F-1 International Student Guidelines

Maintaining Legal F-1 Status (as of 2003)

F-1 students are under the jurisdiction of the Department of Homeland Security and the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS). Maintaining legal F-1 status is extremely important for international students, as it may not be possible to rectify the situation if you fall “out of status.” Students who are out of status are not allowed to work on campus and are not eligible for other F-1 benefits. Also, being out of status may make a student’s visa invalid. Students who are out of status for more than 180 days risk being banned from entering the United States for 3 years. Those who are out of status for more than 1 year may be inadmissible for 10 years.

Entry Documents and Procedures

- **Students may enter the US with a valid F-1 visa and I-20 form** (Canadian citizens/nationals do not need to obtain a visa). Tourist (B-2) visa or a visa waiver cannot be used to enter the U.S. as an F-1 student. The I-94 card should state “F-1 D/S” (duration of status).
- **Student passport must be valid 6 months into the future.** Students who do not need a passport to enter the U.S., such as Canadian citizens, are exempt from this requirement.
- **Students must attend the school they are authorized to attend** (the school listed on the I-20 that you used to enter the U.S.). If an I-20 was issued from another school or if a student holds an I-20 from another school, Cerro Coso must comply with the mandatory transfer procedure **within 15 days** of the program start date listed the I-20.

Full-time Enrollment

- **Students must be enrolled full-time.** Students must carry 12 units or more per semester. If they do not, they are considered out of status and the SEVIS must be notified. The PDSO may authorize an exception prior to dropping below a full load, but this may only be done for medical reasons, academic reasons (with advisor recommendation) or for the last semester before graduation if no other classes are needed. Reduced course load is only available **one time** for academic and medical reasons. If a student drops below “full-time” without pre-approval, they will be considered “out of status.”
- **The I-20 must be reviewed at the beginning and end of each semester** if the student plans to leave the U.S. The I-20 must be signed for entry to the US for the next term.
- **Temporary Absence: If the student is outside the U.S. for more than 5 months,** a new I-20 must be completed before you return to Cerro Coso because a break in F-1 status has occurred. The exception to this is if the student is enrolled in a pre-approved study abroad program.
Employment

- **Limit on-campus employment to no more than 20 hours per week** while school is in session. Full-time employment (40 hours per week) on campus is permitted during official college breaks and vacations.
- **Off-campus employment must be authorized.** Students may not work off campus unless authorization is received from the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS). Please have student contact the PDSO/DSO to apply for off-campus employment authorization. *(Please note: practical training employment must be related to the student’s major field[s] of study.)*

Address Changes

- **Report a change of residence or address** to PDSO/DSO within 10 days of the change. We must update the BCIS through SEVIS within 21 days of the change.

Suspensions/Withdrawals

**If a student is suspended from the College or withdrew,** a new I-20 must be reissued before the return to Cerro Coso College. Students cannot remain in the U.S. with the original. Students must comply with the mandatory I-20 transfer procedure, change their status, or depart from the U.S. immediately. Students who fail to do so will be considered “out of status.” If a student withdraws with PDSO/DSO prior approval, they have a 15-day grace period in which to depart from the U.S.

Program Extensions

- **If a student must remain in the U.S. longer than the period of time specified on the I-20,** the student must apply to the PDSO for a program extension before the program end date on the I-20 form. Program extensions can only be granted if the delay in completion of studies is due to compelling academic or medical reasons. A student who is unable to complete the program within the time listed on the I-20 and who is ineligible for extension is considered “out of status.”

Completion of Program - Options

- **Student must depart from the U.S. within 60 days after their program completion date** (May grads – date of Commencement; December grads – last day of Fall Term final exams).

OR

- **Apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT) prior** to the program completion date, with an employment start date before the end of the 60-day grace period. Our office policy requires you to submit your OPT application at least 10 days before your program end date.
OR

- **Complete the transfer procedure** to enroll as an F-1 student at another U.S. institution. The student must discuss their plans at least one month prior to the program end date.

