



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.

Maintaining Your F-1 Status

Below are some of the most common F-1 regulations. Failure to follow F-1 regulations may result in the termination of your F-1 status.

1. Keep your documents up to date

- a. **I-20:** Do not let your I-20 expire. If you need an extension to the completion date on the I-20, please apply for an Extension of Stay. If your I-20 expires before you graduate, you will be out of legal status. Keep all of your I-20s for your records.
- b. **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.
- c. **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-94s 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.
- d. **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 U.S. Pay attention to the number of entries into the United States you are allowed. After your first entry to the U.S. in F-1 status 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.
 - i. **Note:** 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. **U.S. Address:** 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.
- f. **International Address:** Maintain a permanent address outside the United States to which you intend to return.

2. Maintain Full-time Enrollment

You must enroll for the following number of credit hours each semester.

Student	Credit Hours for Fall and Spring	Credit Hours for Summer
TAMU Graduate Students	9	6
TAMU Undergraduate Students	12	8

If you need to fall below the required number of credit hours, you must apply for and obtain authorization from ISS for a Reduced Course Load 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 when summer is considered vacation time you are not required to take classes for immigration purposes. Please consult your academic department concerning university rules on summer registration.

If you want to take classes at another U.S. school in conjunction with your TAMU classes, then you need to request Co-Enrollment authorization from ISS. During the Spring and Fall semesters, you should be taking at least half of your courses at TAMU. If you wish to enroll only at another U.S. during the summer, then you will need to request Other School Enrollment authorization.

Only 3 hours of distance learning or online 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 term.

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.

Consult the ISS website for information about Curricular Practical Training, Optional Practical Training, On-Campus Work at an Off-Campus Location, and economic hardship work authorization.

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

An ISS 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 or your I-20 expires, whichever comes first. Be sure that you enter the United States on your F-1 visa. 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.

Always make sure your I-94 card is marked "F-1" and "D/S". If you are given a 30-day entry, consult ISS right away.

E. Dependents

You may bring your dependents (spouse and/or unmarried children under age 21) to the U.S. as F-2 dependents. Refer to the Invitation of Dependents information on the ISS website for details about how to do so. F-2s **CANNOT** work in the U.S. or receive any compensation for services, such as baby-sitting. F-2s can enroll in college-level, degree-seeking programs, but may not enroll in a full course load (i.e. at TAMU, F-2s must enroll less than 12 credit hours if undergraduate or less than 9 credit hours if a graduate student. F-2 dependents 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 U.S. government requires individuals applying for an F-1 visa or F-1 status to pay the SEVIS fee in order to begin a program of study or to change to F-1 status. For further information regarding the SEVIS fee, please visit <http://iss.tamu.edu/Prospective-Students/Applying-for-Visa/Immigration-Requirements>.