Welcome to the Manual for Advisors of F1 International Students

Created by Office of International Programs

Please contact us with any questions:
Office of International Programs
Presidents Hall 9
Telephone (973) 761-9072
Fax (973) 275-2383
Email oip@shu.edu

Table of Contents

The Office of International Programs (OIP) has created this manual to assist advisors of F1 international students with common situations they face when advising them. OIP is responsible for reporting information on international students' academic progress to the U.S. government. In order to be compliant, we need to collaborate with academic advisors and other campus offices to obtain this information.

We are providing this manual as a resource to inform advisors that international students have restrictions on the topics below. We do not expect that advisors memorize this information, but just to recognize this these topics affect an international student's visa status and therefore to coordinate with OIP for a solution.

Section 1 - General Information

1.1. What is the role of the Office of International Programs?

The Office of International Programs (OIP) assists international students to obtain the F1 visa and to maintain their visa status throughout their time at Seton Hall University. OIP is authorized by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to generate the form I-20 on behalf of Seton Hall University. The form I-20 verifies to DHS that the student has been accepted to SHU and has provided enough financial evidence to prove they can pay for their educational and living expenses for the duration of their academic program. OIP generates the form I-20 in a DHS database called SEVIS (Student Exchange Visitor Information System) and the student uses this form to apply for the F1 visa at the U.S. embassy in their home country.

OIP is also in charge of assisting exchange students and research scholars to obtain the J1 Exchange Visitor visa and American students through the study abroad process, but that's for another manual!

1.2. What is the F-1 visa?

An F-1 visa allows foreign nationals to study full-time in the United States.

1.3. Basics of the F-1 Visa

- The student has met all standards of admission
- The student has the financial resources to pay for their education and living expenses
- Students must always be full-time. That means:
    - 12 credits for ESL, undergraduate and law students
    - 9 credits for graduate and PhD students
- Students must be enrolled in an on-campus program (not online) with a specific educational objective
- Students must make normal progress towards completing their degree. That means:
    - Students must take courses on track as outlined by the program.
    - Students cannot fail a class due to excessive absences or not completing assignments
- Students must be authorized by OIP for paid or unpaid off-campus work/internships
- OIP must report all changes regarding the student to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

1.4. How OIP Reports Student Information to DHS
- F1 students are responsible for updating OIP regarding change of contact information, change of majors, change of level, expected date of graduation, internships/work
- OIP must report program changes as above to DHS
- OIP emails students before the semester starts to remind them to be full-time and begins confirming full-time enrollment to DHS after the drop/add period is over.
- OIP sends automatic emails to students whose I-20 will be expiring to remind them to take action.

Section 2 – Full-time vs. Part-time Enrollment
- Students must always be enrolled full-time in credit-bearing courses during fall and spring semesters.
  - 12 credits for ESL, undergraduate and law students
  - 9 credits for graduate and PhD students
  - A WD grade in any course is considered to be 0 credits and not credit-bearing. WD grade will not be considered part of your full-time status.
- Students do not need to enroll in summer classes unless required by their program to stay on track. If student starts in the summer semester, student must be registered for at least 6 credits.

2.1 - Acceptable Reasons for Part-time Enrollment
- Students must always be full-time as outlined above, unless they qualify for one of the reasons below. If they do not qualify for a reason below, they must add credit-bearing classes to be full-time.

Reasons	Guidelines
Illness or Medical Condition	- Cannot exceed 12 month aggregate per program level - OIP must renew this authorization each semester, based on new or continuing medical information - May be used nonstop or at different times during a program level - Student may be part-time or be excused from all classes - Student must provide medical documentation from a licensed: - Medical Doctor - Doctor of Osteopathy - Clinical Psychologist
Academic Difficulties, including: - Improper course level placement - Initial difficulty with reading requirements - Initial difficulty with the English language - Unfamiliarity with U.S. teaching methods	- Can only be used <u>one time</u> and only in the <u>initial academic semester</u> (of a degree-seeking program) - Student must maintain <u>a minimum six-credit course load not including ESL courses</u> - Student must begin a full course of study at the next semester (excluding summer)
Student Will Complete Program In Current Term	- Used in a student's final term if he/she can complete the program with fewer classes than full-time - Student must be enrolled in at least one required <u>on-campus</u> class (cannot be enrolled in only online classes)

