

APPENDIX I

International Student Services Handbook

RFU - REFORMED UNIVERSITY

Updated: October, 2018



INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICES HANDBOOK

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| International Student Services Center..... | 5 |
| SEVIS..... | 6 |
| The International Student and the SEVIS System..... | 6 |
| What is SEVIS?..... | 6 |
| Who has access to SEVIS?..... | 6 |
| What data does SEVIS collect?..... | 6 |
| What other immigration changes should each international student know about?..... | 7 |
| How should I stay informed of SEVIS updates or information?..... | 7 |
| ACADEMIC RESOURCES and INFORMATION..... | 8 |
| Academic Advisor..... | 8 |
| Classroom Procedures..... | 8 |
| Attendance Policy..... | 9 |
| Important Information Regarding Class Attendance..... | 9 |
| Official Class Attendance..... | 9 |
| Full-Time Status..... | 10 |
| ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES..... | 10 |
| Office of Admissions..... | 10 |
| Registrar's Office..... | 11 |
| Official Documents..... | 11 |
| Grades..... | 11 |
| Office of Business Affairs (Student Accounts Office)..... | 11 |
| Refunds..... | 11 |
| Terms of Refund..... | 12 |
| Important Refund Information Regarding Housing..... | 13 |
| Full Refund if Called to Active Duty..... | 13 |
| Appeal / Complaint..... | 13 |
| IMMIGRATION INFORMATION..... | 14 |
| Immigration Information..... | 14 |
| Passport..... | 14 |
| Visa..... | 14 |
| Form I-94, Arrival/Departure Record..... | 14 |
| Form I-20..... | 14 |
| Data Integrity..... | 15 |
| IMPORTANT RULES TO REMEMBER..... | 16 |
| Your Role and Responsibilities as an International Student..... | 16 |
| Full-time study..... | 16 |
| Medical Conditions..... | 17 |
| Completion of a course of study in the final term or semester..... | 17 |
| Program End Date Extension Procedure..... | 17 |
| Years to complete degree / Number of months listed on your I-20 form..... | 18 |
| On-line Courses (Distance education)..... | 18 |
| Employment..... | 18 |
| Address Changes..... | 19 |
| Dependents of F-1 Visa holders (F-2)..... | 19 |
| Authorized Summer Vacation..... | 19 |
| Tax Reporting Information..... | 20 |
| F-1 Transfer Procedures..... | 20 |

| | |
|--|----|
| How long can an F-1 student stay in the U.S.? | 21 |
| Reformed University Policy on Change of Status | 22 |
| Reformed University Policy on Reinstatements to F-1 Status (I-539 Petition for Reinstatement): | 23 |
| EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION | 23 |
| Employment Information | 23 |
| On-Campus Employment | 23 |
| Optional Practical Training | 24 |
| OPT General Information | 24 |
| Termination of OPT | 24 |
| Request for authorization for OPT | 24 |
| SEVIS Process | 24 |
| Employment authorization | 25 |
| Decision on application for employment authorization | 25 |
| Temporary absence from the United States of F-1 student granted employment authorization | 25 |
| HOW TO APPLY: | 25 |
| Once Application Has Been Filed: | 26 |
| OPT Frequently Asked Questions | 27 |
| Curricular Practical Training (CPT) | 30 |
| SEVIS Process | 30 |
| CPT Frequently Asked Questions | 31 |
| Economic Hardship Application Procedure | 31 |
| Procedures for applying for economic hardship work authorization: | 31 |
| What to send with the Economic Hardship application | 32 |
| Social Security Numbers | 33 |
| ADDITIONAL INFORMATION | 34 |
| International Student Health Insurance | 34 |
| Driving in the United States | 34 |
| Accidents | 36 |
| Emergency Weather Plan | 36 |
| Emergency Contact Information | 36 |
| <i>SEVIS Tips for Emergency Evacuations</i> | 36 |
| Money & Money Management | 36 |
| Expenses | 37 |
| U.S. Currency | 37 |
| Banking | 37 |
| Opening an Account | 37 |
| Banking Terms | 38 |
| Checking Account | 38 |
| Transfer of Funds to the US | 38 |
| Tax Returns | 38 |
| Credit | 39 |
| Buy Used Rather Than New | 39 |
| GLOSSARY OF TERMS | 39 |
| Some Reminders | 42 |
| Your responsibilities as an F-1 Student | 41 |
| Your restrictions in F-1 Status | 42 |
| F-1 Status Benefits | 42 |

Dear students,

Welcome to RFU - Reformed University! We are pleased that you have chosen to further your post-secondary education with this institution. Since its official beginning in 2006 here in the US, many qualified students have successfully graduated with Reformed University degrees. Many of those graduates are now professionals in their native countries and in their mission fields. The faculty and staff of RFU extend a warm welcome to each of you and wish that your experience with us will prove to be a valuable endeavor of eternal value.

The International Student Advisement Center is and will be an important key source of information and support while you study at Reformed University as an international student with F-1 visa status or as a dependent of an international student. This handbook was prepared as a guide for understanding policies and procedures to help you maintain your student visa. It may not contain answers to every question you may have; however, consider this handbook as the fundamental and foundational guideline for your staying and studying before you actually come and visit the center for answers and help. It was designed to give you information on who to contact and about some of the experiences that you can expect while you study at Reformed University. The Reformed University Catalog, Student Handbook, and official website at www.runiv.edu are other resources that will help you throughout your career at RFU. Most campus policies are outlined in these resources along with Student Handbook and Code of Conduct Manual.

We are dedicated to providing high-quality services to assist and enhance your academic and social experience while at our institution. If you have any questions regarding enrollment at RFU, please do not hesitate to contact us!

Joshua Kim, PhD
Executive Vice President
Dean of Academic Affairs
PDSO International

Contact us:

Phone (770) 232-2717
Fax (770) 232-2750
Email: admins@runiv.edu

1724 Atkinson Rd.,
Lawrenceville, GA 30043

About this Handbook

Reformed University takes seriously the task of providing quality education for international students who are preparing themselves for the job market and leadership roles in their own countries.

This handbook is designed to help acquaint students visiting and studying at Reformed University with F-1 Visa Status with some matters that are of particular importance to you as an F-1 student attending RFU and to familiarize you with the services offered to F-1 students. Please use it for reference throughout the time of your stay. This is NOT, however, a comprehensive guide to all matters regarding F-1 students. Please contact the International Student Advisor with any other matters or questions you may have regarding your status. The rules and regulations noted in this handbook may change without prior notice due to amendments of SEVIS and/or USCIS regulations.

International Student Services Center

The International Student Services Center exists to provide quality administration and information for federal regulation compliance to all international students attending Reformed University. In conjunction with the Reformed University Office of Admissions the collective effort is to provide quality administrative assistance to all international students for an educational experience of excellence.

ISSC advises students on all F-1 immigration issues. Such issues may include maintaining status, failing to maintain full-time status or withdrawing below full-time, changing immigrant or non-immigrant status, applying for work permits, and applying for curricular or optional practical training, reinstatement and more.

International students are required to report and update a current mailing address and telephone number to the office within 10 calendar days of any changes.

STAY IN TOUCH WITH THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICES CENTER

- Make sure to check in with the ISSC when you first arrive on campus.
- Check your email – ISSC will send important reminders, updates, and immigration information to your RFU email address.
- Let ISSC know before you leave, change or finish your academic program.
- Inform ISSC when you move to ensure that your address and other information in the SEVIS database are accurate and up-to-date.
- Notify ISSC if you plan to travel out of the United States; ISSC must sign your I-20 form before you leave the country.
- Notify ISSC if you will transfer to a new program or school.
- Report any dependents (spouse or children) to ISSC.
- Work with ISSC to extend your I-20 if you need additional time to complete your program of study.

MAINTAIN A VALID PASSPORT AT ALL TIMES.

International Student Services
Reformed University

Office Hours: Monday-Friday 9:00AM to 5:00PM
The office is closed on weekends and all scheduled holidays.

SEVIS

The International Student and the SEVIS System

An international student is someone who obtains a Non-Immigrant Student (F-1) Visa to study in the United States using a SEVIS Form I-20. To remain in F-1 status, a person must become and remain a full-time student every fall and spring semester until he/she completes an academic degree program or non-degree certificate program at Reformed University.

What is SEVIS?

SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) is an Internet database which maintains current academic and immigration information on non-immigrant students (F-1 visas) and their dependents (F-2 visas). SEVIS enables schools to transmit electronic information and event notifications, via the Internet, to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the Department of State (embassies and consulates) throughout a student's stay in the U.S.

Previously, the SEVIS system was paper-based and most of the information required by SEVIS was reported to the US federal government for many years until schools, students and government officials found the paper-based system precluded widespread coordination between schools and governmental agencies. Therefore, in 1996, Congress passed legislation directing the INS to move to an electronic data collection system. Lack of funding delayed the implementation until the USA Patriot Act in October 2001 authorized funding and required nationwide compliance by January 30, 2003.

Who has access to SEVIS?

- The school that issued your ACTIVE I-20 (previous institution DOES NOT have any access to your information unless the transfer history)
- ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement), <http://www.ice.gov/>
- USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services) <http://www.uscis.gov/>
- CBP (Customs and Border Protection), <http://www.cbp.gov/>

What data does SEVIS collect?

