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## GENERAL IMMIGRATION INFORMATION FOR F-1 STUDENTS

### Understanding Changes in the Immigration Regulations

The tragic events of September 11, 2001 drastically changed the way many Americans view visitors to the United States. As a democracy, the U.S. government has reacted to this strong public concern with a wide array of new laws, procedures, and regulations and has changed the way in which existing laws are interpreted and enforced. International students and scholars and their families are affected by these measures in numerous and important ways.

Updated regulations governing the status of international students, scholars, and their families took effect on January 1, 2003. These regulations indicate that the U.S. government has adopted a policy of "no tolerance" for mistakes on the part of non-immigrants, including F-1 students. It is critical that you understand the F-1 regulations and comply with them.

The immigration offices of the U.S. government are part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Its functions are divided into three offices within DHS: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and Customs and Border Protection (CBP). USCIS processes applications for F-1 benefits, CBP officers staff ports of entry, and ICE handles cases of students who fail to maintain status.

### Immigration Documents

*All immigration regulations are handled by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).*

**Passport:** You must make sure that your passport is valid for at least six months in the future. An expiring passport can be renewed or revalidated through your country's Embassy in Washington DC, or your Consulate in New York.

**Visa:** The visa is a stamp made in the passport by a U.S. Embassy or consulate outside the United States. It shows the number of entries you are permitted in and out of the United States, but does not determine the length of time you may remain in the United States. Remember that having a valid visa is necessary for entering and re-entering the U.S.

**I-94 Card:** This is a small, white card, which is usually stapled to the visa page in your passport when you enter the U.S. It indicates the amount of time you are authorized to stay in the U.S. For this reason, the I-94 card is extremely important - DO NOT LOSE IT. Students on an F1 or J1 visa will have D/S written on the I-94 card. "Duration of Status" (D/S) means that you may remain in the U.S. as long as you continue to be a full time student.

**I-20 Form:** This is a form given to F1 and F2 visa holders as a permanent record of your periods of stay in the U.S. When you enter the U.S. for the first time, the immigration officer will stamp the upper right corner of the I-20 form. This document notes extensions of stay, school transfer and permission to work, among other things. Every time you plan to leave the country, you must have your I-20 form signed by the School Director in order to return to the United States.

## Maintaining Student Status

**Full-time Status:** All F1 students must maintain full time status at all times. This means that International Language Institute students must be enrolled for a minimum of 20 hours per week. Once an international student has stopped taking at least 20 hours per week, he/she is out of status.

**Travel:** To travel outside the United States, an F1 (or J1) student must have 3 things: a valid I-20 (or DS-2019) form with a recent signature from the International Student Advisor, a valid passport, and a valid visa allowing for re-entry.

**Program Extension:** If F-1 students need to stay at The International Language Institute longer than the completion date on their I-20 form in order to complete their studies, an application for an Extension of Stay must be processed. Students in this situation should make an appointment to see the School Director **BEFORE** their I-20 expires.

## Arriving at a U.S. Port of Entry...What a student can expect

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's **Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP)** is committed to facilitating your stay in the United States while you take advantage of our nation's academic, educational, and cultural offerings. To enhance security without slowing legitimate travel, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has instituted some changes in U.S. entry and exit procedures. Careful planning and preparation by international students can ensure that any delay based on these procedures is minimal.

**Plan Your Arrival:** You may be refused entry into the United States if you attempt to arrive more than 30 days before the program start date listed on your SEVIS I-20 form.

**Always Hand-Carry Your Documents:** If your baggage is lost or delayed, you will be unable to present the documents at your port of entry. As a result, you may not be able to enter the United States. **Do not check the following documents in your baggage:**

1. **Your passport, valid for at least six months beyond the date of your expected stay;**
2. **Your immigration documents:** When you receive your nonimmigrant visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate, the consular officer may seal your immigration documents in an envelope and attach it to your passport. You should not open this envelope! The Customs and Border Protection Officer at the U.S. Port of Entry will open the envelope; and
3. **SEVIS Form I-20.**

*In addition, it is strongly recommended that you also hand carry the following documentation:*

1. Evidence of financial resources;
2. Evidence of student status, such as recent tuition receipts and transcripts;
3. Paper receipt for the SEVIS fee, Form I-797, and
4. Name and contact information for your "Designated School Official", including a 24-hour emergency contact number at the school.

