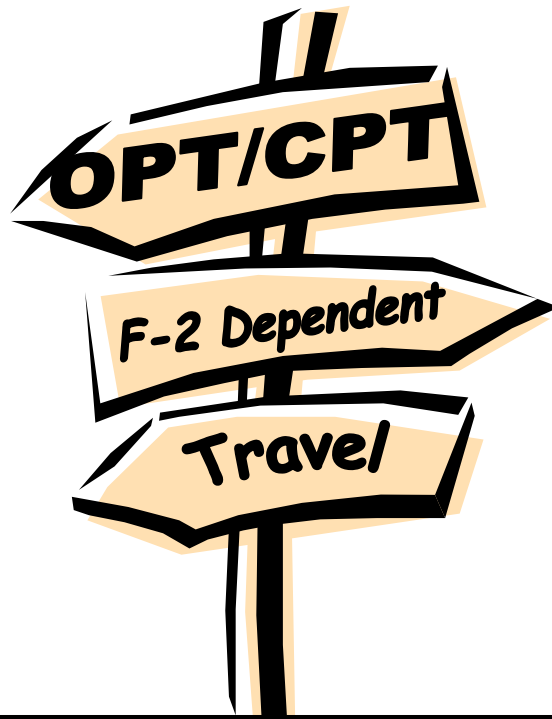




F-1 International Student Handbook



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How to Maintain F-1 Status While in the U.S.

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Reference is made in this document to a number of forms used by the Office of International Education (OIE) at Georgia Tech. These forms are available on the OIE website at: <http://www.oie.gatech.edu/issv/forms/>

IF YOU NEED MORE INFORMATION CONCERNING YOUR F-1 NONIMMIGRANT STUDENT STATUS AND THE RELATING IMMIGRATION PROCEDURES, PLEASE CONTACT EITHER YOUR FOREIGN STUDENT ADVISOR ON CAMPUS OR A NEARBY IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE OFFICE.

FAMILY NAME: [REDACTED] FIRST NAME: [REDACTED]

Student Employment Authorization:

Employment Status: _____ Type: _____

Duration of Employment - From (Date): _____ To (Date): _____

Employer Name: _____

Employer Location: _____

Comments: _____

SEVIS

Student's Copy
#00 [REDACTED]



Work Authorization/ Recommendation

Event History (Past two years):
 Event Name: _____ Event Date: _____ Name of Official: _____ Title of Official: _____

Travel signature

This page when properly endorsed, may be used for reentry of the student to attend the same school after a temporary absence from the United States. Each certification signature is valid for one year.

Name of School: _____

Deborah Shepherd		Enrollment Services Asst.	05/08/2003	Atlanta, GA
Name of School Official	Signature of Designated School Official	Title	Date Issued	Place Issued (city and state)
Name of School Official	Signature of Designated School Official	Title	Date Issued	Place Issued (city and state)
Name of School Official	Signature of Designated School Official	Title	Date Issued	Place Issued (city and state)
Name of School Official	Signature of Designated School Official	Title	Date Issued	Place Issued (city and state)

for entry to the U.S. up to the expiration date, but it is safest to always keep it valid at least 6 months into the future at all times).

2. Maintain a full course of study

Students in F-1 status must be in a full course of study (that is, they must be a full-time student). Full-time at Georgia Tech is 12 hours for undergraduate and graduate students. Students must register for and complete their 12 hours of courses. If a student drops a course without authorization and it takes them below 12 hours, the student is not maintaining status. If a student fails a course, it still counts towards the 12 hours.

Only three credit hours of distance learning can be counted towards this 12 hour total.

Vacation semester

Summer is a vacation semester. A student can be enrolled full-time, part-time or not at all in the summer as long as the student is returning to school in the fall.

Reduced Course Load

If an international student advisor approves a reduced course load for a student then the student may drop below 12 hours enrollment. The reasons for a reduced course load are very specific and must be approved by the advisor before the student drops the class.

Please see the Reduced Course Load Request form for further details.

3. Make normal progress in your studies

If a student is academically dismissed, the I-20 is cancelled in 21 days. The student must either transfer to another institution in those 21 days or depart the U.S.