- Whether a student enrolled or failed to enroll in classes each semester prior to the first day of class;
- Whether a student drops below full time enrollment (12 credit hours for undergraduate students, or 9 credit hours for graduate students) without prior authorization from a Primary Designated School Official (PDSO);
- Changes of major or academic level;
- Program extensions;
- Premature (either voluntary and involuntary) termination of study – date and reason;
- A change in the student's (or the dependent's) legal name, contact information or mailing address;
- A change in the student's (or the dependent's) marital status;
- A change in the student's (or the dependent's) immigration or non-immigration status;
- Employment authorizations (Curricular or Optional Practical Training);
- Financial information;
- School transfers;
- Academic or disciplinary actions taken due to criminal conviction; and
- Information regarding any student who fails to maintain status or complete their program.

What other immigration changes should each international student know about?

- Students must report address changes within 10 days to the Primary Designated School Official (PDSO);
- Students must apply to the USCIS for Optional Practical Training (OPT) prior to completion of studies at least 120 calendar days;
- Students are eligible for 12 months of OPT after each higher education level (Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate);
- Only one on-line/distance education course (3 credit hours) per semester may count toward full-time enrollment. All other courses must be on-campus;
- Only one directed/independent study education course (3 credit hours) may count toward full-time enrollment. All other courses must be on-campus. This study CANNOT be practiced in conjunction or in combination with on-line/distance study education course;
- Any reduced course load must be pre-approved by a Primary Designated School Official (PDSO);
- An F-2 dependent may not enroll in a full course of study/degree program; and
- New international students may enter the United States no sooner than 30 days prior to the start date on their I-20 (the first day of classes).

How can I stay informed of SEVIS updates or information?

DO NOT rely on your friends or the media for accurate information regarding immigration issues. As well-meaning as they may be, they may not be aware of recent developments and practices. Remember, **YOU** are responsible for maintaining your F-1 or F-2 status. Check with the PDSO if you have any questions/concerns.

In order to maintain constant and clear communication with students, Reformed University uses these channels, so please stay informed:

- Bulletin Board Announcements
- Web Announcements (www.trsususa.org)
- E-Mail Announcements (Student E-mail account is provided for better communication)
- Orientation Sessions
- Semester Beginning and Ending Services
- Chapel Services

ACADEMIC RESOURCES and INFORMATION

Academic Advisors

Reformed University recognizes academic advising to be a critical component of the educational experience and spiritual development. Academic advising is designed to provide necessary tools and information for all students, allowing them to take responsibility for: developing educational and career plans compatible with their goals; meeting institutional and degree requirements; and preparing for a life of change, challenge and individual fulfillment as active citizens in Christ, thus requiring a responsible student body and strong institutional support to be effective and efficient.

A. Thus, it is the policy of Reformed University:

- 1) that all students shall be informed of the advising policy and the advising process during initial introduction to the university and be directed to an appropriate advisor;
- 2) that all enrolled students shall have an assigned advisor;
- 3) that students enrolled registering for courses, including students on probation or admitted on ability-to-benefit category, must be advised prior to registration;
- 4) that all students applying for graduation must be advised;
- 5) that all other advising programs shall be assessed and reviewed every fourth year;
- 6) that each faculty advisor may not be assigned for more than 10 students at any time to advisement;
- 7) that funding and resources shall be adequately maintained by all administrative units to ensure effective and efficient advising at all levels; and
- 8) that accurate information shall be maintained by the advisor with strict confidentiality.

B. The Goals of Academic Advising

- 1) To assist and encourage students in making their own decisions in choosing educational and career objectives commensurate with their interests and abilities;
- 2) To assist students with consideration in subject study or a career training (pastoral duties, education and missionary work), a pastoral interest, a divine nature and personal growth;
- 3) To answer questions raised by students and to make them aware of the possible short- and long-range consequences of their choices;
- 4) To be an information resource regarding the wide range of programs, services and educational opportunities at the University that may be pertinent to the student's educational objectives;
- 5) To be an information source regarding policies, procedures, and programs of the University; and
- 6) To be an on-going source of dialogue and advice about life and academic goals for students.

Classroom Procedures

At the beginning of each semester, your instructors will give you a syllabus for each of your courses. The syllabus will contain important information that you need to know for that course. It will include such information as the assigned text(s), explanation of how grades is determined, tests and assignments, class schedules, classroom policies and other important information. You will need to refer to this syllabus throughout the semester. ISSC strongly recommends that all international students stay informed of all course proceedings and requirements so that you may not fail the course, which would impose immigration restrictions.

Classroom procedures are generally informal, although a high level of academic performance is expected. Regular attendance is advised. In addition, classroom participation is *strongly* encouraged. All instructors have scheduled office hours, when students can go to talk to them to ask questions or

discuss problems. If the instructor does not have an on-campus office, the syllabus will contain their contact information. *Talk to your instructors.* You must understand that instructors expect students to ask questions in class, after class, and during office hours. Getting to know your instructor will enhance your education and will be beneficial even after graduation: when you graduate, you may want to ask some of your professors to write a letter of reference or recommendation for institutions you wish to apply to. Questions about the syllabus, course content, and required assignments are important. Asking questions demonstrates that you are interested.

Campus policy does not permit food or drink in classrooms but some instructors may allow you to drink as long as it does not disturb the rest of the class. Please be advised that some instructors may have different dress code or restrictions imposed during class hours.

Attendance Policy

Students attending on-campus and/or online classes are required to attend at least 80% of the class meetings for each course in which they are enrolled. For semester-long on-campus or online courses, this means that a maximum of three class periods may be missed, since the Reformed University semester schedule is usually 15 weeks long. Any student who misses more than 20% of the meetings may receive an "F," or be forced to withdraw from the course. Exceptions may be made only in cases of extreme circumstances and only with the approval of the Registrar, in consultation with the International Student Advisor.

- a. Absences should be taken only for important and necessary reasons.
- b. The student is held responsible for absences due to late registration. Consequently, a student is not permitted to enroll for a course after the second full week of classes.
- c. Instructors will report to the Registrar any student who:
 - (1) Habitually comes in tardy or leaves early;
 - (2) Misses the whole class session three weeks in succession;
 - (3) Misses 20% or more of the classes for a particular course.
- d. Each instructor will employ the following institutional rules for determining absences:
 - (1) Only tardiness of less than 15 minutes may be counted as a tardy;
 - (2) Three tardiness count as one absence;
 - (3) Tardiness of more than 15 minutes counts as one hour of absence.
- e. **VERY IMPORTANT:** Excessive absences could jeopardize the I-20 status of an international student. Such absences also result in one being required to repay any financial aid received as well as any additional charges incurred by Reformed University.

In any case of disease epidemics which may harm others or expose them to illness, the instructor and the Office of Academic Affairs, upon receiving a doctor's excuse form from the student or his/her designee, may excuse the student from course attendance requirements. However, these exceptions may be made only in cases of extreme circumstances and only with the approval of the Director of Academic Affairs.

Important Information Regarding Class Attendance

Non-attendance is grounds for involuntary withdrawal from a course, and may result in the student being out of status with his/her visa requirements (see "I-20 Reinstatement," elsewhere in this Handbook). Students *must* attend at least 80% of classes or they will be administratively withdrawn. In the event of an administrative withdrawal from class, the student will receive a refund based on the date of withdrawal (see the RU Catalog, "Tuition and Fees" section for details). If a student is withdrawn from class after the deadline for registration for that class, the student may not register for that class again until the following semester. If the administrative withdrawal of an I-20 student places that student under the required minimum enrollment, he/she must register for another on-campus class to remain in compliance. **If the student does not or cannot register for another class, and if the**

student falls into a category of violation of minimum enrollment requirements, the student will be out of status, which must be reported to USCIS through SEVIS. Students who drop below the minimum requirement to maintain F-1 status will be terminated as required by USCIS regulations.

Official Class Attendance

Students must be listed on the official class roll in order to be counted as present in a class. If a student is not officially registered for a course, he/she cannot be counted as present in a class. To be registered for a course, the student must be cleared through the Office of Business Affairs in regards to his/her student account. Pre-registration on the website is NOT official until payment for the course is made or a third party paying the fee is approved. If a registration is approved after the actual start of the course, the class sessions the student attended prior to registration finalization will be deemed absences. These absences will be counted in the semester total and will be subject to the current institutional attendance policies.

Full-Time Status

All international students are legally required to maintain full-time student status. Only when I-20 students are in their last semester prior to graduation may they hold less-than-full-time enrollment status. Generally speaking, full-time enrollment for Bachelor's degree students is 12 credit hours (4 classes) and 9 hours (three classes) for Master's and advanced degree students. Full-time for doctoral students (e.g. Doctor of Ministry) is considered to be 9 credit hours or a combination of classes and 12 clock hours per week toward research and writing. Currently, for the 2017 academic year, Reformed University offers the following degree programs authorized by the Georgia Nonpublic Postsecondary Education Commission of Georgia (GNPEC):

- Bachelor of Arts in Theological Studies (BATS)
- Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration (BABA)
- Master of Divinity (MDiv)

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES

Office of Admissions

The Office of Admissions receives and processes all applications for admission, re-admission, change of degree program and entrance to a higher degree program.

