



F-1 Immigration Orientation



International Graduate Student Services (IGSS)

Graduate School, Virginia Tech

120 Graduate Life Center at Donaldson Brown

■ Introduction

Welcome to Virginia Tech!

This presentation will cover:

- What it means to be an F-1 international student
- Important terminology
- The benefits of being an F-1 student
- Your responsibilities toward maintaining your legal immigration status

Graduate Life Center at Donaldson Brown



■ Important Terminology

By this time, you should have received your form I-20, paid the SEVIS fee, applied for and received the F-1 student visa and successfully entered the U.S.

You may have come across the following acronyms: DHS, SEVP, SEVIS, DSO, and USCIS. You will need to understand what these acronyms mean during your stay in the US.

DHS is the Department of Homeland Security. This is the government agency that has oversight over non-citizens in the United States.

SEVP is the Student and Exchange Visitor Program.

SEVP is a part of DHS. SEVP manages schools, as well as F-1 students and their F-2 dependents. Only SEVP-approved schools can accept international students and issue the Form I-20 immigration document, and F-1 students may only enroll in SEVP-approved programs and campuses. SEVP is responsible for administering the SEVIS database. You can find out more information on SEVP on the [Study in the States website](#).

SEVIS stands for Student and Exchange Visitor Information System.

It is a web-based database used by SEVP to maintain information on SEVP-approved schools and F-1 students and their dependents.

Your I-20 is issued and maintained through SEVIS.

Any changes that happen to you or your program, for example your name, major, degree level or program end date, must be reported through SEVIS.

Only a DSO may issue, update, and sign an I-20 or make any changes to your SEVIS record.

A **DSO** is a Designated School Official.

In the Graduate School, DSOs are also referred to as Immigration Advisors. Only an Immigration Advisor can view your record in SEVIS and make changes to it. Only an Immigration Advisor can sign an I-20.

Our Immigration Advisors are here to help you maintain your F-1 student status and answer questions you may have about your student status.

■ USCIS

[USCIS](#) is the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, an agency within the DHS that authorizes immigration benefits for non-citizens.

These benefits can include off-campus work authorization and changing to another visa status while inside the US. Most benefits require an update to your SEVIS record before you can apply.

■ Immigration Documents

As an international student, you have several different immigration documents that can affect your status inside the United States:

- Passport
- F-1 student visa stamp in your passport
- Form I-20
- Form I-94

Your **passport** must be valid at all times. This means that it cannot be expired while you are in the United States. If it is close to being expired, you must renew your passport within 6 months of the expiration date.

■ F-1 Student Visa

Your **F-1 student visa** is used for your entry to the United States as a student.

Your visa may expire while you are in the United States, and you do not have to renew it until you wish to travel outside the U.S. and reenter in F-1 status again.

Visas may only be renewed at U.S. embassies and consulates outside of the United States.

Review your **I-20** and make sure that it is signed and all details stated on it are correct:

- It should always reflect your current academic status, including your correct degree level and major.
- It must be valid at all times. If your I-20 is about to expire and you are not finished with your program, you will need to request an extension.
- **Keep all original copies of your I-20s.** You may need them in the future.

The **Form I-94** is your Arrival/Departure Record. It is evidence of your admission to the US, immigration status, and authorized period of stay.

It should indicate that your visa type is F-1 and your “Admit Until” date should be written as "D/S," or Duration of Status. This means that you are able to stay in the US as long as you properly maintain your F-1 immigration status.

This information will also be written on the entry stamp in your passport, along with the date and place of entry.

A new I-94 is automatically generated each time you enter the US. You can access your current I-94 and your complete travel history on the CBP website at <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94> . Let us know if you find any errors in your I-94 record, and we will help you get it corrected as needed.

■ Maintaining Status

While you are studying in the United States, you **must maintain your legal immigration status at all times**. For F-1 students this includes:

- Immigration Reporting Requirements
- Academics
- Health Insurance
- Work During Program
- Travel
- Program Completion

■ Reporting Requirements

You are required to report the following information to IGSS **within 10 days** of the date of change so it can be updated in your SEVIS record:

- Change in name
- New address or phone number
- Change in program (major) or degree level
- Change in student status (ie. withdrawal, in-Absentia status)
- Change in immigration status

- Attend all your classes and make satisfactory progress towards the degree program stated on your I-20 form.
- Enroll full-time, in 9 or more credits, in the fall and spring semesters. Summer enrollment is optional if you were enrolled in the spring semester and plan to enroll again in the fall.
- Take no more than 3 credits of online (virtual) coursework per semester counting towards full-time enrollment.
- Obtain prior authorization from an immigration advisor before dropping below full-time enrollment (in your final term or for documented medical reasons).