4. Update your address within 10 days of moving

International Students are required to report a US address and a foreign address to the Department of Homeland Security. When a student moves, they must report their new U.S. address within 10 days.

Georgia Tech international students report their addresses to the Department of Homeland Security by entering them in Oscar. The U.S. address is reported as the “SEVIS Inside U.S.” address, and the foreign address is reported as “SEVIS Outside U.S.” address.

Instructions on how to report these addresses can be found at:
<http://www.oie.gatech.edu/iss/general/UpdateAddresses.pdf>

5. Apply for an extension of your I-20 before the expiration date

If the I-20 expires, because the date in section 5 of the I-20 passes, the student is not maintaining status, which means they are not able to work on-campus.

To apply for an extension, the student should have an international student advisor fill out a Program Extension form. The student will need to have their Graduate Coordinator or Academic Advisor complete the form and provide proof of funding to continue their studies.

6. Request a transfer in a timely manner

For students transferring into Georgia Tech:

Transfer In students should check in to the Office of International Education by the last day of registration. Students will initially receive a “Transfer Pending I-20”.

Students will receive their “Continued Attendance” I-20 on a designated day after the close of registration.

For students transferring out of Georgia Tech:

Students who wish to transfer out of Georgia Tech must complete the “Transfer Out” form, which is available on the OIE website, and submit it with a copy of their acceptance letter from their new school to OIE. A student who wishes to transfer out can only have their SEVIS record transferred to one school, so students must be sure of the school they select.

In both cases, a student must be maintaining status in order to transfer schools in status.

7. Comply with special registration rules

Not all students are special registered. A student can tell if they have been special registered by “Special Registrant” being stamped on the back of their I-94 and an 8 or 10 digit FINS number being written on the front of the I-94 and often on the visa itself. Usually special registrants are male and from predominantly Muslim countries, but anyone can be special registered.

The main requirement for Special Registrants is that they check out with an immigration officer at the U.S. airport or land crossing from which they are departing the U.S. Special Registrants can only leave from a designated port. A list of ports can be found at: <http://www.ice.gov/doclib/pi/specialregistration/srindividuals.pdf>. If a student fails to check out with an immigration officer on departing the U.S., they could be denied entry on returning.

A student who has been special registered may also be called in for an interview at any time. Consequently it is very important that the “SEVIS Inside U.S.” address in Oscar is kept up to date.

8. Do not work without authorization

Working without authorization is the worst kind of immigration offense. In addition, students should be aware that working is a benefit of being in F-1 status, it is not a right. The primary purpose of a person in student status is to study.

ALL OFF-CAMPUS WORK MUST BE AUTHORIZED. Always check with an advisor if you have questions about your eligibility for work.

Work is split into on-campus and off-campus work.

On-campus employment

Definition: Work on-campus for Georgia Tech or for a firm on-campus that provides services for Georgia Tech students, e.g. a food store in the Student Center.

Eligibility: Any F-1 student in good standing is eligible to work on-campus.

How much can I work?: Part-time, that is, up to 20 hours a week, while in school, or full-time, greater than 20 hours per week, during school breaks and the student’s vacation semester.

Procedure: There is no formal authorization procedure. The student must be maintaining F-1 status and their I-20 must be stamped on page 3 by OIE.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

Definition: Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is off-campus work authorized because it is an integral part of the degree program. At Georgia Tech, it is usually done as Co-op, though it can be done as a required internship in a few cases.

How much can I work: Part-time (20 hours or less) or full-time (more than 20 hours) as recommended by the Division of Professional Practice or the department (in the case of undergraduate Building Construction, or graduate City Planning or Information Design and Technology). Students can work as much as they want on CPT, but if they are authorized to work more than 12 months of full-time CPT, they are not eligible for OPT.

Eligibility: Students must be in F-1 status for at least 2 full-time semesters before they are eligible to work off-campus. For Georgia Tech undergraduate students in any major, off campus employment can only be authorized if the student is participating in the Co-op program UNLESS they are majoring in Building Construction. For Georgia Tech graduate students, off campus employment can only be authorized if the student is participating in the Co-op program UNLESS they are majoring in City Planning or Information Design and Technology, when the employment can be authorized as a required internship.