Entering a New Degree or Non-Degree Program

Students who complete a degree at Reformed University and wish to continue in a new program must:

1. Complete an Admission Application.
2. Complete an I-20 application form.
3. Present current financial documentation and a notarized Affidavit(s) of Support verifying the ability to satisfy the obligations required, along with most recent bank statements (2 months).
4. The student's financial supporter must indicate the amount and duration of support. Bank statements must not be older than 2 months prior to the form I-20 application date. A new I-20 form will be created with the new program information and a new program completion date upon acceptance into the new program and when the above actions have been completed. To enter a new program the student must complete a reactivation application which can be completed online at www.runiv.edu or you can secure a form from the International Student Services Center.

Note: *Students (if supporting themselves), their sponsor, or both must provide bank statements (active checking or regular savings accounts) demonstrating that they have available funds that are **equal to or greater than** the total listed in the "Estimated Annual Expenses" section of the I-20 Student Visa Application.*

5. A new I-20 form will have a program beginning date and ending date in accordance with the school calendar indicating semester beginning and ending dates.
6. Upon acceptance of an international student for admission to RU, the Admissions officer will forward the student's file to the International Student Service Center to create an "Initial" or "Pending" I-20 until full registration is complete, after which the student's status becomes "active."

Registrar's Office

All matters regarding grades, graduation, transcripts, letters of certification, and drop/add are conducted in the Registrar's Office.

Official Documents

The Registrar's Office is responsible for maintaining official documents, such as:

- Verification of Enrollment
- Letter of Good Standing
- Travel Letter
- Certificate of Graduation / Certificate of Completion
- Official Transcript

Note: For international students, the minimum document processing time is three (3) days; however, additional time and charges are the student's responsibility, and extra time should be allowed for documents sent to overseas mailing addresses. **The three-day processing time is a MINIMUM. During peak times of the year, the turnaround time could as much as 5-10 days or more.**

Grades

Grades will be posted on the website, and may be printed from there. If there is a problem with a grade, students should provide instructors with an Academic Record Correction Request form from the Registrar's Office. If the grade change is granted, the instructor will advise the Registrar's Office and the changed grade(s) will appear on the website within 30 business days. Academic Record Correction Requests are limited to **within 30 days** from the final day of the course. After 30 days, the Registrar's Office will **NOT** proceed with the correction request.

Office of Business Affairs (Student Accounts Office)

All financial matters are conducted at the Student Accounts Office with the exception of student financial aid. The Reformed University website and Catalog provide students with financial information. Class registration, grades, and the current status of the student's account balance may be obtained from the website. Students are encouraged to visit the website prior to calling the Student Account Office. Students are required to add or drop classes via the Reformed University website. This will automatically send information to the Student Accounts Office. Any tuition refunds due will be added to your student account and will remain on deposit until a request for financial disbursement is received.

Funds will be released only to the student or their approved representative. Approval of a representative must be established with a personal appearance by the student and the written submission at the Student Accounts Office of the authorization approving the representative. Refunds are mailed only to the address maintained by the student in the Reformed University database. It is the student's responsibility to keep their address information up-to-date with the University.

Refunds

Tuition may be refunded as scheduled below (Usually fees and charges are not refundable). **Not attending classes does NOT constitute a formal withdrawal.** A dated and signed Tuition Refund Request Form must be submitted to the Office of Academic Affairs by the scheduled time shown to be entitled to any refunds. Students will receive refunds for overpayments and/or withdrawal from

classes. Students will not receive refunds on late fee charges, administrative charges, private scholarships, late payment fees, application fees, I-20 fees, or penalties for non-payment, default payments, or returned checks. The Office of Business Affairs, in consultation with the Office of Student Affairs, may consider refunds on an individual basis where personal emergency or extreme hardship is involved (student injury, prolonged illness or death, or other circumstances which prohibit completion of the course or program of study, for example). Students who withdraw or are withdrawn from class may be entitled to a partial/full tuition refund, (fees are not refundable). Students will receive refunds for overpayments and/or withdrawal from classes or institution without any additional administrative fees charged.

In any case of course cancellation, the institution will notify each student of the cancellation and recommend other coursework as a replacement. However, if this process is not satisfactorily implemented and a course change is not completed prior to the first day of a class, the institution will refund the full tuition for the cancelled course to the student without the need to file Tuition Refund Request.

Terms of Refund

Refunds are calculated based upon the date on which the student begins the official withdrawal or drop process by submitting the dated and signed Tuition Refund Request Form to the Registrar's Office. Refunds are determined based on the proration of tuition and percentage of program completed at withdrawal, up until 50% of the program, as described below. If the student has begun the official withdrawal process and the Tuition Refund Request is received and recorded by the Registrar's Office

- within three (3) business days after the initial application agreement:
 - 100% of tuition and fees (with the exception of non-refundable application fees)*
- after 3 days from the initial application agreement and during the first week of a semester:
 - 90% of tuition (no fees refunded after this point)*
- during the second week of a semester:
 - 80% of tuition*
- during the third week:
 - 70% of tuition*
- during the fourth week:
 - 60% of tuition*
- during the fifth week:
 - 50% of tuition*
- **NO REFUNDS WILL BE ISSUED AFTER THE FIFTH WEEK OF A SEMESTER**

Reformed University may charge fees for books and supplies which are in addition to tuition. Refunds of these charges will include any unused portion of the fees except for

- items that were special-ordered for a particular student and cannot be used or sold to another student
- items that were returned in a condition that prevents them from being used by or sold to new students
- non-refundable fees for goods and/or services provided by third party vendors

For all students, refunds will be available within 30 calendar days of the refund request. However, any students leaving the USA or with a permanent address in a foreign nation should allow extended delivery time, as the refund check may be delivered within 10 to 15 business days, depending on the country and region of the desired mailing location. While every effort will be made to mail refunds and other information in a timely manner, Reformed University is not responsible for delivery of any refund or other material sent to addresses outside the USA.

Important Refund Information Regarding Housing

Cancellation of the housing contract by the student occupant after acceptance by Reformed University will only be processed upon receipt of a written notice of cancellation by the Department of Student Housing (Dormitory). Upon cancellation of this contract by the student occupant, the student occupant will forfeit

his/her entire room application/damage fee, and the student will also be subjected to penalty charges as stated below. The student occupant may be eligible for a refund of room rent pursuant to the following refund schedule, subject to other provisions in or of this contract. Students who are financial aid recipients are subject to federal government guidelines regarding refunds. Students are required to vacate Reformed University housing and cease using its dining facilities after they withdraw or drop out, or be held liable for room and board charges beyond the last date of attendance. The date the Department of Student Housing (Dormitory) receives written notice of cancellation is the official cancellation date.

Housing Refund Schedule

- If the cancellation date is prior to the official move-in day for a given semester, the occupant is entitled to a refund of room rent equal to 100% of the room rent paid, provided the room is vacated.
- If the cancellation date is after move-in but before or during the first week of classes, the student occupant is entitled to a refund of room rent equal to 90% of the room rent paid, provided the room is vacated.
- If the cancellation date is after the first week of classes yet prior to the end of the first third of a given semester, the student occupant is entitled to a refund of room rent equal to 50% of the room rent paid, provided the room is vacated.
- If the cancellation date is after the first third of a given semester, the student occupant is not entitled to any refund of the room rent and is liable for the entire semester's room rent.

If a student is academically dismissed or expelled from the University, the student must withdraw from housing in writing to the Department of Student Housing (Dormitory) and the same above-refund schedule will apply. The housing refund policy applies to all cancellations. Cancellations occurring during a semester are subject to inspection of the vacated room for any damages.

Official Withdrawal from Housing

A student must officially submit their withdrawal from the residence halls to the Department of Student Housing (Dormitory) to cancel the Housing Contract. If cancellation is during a semester or between fall and spring semester, students are expected to remove their personal items from university housing premises within 48 hours of the signed withdrawal, or in the case of spring semester withdrawal, items must be removed from the room prior to the start of the semester.

Full Refund if Called to Active Duty

Reformed University will refund 100% of ALL tuition and fees for US military personnel who receive orders calling them into active duty and who must perforce discontinue studies during the academic semester.

Appeal / Complaint

Students who are not satisfied with the regulations regarding the Reformed University Refund Policy may appeal to the Registrar. If the students are still dissatisfied, they may appeal either to the President or to the Academic Standing Faculty Committee. The President or the Committee may make a recommendation for resolution, but when a decision being made is not just and fair, in the opinion of the complainant, he or she may make a final appeal to the Georgia Nonpublic Postsecondary Education Commission (GNPEC) at the following address:

GEORGIA NONPUBLIC POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION COMMISSION

2082 East Exchange Place, Suite 220

Tucker, GA 30084-5305

(770) 414-3300

<http://gnpec.georgia.gov>

IMMIGRATION INFORMATION

Immigration Information

As a non-immigrant student, you have been granted temporary permission to live and study in the United States. Prospective students who come to the United States to pursue full-time academic or vocational studies are usually admitted in one of two nonimmigrant categories:

- The F-1 category includes academic students in colleges, universities, seminaries, conservatories, academic high schools, other academic Institutions, and in language training.
- The M-1 visa for vocational training.

Reformed University admits F-1 Visa students only. Your primary responsibility is to pursue your education while in the United States. It is your responsibility to follow the regulations outlined by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in regards to maintaining your non-immigrant status. If you have any questions or concerns about your visa, contact International Student Services Center (ISSC).