■ Health Insurance Requirement

Virginia Tech requires that all international students in F-1 status and their accompanying dependents be covered by health insurance during their enrollment.

Please review our [Health Insurance Requirements](#) for more information.

■ Work During Program

- There are two types of work an F-1 student may do during their program of study:
 - On-campus in an [assistantship](#) and/or a student-wage position
 - Off-campus in an internship that is an integral part of their study and directly related to their program. This is called Curricular Practical Training (CPT).

■ On-campus Employment

- You may work up to 20 hours a week when school is in session in the Fall and Spring semesters; you may work more than 20 hours a week during school breaks.
- If you are on a full assistantship, your contract is for 20 hours per week or 100% full-time graduate employment. In this case you can not work in any additional on-campus positions.
- If your assistantship is less than 20 hours per week, you can work additional hours per week in another assistantship or other on-campus wage position as long as your **total** hours worked in all positions do not exceed 20 hours per week.
- DHS authorization is not required prior to beginning on-campus employment.

■ Working During Program Curricular Practical Training

F-1 students can apply for [Curricular Practical Training](#) (CPT) to work full-time off campus during their program.

To be eligible for CPT, you must maintain good academic standing (3.0 or better GPA) and have maintained F-1 status for at least two academic semesters (9 months), of which at least one semester must be at Virginia Tech.

CPT is approved for one academic semester at a time. CPT will not be authorized for a student in their final semester and cannot cause a delay in the time it will take you to complete your program.

You may not begin employment until after your CPT application has been approved by IGSS.

■ Traveling Outside the U.S.

International students may leave the U.S. for a short period of time and reenter to continue their program if they hold the appropriate travel documents:

- Unexpired I-20 signed by a DSO on page 2; a travel signature must be less than 12 months old at the time of re-entry to the U.S.
- Valid passport
- Valid F-1 visa

Please review our [Travel information](#) before traveling.

If you plan to leave the US for more than a short period of time, please consult with an Immigration Advisor **before** leaving the US. This may impact your I-20.

■ Program Completion

If you are near the program end date on your I-20 but you **will not finish** your program, you must request an extension.

This should be done a minimum of 30 days before your program end date to allow time for processing. Please review our [Extension Request Procedures](#) for more information.

If you do not request an extension before your program end date and you do not graduate, you will be out of status.

■ Program Completion

If you will graduate, you have a 60-day grace period after the end of your program. You will have the following options:

- Apply for post-completion [Optional Practical Training](#)
- [Transfer out](#) to another SEVP-approved institution
- Begin a new degree program at Virginia Tech
- Leave the US

You must choose to do one of these before the end of your 60-day grace period.

■ Failure to maintain status

Failure to maintain status may jeopardize these benefits of your F-1 status:

- Working in the United States
- Continuing your education in the United States
- Re-entry to the United States
- Bringing dependents to the United States
- Any future entries to the United States

■ When To See An Immigration Advisor

The following are examples of situations where you should seek assistance from one of our immigration advisors in IGSS:

- [Working](#) in the United States
- Applying for a [Social Security number](#)
- Changing your program or degree level
- Transferring to a new school
- Changing campus between Blacksburg and NCR
- Taking a leave of absence or break from school

Some more examples of situations where you should seek immigration advising:

- [Traveling](#) outside the United States
- Changing your name
- Requesting a program [extension](#) or shortening your program
- Adding dependents
- Needing to drop below full-time
- Performing research outside of the Blacksburg campus
- Anything that you think may have an impact on your immigration status

All of our request forms and procedures are available on [the IGSS website](#):

- I-20 Request (ie. extension, change of program, etc)
- Dependent I-20 Request
- CPT Application
- OPT Application
- Reduced Enrollment Request
- Transfer Out Request

If you can't find what you are looking for, please contact us.

Processing time is generally two weeks.

There are 6 immigration advisors in the Graduate School:

- Kimberley Cossey: Immigration Advisor, ARO, DSO
- Monika Gibson: Director of Graduate Student Services, ARO, PDSO
- Matthew Grice: Senior Admissions & Academic Progress Advisor, part-time Immigration Advisor, DSO
- Christina Lapel: Senior Immigration Advisor & SEVIS Compliance Coordinator, ARO, DSO
- Jennifer Million: Admissions & Academic Progress Advisor, part-time Immigration Advisor in training, DSO
- Karen Wills: Immigration Advisor, ARO, DSO

■ Contact Information

You can reach us by

Email: igss@vt.edu or phone: 540-231-8486

Visit us during our walk in hours:

Monday, Wednesday & Friday, 1pm-4pm

Tuesday & Thursday, 9am-12pm

We look forward to meeting you! Welcome to Virginia Tech!

