



Immigration Basics for F-1 Students

International Student Services – Texas A&M University

International Student Services: 110 Pavilion, Phone: 845-1824, Fax: 862-4633, Website: <http://iss.tamu.edu>, E-mail: iss@tamu.edu. International Student Services (ISS) is an advocate for international students at Texas A&M University (TAMU). ISS advisors are available to answer your questions, especially questions involving immigration issues, while you are a student. However, it is your responsibility to maintain your legal status.

Keep your documents up to date

- 1. I-20:** Do not let your I-20 expire. If you need an extension to the completion date on the I-20, please contact ISS. If your I-20 expires before you graduate, you will be out of legal status. Keep all of your I-20s for your records.
- 2. Passport:** Do not let your passport expire. You should extend your passport six months prior to the expiration date at your country's Consulate in the United States or when you go back home. You cannot work with an expired passport.
- 3. I-94 Card or I-797:** Keep your I-94 card. It must state "F-1" and "D/S" (Duration of Status). Your dependents I-94 must state "F-2" and "D/S". If you have an expiration date on your I-94 card, then you should speak to an ISS advisor immediately.
- 4. Visa Stamp:** It is okay for your visa to expire while you are in the United States; however, you may need to renew it if you travel outside the United States. Pay attention to the number of entries into the United States you are allowed. It is acceptable for your visa to have another school's name on it. Please contact ISS for information concerning going to Mexico or Canada with an expired visa.
- 5.** Update both ISS and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) of any physical address changes while maintaining legal immigration status (Post Office Boxes are not acceptable for reporting purposes). Reporting changes of address in the Howdy Portal (<http://howdy.tamu.edu>) will fulfill this requirement, as the University will forward the updated address electronically to DHS. Failure to do so could result in losing legal immigration status and being required to leave the United States.
- 6.** Maintain a permanent address outside the United States to which you intend to return.
- 7.** Do not enter the United States on a tourist (B) visa, the visa waiver program, or on a border-crossing card. You will no longer be on a student visa and you will lose all student visa benefits such as work authorization.

B. Maintain Full-time Enrollment

You must complete the following number of hours each semester.

Student	Credit Hours each Fall and Spring	Credit Hours Summer term
TAMU Graduates	9	6
TAMU Undergraduates	12	8
Full Time ELI students	24	21

If you need to fall below the required hours, please contact ISS before you Q-drop the classes. You may or may not be eligible to fall below hours legally. Please ask about a Reduce Course Load Waiver. In order to maintain legal immigration status, a Reduce Course Load Waiver must be approved prior to dropping below hours.

If summer is your first semester at TAMU, first semester in a new academic program, or last semester in your academic program, you must register full-time. Summer is considered vacation time if it is not your first or last semester and you are not required to take classes for immigration purposes. Please consult your department concerning university rules on summer registration.

If you want to take classes at another school, including Texas A&M University English Language Institute, during the summer or in conjunction with your TAMU classes, then you need to complete a co-enrollment form. Co-enrollment must be authorized by ISS. During the Spring and Fall semesters, you should be taking at least half of your courses at TAMU.

Do not change your degree level (bachelors, masters, PhD. or non-degree program), begin a second degree or pursue a double major without consulting ISS first.

Only 3 hours of distance learning or on-line education courses may count towards the fulfillment of your full-time enrollment requirement for each semester.

C. Obtain Work Authorization

Work authorization is dependent on your legal F-1 status and your enrollment at Texas A&M University.

On-Campus Work

As long as you are in legal F-1 status and meet TAMU requirements, you are eligible to work on campus for up to 20 hours per week during the Spring and Fall semesters. You are eligible to work full-time on campus during vacation periods and during the summer semester.

Off-Campus Work

You must get proper work authorization prior to working off-campus. **You will be out of status and eligible for deportation if you work without DHS authorization. Do not risk it.** Work is considered anything for which you are compensated, such as being given cash, food, or room/board.

Speak to ISS concerning Optional Practical Training, Curricular Practical Training, or economic hardship work authorization.

D. Traveling outside the United States while you are a student

An International Student Advisor should sign your I-20 before you leave the United States. The signature is valid for up to one year or until you graduate if you graduate in less than a year. Be sure that you enter the United States on your F-1 visa. Always make sure your I-94 card is marked "F-1" and "D/S". If you are given a 30-day entry, come to ISS immediately.

Do not enter the United States on a tourist (B) visa, the visa waiver program, or on a border-crossing card. You will no longer be on a student visa and you will lose all student visa benefits such as work authorization.

E. Dependents

You may bring your dependents (spouse and/or unmarried children under age 21) to the U.S. Please consult ISS about the procedure. F-2s **CANNOT** work or receive compensation for services, such as baby-sitting. F-2s can enroll in a college-level, degree-seeking program, but may not take a full course load (less than 12 credit hours for undergrad programs, and less than 9 for grad). They may also take courses that are avocational or recreational in nature. F-2s must travel with the proper paperwork, such as an I-20 signed for travel.

F. SEVIS Fee

The US government requires individuals applying for an F-1 or J-1 exchange visitor visa or F-1/J-1 status to pay the SEVIS fee in order to begin a program of study or exchange visitor program, change status, change exchange visitor category, or be reinstated to legal status after a substantive violation. For further information regarding the SEVIS fee, please visit <http://iss.tamu.edu/Prospective-Students/Applying-for-Visa/Immigration-Requirements>