

The Rackham Grace Period and F-1/J-1 Status

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.

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

<https://rackham.umich.edu/navigating-your-degree/doctoral-degree-deadlines/> [1]

<https://rackham.umich.edu/navigating-your-degree/completing-doctoral-degree-requirements/> [2]

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*:

Final term of enrollment	I-20/DS-2019 end date
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winter	April 30
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spring/summer	August 31
fall	December 31

The Rackham Grace Period exists to allow PhD students a small amount of extra time if needed at the end of a semester. Use of the Rackham Grace Period does not extend a student’s enrollment, and thus does not change the I-20/DS-2019 end date. Consider the following chart:

Final term of enrollment	Rackham Grace Period	I-20/DS-2019 end date
fall 2020	01/01/2021 - 02/08/2021	12/31/2020
winter 2021	05/01/2021 - 05/24/2021	04/30/2021
spring/summer 2021	09/01/2021 - 09/20/2021	08/31/2021

Please note that the degree conferral date has no significance from an F-1/J-1 immigration perspective. For example, if you complete your PhD requirements in May during the winter Rackham Grace Period, then your I-20/DS-2019 will end April 30 reflecting winter term as your final term of enrollment, regardless of the fact that your degree will not be conferred until August.

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.

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.

Source URL: <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/students/rackham-grace-period>

Links

[1] <https://rackham.umich.edu/navigating-your-degree/doctoral-degree-deadlines/>

[2] <https://rackham.umich.edu/navigating-your-degree/completing-doctoral-degree-requirements/>