changing immigration status}

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students> {Overview of student visas, procedures, and regulations}

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study.html> {links to U.S. Embassies / Consulates and procedures for applying for the various visas}

<https://www.ice.gov/sevis/students> {Overview of student visas and regulations}