Passport

Your passport is your own government's permit for you to leave and re-enter your own country. You should keep your passport valid at all times (most passports contain an expiration date) unless exempt from passport requirement. Consult your own embassy in the U.S. to renew your passport. The embassy officials will tell you what forms and fees, if any, are required. If you are required to supply a letter affirming that you are a student at Reformed University (i.e., Verification of Enrollment) you can request an official letter from the Reformed University Registrar's Office. For addresses of your country's embassy, link to <http://www.embassy.org/embassies/>

Visa

The visa stamp put in your passport by the U.S. consul abroad is required to enter the United States, unless exempt from visa requirements, but has no bearing on how long you can stay here. It also indicates the classification status you will have upon admission to the United States. It is necessary to renew your visa if the visa has expired and you are planning on traveling outside the North American continent. You may renew your visa by visiting the US consul in the country to which you are traveling; unfortunately, ***it is NOT possible to renew an F-1 visa within the borders of the U.S.***

Form I-94, Arrival/Departure Record

A Form I-94 shows that you have been admitted to the US. The I-94 form is usually stapled onto the US visa page of your passport. It contains an eleven-digit identifying number (called your departure number) that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) uses to keep track of your arrival in and departure from the United States. The DHS sometimes refers to the "departure" number as the "admission" number. There may be a date written in the upper right-hand corner of your I-94. You must leave the US by that date or apply to extend your stay. If there is no date, but rather the inscription "D/S" (duration of status,) you are admitted for the length of your program of study as indicated on your I-20, plus any period of post-completion optional practical training, plus 60 days. If you graduate before the completion date indicated on your I-20 you are considered to have completed your program of study and your I-20 is no longer valid.

Form I-20

A Form I-20 is the immigration document issued for the program and level of study the student is presently pursuing. Page 3 of the I-20 contains lines for an endorsement by a Designated School Official (PDSO or DSO) affirming that the information on the front of the I-20 is correct for the purpose of re-

entering the United States. There are spaces for information about the F-1 student's dependents, and others for employment authorization, curricular practical training, recommendations for post-completion practical training, or notations by a DHS official.

Note: Any international student traveling outside the US border should inform the PDSO or DSO of Reformed University to receive an endorsement on the page 3 for the purpose of re-entering the United States. KEEP THESE DOCUMENTS CURRENT AND IN A SAFE PLACE AT ALL TIMES.

Make photocopies of your travel documents and keep the copies in a safe place, separate from the originals. Photocopy the following documents for you and any dependents:

- Passport pages that have your picture and personal information, as well as official information (including its date of expiration)
- Current Visa status page
- Both sides of your Form I-94
- All parts of your I-20
- Keep all copies of former I-20s

Note: Reformed University International Student Services Center is NOT responsible for making photo copies of your documents. School officials will not reproduce those documents at your request. You must make and maintain these copies YOURSELF.

Data Integrity

The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) record must be in *Active* status when an F, M or J nonimmigrant applies for a benefit. A nonimmigrant with a record in any other status will not be able to apply for a benefit.

- The nonimmigrant's name must match all supporting documents.
- The nonimmigrant's status, name, and date of birth, must be correct in SEVIS.
- The supporting documents must be consistent and reflect the nonimmigrant's proper name, date of birth and nonimmigrant status.

What should an F, M or J nonimmigrant do if there is an error on the passport?

- A nonimmigrant with a passport error should consult their home country embassy or consulate to find out how to correct, update or renew the passport. Most embassies and consulates have a website with information regarding this issue.
- Spacing is as important as spelling and must be consistent. For instance, the system will not read "Kim Hyunji" and "Kim Hyun Ji" as the same name.
- Your passport should show your **actual legal name** in your country of origin. Unofficial names, nicknames, etc. are not acceptable

What should an F, M or J nonimmigrant do if there is a discrepancy on the Form I-94?

US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) reviews requests for corrections and, if appropriate, issues the necessary replacement documents to remedy the following errors made on the Form I-94 at the time of entry into the United States.

What should an F, M or J nonimmigrant do if there is a discrepancy on the Form I-20?

Please visit ISSC for immediate amendments on your Form I-20. The PDSO or DSO will change the information on your I-20 based on your most recent passport and I-94, and will reprint the document for your use.

IMPORTANT RULES TO REMEMBER

Your Role and Responsibilities as an International Student

The U.S. Federal Government has implemented regulations that govern how international students must maintain status while pursuing a degree. The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) is an integral part of these regulations. SEVIS has very specific and very strict requirements for updating the data it contains. The guidelines below are for maintaining status while in the U.S. Failure to follow these guidelines could result in your F-1 status being cancelled.

Maintain full-time student status

Only when the I-20 student is in the last semester prior to graduation may he/she possess a less than full-time enrollment status. Full-time for a Bachelor's degree student is 12 credit hours (4 classes); for Master's degree students, 9 credit hours (3 classes); and, for Doctor of Ministry student, 9 credit hours or a combination of classes and 12 clock hours per week toward research and writing.

Make progress toward the completion of your degree

You must make normal degree progress, and be enrolled in a full course of study appropriate for your level and major.

The Department of Homeland Security may be notified for the following reasons:

- Failure to enroll in a full-time course load
- Failure to enroll in courses for the semester
- Unauthorized drop of courses which results in reduced course load
- Non-attendance of class(es)
- Absences in excess of 3 per class (No absences are allowed in modules)
- Failure to maintain adequate progress towards completion of program (repeated grades of "F")
- Academic dismissal due to poor GPA
- Working illegally
- Failure to make a full payment for enrolled courses

I-20 students must, without exception, register for classes before the semester begins. Attendance is strictly enforced. Absences in excess of 3 classes per semester will result in failure of the course and possible disciplinary action.

Full-time study

- F-1 students *must maintain full-time student status each semester* until they receive their degrees, except when the student needs a lesser course load to complete the degree requirements for graduation.
- F-1 students are not required to register for the summer session.
- F-1 students who request an earlier acceptance prior to the fall semester **MUST** register for the summer session to be **ACTIVE** in his/her visa status.
- Credit for courses taken during the summer break is not considered valid by the Federal Government for status verification.
- Full-time study for international students means a minimum of nine credit hours for graduate students, and twelve credit hours for undergraduate students. Any deviations from these listings should be discussed with an advisor in ISSC. There are a few circumstances under which a student may be authorized to enroll less than full-time or to withdraw from a class during a given semester; however, **prior approval** from an ISSC advisor must be obtained.

ALL INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ARE REQUIRED TO MAINTAIN A FULL COURSE LOAD. ANY STUDENT WHO DROPS BELOW A FULL COURSE LOAD WITHOUT AUTHORIZATION WILL BE OUT-OF-STATUS. REDUCED COURSE LOAD AUTHORIZATION REASONS ARE LISTED BELOW.

A Designated School Official (PDSO or DSO) may authorize an international student to drop below a full course load for the following reasons, as noted in USCIS Federal Regulation Code 8 CFR Sec. 214.2 (f) 6:

Academic difficulties

The PDSO may authorize a reduced course load because of a student's initial difficulty with the English language or reading requirements, unfamiliarity with US teaching methods, or improper course level placement. The student must resume a full course of study at the next available term, session, or semester, excluding a summer session, in order to maintain student status. **A student previously authorized to drop below a full course of study due to academic difficulties is not eligible for a second authorization by the PDSO due to academic difficulties while pursuing a course of study at that program level.** A student authorized to drop below a full course of study for academic difficulties while pursuing a course of study at a particular program level may still be authorized for a reduced course load due to an illness medical condition as noted below.

Medical Conditions

The PDSO may authorize a reduced course load (or, if necessary, no course load) due to a student's temporary illness or medical condition, for a period of time not to exceed an aggregate of 12 months while the student is pursuing a course of study at a particular program level. In order to authorize a reduced course load based upon a medical condition, the student must provide medical documentation from a licensed medical doctor, doctor of osteopathy, or licensed clinical psychologist, to the PDSO to substantiate the illness or medical condition. The student must provide current medical documentation and the PDSO must reauthorize the drop below full course of study each new term, session, or semester. **A student previously authorized to drop below a full course of study due to illness or medical condition for an aggregate of 12 months may not be authorized by a PDSO to reduce his or her course load on subsequent occasions while pursuing a course of study at the same program level.** A student may be authorized to reduce course load for a reason of illness or medical condition on more than one occasion while pursuing a course of study, so long as the aggregate period of that authorization does not exceed 12 months.

Completion of a course of study in the final term or semester

The PDSO may authorize a reduced course load (RCL) in the student's final term, semester, or session if fewer courses are needed to complete the course of study. If the student is not required to take any additional courses to satisfy the requirements for completion, but continues to be enrolled for administrative purposes, the student is considered to have completed the course of study and must take action to maintain status. Such action may include application for change of status or departure from the US. **Note:** *An RCL must be authorized in SEVIS by the PDSO **BEFORE** the student registers for a reduced course load.*

Program End Date Extension Procedure

All SEVIS Form I-20s have a completion of studies date listed under section five (5). The statement reads:

5. The student named above has been accepted for a full course of study at school, majoring in [MAJOR]. The student is expected to report to the school no later than [DATE] and complete studies not later than [DATE]. The normal length of study is [NUMBER OF MONTHS] months.