OR

- **Students may also consider applying for a change to another visa category.** Again, consult with the PDSO/DSO for more information.

Questions?

- **If a student is unsure about their status**, please have student contact the PDSO/DSO as soon as possible. It may be possible to file for reinstatement at the local Immigration and Naturalization Service (BCIS) Office, although it is becoming increasingly difficult to do so.

### Reinstatement to Status Student

Reinstatement to student status is needed when the F-1 student has not maintained immigration status. Failing to maintain status can happen in a variety of ways. Here are some examples:

- If the student has not maintained a full course of study as required by the BCIS
- If the student's date of completion in item #5 on the I-20 Form has expired and no extension of stay was requested
- If the student has failed to follow the correct procedures to transfer from one institution to another within the first 15 days after enrollment at the new school

**Procedure:**

- Please have student make an appointment with PDSO/DSO. They will assist the student with the following:
  
  o Complete Form I-539
  o Write a letter to the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) requesting reinstatement, explaining the reasons for falling out of status and stating that you have not engaged in unauthorized employment
  o Provide documentation from your department to support your reinstatement to student status. This letter must include the expected degree completion date
  o Provide proof of financial support in order to get new I-20. The PDSO/DSO will go over the financial support information with student
  o Provide the original I-94
  o Provide photocopy of your visa and passport page from your passport
  o Provide a photocopy of the original I-20 ID
  o Provide a check or money order for $140.00 made payable to "BCIS"
SPECIAL NOTE:
You are not allowed to work until a BCIS decision has been made about your application for reinstatement to student status.

TRAVEL AND REENTRY:
If you are out of status and are not eligible to apply for reinstatement, you can leave the US and reenter with a new I-20. Student will then be in good F-1 status when reentering the US, however, student will begin F-1 status again, which means that student must be in status for 2 semesters before becoming eligible for CPT or OPT.

NOTE: If student is traveling out of status, there is no guarantee that they will be permitted to reenter the US. The decision on whether or not student is able to reenter is made by the BCIS officer at the port of entry. No guarantees can be made by Cerro Coso for student re-entry.

Immigration Documents:
Students should make photocopies of their travel documents and keep them in a safe place. Cerro Coso will also make copies for student file.

Passport – students should keep it with them at all times. If a student needs to renew their passport, they may find information at www.travel.state.gov

Visa – the visa stamp is placed in student passport by the US Consulate and indicates the authorized length of stay in the US. To renew a US visa for reentry, it must be done by visiting the consulate in the foreign country. It is not possible to renew an F-1 visa while in the US. Students from Mexico, Canada or the Caribbean Islands my only need a passport, no visa.

I-94 (Arrival/Departure Record)
The I-94 is typically stapled into the passport and contains an eleven digit identifying number (admissions number). BCIS uses this number to track student arrival and departure. The D/S stamp (Duration of Stay) shows the length of study, plus OPT (Optional Practical Training), plus 60 days. If a student has graduated prior to the completion date on the I-20, the I-20 is no longer valid.

Curricular Practical Training
For an experience to be considered eligible as Curricular Practical Training (CPT) it must be an integral part of the degree program. It is further defined as alternate work/study, internship, cooperative education, or any other type of required internship or practicum which is offered by sponsoring employers through cooperative agreements with the school.

Note - Students are eligible for CPT only if they are in F-1 status and have been enrolled full-time for at least nine months.
Optional Practical Training

Optional Practical Training (OPT) gives F-1 students an opportunity for work experience in the U.S. before and/or after completion of your degree. It is limited to a total of 12 months for each higher degree level in a field directly related to their course of study. Unlike Curricular Practical Training (CPT), OPT does not have to be included as a required internship or practicum listed in your course descriptions.

Eligibility

F-1 students are eligible for Optional Practical Training if they have maintained full-time student status for at least one academic year (2 semesters). Students are eligible for OPT:

- during vacation period
- after completion of all course requirements
- part-time during academic year and
- full-time after completion of the program of study

Students must complete Practical training within 14 months after completion of the course of study.