Procedure: Authorized by OIE. Bring the following documents to OIE:

- Letter of work approval from the Division of Professional Practice (or letter from department if a required internship).
- Current I-20.

A new page 3 with the work authorization will be stapled to the back of the current I-20. After picking up the I-20 the student must register for the appropriate course. The I-20 with the CPT authorization is proof of employment eligibility, which students need to show to their employer.

Time for approval: 5 working days.

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Definition: Optional Practical Training (OPT) gives F-1 students an opportunity for work experience in the U.S. before and/or after completion of a degree. Initially, a student can apply for 12 months of OPT. A student gains another 12 months of OPT when they move to a higher degree level. A student may apply for a one-time 17 month extension of OPT in certain cases. Work must be directly related to the student's field of study.

Eligibility: Students must be in F-1 status for at least 2 full-time semesters before they are eligible to work off-campus. OPT is usually used for post-completion in which case, the student must have completed course requirements for the degree.

How much can I work?: Post-completion is always full-time. Pre-completion is part-time (20 hours or less) while in school and full-time (more than 20 hours per week) during school breaks and the student's vacation semester. The total amount of time allowed for OPT per degree level is 12 months.

Procedure:

- Recommended by OIE. Authorized by USCIS.
- Attend an OPT workshop held by OIE.
- After attending an OPT workshop, make an appointment with an advisor to prepare the application.

Time for approval: Student should allow up to 3 months.

Social Security Numbers

F-1 students must have a job in order to be eligible for a Social Security Number. Unemployed F-1 students and F-2 Dependents are NOT eligible for a Social Security Number.

F-1 students must be present in the United States for at least 10 working days before they apply for a Social Security Number. The student must apply in person at the Social Security Administration and will need to present their **Passport, original I-94 Form, and the following documents:**

F-1 Students:

- 1. I-20**
→ Must be the current I-20
- 2. MUST be employed and have Letter of Employment**
→ Letter should include the following:
Type of work, employment start date, hours per week, nature of the work, and supervisor's name and title.
- 3. Letter of Support from OIE**
→ OIE will need to see the Letter of Employment before issuing the support letter.

Once the application is successful, the student will usually receive the card by mail in 4 to 8 weeks, unless the application requires further security processing. The student will also receive a receipt indicating that they have applied successfully for a card. This receipt is sufficient to be initially placed on payroll by the Office of Human Resources.

9. Obey state and federal laws

Most F1 students are required to file a tax form even if they do not work. Tax season is generally from January 31 to April 15 and covers the previous calendar year's work. OIE offers an on-line software program to help with filing federal tax forms and workshops to help with filing state of Georgia tax forms.

Students should also be aware that breaking any state or federal laws can have implications for their immigration status.

10. Depart from the U.S. in a timely manner

After completion of the program of study, the student has 60 days to:

- Leave the country
- Get an I-20 for a new program at Tech or another school
- Apply for a new status
- Begin OPT

If the student abandons their program or drops out of school, there is no grace period and the student should leave the country immediately.

If a student is thinking about withdrawing from school, they should discuss the situation with an international student advisor before doing anything.

11. Travel Issues

If a student plans to travel outside the U.S., they should be aware of the following issues.

1) **I-20:** A valid travel signature on page 3 of your current I-20 is necessary for travel. The travel signature is valid for one year and multiple entries for those studying. It is valid for 6 months for those on post-completion OPT.

2) **Passport:** The passport should be valid for 6 months beyond the date on which they plan to re-enter the U.S.

3) **A valid U.S. visa.** If the visa has expired, arrangements should be made to get a new visa. For more information, see the OIE website at:
<http://www.oie.gatech.edu/iss/general/faq.html#33>.

4) **Automatic Revalidation of Visa:** If the student:

- has an expired visa;
- is currently maintaining status in the U.S.;
- is not going to apply for a visa; and,
- is NOT a national of Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Sudan, and Syria,

the student may travel to Canada, Mexico, or the Caribbean Islands for less than 30 days. For such trips, the student will only need your passport, the passport with the expired visa (if in a different passport), and an I-20 with a valid travel signature. When the student leaves the US, they should keep their current I-94 card.