All international students are given a specific number of years to complete a respective degree. Currently Reformed University allots the following:

Years to complete degree / Number of months listed on your I-20 form

- **Bachelor of Arts in Theological Studies (BATS) and Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration: Five calendar years / 60 months**
- **Master of Divinity (MDiv): Four calendar years / 48 months**

If the student fails to complete all coursework within the time allotted due to class failure (a grade of "F") an extension CANNOT be granted to repeat the course(s). The student will have to utilize a summer session (if possible) or take extra courses in addition to the required minimum course load to complete the programs requirements. Minimum course taking requirement per semester by USCIS or SEVIS may differ from the school requirement. Please check with your advisor before registration. Students who fail to complete the programs requirements within the allotted time and **are not eligible** for an extension will be placed out of status after the program completion date has passed. The student will not be permitted to continue to pursue his studies.

To request an extension on an I-20 the student must complete a Official Document Request form (Form I-20 extension request) which can be obtained from the ISSC Office. This must be done at least **45 days prior** to the program end date.

Program extension for students in lawful status (USCIS Federal Regulation Code 8 CFR Sec. 214.2 (f) 7)

An F-1 student who is unable to meet the program completion date on the Form I-20 may be granted an extension by the PDSO if the PDSO certifies that the student has continually maintained status and that the delays are caused by compelling academic or medical reasons, such as changes of major or research topics, unexpected research problems, or documented illnesses. Delays caused by academic probation or suspension are not acceptable reasons for program extensions. A PDSO may not grant an extension if the student did not apply for an extension until after the program end date noted on the Form I-20. An F-1 student who is unable to complete the educational program within the time listed on Form I-20 and who is ineligible for program extension pursuant to this paragraph (f)(7) is considered out of status. If eligible, the student may apply for reinstatement under the provisions of paragraph (f)(16) of this section.

Online Courses (Distance education)

Students may take one online course or distance education course and have it count towards **one** of the courses required for full-time enrollment. While more online courses may be taken in any semester, only 3 credit hours will count toward the total required to maintain a full course of study. These courses must be taken concurrently with traditional campus-based courses. Please note that the student is not limited to one online course, but no matter how many online courses the student takes; only 1 course (or 3 credit hours) per semester counts towards maintaining a full course of study. Please note that Reformed University does not currently (2017) offer online courses.

Employment

Employment opportunities are limited for international students in the US. On-campus employment is allowed for F-1 status holders with the permission of the ISSC office. On-campus employment is limited to 20 hours during the academic year and may be increased to full-time during vacation periods. Off-campus employment is available with special permission; please consult an advisor in the ISSC for further information. Please see the section on F-1 employment for more details.

Address Changes

Students must keep the International Student Services Center (ISSC) informed of their current telephone number, local US and permanent home country addresses. If it is necessary to change any of this information, students must submit a Student Information Change Request Form to the ISSC office without delay. DHS requires all non-immigrants to update their address **within 10 days** of any change. To meet these federally-mandated requirements, please contact the ISSC office with any address change. You will be required to also complete an AR-11 form which notifies the DHS of your address change or you may change your address online at <https://egov.uscis.gov/crisgwi/go?action=coa.Terms>.

Dependents of F-1 Visa holders (F-2)

For dependants to enter the US on an F-2 Visa, all names, birthdates and country of birth must be listed on the I-20 application. Also, a Form I-20 cannot be processed without the student's foreign address. The F-2 spouse of an F-1 student may not engage in full-time study, and the F-2 child may only engage in full-time study if the study is in an elementary or secondary school (kindergarten through twelfth grade). The F-2 spouse and children of an F-1 student may not accept employment. If the F-2 spouse or child wishes to engage in full-time study he/she must apply for and obtain a change of nonimmigrant classification to F-1 or M-1 status. **(Reformed University does NOT admit M-1 Visa students.)**

USCIS Federal Regulation Code 8 CFR Sec. 214.2 (f) 15

- (i) Employment. The F-2 spouse and children of an F-1 student may not accept employment.

- (ii) Study. (A) The F-2 spouse of an F-1 student may not engage in full-time study, and the F-2 child may only engage in full-time study if the study is in an elementary or secondary school (kindergarten through twelfth grade). The F-2 spouse and child may engage in study that is a vocational or recreational in nature.

(B) An F-2 spouse or F-2 child desiring to engage in full-time study, other than that allowed for a child in paragraph (f)(15)(ii)(A) of this section, must apply for and obtain a change of nonimmigrant classification to F-1, J-1, or M-1 status. An F-2 spouse or child who was enrolled on a full-time basis prior to January 1, 2003, will be allowed to continue study but must file for a change of nonimmigrant classification to F-1, J-1, or M-1 status on or before March 11, 2003.

(C) An F-2 spouse or F-2 child violates his/her nonimmigrant status by engaging in full-time study except as provided in paragraph (f)(15)(ii)(A) or (B) of this section.

Authorized Summer Vacation

Reformed University operates on a semester schedule. Therefore international students are authorized to take a vacation without registering for classes between the months of May and August, specifically, the period between the end of the spring semester and beginning of the fall semester. Students are also not required to register for courses between the holiday vacation months, specifically, the period between the end of the fall semester and beginning of the spring semester. This period is usually approximately 30 days. The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services regulation for annual vacation is listed below.

USCIS Federal Regulation Code 8 CFR Sec. 214.2 (f) 5

- (iii) Annual vacation. An F-1 student at an academic Institution is considered to be in status during the annual (or summer) vacation if the student is eligible and intends to register for the next term. A student attending a school on a quarter or trimester calendar who takes only one vacation a year during any one of the quarters or trimesters instead of during the summer is considered to be in status during that vacation, if the student has completed the equivalent of an academic year prior to taking the vacation.

The responsible school official should be contacted well before travel out of the country. *Travel should only occur during the authorized vacation period* excluding unforeseen emergency circumstances. Students planning to travel should have an endorsement from the Designated School Official on the last page of the Form I-20. The PDSO will sign the form if:

- The student's financial documents are still valid
- The student is planning to re-enroll upon return to the United States
- The student is in compliance with all F-1 regulations.

A signature can be obtained by the PDSO in the ISSC Office.

Students may leave the United States and be readmitted after absences of five months or less. Upon your return to the United States, you should provide immigration inspectors with:

- A valid passport.
- A valid F-1 entry visa stamped in the passport (if necessary).
- A current USCIS Form I-20 ID (Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Student Status - for Academic and Language Students) signed by your appropriate school official (you should have the appropriate school official sign your USCIS Form I-20 each time you wish to temporarily travel outside the United States).
- A new USCIS Form I-20 A-B/I-20 ID if there has been any substantive changes in your course of study or place of study
- Proof of your financial support.

When making your travel plans, please remember that you must be a full-time student to keep your F-1 student status. You will be considered to be "in status" if you take the annual summer vacation, as long as you are eligible and intend to register for the next school term.

Reformed University **strongly** recommends all traveling international students to seek advice prior to departure. All international students **MUST** be registered for each semester and have all charges and tuition cleared in order to remain active on the course attendance list. Please schedule travel during your authorized vacation period for your safekeeping of your status.

Tax Reporting Information

All international students are required to submit an **Annual Tax Report** to the United States Internal Revenue Service (IRS) for the duration of their studies in the U.S. Students who have been in the U.S. beyond 6 years **must** file taxes. Submitting an Annual Tax Report is not the same procedure as Filing Income Taxes. Assistance and information for tax filing and reporting can be obtained by calling the Internal Revenue Service at 1-800-829-1040 or visiting <http://www.irs.gov>.

F-1 Transfer Procedures

The procedure to transfer from one institution to another DHS-approved institution within the US is detailed below.

Eligibility

An F-1 student is eligible to transfer to another DHS-approved school if the student has maintained valid legal status, has carried a full course of study at the school last attended, intends to pursue a full course of study at the new school and is financially able to attend the new school.

Checklist of Documents

The school to which you are transferring may require the DSO from your previous institution to fill out a Transfer Clearance Form. Once you have met all requirements for transfer, have a valid transfer clearance from the former school, and have been released in SEVIS by your previous school, you will be issued a new Form I-20 from the new institution.

Procedures

If you **are** transferring **TO** Reformed University:

- 1) Inform the international student advisor at your current school that you intend to transfer to Reformed University
- 2) Fill out Transfer Clearance Form
- 3) Ask International Student Advisor at your current school to fill out and sign the Transfer Clearance Form
- 4) Report to ISSC within 15 days of the report date on your new Reformed University I-20 to proceed with the transfer procedure. **THIS IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN YOUR STATUS**
- 5) You will need to have the Transfer Clearance Form signed by a PDSO at your previous Institution, your passport, I-94 Departure Record, and all previously issued I-20s. If you have dependents in the U.S., you must bring each of their I-20s, passports, and I-94 Departure Records.
- 6) Submit admission application to Reformed University along with documents and information listed above
- 7) Upon acceptance, the ISSC will notify your current school with Transfer Acceptance Letter and the Transfer Request via Fax
- 8) Upon your SEVIS release, Registration, and Full payment of Tuition and Fees to Reformed University, you will be issued with a new Form I-20

Notes

Your transfer is not complete until you have enrolled full-time for classes and your ISSC advisor verifies your full-time enrollment, updates your current U.S. and foreign addresses, and registers your record in SEVIS. **The act of registering you in SEVIS is MANDATORY every semester. Be sure to make this possible by keeping your addresses current in Reformed University records. Failure to do so could cause you to fall out of status.**

If you **are** transferring **FROM** Reformed University to a new Institution:

- 1) Submit Transfer Request Form to the Office of Admissions
- 2) Inform ISSC that you intend to transfer to another school
- 3) Discuss and determine with an ISSC advisor and the PDSO from your new school when Reformed University should "release" your SEVIS record to your new school. Keep in mind that once your record has been released to another school, Reformed University cannot access your record and consequently cannot reverse the release. Therefore, it is imperative that you be certain of your admissions status and of your decision to transfer to a given school.
- 4) Ask ISSC to sign the Transfer Clearance Form from the new Institution if required, and to release your record in SEVIS on a given date.
- 5) Report to the Designated School Official at the new Institution within 15 days of the program start date on your new I-20 to complete the transfer procedure.

