



Helpful Reminders for F-1 International Students

1. Carry a photocopy of your passport and visa documents in your bag/backpack at all times; keep the originals in a safe place. Make a copy of all your important papers (front and back) for your records, including every Form I-94 and Form I-20 received throughout your F-1 stay in the U.S. **Never throw away any old U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services documentation.** You may need it in the future.
2. Check your I-20 expiration date. It must be valid at all times in order to maintain your legal status in the U.S. If you need an extension, check the OIE Web site at http://www.vcu.edu/oie/imm/f1_extension.html for directions. Please start the process with OIE **at least one month prior** to the expiration date shown on the form.
3. Check your passport expiration date. Do not let it expire. If you are traveling and need to extend or renew your visa, the passport must be **valid for a period of at least six months beyond** the requested visa extension date.
4. Maintain your registration status at a full-time credit load (minimum 12 credit hours for undergraduate students and nine credit hours for graduate students). **It is against immigration regulations to enroll for less than full-time studies. Audits and withdrawals do not count toward this requirement.** You also must make reasonable progress toward your degree. Failing two classes out of four is **not** reasonable progress. Academic students do not need to be registered for classes during summer and winter breaks in order to maintain their status.
5. **Students may not work off campus without prior OIE approval. Unauthorized work will subject you to severe immigration consequences.**

Please note: Research, teaching and graduate assistantships do not require advance approval by the OIE. However, the USCIS regulations allow a **maximum of 20 hours per week** of on-campus work while school is in session during fall and spring semesters. (No exceptions.) F-1 students in status may work up to 40 hours per week on campus during the winter and summer breaks.

6. Keep the OIE informed of any changes in your legal status, physical or mailing address, Social Security number or phone number(s) **within 10 days** of the change. You may do this by filling out the appropriate forms at the OIE.
7. If you change your field of study, you must contact OIE for instructions on obtaining a new I-20. This new I-20 must be **completed within 15 days of your change of major.**
8. **Before you travel outside the U.S.** (including travel to Mexico and Canada) you must bring your Form I-20, together with your passport and I-94 card, to Immigration Services in OIE for a signature. (Note: The OIE must receive your request at least **two weeks** prior to when you need it or we cannot guarantee that the form will be ready in time for your travel plans).

Note: Be aware of the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) regulations affecting nationals or citizens of certain Middle Eastern countries and anyone designated by the State Department. For more information please contact the OIE or check the visit the USCIS Web site at: <http://www.uscis.gov>.

9. If you are a **transfer student**, remember that you must first register for classes and then make an appointment with OIE to complete your transfer. **You will become out of status if you do not complete the transfer process with the OIE within 15 days of the start of classes.**
10. Be sure to activate your VCU e-mail account. We will e-mail important information and updates to this address.
11. You must attend at least one full semester at VCU before we will grant a request to transfer to another school.
12. If you are graduating and/or completing your studies, please inform OIE of your future plans as soon as possible to avoid lapses in immigration status and/or delay in requests for time-sensitive immigration benefits (i.e., practical training, etc.).
13. If you complete one program and have plans to change your level of study you must have your new I-20 **within 60 days of your last day of classes** in order to maintain your status. Contact the OIE for more information.
14. If you are planning to apply for Optional Practical Training, you must apply at least two months before your last day of classes. Additionally, you must not exit the U.S. after applying for OPT without first having received your Employment Authorization Card from the USCIS. See the OIE Web site at http://www.vcu.edu/oie/imm_opt.html for more details on applying.
15. Due to the high cost of hospitalization and treatment for illness and/or accidents, VCU requires that you purchase a health insurance policy. Several options are identified in the “Information for International Students” section.
16. In February, look for federal and state income tax filing instructions in your postal mail and VCU e-mail.
17. Please check our Web site accordingly for any more updates.

When you have questions, please remember that OIE Immigration Services is here to help you understand these regulations and advise you regarding USCIS requirements, rules and procedures. **Nonetheless, you are responsible for maintaining your student status while you are in the U.S.** Please call us at the number below if you have questions or would like to make an appointment with an adviser.

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