Students do not have to have a job offer to apply for Optional Practical Training.

Students who have engaged in one year or more of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) are ineligible for Optional Practical Training.

Students must apply for OPT by their completion date. They can be authorized to work up to 60 days after completion of your program.

Procedures:

Have student contact the campus PDSO/DSO to schedule an appointment to discuss the full details of the application process. Student will receive information on how to obtain all the necessary paperwork from BCIS and informed what documents are needed to obtain an Employment Authorization Document.

After applying for OPT, student will receive a Notice of Action in a few weeks, then the EAD card several months later. If the student does not receive the EAD 90 days after the date on the Notice of Action, they can contact the BCIS office in Laguna Niguel and apply for a card.

You can check the status of your application at:

Student will need their SRC number, which is on the cancelled check mailed with the OPT application.

Optional Practical Training (OPT) & Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

- CPT is authorized for off-campus work performed before completion of student’s academic program. OPT can be authorized for off-campus work before or after completion of student’s academic program.
- F-1 visa holders have a maximum of 12 months of OPT available to them for each higher level of education. The amount of CPT is not limited by the immigration regulations.
• CPT must fall into one of the three categories of eligibility listed above. You can work anywhere within your academic field on OPT.
• CPT is authorized through Cerro Coso College, authorization is not necessary from the BCIS. OPT is authorized through the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS).
• Students who have received one year or more of full-time CPT are NOT eligible for OPT. Part-time curricular practical training (20 hours or less a week) is not counted toward the one-year threshold at which the student loses eligibility for Optional Practical Training.

30 Day Admission Notice

If a student does not have their I-20 when coming through the US Port of Entry, they may be given a 30 Day Admission Notice. To obtain the D/S stamp on their I-94, they will need to mail ASAP:

• Original I-20
• Original I-515 (30 day admission notice)
• Passport and visa (if visa is required for US entry)
• Original I-94

Mail documents directly to:

SEVIS
801 I St. N/W
Room 862
Washington DC, 20536
SEVIS (800) 892-4829

EAD card for OPT -

F-1 students applying for OPT must file a Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization, to request an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) and I-538 must be completed by the PDSO/DSO

Mail I-538 to:

ACS Students/Schools (STSC) Section
PO Box 170
London, KY 40741

Or overnight to:

ACS – INS, INS Students/Schools (STSC) Section
Mail documents in bold below to Laguna Niguel -

**BCIS Form I-765**

**Photocopy of I-20**

$120 - non-refundable fee - Pay with check or money order in US currency only. Make payable to "Immigration and Naturalization Service."

**Photocopy of Form I-94 Departure Record (front and back), if available**

**A copy of your last EAD (front and back) if applicable**

**2 photographs** - 2 photos with a white background taken no earlier than 30 days before submission to the INS. They should be unmounted; printed on thin paper; glossy; and unretouched. The photos should show a three-quarter front profile of the right side of your face, with your right ear visible. Your head should be bare unless you are wearing a headdress as required by a religious order to which you belong. The photo should not be larger than 1 1/2 x 1 1/2 inches, with the distance from the top of the head to just below the chin about 1 1/4 inches. Lightly print your name and your A #, if known, on the back of each photo with a pencil.

**Mail to:**

BCIS California Service Center
P.O. Box 10765
Laguna Niguel, CA 92607-0765

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**F-2 Dependents**

Only the spouse and unmarried minor children (under 21 years old) of an F-1 student are eligible to enter the United States in F-2 dependent status. Each dependent must receive their own I-20 if they wish to obtain an F-2 visa and enter the U.S. in F-2 status.

**Conditions of F-2 Status**

F-2 dependents may remain lawfully in the U.S. as long as the F-1 student is maintaining F-1 status. However, dependents may not accept employment in the U.S. The F-2 spouse may not engage in full time study, and an F-2 child may only engage in full time study if the study is in an elementary or secondary school (kindergarten through twelfth grade). F-2 dependents may engage in study that is a vocational or recreational in nature (e.g. one English course or a sports or music/art class).