How long can an F-1 student stay in the U.S.?

In contrast to most other non-immigrants who receive a specific period of time to remain in the US, a foreign national who obtains F-1 status is allowed to remain in the US for the duration of status; that is, the time it takes to complete the studies plus possible practical training. Duration of status is defined as the time during which an F-1 student is pursuing a full course of study at an approved educational institution, or engaging in authorized practical training following completion of studies, except that an F-1 student who is admitted to attend a public high school is restricted to an aggregate of 12 months of study at any public high school(s).

An F-1 student may be admitted for a period up to 30 days before the indicated report date or program start date listed on Form I-20. The student is considered to be maintaining status if he/she is making normal progress toward completing a course of study. Moreover, the international student will also be allowed to stay in the country for up to twelve additional months beyond the completion of the studies to pursue practical training.

Grace Period

Normal Grace Period - 60 calendar days

An F-1 student who has completed a course of study and any authorized practical training following completion of studies will be allowed a maximum of 60-days to prepare for departure from the United States or to transfer to another institution in accordance with immigration laws.

Withdrawal from Classes - 15 calendar days

An F-1 student authorized by the DSO to withdraw from classes will be allowed a 15-day period for departure from the United States from the date of withdrawn.

Fail to Maintain F-1 Status - 15 calendar days

An F-1 student who fails to maintain a full course of study without the approval of the DSO or otherwise fails to maintain status will be allowed a 15-day period for departure from the United States from the date of I-20 termination.

Reformed University Policy on Change of Status

The International Student Services Center DOES NOT offer legal advice or act for students in changing their current status to F-1 or to any others from F-1. ISSC strongly recommends international students to designation to counsel. **In general, the following requirements exist for a Change of Status to F-1 (I-539 petition):**

Full admission to an academic program at Reformed

University Valid current non-immigrant status

Successful compilation of the requirements for a change of status

- A written statement explaining the reason why a change of status is being requested
- A check or money order in the amount of \$ 300.00, payable to "US Department of Homeland Security" (Please check with the USCIS for any updated fees)
- A copy of the student's passport main ID (biographical) page and current visa
- The student's original I-94 card (for copying purposes only)
- Current financial documentation (originals, no photocopies or faxes) showing at least the tuition and fee amount listed on your I-20 form available to the student or student's sponsor, and an additional \$3,000 per F-2 dependent. For students with sponsors, a completed and notarized I-134 Affidavit of Support and official banking statements
- SEVIS Fee of \$200 paid to the Department of Homeland Security. Information and instructions regarding the SEVIS fee are available at www.fmjfee.com
- If the applicant is a dependent, a copy of the primary status holder's I-94 and passport main page are also required. If the primary status holder is in F-1 status a copy of his/her I-20 is required.

Reformed University Policy on Reinstatements to F-1 Status (I-539 Petition for Reinstatement):

International Student Services assists students who need to reinstate to F-1 status. However, even though Reformed University will assist with the reinstatement, the student is responsible for ensuring that any petition for reinstatement is complete, accurate, and timely. Students MUST apply for reinstatement within 5 months of falling out of status.

Please note: Reformed University will not assist students with a reinstatement to status unless the

student is currently registered at Reformed University in full-time status.

The student must be able to do the following:

- Establish to the satisfaction of USCIS that the violation of status resulted from circumstances beyond the student's control, or that failure to receive reinstatement to lawful F-1 status would result in extreme hardship to the student, and
- The student is currently pursuing a full course of study at the school which issued the Form I-20, and
- Has not engaged in unauthorized employment, and
- Is not deportable on any ground other than section 242(a)(1)(b) or (c)(1) of the Act [overstaying or failing to maintain status], and
- Has not been out of status more than 5 months

In general, the following requirements exist for a Reinstatement:

- Current full-time enrollment at Reformed University.
- Successful completion of the requirements for reinstatement
- A written statement requesting reinstatement and explaining the reason why the student fell out of status
- A check or money order in the amount of \$ 300.00, payable to "US Department of Homeland Security." (Please check with USCIS for any updates on the fees before submitting the documents.)
- A photocopy of the student's last I-20
- A copy of the student's passport main ID (biographical) page and current visa
- The student's original I-94 card (original may not have to be mailed to US DHS)
- An official academic transcript from each US school attended since the last entry into the US
- Current financial documentation (originals, no photocopies or faxes) showing at least the tuition and fee amount listed on your I-20 form available to the student or student's sponsor, and an additional \$3,000 for each F-2 dependent. For students with a sponsor, a completed and notarized I-134 Affidavit of Support

EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

Employment Information

There are three options for student employment: (1) curricular practical training (2) optional practical training and (3) temporary hardship. Off-campus employment recommendations will only be given to students who have been enrolled for one academic year and are in good academic standing, meaning a grade point average above a 2.0 and/or are not subject to academic probation based upon the current Reformed University Catalog. These options are explained in detail below in conjunction with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services regulations.

On-Campus Employment

Due to limited available positions, on-campus employment at Reformed University is not common. However, if a position becomes available, the Office of Student Affairs may post a recruiting announcement for fields such as: Library assistant, Chapel assistant, teaching assistant, Research Assistant, etc. RU's pay rate is up to \$10.00 per hour. Upon recruitment, proper job training and orientation will be provided. Each on-campus employee is required to fill out a time sheet each month to file for payroll, and the Office of Business Affairs, at the reimbursement request from the Office of Student Affairs, will issue a payroll statement and credit the student's account.

USCIS Federal Regulation Code 8 CFR Sec. 214.2 (f) 9i

(i) On-campus employment.

On-campus employment must either be performed on the school's premises, (including on-location commercial firms which provide services for students on campus, such as the school bookstore or cafeteria), or at an off-campus location which is educationally affiliated with the school. Employment with on-site

commercial firms, such as a construction company building a school building, which do not provide direct student services is not deemed on-campus employment for the purposes of this paragraph. In the case of off-campus locations, the educational affiliation must be associated with the school's established curriculum or related to contractually funded research projects at the post-graduate level. In any event, the employment must be an integral part of the student's educational program. Employment authorized under this paragraph must **not exceed 20 hours** a week while school is in session. An F-1 student may, however, work on campus fulltime when school is not in session or during the annual vacation. A student who has been issued a Form I-20 A-B to begin a new program in accordance with the provision of **8 CFR 214.3(k)** and who intends to enroll for the next regular academic year, term, or session at the Institution which issued the Form I-20 A-B may continue on-campus employment incident to status. Otherwise, an F-1 student may not engage in on-campus employment after completing a course of study, except employment for practical training as authorized under paragraph (f)(10) of this section. An F-1 student may engage in any on-campus employment authorized under this paragraph, which will not displace United States residents. In the case of a transfer in SEVIS, the student may only engage in on-campus employment at the school having jurisdiction over the student's SEVIS record. Upon initial entry to begin a new course of study, an F-1 student may not begin on-campus employment more than 30 days prior to the actual start of classes.

Optional Practical Training

OPT General Information

- Apply for OPT at least **120 days prior** to the start date of your employment.
- A student may apply to the Service for authorization for temporary employment for OPT directly related to the student's major area of study.
- The student may **not** begin OPT until the date indicated on his/her employment authorization document, Form I-766 or Form 688B.
- A student may submit an application for authorization to engage in OPT up to 90 days prior to being enrolled for one full academic year, provided that the period of employment will not begin until after the completion of the full academic year as indicated by the PDSO.
- A student may be granted authorization to engage in temporary employment for OPT: (1) during the student's annual vacation and at other times when school is not in session, if the student is currently enrolled, and is eligible for registration and intends to register for the next term or session; (2) while school is in session, provided that practical training does not exceed 20 hours a week while school is in session; or (3) After completion of the course of study, or, for a student in a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree program, after completion of all course requirements for the degree (excluding thesis or equivalent). Continued enrollment, for the school's administrative purposes, after all requirements for the degree have been met does not preclude eligibility for OPT. However, OPT must be requested prior to the completion of all course requirements for the degree or prior to the completion of the course of study. A student must complete all practical training within a 14-month period following the completion of study.

Termination of OPT

Authorization to engage in OPT employment is automatically terminated when the student transfers to another school or begin study at another educational level.

Request for authorization for OPT

The OPT process begins at the Reformed University International Student Services Center. A request for authorization to accept OPT must be made to the designated school official (PDSO) of the school the student is authorized to attend on Form I-538, accompanied by his or her current Form I-20.

SEVIS Process

In making a recommendation for OPT under SEVIS, the PDSO will update the student's record in SEVIS as having been recommended for OPT. A PDSO who recommends a student for OPT is responsible for maintaining the record of the student for the duration of the time that training is authorized. The PDSO will indicate in SEVIS whether the employment is to be full-time or part-time, and note in SEVIS the start and end date of employment. The PDSO will then print the employment page of the student's SEVIS Form I-20, and sign and date the form to indicate that OPT has been recommended. The student must file with the service center for an Employment Authorization Document (Form I-765), with fee and the SEVIS Form I-20 employment page indicating that OPT has been recommended by the PDSO.