2.2. - How Students Can Request Authorization to be Part-time

Form Required:	Part-time Authorization form available at OIP
Advisor's Role:	If a student qualifies for one of the reasons above, please sign the Part-time Authorization form and indicate the appropriate reason.
OIP's Role:	Review the form and if approved, authorize the part-time enrollment in student's SEVIS record.
Consequence:	If student drops below full-time without approval from OIP, their SEVIS record must be terminated for the reason, "Unauthorized Drop Below".

2.3. - Troubleshooting Problems – Full-time vs. Part-time Status

➢ What if a student qualifies for an initial difficulty reason, but doesn't want to take more than 3 credits?
  o The rule states students must take at least 6 credits.

➢ What if the student doesn't have enough courses to be full-time in a given semester?
  o Students must add credit-bearing courses of their choice to equal full-time status. Students MUST remember, although these classes may not count towards their degree requirements, they still must attend and complete all assignments.

➢ What if a PhD student has completed all course requirements and only has dissertation left to work on?
  o If the PhD program considers the student to be full-time at this stage in the program, the student should register for thesis continuation until they are finished with their dissertation. The advisor should indicate that the student is working on their dissertation on the part-time form.

2.4. - Other Ways to Achieve Full-time Status

If an academic department considers students in the following situations as maintaining full-time status, then OIP can register them as full-time.

1. Graduate/PhD students who have completed formal coursework and are registered for thesis continuation.
2. Concurrent enrollment in two different schools, as long as the student is counting that outside course toward SHU degree. Student must receive approval from OIP and complete Permission to Study at Another Institution Form, aka Credit Transfer Sheet.

2.5. – Factors that can Delay Progress toward Completing Degree

As a result of the following, students may find themselves without a full-time schedule in a given semester.

Factors	- Not following the course registration plan outlined by advisors - Not registering for classes on time - Taking courses out of sequence, for example: - Taking too many extra classes in summer - Not taking pre-qualifier/prerequisite classes when expected - Starting a program out of sequence - Needing to retake classes due to failing - Taking a semester off
Consequences	- Immigration record may be terminated. - Pay for unnecessary classes in order to be full-time - Extension of I-20 may not be granted, student would return to home country - Start post-completion OPT earlier than desired

Section 3 - Restriction on Online Classes

No more than **three credits per semester** may be counted toward the full course of study requirement if the class is taken online or through distance education <u>and</u> does not require the student's physical attendance for classes, examination or other purposes integral to completion of the class. This means a student could potentially take more than 3 credits online per semester, but only 3 credits would count toward their full-time status. If a student only has 1 class left in order to graduate, they cannot be enrolled only in an online class. However, students are permitted to take only online classes during their break periods because they are not required to take classes at this time.

ESL Students: If the F-1 student's course of study is in a language study program, no online or distance education classes may be considered to count toward a student's full course of study requirement.

3.1. – Troubleshooting Online Class Restrictions

➢ Examples of acceptable course registration:
   o For undergraduate students: 9 credits on-campus and 3 or more* credits online
   o Graduate students: 6 credits on-campus and 3 or more* credits online
   o ESL students cannot take online classes
   *As long as students take the minimum amount of on-campus credits, they may take more than 3 credits online, but only 3 credits of the online classes will count towards their full-time status. Example, it is acceptable for an undergraduate student to take 9 credits on-campus and 6 credits online. Not acceptable for them to take 6 credits on-campus and 6 credits online.

➢ Is an online class that has a mandatory physical reporting requirement subject to this rule?
   o No. It is reasonable to read this regulation as saying that not all online or distance education courses are subject to this restriction, but rather only online or distance education courses that do not require the student's physical attendance for classes, examination or other purposes integral to completion of the class.

➢ What if a student only has 1 online class left to take in their final semester?
   o This is not permitted. Students cannot be registered for only 1 online course. If a student remains in the United States without reporting to any class, it becomes a security issue and cannot be allowed. If this happens, they must add another class or take the class online from their home country.