**Entering the U.S. in F-2 Status**

Dependents are eligible for admission to the United States in F-2 status when they either accompany the F-1 student into the U.S., or wish join the F-1 student who has already been admitted into the U.S. in F-1 status.

To bring your spouse/children to the United States, students need to obtain a new Form I-20 for them to apply for F-2 visas at the US embassy or consulate overseas (except citizens of Canada). Dependents also need a passport that is valid at least 6 months from the date of entry. F-2 visas are only for immediate family members (spouse and children). In order for the PDSO/DSO to issue the I-20 for dependents, financial support must be shown for
each accompanying family member for the expected time necessary to complete the degree.

Minimum required support for one year:

- $6500 for husband or wife
- $3000 per child
- $3000 each additional child

Financial documentation must be provided:

- Student must show that the required amount of money has been in the student’s US bank account for at least three months,
  OR
- If your sponsor is supporting the student’s dependents, then a letter will be required from the sponsor,
  OR
- If relatives are supporting the student’s dependents, then a letter from the relative AND a letter from the relative’s bank showing the required amount of money is available is necessary. If the money is coming from overseas, then the money stated must be in US dollars.

All family members must be covered by medical insurance while they are here in the United States.

**Requesting an I-20 for a Dependent**

Please fill out the attached “Request to add F-2 Dependents.” Once the PDSO/DSO has all the required documentation, it will take approximately 3 to 5 working days to process the I-20.

**Changing Dependents to F-2 Status When They Are Already in the U.S.**

If the student’s dependents are already present in the U.S. in another non-immigrant status, the PDSO/DSO will assist in changing dependents to F-2 status. However, if they have imminent plans to travel out of the U.S. before their current nonimmigrant status expires, they can follow the above instructions for "Entering the U.S. in F-2 Status."

**Extension of Stay for F-2 Dependents**

An F-2 dependent’s permission to remain in the U.S. is automatically extended when the F-1 student is approved for a program extension or for Optional Practical Training following their completion of studies.
Request to add F-2 Dependents

Please fill out the form with your family information:

Your last name (family name) _____________________________________________

First name_________________________________ Middle Name_________________

Your phone#___________________________________________________________

E-mail_______________________________________________________________

SPOUSE

Your spouse's last name_______________________________________________

First name_________________________________ Middle Name_________________

Date of birth (month/date/year)________________________________________

Country of birth_____________________________ Passport # ________________

CHILDREN

Your child's last name__________________________________________________

First name_________________________________ Middle Name_________________

Date of birth (month/date/year)________________________________________

Country of birth_____________________________ Passport # ________________

Your child's last name__________________________________________________

First name_________________________________ Middle Name_________________

Date of birth (month/date/year)________________________________________

Country of birth_____________________________ Passport # ________________
Off-Campus Employment Based on Economic Hardship for Students in F-1 Status

PURPOSE

This handout is designed for students in F-1 status. It will provide you with information on a type of employment opportunity which the Bureau of Citizenship & Immigration Services (BCIS) calls "off-campus employment based on economic hardship."

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

1. According to BCIS regulations, if other employment opportunities are not available or are otherwise insufficient (i.e. on-campus employment), F-1 students are eligible for off-campus work authorization.

2. The need to work must have been caused by unforeseen circumstances beyond the student's control:
   - loss of financial aid or on-campus employment without fault on the part of the student;
   - substantial fluctuations in the value of currency or in the exchange rate;
   - unusually high increases in tuition and/or living expenses;
   - unusually high medical bills;
   - other substantial and unexpected expenses.

3. Students must also have been in F-1 status for one full academic year (2 semesters), be in good academic standing (2.0 GPA for undergraduates), and demonstrate that the employment will not interfere with the student's carrying a full course of study.

4. BCIS also requires that a student make a good faith effort to locate employment on-campus before applying for employment based on economic hardship.