Employment authorization

The total periods of authorization of OPT and CPT shall not exceed a maximum of twelve months. Part-time OPT, 20 hours per week or less, shall be deducted from the available OPT at one-half (50%) the full-time rate. As required by the regulations at 8 CFR part 274a, an F-1 student seeking OPT (excluding CPT) under paragraph (f)(10) of this section may **not** accept employment **until** he/she has been issued an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) by the Service. An F-1 student must apply to the USCIS for the EAD by filing the Form I-765. The application for employment authorization must include the following documents:

- A completed Form I-765, with the appropriate fee
- A PDSO's recommendation for OPT on Form I-20, or, for a SEVIS school, on an updated SEVIS Form I-20.

Decision on application for employment authorization

The Service shall adjudicate the Form I-765 and issue an EAD on the basis of the PDSO's recommendation unless the student is found otherwise ineligible. The Service shall notify the applicant of the decision and, if the application is denied, of the reason or reasons for the denial. *The applicant may not appeal the decision.* An F-1 student authorized by the Service to engage in OPT is required to report any change of name or address, or interruption of such employment to the PDSO for the duration of the authorized training. A PDSO who recommends a student for OPT is responsible for updating the student's record to reflect these reported changes for the duration of the time that training is authorized.

Temporary absence from the United States of F-1 student granted employment authorization

A student returning from a temporary trip abroad with an unexpired off-campus employment authorization on his or her Form I-20 may resume employment only if the student is readmitted to attend the same school which granted the employment authorization. An F-1 student who has an unexpired EAD issued for post-completion OPT and who is otherwise admissible may return to the United States to resume employment after a period of temporary absence. The EAD must be used in combination with a Form I-20 endorsed for reentry by the PDSO within the last SIX months.

HOW TO APPLY:

Option One: Paper Application

Application Checklist

- Complete I-765 Form (Item # 3 on the form, should be your current, valid, mailing address)
- SEVIS I-20 with an OPT employment recommendation listed on the last page
- Two color pictures that meet USCIS specifications (these will be passport size photos, write name and I-94 number lightly in pencil on back of pictures)
- Photocopies of the I-94 (front and back), and passport identification page [recommended]
- Check for \$410.00 made payable to USCIS (Fee may change without notice. Please check the USCIS website for updated information).

Once all required information is ready, you may mail all paper applications to:

USCIS
P.O. Box 660867
Dallas, TX 75266

For Express Mail and Commercial Courier Service:

USCIS TSC
Attn: AOS
2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business
Suite 400
Lewisville, TX 75067

Option Two: Electronic Filing

- Go to <http://uscis.gov/graphics/formsfee/forms/efiling.htm>
- Read all instructions prior to completing the application
- Click the “E” which will be listed in the lower right hand corner once you locate the form
- Student submits application on-line with \$410.00 filing fee (you must provide checking or savings account info.)
- Student gets an electronic confirmation of receipt notice
- Student then needs to make an appointment with a USCIS Application Support Center to provide a digital photograph, signature and fingerprints

Once Application Has Been Filed:

Application process: Applicants should receive a Form I-797 Notice of Action that indicates receipt of the petition to the Service Center and will list a Receipt Date and Notice Date. Typically this form will state that the processing time is approximately 80 days from the Notice Date. However, currently these applications are taking a minimum of 4 or more months to process.

Checking on the status of the application: Students can check on the status of an application by going online to: <https://egov.immigration.gov/graphics/cris/jsps/caseStat.jsp> or by calling 1-800-375-5283. Students will need to provide the Receipt Number (SRCxxxxxxxx).

Applications still pending after 90 Days: If it has been 90 days past the Receipt Date on the USCIS receipt and the student still has not received the EAD card, the student can apply for a temporary card at:

Atlanta District Office
Dept. of Homeland Security – USCIS
2150 Parklake Drive
Atlanta, GA 30345

Change of Address: The U.S. postal service does not forward government documents, when someone moves, so even if the student has asked for his/her mail to be forwarded, the EAD will be returned to the TSC. If students do change addresses from what is listed on the I-765, they can report the change of address by phoning 1-800-375-5283 or by mailing to

Alien Address Changes
USCIS/TSC
PO Box 850891,
Mesquite, TX 75185-0891

Approval: If the OPT application is approved, USCIS will issue the student Form I-766, a card known as the Employment Authorization Document (EAD). The approval will also be indicated in SEVIS. The PDSO should print out a new page three of the I-20 indicating OPT authorization and give it to the student.

Optional Practical Training Federal Regulations

USCIS Federal Regulation Code 8 CFR Sec. 214.2 (f) 10ii

(A) General. A student may apply to the Service for authorization for temporary employment for optional practical training directly related to the student's major area of study. The student may not begin optional practical training until the date indicated on his or her Employment Authorization Document (EAD), Form I-766 or Form 688B. A student may submit an application for authorization to engage in optional practical training up to 90 days prior to being enrolled for one full academic year, provided that the period of employment will not begin until after the completion of the full academic year as indicated by the PDSO. A student may be granted authorization to engage in temporary employment for optional practical training (Paragraph (f)(10)(ii)(A) revised effective 1/1/03; **67 FR 76256**):

1. During the student's annual vacation and at other times when school is not in session, if the student is currently enrolled, and is eligible for registration and intends to register for the next term or session;
2. While school is in session, provided that practical training does not exceed 20 hours a week while school is in session; or
3. After completion of the course of study, or, for a student in a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree program, after completion of all course requirements for the degree (excluding thesis or equivalent). Continued enrollment, for the school's administrative purposes, after all requirements for the degree have been met does not preclude eligibility for optional practical training. However, optional practical training must be requested prior to the completion of all course requirements for the degree or prior to the completion of the course of study. A student must complete all practical training within a 14-month period following the completion of study.
4. Termination of practical training. Authorization to engage in optional practical training employment is automatically terminated when the student transfers to another school or begin study at another educational level. (Revised effective 1/1/03; **67 FR 76256**)
5. Request for authorization for practical training. A request for authorization to accept practical training must be made to the designated school official (PDSO) of the school the student is authorized to attend on Form I-538, accompanied by his or her current Form I-20 ID.

OPT Frequently Asked Questions

What is the earliest I can apply for Optional Practical Training?

It is recommended that you apply as early as **120 days (4 months)** before the date you request your OPT to begin or the semester before you plan to begin OPT (*August for a January start date and January for a May or June start date.*)

What are the eligibility requirements?

To be eligible for optional practical training, you must:

1. Have been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis for one full academic year,
2. Currently be maintaining a full-time program of study and valid F-1 status, and
3. Intend to work in a job directly related to your major field of study. A job offer is *not* required to be eligible for or to apply for OPT, but the student is expected to work or to be actively seeking employment after the OPT approval card (EAD) is issued.

When must I apply for OPT?

- **Post-completion OPT:** You **must** apply **before** the date you complete your studies. The USCIS must receive your application by your completion date, so apply well in advance. After your completion date passes, you are ineligible to apply for post-completion OPT. If you intend to travel abroad around the time you will complete your studies, you must apply for post-completion OPT before you leave the United States. Consult with the International Student Services Center (ISSC) if you intend to travel abroad during this time.
- **Pre-completion OPT:** You should apply 3-4 months before the date you wish to begin employment.

What is my completion date?

The "completion date" refers to the date that your degree requirements are completed (as verified by your academic advisor). This may not necessarily be the same as the "official" college/seminary graduation ceremony date. For most undergraduates and master's students without a thesis requirement, the completion of studies date is the May, or December date that follows your last term of full-time enrollment.

What happens after I mail my application?

Usually within approximately one month, USCIS will mail a receipt to you at the address listed on Form I-765. Full processing of the OPT application materials is likely to take up to an additional 90 days. Upon approval, USCIS will mail your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) to the same address you provided on form I-765. *You may not begin employment before you receive your EAD and the start date on the card has been reached. Working before receipt of your EAD constitutes illegal employment that renders you illegally present in the United States.*

What if my address changes while my OPT is still pending?

If you change your address before your receipt and/or card are issued, you must notify USCIS. We also recommend you inform the Reformed University ISSC.

How can I check the status of my application?

Once you receive a notice from USCIS confirming receipt of your application, you can check the status at: <https://egov.immigration.gov/cris/jsps/> (Use the EAC number located in the top left of the receipt notice). Alternatively, USCIS prints the EAC number on the back of your check once it is cashed. You may be able to obtain a copy of your check from your bank.

Can I travel on practical training?

Post-Completion OPT:

You should not experience difficulty reentering the United States if you have all the items listed below:

- a valid passport,
- a valid F-1 visa stamp in your passport (except Canadian citizens),
- your OPT I-20 endorsed for reentry by your PDSO within the last six months,
- your valid practical training EAD issued by USCIS, and
- evidence of employment such as a job offer or employment verification letter.

If you do **not** have all of these documents listed above or plan to leave the US while your OPT application is pending with USCIS, you should consult with ISSC before travel abroad. For more information, see: http://www.ice.gov/graphics/sevis/travel/faq_F-2.htm. *Please note:* Your EAD will have a notation, "not valid for reentry to US". This is printed on all EAD cards issued for OPT and simply means that the card alone is not sufficient for reentry to the US.

