The Rackham Grace Period and F-1/J-1 Status- Special COVID-19 procedures

The information on this page only applies to F-1/J-1 students who plan to use the extended Winter 2020 Rackham “grace period.” Students planning to graduate in future terms should refer to the standard Rackham Grace Period and F-1/J-1 Status information.

Key Points

- Using the Rackham Grace Period allows doctoral degree completion without enrolling in the next term
- I-20/DS-2019 dates are based on enrollment, not degree conferral
- Employment authorization (both on-campus and post-completion) is impacted directly by use of the Rackham Grace Period. Advance planning is essential.
- Special COVID-19 procedures have been established for students with April 30, 2020 I-20/DS-2019 end dates.

Rackham Grace Period

A doctoral student must be enrolled for eight hours of candidacy during the full term in which s/he defends. It is expected that the defense will occur prior to the last day of classes for the intended final term of enrollment.

Even if you successfully defend your dissertation prior to the last day of classes during your final term, additional time after the oral defense is required for thesis revisions and corrections, a post-defense meeting, and other procedures. The Rackham Grace Period exists to allow PhD students a small amount of extra time if needed after the end of a semester, during which these post-defense degree requirements may be completed without having to enroll in the subsequent semester. For Winter Term 2020, Rackham has extended the grace period through August 18, 2020. Students who need to use the special Winter 2020 extended Rackham grace period may request an I-20 or DS-2019 extension by following the procedures explained at the end of this page.

For more information from Rackham about doctoral degree deadlines and requirements, please visit their website:

https://rackham.umich.edu/navigating-your-degree/doctoral-degree-deadlines/ [3]
https://rackham.umich.edu/navigating-your-degree/completing-doctoral-degree-requirements/ [4]
F-1/J-1 Status Considerations

F-1 and J-1 PhD students who use the Rackham Grace Period to complete their degree requirements should be aware of the following immigration considerations:

I-20/DS-2019 end date: The end date of your I-20 or DS-2019 is based strictly on your final term of enrollment, but students who need to use the special Winter 2020 extended Rackham grace period may request an I-20 or DS-2019 extension by following the procedures explained at the end of this page.

On-Campus employment considerations: F-1 and J-1 students are eligible to work on-campus while enrolled full-time and making progress towards degree completion. The dates of your on-campus work eligibility are strictly tied to the dates of your I-20/DS-2019.

As such, on-campus employment authorization does not exist during the Rackham Grace Period unless obtained via post-completion employment authorization (see below). For example, if you complete your PhD requirements in May during the winter Rackham Grace Period, your I-20/DS-2019 end date will be April 30, which means your on-campus work authorization ends April 30, unless you have already been approved to begin Post-Completion OPT or Academic Training. If you plan to use the extended Winter Term 2020 Rackham grace period, you must apply for an extension of your I-20 or DS-2019 in order to maintain eligibility to work on campus.

Post-Completion employment considerations: In order for you to maintain your F-1 or J-1 status and work in the US following the end date of your I-20/DS-2019, you must qualify for, apply for, and be approved for either Post-Completion OPT (F-1 students) or Academic Training (J-1 students). Please visit our website for more details about these types of employment authorization.

If you intend to work shortly after your final term of enrollment ends, advance planning is essential: current OPT processing time is 3+ months, while Academic Training should be authorized prior to the expiration of the DS-2019.

F-1/J-1 Grace Period: Following the completion date of the I-20 form, F-1 students have a 60-day immigration grace period. Following the completion date of the DS-2019 form, J-1 students have a 30-day immigration grace period.

Please do not confuse this immigration grace period with the Rackham Grace Period. The immigration grace period exists to provide students time after their enrollment is completed, prior to departing the US. Although it is possible to wait until the immigration grace period to apply for post-completion employment authorization, for the reasons explained above, it is not recommended.

Next Steps

As an F-1 or J-1 international student, it is your responsibility to understand and navigate both academic and immigration requirements. Please consult your academic department and/or the Rackham Graduate School should you seek clarification on doctoral degree deadlines and requirements. Please consult the International Center should you seek clarification about F-1/J-1 deadlines and requirements.

Advance planning is very important. Please take time before your oral defense to identify a PhD completion plan that works well from an academic, immigration, and employment perspective.
SPECIAL COVID-19 PROCEDURES FOR F-/J-1 STUDENTS WITH APRIL 30, 2020 I-20 OR DS-2019 END DATES.

The Rackham Graduate School has decided to extend the Winter Term 2020 deadline for final dissertation completion and filing from May 26, 2020 to August 18, 2020. If the current end date on your Form I-20 or DS-2019 is April 30, 2020, please review the following four scenarios:

1. If you plan to complete all Ph.D. requirements no later than April 30, 2020, meaning that you will not need to use the Rackham “grace period”, or you have already left the United States and plan to complete your Ph.D. requirements outside the U.S., there are no special actions that you need to take.  
   - If you plan to work in the U.S. after completing your degree requirements, be sure to apply for OPT [5] or AT [6] by the appropriate deadlines.

2. If you will be able to complete your Ph.D. requirements by the end of your immigration grace period (I-20 end date plus 60 days for F-1 students; DS-2019 end date plus 30 days for J-1 students), it will not be necessary for you to request an extension of your I-20 or DS-2019. 
   - You can remain in the U.S. during your immigration grace period and use a portion of the extended Rackham grace period to complete your degree requirements. 
   - Remember that your on-campus employment authorization ends on your I-20 or DS-2019 end date. You will not be able to work in the U.S., including on campus after that date, unless you have been approved for Optional Practical Training or Academic Training.
   - If you plan to work in the U.S. after completing your degree requirements, be sure to apply for OPT or AT by the appropriate deadlines.

3. If you will need to use the entire extended Rackham grace period (through August 18, 2020 to complete your Ph.D. requirements), you will be able to apply for an extension of your I-20 or DS-2019 even though you will not be enrolled in classes, due to the current challenging COVID-19 circumstances. If you decide to do this, you should follow the normal I-20 extension [7] or DS-2019 extension [8] procedures by April 30, 2020 and include a special letter that Rackham’s central administration can provide to you. This letter will be included in your International Center immigration records to document the special circumstances justifying the extension.

4. If you will not be able to complete your Ph.D. requirements by August 18, 2020 and will need to enroll in classes for a future term, you should request an extension of your I-20 [7] or DS-2019 [8]. Follow normal extension procedures and be sure to apply for your extension several weeks before your I-20 or DS-2019 end date. No special letter from Rackham will be required.

Source URL: https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/students/rackham-grace-period-covid-19

Links
[2] https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/students/rackham-grace-period
[5] https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/students/f1-students/apply-opt
[6] https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/students/j1-students/academic-training
[7] https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/students/f1-students/extension