For comprehensive information on procedures for traveling and arriving in the United States, visit: <http://educationusa.state.gov/predeparture/travel/customs.htm>

### **Complete Your Entry Paperwork:**

**If Arriving By Air:** Flight attendants will distribute Customs Declaration Forms (CF-6059) and Arrival Departure Record Forms (I-94). These must be completed prior to landing.

**If Arriving By Land or Sea:** The CBP Officer at the port of entry will provide the necessary Customs Declaration Forms (CF-6059) and Arrival-Departure Record Forms (I-94) to be filled out upon your arrival.

### **As You Arrive at the Port of Entry:**

Proceed to the terminal area for arriving passengers. Have the following documents available for presentation: your passport; SEVIS Form (I-20); Arrival-Departure Record Form (I-94); and Customs Declaration Form (CF-

6059). The Form I-94 should reflect the address where you will reside, not the address of the school or program.

All visitors entering the United States must state their reason for wishing to enter the country. You will also be asked to provide information about your final destination. **It is important that you tell the CBP Officer that you will be a student.** Be prepared to include the name and address of the school program where you will enroll/participate.

Once your inspection is successfully completed, the inspecting officer will:

- **Stamp your SEVIS Form for duration of status (“D/S”) for F visa holders**
- **Stamp your SEVIS Form for 30 days beyond program end date for M visa holders**
- **Stamp the Arrival-Departure Record Form (I-94) and staple it in the passport**

#### **Following Admission into the United States:**

Students should report to their school within 30 days of the date that appears on the SEVIS I-20 form to register for courses or to validate their intended participation. Failure to do so may result in serious consequences.

#### **Additional Information:**

**Secondary Inspection Requirements:** If the CBP officer at the port of entry cannot initially verify your information or you do not have all of the required documentation, you may be directed to an interview area known as “secondary inspection.” Secondary inspection allows inspectors to conduct additional research in order to verify information without causing delays for other arriving passengers.

The inspector will first attempt to verify your status by using the Student and Exchange and Visitor Information System (SEVIS). In the event that the CBP Officer needs to verify information with your school or program, **we strongly recommend** that you have the **name and telephone number of the foreign student advisor at your school.** In the event you arrive during non-business hours (evening, weekends, holidays), you should also have an emergency or non-business hour phone number available for this official.

Failure to comply with U.S. government entry-exit procedures may result in your being denied entry to the United States. Under certain circumstances, the CBP officer may issue a “Notice to Student or Exchange Visitor” Form (I-515A), which authorizes temporary admission into the United States. Work with your school to submit the proper documentation without delay.

**US-VISIT:** All nonimmigrant visitors holding visas -- regardless of race, national origin, or religion -- participate in the US-VISIT program, a comprehensive registration system tracking entries to and exits from the United States. For more information: [www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/interapp/editorial/editorial\\_0440.xml](http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/interapp/editorial/editorial_0440.xml)

**National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS):** Some individuals may be asked to provide additional information under the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS). A packet of information will be available at each port of entry explaining the registration procedure. For more information: [www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/interapp/editorial/editorial\\_0440.xml](http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/interapp/editorial/editorial_0440.xml)

## **Student Health Insurance**

In the United States, individuals are responsible for paying for their own medical care costs. In general, these costs are very high. To prepare for the financial responsibility of unexpected illness or injury, all international students on F-1 visas at the International Language Institute should have health insurance. One of the companies offering health insurance for international students is Compass Benefits at <http://www.compassbenefit.com>.