

F-1 INTERNATIONAL STUDENT GUIDELINES: MAINTAINING LEGAL F-1 STATUS

Middlebury College

When you enter the U.S. as an F-1 student, you are under the jurisdiction of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and, in some cases, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Maintaining legal F-1 status is extremely important for international students, as it may not be possible to rectify the situation if you fall “out of status.” Students who are out of status are not allowed to work on campus and are not eligible for other F-1 benefits. Being out of status may make a student’s visa invalid. Students who are out of status for more than 180 days risk being banned from entering the United States for 3 years. Those who are out of status for more than 1 year may be inadmissible for 10 years. To maintain legal F-1 status, follow these guidelines and consult with International Student and Scholar Services about your questions.

Entry Documents and Procedures

- **Always enter the U.S. with a valid F-1 visa and I-20 form** while you are a student (Canadian citizens/nationals do not need to obtain a visa but need to enter with an I-20 for the duration of their academic program). Do not use a tourist (B-2) visa or a visa waiver to enter the U.S. Your I-94 card should state “F-1 D/S” (duration of status). If it does not, please see International Student and Scholar Services immediately.
- **Have a passport that is valid 6 months into the future.**
- **Attend the school you are authorized to attend** (the school listed on the I-20 that you used to enter the U.S.). If you last entered on an I-20 from another school or if you hold an I-20 from another school, you must comply with the mandatory transfer procedure **within 15 days** of the program start date listed on your I-20 from Middlebury College. Be sure to see International Student and Scholar Services within the 15-day timeframe. Middlebury students who have transferred to the I-20 of another U.S. institution (i.e., American University for Washington Semester program) must abide by this regulation both at the new school and when they return to Middlebury.

Full-time Enrollment

- **Be enrolled full-time.** At Middlebury, full-time is 3-5 courses per semester and one course during the January term. On average, students enroll in 9 courses each year. Exceptions may be made only for illness, initial difficulty with the English language, or when undergraduates are completing their course of study in their last term at Middlebury College. International Student and Scholar Services must authorize these exceptions prior to their taking effect. If you drop below “full-time” without pre-approval, you will be considered “out of status.”
- **Have your I-20 signed by International Student and Scholar Services each Fall and Spring Term.** If you plan to leave the U.S., be sure your I-20 has been signed for the **current Fall or Spring Term.**
- **Temporary Absence: If you are outside the U.S. for more than 5 months,** you must obtain a new I-20 before you return to Middlebury College because a break in your F-1 status has occurred. The exception to this is if you are enrolled in a Middlebury College School Abroad or a pre-approved study abroad program.

Employment

- **Limit on-campus employment to no more than 20 hours per week** while school is in session. Full-time employment (40 hours per week) on campus is permitted during official college breaks and vacations.
- **Refrain from off-campus employment without authorization.** You may not work off campus unless you receive authorization from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) or International Student and Scholar Services. Contact International Student and Scholar Services to apply for off-campus employment authorization. (*Please note: off-campus employment must be related to your major field[s] of study.*)

Address Changes

- **Report a change of residence or address within 10 days of the change through the ISSS website.**

Suspensions/Withdrawals

- **If you voluntarily withdraw with International Student and Scholar Service's prior approval**, you have a 15-day grace period in which to depart from the U.S.
- **If you are suspended from the College or withdraw**, you have no grace period, and cannot remain in the U.S. with your Middlebury College I-20. You must obtain a new I-20 from us before you return to Middlebury College.
- If you are suspended or withdraw from Middlebury, you should transfer to another institution and comply with the I-20 transfer procedure; change your status; or depart from the U.S. immediately. Students who fail to take one of these actions are "out of status."

Program Extensions

- **If you need to remain in the U.S. longer than the period of time specified on your I-20**, you must apply to International Student and Scholar Services for a program extension before the program end date on your I-20 form. Program extensions can only be granted if the delay in completion of studies is due to compelling academic or medical reasons. A student who is unable to complete the program within the time listed on the I-20 and who is ineligible for extension is considered "out of status."

Completion of Program – Options

Once your program of study is complete, you have four options. You can:

- **Depart the U.S. within 60 days after your program completion date** (May grads – date of Commencement; December grads – last day of Fall Term final exams; Febs – date of Feb Celebration).

OR

- **Apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT)** before your program completion date. You must submit your OPT application to International Student and Scholar Services at least 2 weeks before your program end date.

OR

- **Complete the transfer procedure** to enroll as an F-1 student at another U.S. institution. You should meet with International Student and Scholar Services to discuss your plans at least one month before your program end date.

OR

- **Change to another visa category.** Again, consult with International Student and Scholar Services for more information.

Questions?

If you are unsure about your status, please contact International Student and Scholar Services.

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