Section 4 - Internships & Work

An F1 student's ability to work and train in the United States is limited by law. **Students must be authorized by OIP for paid/unpaid off-campus internships and employment.** The F1 visa rules allow for this through Curricular Practical Training (CPT) or Optical Practical Training (OPT).

4.1. - Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

Curricular Practical Training (CPT)	CPT is training that is an integral (i.e., required) part of the student's curriculum. It is authorized by OIP.
Examples	In order to graduate from X program, all students must: • complete an internship or • conduct research for dissertation/thesis or • complete elective credits, such as an internship course or independent study
Form Required	Advisor Recommendation for CPT form
Advisor's Role	Meet with student to discuss whether there is an opportunity in their academic program for CPT, and also if employment letter is appropriate for the internship course. If so, complete form to confirm the off-campus position will fulfill a requirement of the student's program. (See CPT packet)
OIP's Role	• Review CPT Request Forms • Review employment/ internship offer letter • Confirm course registration • Authorize CPT in SEVIS and issue new I-20
Restrictions	-Student must enroll in a full course of study for 1 full academic year before being eligible for CPT.* →Time spent studying full-time as an F1 in another program or school (even ESL) or in another <u>valid</u> visa status may apply →Periods of authorized part-time enrollment may also count -Can be full-time/part-time per week** -CPT start and end dates should match semester dates. If dates extend beyond semester dates, advisor must provide documentation stating that the student will fail the class if the CPT is not granted for those dates. Students in their last semester must end their CPT by the end date on their I-20. -1 year of full-time CPT disqualifies a student for OPT **-Not every student's program allows for CPT**
Exceptions	**Full-time CPT will be approved on a case-by-case basis. Students must still maintain a full-time course load and not jeopardize their ability to pass classes. Advisors should support this in their form.
Consequences	Working / training off-campus without authorization is grounds for visa termination and may also jeopardize ability to receive future benefits from USCIS

4.2. - Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Optional Practical Training (OPT)	Up to 12 months of full-time work authorization in student's field of study. Available for every degree level. Students can apply for this authorization while still studying in their program (pre-completion) or after they complete their program (post-completion). The application for OPT is made to U.S. Customs and Immigration Services, costs $410 to apply and takes 3-5 months to approve. **Pre-completion OPT:** Used *before* the student's program end date **Post-completion OPT:** Used *after* the student's program end date; or for a student in a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree program, after completion of all course requirements for degree (excluding thesis or the equivalent). **24-month Extension of OPT (STEM OPT):** Used after regular OPT is completed. Only for students who majored in DHS-approved Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) degrees. **Cap-Gap OPT Extension:** For students whose future employer files a qualifying H-1B petition.
Examples	- Student found a position in their field of study, but there is no mandatory academic requirement in their program to fulfill. - Student found a position in their field of study and they would like to get the experience.
Form Required	Academic Advisor OPT Recommendation Form Fill in expected date of graduation (needed to determine pre-completion OPT vs. post-completion OPT)
Advisor's Role	Meet with student to discuss expected date of graduation and complete OPT Advisor form.
OIP's Role	Review Advisor form and create OPT Request I-20 in student's SEVIS record.
Consequences	Working / training off-campus without authorization is grounds for visa termination

Section 5 - How Students Can Request An I-20 Extension

An I-20 form is valid for the average amount of time needed to complete a certain degree. If students need more time to complete their program, they must request an extension of the I-20 form from the OIP before the end date on the I-20.

Form Required	Extension Request form available at OIP
Advisor's Role	Complete Extension Request form. Please do not let students complete their own form, as we need the advisor to give their judgement of whether the student is eligible for an extension. Students will not be eligible for extensions due to probation, excessive absences or failing grades. Please call an OIP advisor to discuss.
OIP's Role	Review extension form and additional finances provided by student. If approved, extend the I-20 end date of student's SEVIS record.
Consequences	If the student does not extend before their I-20 end date and they have not completed their program, they must leave U.S. and return with new I-20 form. In some circumstances where all courses have been completed and only thesis remains, some students may be able to apply for post-completion OPT at this point. Please call an OIP advisor to discuss.