

MAINTAINING LEGAL F-1 STUDENT STATUS

Generally speaking, foreign students are admitted to the United States for the purpose of being full-time students. As a foreign student, you are required by U.S. law to abide by immigration regulations (outlined below) throughout your stay here. Participation by students in any other activities (e.g., employment) is considered to be a privilege and is only allowable in accordance with strict immigration rules.

International students are normally admitted to the U.S. for "Duration of Status" (D/S) as noted on your Form I-20 and I-94 card. This means that you are allowed to remain in the U.S. for as long as you "maintain legal F-1 student status," NOT for the length of time indicated on your visa or in item #5 of your Form I-20.

Please note that it is your responsibility to be informed about immigration rules and any rule changes which may occur during your stay in the U.S. Penalties for violations of immigration law can be severe and include becoming ineligible for re-entry to the United States for up to ten years and having a visa voided, so it is extremely important for you to understand your legal responsibilities. The International Student and Scholar Office (ISSO) can provide the necessary information and assistance to you, but it is the student, not the university, who is ultimately responsible for maintaining legal F-1 student status.

- ◆ **Report any change of address to the U.S. government's SEVIS (electronic information system) by reporting it to the University through Online Services within ten days of any move.** Please see the ISSO handout "Using Online Services to Fulfill Your SEVIS Immigration Reporting Requirements" for information about how to change your address through Online Services.
- ◆ **Enroll at the school which issued your Form I-20.**
- ◆ **Attend school full-time** each semester during the academic year. At Towson University this means at least 12 credit-units for undergraduate students, 9 credit-units for graduate students, and 18 contact hours for English Language Center (ELC) students. You cannot drop below this except under specific circumstances which must be authorized in advance by an ISSO advisor. Please note that credits received from CLEP or other proficiency exams do not count toward the full-time attendance requirement.
- ◆ Make **satisfactory academic progress**. Undergraduate students should refer to the "Good Standing and Satisfactory Academic Progress" section of the undergraduate catalog. Graduate students should refer to the "Academic Standing" section in the Graduate School catalog. ELC students should refer to the ELC Student Handbook.
- ◆ Complete your degree or academic program by the **date stated in item 5** of your Form I-20. If you are not able to complete your program by that date due to valid academic or medical reasons, you must apply for an F-1 program extension before your I-20 expires.

- ◆ If you transfer to another school, you must **follow immigration transfer regulations**. (You will need a new I-20 from that school and report to your new school's international student advisor to process the transfer within 15 days of the start date in item 5 of your new I-20.)
- ◆ Have an **unexpired passport** at all times. You should begin to renew your passport well before it expires. (Your country's embassy in Washington, D.C. should be able to assist you with this process. Contact information for all the embassies in Washington, D.C., can be found on the web at: <http://www.embassy.org/embassies/index.html>.) Canadians are exempt from the passport requirement.
- ◆ **Limit employment to a total (all jobs) of 20 hours per week while school is in session**. Students are allowed to work full-time in authorized employment at times when school is not in session, i.e., during the summer, minimester and spring break.
- ◆ **Receive authorization for any and all off-campus employment**.
- ◆ **Complete a U.S. tax return**, as required.
- ◆ **When you are near the end of your degree or academic program, do one of the following:** (a) obtain a new Form I-20 for a new school or program within 60 days after completion of your program and attend the next available semester within 5 months of your program completion date, (b) apply to change to another immigration status within 60 days after completion of your degree or program, (c) apply for optional practical training work permission prior to completion of your degree or program, if eligible, or (d) depart from the U.S. within 60 days after completing your degree or program. (If you do not complete a degree or academic program, you must consult with an ISSO advisor and depart within 15 days.)

You should contact an ISSO advisor if you have difficulty meeting any of these requirements **before** you have a problem. However, if you do make a mistake, please remember that we are here to assist you in reviewing your options and making wise decisions. The ISSO staff does not work for the Department of Homeland Security or the federal government, but are employees of the university who want you to be successful.