CHANGE OF STATUS TO F-1 BY TRAVEL

If you are in the United States in a valid immigration status, you may be eligible to change your status to F-1. You must either be admitted to UT Austin for an upcoming semester or be currently enrolled as a UT student. There are two ways to change your status: 1) by application to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) or 2) by international travel.

This handout describes the process of changing status by traveling internationally. For information about how to change your status by USCIS application, please see our handout “Change of Visa Status to F-1 Within the United States.”

Important points to know:

1) If you are changing your status from B-2 or F-2, you may begin classes only after you return to the United States and obtain F-1 status.
2) You may begin on-campus employment only after you reenter in F-1 status.
3) Your change of status is not complete until you reenter the United States and meet with an international student advisor to activate your immigration record.
4) You may not apply for or renew a Texas driver’s license or Texas identification card until ISSS activates your immigration record.
5) You may enter the United States no earlier than 30 days prior to the program start date listed in section 5 of the Initial I-20. Therefore it is important to plan your travel carefully.

Continuing students and newly admitted students in the Austin area should make an appointment to meet with an international student advisor. Newly admitted students who are not in the Austin area may email hotline@austin.utexas.edu to initiate the process. Your case will be assigned to an advisor for processing.

**Step One: Obtain an Initial I-20 from ISSS and Pay the SEVIS Fee**

In order to change your status by travel, you first need to obtain an “Initial Attendance” I-20 from International Student & Scholar Services.

To qualify for an I-20 you must:

- Be a continuing student OR a newly admitted student for an upcoming semester.
- Provide proof of funding for one year of expenses (tuition and living expenses). You can find the most recent estimate of expenses on the Certification of Financial Responsibility form.
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Examples of documentation include a student’s bank statement, a sponsor’s bank statement accompanied by a letter from the sponsor accepting financial responsibility for the student, a letter of appointment (for TA’s, GA’s, etc.) detailing the financial award, or a combination of any of the above.

Once an advisor issues your I-20, you must pay the SEVIS fee of $200. Payment may be made only after obtaining an I-20. For more information about the SEVIS fee please refer to the SEVIS Fee handout.

Step Two: Depart the United States and Obtain an F-1 Visa

- When you leave the United States, you will need the Form I-20 to obtain an F-1 visa from a U.S. consulate or embassy. It is not possible to obtain an F-1 visa inside the United States.
- We recommend that you make your application in your home country or country of residence. Please see our “Visa Information” handout for more information on how to apply for a visa.

Step Three: Reenter the United States in F-1 Status and Report to ISSS

- You may enter the United States no earlier than 30 days prior to the program start date listed in section 5 of the Initial I-20.
- At the port of entry present your I-20 and newly acquired F-1 visa to the inspection officer.
- After you return to the United States in F-1 status you must review and print your I-94 information at: www.cbp.gov/I94. The I-94 record must indicate “F-1” and “D/S.”
- A note about traveling to Canada or Mexico. Be sure that upon your return to the United States, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection inspection officer gives you a new I-94 entry record to indicate your new F-1 status. If you are not given a new I-94 record that indicates you are in F-1 status, you will be required to travel again in order to obtain the proper status.
- Schedule an appointment to meet with an International Student Advisor shortly after you return to the United States – no later than 21 days after the start date listed in section 5 of your I-20. You will need to bring all of your immigration documents with you so we can review them and activate your record.
- Failure to meet with ISSS in a timely manner could lead to the termination of your F-1 record and cause you to lose your valid immigration status.