To view the Code of Federal Regulations regarding Automatic Revalidation of Visa, visit the following website:

<http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/get-cfr.cgi?TITLE=22&PART=41&SECTION=112&YEAR=2002&TYPE=TEXT>

5) **Department of Homeland Security recommends students have their transcripts and proof of financial support** with them when they return.

6) **Special Registrants:** Special registrants must currently appear before an inspecting officer at the port of departure before leaving the US.

Frequently Asked Questions on Reentering to the US are on the Immigration and Custom Enforcement Website: http://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel/faq_f.htm

12. International Student & Scholars Services Advising Schedule

There are many ways to contact an advisor at International Student & Scholar Services at Georgia Tech. *The office is open Monday through Friday 8:30am-4:30pm.*

Telephone Calls & E-mail

An advisor will be available to take phone calls from 8am - 5pm. Telephone calls are a good way to get straight-forward general information, but you may be referred to come back for an appointment if your situation is more complicated. Questions may also be emailed using the office address: info@oie.gatech.edu. Please only e-mail one advisor with your question.

Walk-In Advising

International Students may see an advisor for a 10 minute time slot on a first-come, first-served basis from 8:30am-4:30pm. These times are for students with routine inquiries and requests.

Advisor Appointments

Individual Appointments are scheduled at various times between 8:30am-4:30pm. You should call the Office of International Education at 404-894-7475 to schedule an appointment. You will be asked for some information on the reason for the appointment. This will allow us to give you an idea of the documents you may need to bring and it will help the advisor to prepare for your visit if necessary. If you are uncomfortable in giving your reason for the visit then you do not have to share this information.

Walk-in Advising or Appointment?

Is your request more suited for walk-in advising or appointment advising?

Walk-in Advising

- Co-op
- Travel signatures
- Extension of stay
- Transfer out to another school
- Replacement of lost forms

Appointment

- OPT (after attending OPT session)
- Change of status
- Reinstatement
- Documents for dependents

Before coming to OIE have you:

Completed all the necessary forms? Forms are available at:

<http://www.oie.gatech.edu/iss/forms/>

Brought your passport, I-94 and I-20s? Are there any other documents relevant to your situation?

If you are coming for walk-in advising, can your question be answered in 10 minutes?

13. Your Role and Responsibilities for Compliance with F-1 Laws and Regulations

The U.S. Federal Government regulations state how international students must maintain status. Failure to follow these regulations could result in your F-1 status being cancelled. The bullets below give a summary for maintaining status while in the US. We don't want you to lose your F-1 status, so please help the Office of International Education (OIE) to keep your information updated.

- Keep a valid, unexpired passport and I-20
- Update current physical address in Banner/OSCAR every time you move
- Be enrolled in a degree-seeking course and make normal progress towards said degree
- Be enrolled full-time (12+hrs) unless authorized **in advance** to take a reduced course load. You must get authorization from OIE before the registration fee deadline to qualify
- Be enrolled for no more than 3 hours of on-line/distance education in any semester
- Reduced Course Load is only available for:
 - Academic reasons with academic advisor recommendation, only **once per degree level**
 - Medical reasons with supporting documentation from a Medical Doctor in Atlanta
 - A vacation semester (see below) or your last semester before graduation.
- Vacation semester: You are eligible for a vacation semester during the summer semester only.
- Notify OIE of any change of major or degree level within 10 days of the change
- Submit an I-20 extension request **before** the I-20 expires.
- Work no more than 20 hours/week (on and/or off campus) while enrolled full-time.
- **Work off-campus only with the appropriate authorization.** Off-campus work without authorization is a serious violation of your status; you will be working illegally.
- Apply for post-completion OPT **before** the end of completion of studies. This might not be the same semester as when you officially graduate.
- Have a valid travel signature on your I-20 before leaving and re-entering the US
- Complete an Income Tax Return as per IRS regulation by April 15th of every year.
- Notify OIE of any change in information on the I-20 or addition of dependents.