**Frequently Asked Questions**

**MAINTAINING LAWFUL STATUS**

What is the basic structure of the immigration system in the United States?

As an F-1 or J-1 student/exchange visitor, you must comply with the regulations of the following two governmental departments and their subsidiary programs in order to maintain lawful status. You may already be familiar with the acronyms below.

**Department of Homeland Security (DHS)**
- U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)
  - Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP)
  - Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS)
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)
- U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP)

**Department of State (DOS)**
- Consular Affairs (CA)—visa issuance at U.S. embassies and consular posts abroad
- Education and Cultural Affairs (ECA)—J-1 Exchange Visitor Program

Why do I have to attend an international student orientation?

If you have been issued a SEVIS I-20 form and/or a SEVIS DS-2019 form, you must attend the Office for International Students and Scholars (OISS) orientation. The OISS orientation is mandatory for all international students who are new to DePaul University (this includes students transferring from another U.S. university). The OISS orientation will cover important information regarding your F-1 or J-1 non-immigrant visa status especially as it relates to the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). The orientation will also introduce you to various academic and social resources of the University. Please note that this orientation is different and separate from the orientation you may be required to attend by your academic department.

What is SEVIS?

SEVIS stands for "Student and Exchange Visitor Information System." SEVIS is an internet-based system designed to allow schools and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of State (DOS) to exchange data on the visa status of international students and exchange visitors.

The requirement that schools provide the federal government with information about students and exchange visitors in F-1 and J-1 visa status is not new. Much of the information which must be reported through SEVIS had also been required by the former Immigration and Naturalization Service (now subsumed within DHS). However, the paper-based reporting system did not lend itself to good communication between schools and government agencies.

In 1996, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA) directed the INS to establish a nationwide electronic system to collect information pertaining to international students and exchange visitors. In October 2001, Congress passed the USA Patriot Act which required nationwide compliance by January 2003.

All U.S. universities and colleges are therefore now required to electronically report information to the
U.S. government (ICE) about international students who have been issued SEVIS I-20 (F-1) and SEVIS DS-2019 (J-1) forms.

**What does it mean to maintain status?**

International students who have F-1 and J-1 visa status must follow certain rules in order to maintain their lawful non-immigrant status. Failure to maintain lawful student status may lead to serious immigration-related problems, ranging from loss of the opportunity to engage in Optional Practical Training / Academic Training, to deportation and/or ineligibility to re-enter the U.S. upon return from traveling abroad.

The requirements for maintaining lawful student status include the following responsibilities:

- **Legal Name** - reporting any change(s) to your legal name immediately to the OISS
- **Valid Passport** - not allowing your passport to expire
- **Valid SEVIS I-20 (F-1) / SEVIS DS-2019 (J-1) forms** - not allowing your SEVIS documents to expire
- **Full Course Load** - making sure that you are enrolled as a full-time student each quarter (12 credit hours for undergraduate students / 8 credit hours for graduate students / 6 credits hours for graduate students in the School of Music)
- **Change of Address** - reporting immediately any change of your U.S. address via Campus Connection
- **Employment** - refraining from working without legal authorization
- **Transfer of Schools** - following proper procedures to transfer schools
- **Program Extensions** - following proper procedures for requesting extension of your I-20 or DS-2019
- **Change of Program/Level** - following proper procedures for change of program/level

Maintenance of lawful non-immigrant status is your responsibility alone! If you have any questions regarding your status, we invite you to visit our office and/or call the OISS at 312-362-8376.

**What happens if I am not in status? How can I regain lawful status?**

Our office provides advising services to students who are in violation of their F-1 Student or J-1 Exchange Visitor status. Should you have questions or concerns regarding your current legal status, please visit our office in Suite 9300 of the DePaul Center, or contact us by phone at 312-362-8376.

**What happens if my visa stamp in my passport expires? What’s the difference between ‘visa’ and ‘status’?**

Your visa is your entry permit into the U.S. It gives you permission to enter the country. However, it does not determine how long you may stay. Your immigration status on the other hand determines the length of time you may stay and is noted on your I-94 card. Your status (noted on the I-94 card) is determined at the time of entry into the U.S. by the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer. The status you are
granted depends on the type of visa you hold at the time of entry. For example, if you obtained an F-1 visa from the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in your home country, your status upon entry in the U.S. will be indicated as "F-1, D/S" on the I-94 card. However, please note that it is possible that your status does not correspond to the type of visa you used to gain entry to the U.S. if you filed an application to change your status while remaining in the United States.

How long can I remain in the U.S. after completion of my program?

The completion of your program is determined by your academic progress, not the date on your I-20 or DS-2019. Therefore, DHS considers program completion to be the date on which you complete all of your degree or program requirements; the fact that your I-20 or DS-2019 will "expire" in the future does not matter. F-1 students can remain in the U.S. for a grace period up to 60 days after their program completion date; J-1 students and scholars can remain in the U.S. for 30 days after their program completion date. Please note, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) will not allow students and exchange visitors to re-enter the U.S. during their grace period in F-1 or J-1 status, respectively. Please plan your post-completion travels accordingly. If you wish to discuss your post-completion travel plans in more detail, please contact the OISS at oiss@depaul.edu or 312-362-8376.

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