

Change of Status to F-1

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Overview

An F-1 student is a nonimmigrant who is pursuing a full course of study to achieve a specific educational or professional objective at an academic institution in the US. Once the educational objectives have been achieved, the F-1 student is expected to return to his or her residence abroad.

A student acquires F-1 status using Form I-20, issued by the U.S. school which the student is attending/planning to attend. Status is acquired in one of two ways: 1) by entering the United States with the I-20 and an F-1 visa obtained at a U.S. consulate abroad (Canadian citizens are exempt from the visa requirement); or 2) by applying to USCIS for change of nonimmigrant status (if the student is already in the United States and cannot travel). Please note that if you choose the latter form of acquiring F-1 status, you will not receive an F-1 travel visa, only F-1 status. This means that if you later travel outside the U.S. while in F-1 status, you will have to apply for F-1 visa at a U.S. consulate in order to be able to return to the U.S.

A person of any non-immigrant status except C, D, K, or M (and in some cases J), and except those who entered the United States under the terms of the Visa Waiver Program, can apply for a change to F-1 status if he/she has maintained lawful non-immigrant status up to the time of application. Those with J status who are subject to 212(e) two-year home country physical requirement may not change status in the U.S. unless a waiver has been granted. Non-immigrants in A, G, or NATO status must first complete Form I-566, and have it properly endorsed by the foreign mission to the U.S. and the Department of State.

Documentation Needed to Apply for Change of Status to F-1

- [G-1145, E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance](#) ^[1]
- A cover letter (one page) requesting the change of status from your current status to F-1. This letter should include a brief explanation as why you wish to change to F-1 status. You should also provide a checklist of the documentation you are including in your application.
- [USCIS Form I-539 Application to Extend/Change Nonimmigrant Status](#) ^[2], including application fee.

- Evidence of financial support (i.e., bank statement, assistantship letter, etc.). If you have been offered an assistantship from the department and therefore will need to start your on-campus job under F-1 employment authorization, you may want to request USCIS to expedite your change of status application. There is no guarantee that your application will be expedited, but there is no harm in asking. Please note that after your change of status to F-1 is approved, the earliest date you may start working on campus is 30 days before the first day of classes of your first term as F-1 student.
- Copy of the admission letter from the University.
- Copy of your entire F-1 I-20 (sign in “Student Attestation” section on page 1 of the form before making a copy). Do NOT send your original I-20. USCIS does not require the original and will not return it.
- Copy of the receipt indicating payment of the [SEVIS fee](#) [3]. Please note that the SEVIS fee is separate from the application fee; both fees must be paid if you are applying for the change of status within the U.S.
- Copies of all of the immigration documents (e.g. DS-2019, F-2 I-20, I-797, paper or print-out of electronic [Form I-94](#) [4], valid passport, visa stamp, EAD card, etc.) showing that you are currently in lawful non-immigrant status.
- Copy of the waiver of the 212(e) Two-Year Foreign Residency Requirement (if you were previously in J status and subject to the requirement), if applicable.

We recommend that you make a copy of this application for your own record.

Mailing Address and Where to File

It **may take USCIS several months** to adjudicate an I-539 request, and therefore you should use a return address that will be valid for many months. We do not recommend trying to change your I-539 mailing address once your application has been submitted to USCIS.

If you know that you will be moving soon, we recommend using a friend or relative’s address in the U.S. If you select this strategy, make sure to include the name of your friend or relative on the line of the I-539 form that says “In care of.” Be sure to verify that their name is on their mail box.

The address that you use on your I-539 will dictate to which USCIS Service Center you should mail your application. If the address you use is in Michigan, you should mail your application to one of the following:

For U.S. Postal Service (including US Postal Service Express mail):

USCIS
P.O. Box 660166
Dallas, TX 75266

The U.S. Postal Service is the only service that delivers to a P.O. Box address. We recommend that you use a trackable mailing method so that you have delivery confirmation of your application. If you send your application with a method that requires a signature upon delivery, use the express mail and courier deliveries address below.

For express mail and courier deliveries (e.g., UPS, FedEx, DHL, etc):

USCIS
ATTN: I-539
2501 S. State Highway 121 Business
Suite 400
Lewisville, TX 75067

If you are using a non-Michigan address on the I-539 form, please refer to the USCIS Form I-539 instructions for the correct USCIS mailing address.

We do not recommend using USCIS Electronic Immigration System (ELIS).

If your change of status is pending with USCIS and you later decide to leave the U.S., your change of status is considered to have been abandoned.

Important Things to Remember

If you are currently in F-2 status:

Source: 8 CFR (Code of Federal Register) § 214.2(f)(15)(ii)

- Individuals in F-2 status are eligible for part time study. Refer to F-2 Dependents for details. However, once your change of status to F-1 is approved, you are required to be enrolled full time. If your change of status has not been approved by the deadline for adding/dropping classes, your I-20 start date will be deferred until the start of the next semester and you must stay enrolled part time until the end of the current semester in order to maintain your F-2 status.

If you are currently in B1/B2 status:

Source: 8 CFR § 214.2(b)(7) and §248.1(c)

- Individuals in B1/B2 status are prohibited from “enrolling in a course of study” until after USCIS approves their change of status application.

If you are currently in any other status (e.g., H, J, L, E, etc.):

- If your current status allows full-time studies in the U.S., you may start classes before your change of status application is approved. However, you are not allowed employment under F-1 status until after your application is approved. For example, if you have an assistantship, you won't be able to start it until after you receive your F-1 status.

Traveling and Reentering the U.S.

The alternative method of changing to F-1 status is through travel and re-entry, which may be preferred over the in-country change of status in certain situations. In this case, you would depart the U.S. and then apply for an F-1 visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate abroad, preferably the local consulate in your home country. If the F-1 visa application is approved and the F-1 visa is issued, then you can re-enter the U.S. using your F-1 I-20 form and F-1 visa. At the Port of Entry, your electronic [I-94](#) [4] will be updated to show your status as F-1 and the Admit Until Date as D/S, which confirms F-1 status.

Please note that Canadian citizens are exempt from the requirement of a having an F-1 visa to re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status. But travel and re-entry are still required for Canadian citizens to obtain F-1 status.

For further information about travel and re-entry and/or visa applications, refer to the [U.S. Department of State](#) [5] web site and [Travel Outside the U.S. and Reentry](#) [6].

If you would like to discuss the risks and benefits of your strategy for change of status, or have questions about your options, please call the U-M International Center to schedule an appointment with an advisor.

Source URL: <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/change-status-to-f1>

Links

[1] <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/form/g-1145.pdf>

[2] <https://www.uscis.gov/i-539>

[3] <https://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901>

[4] <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/i-94>

[5] <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas.html>

[6] <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/travel-outside-us-reentry>