5. The student is not required to have a job offer before applying for this type of employment authorization.

6. The job is not restricted to student's field of study/major.

7. This type of work permission does not affect Optional Practical Training.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES

You should contact the PDSO or DSO of International Admissions (located in the Office of Student Learning) so that they may evaluate your situation to make certain that you meet the eligibility requirements for this type of employment authorization.

To apply for off-campus employment based upon economic hardship, schedule an appointment with the DSO of International Admissions and bring the following:
1. I-765 form For item #16, put (c) (3) (iii). Website is: http://www.immigration.gov/graphics/formsfee/forms/i-765.htm
2. $120.00 processing fee (check or money order made payable to BCIS).
3. I-20 ID form
4. I-94 Card
5. Your passport
6. Two photographs (green card type) with a white background and taken within the last 30 days. Please see the General Instructions for more information (website below).
7. You should also submit any other supporting materials such as affidavits which detail your unforeseen circumstances and which demonstrate the unavailability of employment on-campus.

****Please note: The blue "Signature Card" mentioned in the form's instructions is no longer required.

General Instructions needed to complete BCIS forms can be found at the website below: http://www.immigration.gov/graphics/formsfee/forms/forminfo.htm

REVIEW AND APPROVAL

1. Authorization by the Immigration Service. Your permission to begin employment based upon economic hardship is not finalized until you have received an "Employment Authorization Document" (EAD) from the BCIS. The EAD card will have your photograph and will also indicate the exact dates of your authorized employment. You must mail (1) BCIS Form I-765, (2) I-20 I.D. (Photocopy), (3) I-94 Card (Photocopy), (4) letter of explanation, (5) two photographs, and (6) a $120.00 filing fee to the BCIS California Service Center, P.O. Box 10765, Laguna Niguel, CA 92607-0765. The BCIS work permission on the EAD will begin on the date the EAD is issued. Please remember that you are required to obtain your EAD before being able to begin employment.

2. Employment will only be granted for a maximum of 12 months (1 year) or up to your expected date of graduation (whichever is less). If you are still experiencing economic hardship, have not yet graduated, and wish to extend your work authorization, you will need to apply once again following the instructions above.

3. Employment based on economic hardship can be renewed only by BCIS and only if you are maintaining your full-time status and in good academic standing.

4. Your employment authorization is automatically terminated if you fail to maintain your full-time student status, if you are no longer in good academic standing, or if you transfer to another school.

5. Employment is only authorized part-time (20 hours/week or less) while school is in session; full-time during holidays or school vacations.
EMPLOYMENT ELIGIBILITY VERIFICATION

When you begin work, you and your employer must complete a form entitled "Employment Eligibility Verification" (INS Form I-9), which the employer retains. The I-9 must be updated each time you receive a renewal of your work permission.

SOCIAL SECURITY AND OTHER TAXES

In general, F-1 students who have been in the U.S. less than five years are exempt from Social Security (F.I.C.A.) taxes. Your earnings, however, are subject to applicable federal, state and local taxes. Students must file a tax return on or before April 15 each year, which will determine if any of the withheld taxes can be refunded.

A NOTE OF CAUTION

While INS regulations provide a variety of opportunities for you to be employed during your time in F-1 status, working improperly or without authorization is a serious violation of your status. You should therefore consult with your international student advisor before taking up any employment. It is your responsibility to comply with all immigration regulations which apply to F-1 students. If you fail to comply with your responsibilities, you may not be eligible for benefits normally granted to F-1 students.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Please contact the campus PDSO or DSO of International Admissions for further information

Kimberly Blackwell, DSO (760) 384-6219
email kblackwe@cerrocoso.edu
FAQ’s

Q: What is SEVIS?
A: Student and Exchange Visitor Information System - put in place by the Department of Homeland Security to monitor and maintain the status of international students, as required by federal mandate. SEVIS is an online dynamic document, all student arrival and departure information, and changes to student status and whereabouts must be entered into the SEVIS system.

