

# USCA International Student Immigration Guidelines



U of SC Aiken

International Programs

## Terminology:

- **SEVIS: Student and Exchange Visitor Information System:** An internet-based application that facilitates timely electronic reporting and monitoring of international students and exchange visitors, as well as their dependents, in the United States. This application enables schools and program sponsors to transmit electronic information to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Department of State through a student's or exchange visitor's program in the United States.
- **Principle Designated School Official (PDSO):** Serve as the primary point of contact with the Student and Exchange Visitor Program on any issues that relate to school bona fides or compliance with regulations. Administer the F/M program at the school, keeping the school information in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) up-to-date, manage DSOs, oversee the management of student records and respond to SEVIS-generated alerts. Submit school certification and recertification packages.
- **DSO: Designated School Official (DSO):** A regularly-employed member of the school administration designated by the head of a Student and Exchange Visitor Program-certified school to provide recommendations to F and/or M students enrolled at the school regarding maintenance of nonimmigrant status, and to support timely and complete record keeping and reporting to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.
- **VISA:** A document issued by the Department of State that enables a student or exchange visitor to travel to a U.S. port of entry and request permission to enter the United States. Students need either an F-1 or M-1 visa to enroll in U.S. programs of study.
- **F-1/I-20 Record:** F-1 is the most common immigration status for degree seeking international students. Prospective F-1 students will receive a Form I-20 (Certificate of Eligibility) document from the school which they will use to apply for an F-1 visa at a US consulate or embassy. F-1 students are then admitted to the United States in F-1 status to study and must attend school full time except during their vacation break.

## Academic Requirements:

- International Students must maintain full course of study during the fall and spring terms.
- Only **ONE** online course can count towards full course of study each semester.
- Student must contact P/DSO prior to dropping a class.
- Depending on circumstances students may be eligible to apply for a reduced course load.
- Students must be making normal progress towards degree completion.
- If student needs an extension of their program end date (listed on I-20) they must complete the extension request form 15 days prior to their current program end date.

## Employment:

- Students may engage in on campus employment without prior authorization from P/DSO. Limit is 20hrs a week during academic year.
- Prior to working off campus students are **required** to obtain authorization from the Office of International Programs. Types of off campus authorization is Curricular Practical Training (CPT), Optional Practical Training (OPT), or Economic Hardship. See OIPs website for more information on employment for international students.

## Immigration/Travel:

- F-1 students may remain in the U.S. even if their visa (in passport) has expired as long as their I-20 is still valid. If the student leaves the U.S. and their visa is expired they will need to renew this prior to reentry.
- Students must depart the U.S. within 60days of program completion or apply for OPT
- Students should always have a valid passport and should renew their passport 6 months prior to expiration.
- Students must have a valid travel signature on their I-20 before traveling outside of the U.S. A travel signature is valid for a full year from signature date. Travel signatures for students under OPT is only valid for 6 months.

## **FAQs:**

### **Do all international students have to follow the same rules?**

*Know the student's immigration status.* Students in the U.S. may have a variety of statuses.

### **Can students enroll concurrently at more than one institution?**

F-1 students may enroll concurrently if the combined enrollment is a full time course of study and a minimum of 6 credits are taken at USCA. Students must attend another SEVIS-approved institution and consult with the Office of International Programs beforehand.

### **What if an international student changes major or degree level—does the student need to do anything?**

Yes, students need their immigration documents to reflect their current degree program and level of study. If a student plans to change majors or degree level, please have them contact OIP for procedures on how to obtain updated immigration documents.

## **Contact:**

Office of International Programs: Student Activities Center- Student Life Suite

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