A: How can I get an I-20?
Q: Form I-20 (Certificate of Eligibility for Non-Immigrant F-1 Student Status) will not be issued until you completed application has been reviewed and accepted. Application packet can be mailed to the student, or they can download it on our website:

[http://www.cerrocoso.edu/studentservices/international-students/](http://www.cerrocoso.edu/studentservices/international-students/)

Once the student receives the I-20 it must be taken the Embassy/Consulate in their country to be issued a visa for entry to the US (Canadians do not need a Visa). Please see Regulations for Foreign Visa Students in the application packet referred to above.

Q: Is there an application fee?
A: Yes, $50.00 payable to CCCC in US dollars

Q: Do I have to attend full time?
A: Yes, student must carry at least 12 units per semester. The PDSO (Primary Designated School Official, Jill Board) may authorize an exception prior to dropping below a full load, but this may only be done for medical reasons, academic reasons (with advisor recommendation) or for the last semester before graduation. A student may only drop below a full load one semester. The PDSO/DSO will check on student enrollment 30 days into the semester.

Q: Do I have to take the TOEFL examination?
A: All applicants must prove their English proficiency. The TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) must be taken by anyone whose native language is not English. Student must present a minimum TOEFL score of 500 (paper-based) or 173 (Computer-based).
Q: Do I need to send official transcripts or mark sheets? Do my transcripts have to be translated?

A: Yes, official transcripts of academic records together with an English translation certified by an international evaluation service, and a transcript of courses in progress if previously enrolled at a higher ed institution.

Q: Is financial aid offered to international students?

A: No financial aid or scholarships are offered to international students. International students must be self-supported and must provide the sufficient funds to cover expenses for entire period of study. The estimated yearly cost is $17,000 - $20,000. $17,000 is an approximate cost for a one year, 30 unit program.

Q: Can I work as an international student?

A: Yes, as an international student you may work part-time (up to 20 hours per week) on campus (no funding is currently available for 2003-2004 year). You cannot work off-campus without permission of the PDSO/DSO (Designated School Official) and the BCIS (Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services). Remember one of the admission requirements was to submit a financial statement showing that you have sufficient money ($17,000 -$20,000) for your tuition and living expenses per year. Therefore, you should not count on getting job on campus. Please contact PDSO/DSO for further information regarding off campus employment, including Optional Practical Training (OPT) and Curricular Practical Training (CPT).

Q: Can I bring my family?

A: Yes, only your spouse and unmarried minor children (under age 21) are eligible to enter the US in F-2 dependent status. Each dependent must receive their own I-20 if they wish to obtain an F-2 visa and enter the US. Please see PDSO/DSO for further information.

Q: Can I get a drivers license or social security card?

A: Yes, students can obtain both, however the social security number is not necessary other than to obtain employment.

To get a drivers license, student must either provide the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) with a social security number or a denial letter from the Social Security office. In most instances, the student will be given a denial letter (not a social security card). The DMV will accept the denial letter and issue a drivers license. Student will need an Enrollment Verification Letter from A&R showing they are a full time student.

If a student is seeking a social security number, they would need a letter showing that in order to obtain on campus employment the social security number is needed and an Enrollment Verification Letter from A&R showing they are a full time student.
Q: When does the PDSO/DSO need to be notified?

A: The PDSO/DSO should be notified:
- Upon student arrival
- When long term SEP is complete (copy needed for Int’l student file)
- Prior to dropping below 12 units
- Temporary travel out of the country
- Add/change F-2 dependents
- Prior to seeking employment, including OPT and CPT
- Update financial information
- Update personal information, drivers license, social security, tax ID #
- Address/phone number changes
- Program extension requests
- Shorten program length
- Program change (new major, etc)
- Suspensions or other disciplinary action
- Termination of student
- Transfer requests
- Program completion
- Before departure

Q: How can I reach you?

A: E-mail is usually the easiest and most effective ways to reach us. We check our email daily and you can expect a timely response.

Kimberly Blackwell, DSO
kblackwe@cerrocoso.edu
Phone (760) 384-6219
Fax (760) 375-4776

***All documents related to international students are kept in the Office of Student Learning, including guidelines, applications and student files.