Pre-Completion (e.g. summer) OPT:

You can travel and return to the US with a valid passport, valid F-1 visa stamp and your OPT I-20 endorsed by your PDSO within the last twelve months. You do not need evidence of a job or a valid EAD issued by USCIS to return to the US.

Do I still need to notify USCIS if my address changes while on post-completion OPT?

Yes. Please contact the ISSC and you will be sent the appropriate address change completion forms.

Can I change my OPT dates or cancel OPT if I do not get a job?

Once your application has been received by USCIS, ISSC cannot cancel or change your OPT dates for you. If you want to try to withdraw your OPT application after you have sent it to USCIS, you will need to submit a written request to them directly. Please consult with ISSC for more information. **We advise that you carefully choose your dates and consider your job prospects before applying for OPT, since canceling your application may be difficult or virtually impossible to do.** An unexpected delay in completing degree requirements, inability to find an appropriate job or loss of a job does not allow you to take back or adjust practical training authorization even if this means you will lose time when you would otherwise have been eligible to work under Optional Practical Training.

Do I need a Social Security Number to work in the US?

Yes. If you plan to work in the US you will need a valid Social Security Number (SSN). To apply, please obtain instructions and directions to the Social Security Office from ISSC. The Social Security Administration will process your application and mail your Social Security number to you.

Do I need to complete any forms with my employer to begin working?

Yes. Within the first three days of beginning work you and your employer must complete a form entitled employment Eligibility Verification (Form I-9). This form will be kept on file by your employer and must be updated each time you receive a renewal of your work permission. Your employer will provide this form and assist you in its completion.

Can I change employers while on OPT?

Yes. OPT work authorization is not job-specific. Therefore, you may change employers, or have multiple employers at the same time, provided that each position is directly related to your major field of study and commensurate with your educational level and you **do not** work over the maximum allotment of hours per your authorization.

Do I pay taxes while working on OPT?

Students in F-1 status are subject to all federal, state and local taxes that may apply. In general, however, F-1 students who have been present in the US for no more than five calendar years are exempt from Social Security (FICA) and Medicare taxes. Be sure to bring this to the attention of your employer, as many employers are unfamiliar with this provision of the tax laws. If you need more information about the F-1 Social Security and Medicare tax exemption. You should consult an accountant or tax attorney. ISSC cannot provide this type of individual tax assistance.

How long can I stay in the US after the end date of my OPT?

You have a 60 day grace period after the end of your OPT. You are not authorized to work nor can you leave and reenter the US in F-1 status during the grace period.

What should I do if I want to begin a new program of study in the US when I finish my OPT?

You must contact ISSC and tell us what school you plan to attend and when your new program of study will begin. (This is also true if you are returning to Reformed University to begin a new program. We are

not likely to know unless you tell us.) We must then "release" your F-1 SEVIS record to your new school **within 60 days of the end of your OPT** (or update your SEVIS record for a new Reformed University program). If you fail to notify ISSC of your plans to begin a new program of study before the end of your 60-day grace period, your F-1 SEVIS record is likely to become invalid and may cause immigration problems for you.

However, most likely, our ISSC officials will contact each OPT beneficiary approximately 90 days prior to the OPT end date to confirm your intention of (1) further pursuing higher degree program, (2) further extending your degree program in another field, (3) transferring to another institution, or (4) returning to your home country after completing your OPT. This is specifically why we need to have your updated contact information even while you are OPT.

IMPORTANT

Final Note: Failure to comply with employment regulations can result in severe consequences imposed by the Federal Government.

It is your responsibility to comply with all immigration regulations which apply to F-1 students, including employment regulations. Working without proper authorization is a serious violation of your student status. IF YOU FAIL TO COMPLY WITH YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES, YOU MAY NOT BE ELIGIBLE FOR BENEFITS NORMALLY GRANTED TO F-1 STUDENTS AND POSSIBLY SUBJECT TO DEPORTATION. Should you face any trouble with your employer, please contact ISSC for any advice.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

An F-1 student may be authorized by the PDSO to participate in a curricular practical training program that is an integral part of an established curriculum. Curricular practical training is defined to be alternative work/study, internship cooperative education, or any other type of required internship or practicum that is offered by sponsoring employers through cooperative agreements with the school. Students who have received one year or more of full-time curricular practical training are ineligible for post-completion academic training. Exceptions to the one academic year requirement are provided for students enrolled in graduate studies that require immediate participation in curricular practical training. A request for authorization for curricular practical training must be made to the PDSO. A student may begin curricular practical training only after receiving his or her Form I-20 with the PDSO endorsement. 8 C.F.R. 214.2(f) (10) (i)

SEVIS Process

To grant authorization for a student to engage in curricular practical training, a PDSO at a SEVIS school will update the student's record in SEVIS as being authorized for curricular practical training that is directly related to the student's major area of study. The PDSO will indicate whether the training is full-time or part-time, the employer and location, and the employment page of the SEVIS Form I-20 indicating that curricular practical training has been approved. The PDSO must sign, date and return the SEVIS Form I-20 to the student prior to the student's commencement of employment.

Preconditions

Student must have been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis at an USCIS (DHS) approved school for one full academic year before being eligible for CPT. Exception exists for graduate students whose programs require immediate curricular training. Available only while student is in F-1 status, before completion of the educational objective. Students in English Language Training programs are ineligible for CPT.

Location

Students may engage in CPT only for the specific employer, location and period approved and recorded by the PDSO in SEVIS.

Duration

Duration depends on the specific period granted by the PDSO. May be granted by the PDSO in increments of no more than one year, or until expected date of employment completion, whichever is shorter. There is NO cumulative maximum, except that it can only be approved before completion of the academic objective.

Hours per week

Part-time (20 hours or less) or full-time (over 20 hours).

Offer of Employment

Must have an offer of employment from an employer offering work that qualifies as CPT. You must also maintain a full course of study in F-1 status during the period of employment, but some exceptions may apply.

YOU MUST RECEIVE WRITTEN AUTHORIZATION FROM PDSO, WHO RECORDS AUTHORIZATION IN SEVIS AND ISSUES SEVIS I-20 WITH NOTATION, *BEFORE* WORK BEGINS.

Procedure to apply for CPT:

- Student must visit the ISSC office and speak with a PDSO.
- Student should bring the following:
 - A letter verifying employment on company/ministry letterhead
 - Start and end date of employment
 - Approximate hours you will work per week



Once the authorization is approved, the PDSO will recommend you through SEVIS. Once approved the only documents needed are a SEVIS I-20 endorsed by the PDSO.

CPT Frequently Asked Questions

What is CPT?

The regulations state that CPT must be “an integral part of an established curriculum.” They define curricular practical training as “alternate work/study, internship, cooperative education, or any other type of required internship or practicum which is offered by sponsoring employers through cooperative agreements with the school.” [8 C.F.R. 214.2(f) (10) (i)]

How will CPT effect my eligibility for OPT?

F-1 students who engage in a sum of 12 months or more of full-time CPT “trigger” that eliminated eligibility for OPT. BUT the use of 12 months of full time CPT only affects eligibility for OPT at the *same* program level at a school from which the student transfers does count toward this 12 month aggregate. CPT authorized at another program level does not count toward this 12 month aggregate.” [DHS SEVIS RTI user’s manual (vol. II), S.4.5.5.3.3 AMDOC #200405008.]

What are the requirements for CPT?

- You must have been enrolled at current Institution for at least one full academic year.
- Employment must be an integral part of the established curriculum for degree program. (Course must be listed in course catalog as qualifying for academic credit with a faculty member assigned to the course. It is also required that the practical training experience be instrumental to achieving a curricular academic objective.)
- Eligibility exists only while student is in F-1 status, before completion of the educational objective.

Economic Hardship Application Procedure

An eligible F-1 student may request off-campus employment work authorization based upon severe economic hardship caused by unforeseen circumstances beyond the student’s control. These circumstances may include loss of financial aid (sponsorship) or on campus employment without

fault on the part of the student, substantial fluctuations in the value of currency or exchange rate, inordinate increases in tuition and/or living costs, unexpected changes in the financial condition of the student's source of support, medical bills or other substantial and unexpected expenses.

Procedures for applying for economic hardship work authorization:

Student must prepare and submit the following to the PDSO at the authorized school of attendance:

- A statement describing the unforeseen hardship situation and, if possible, should attach backup documentation; for example, a letter from home telling of a change in family circumstances or proof of a currency devaluation in the student's country.
- Explain why other employment options are unavailable or insufficient
- Complete Form I-765, using the code: "I (3) (iii)" at item 16
- Obtain 2 passport photos

The PDSO must:

- Verify eligibility for the benefit, including maintenance of F-1 status for at least one academic year and currently in good standing as a student.
- Update SEVIS with a recommendation for employment
- Print the SEVIS I-20

What to send with the Economic Hardship application:

1. Completed I-765 form (<http://uscis.gov/graphics/formsfee/forms/index.htm>)
2. SEVIS I-20 showing PDSO recommendation for employment
3. Two color photos that meet USCIS specifications
4. Photocopies of the I-94 (front and back), and passport identification page
5. Supporting materials that detail the unforeseen circumstances requiring the student to seek employment authorization and the unavailability of on campus employment. Provide a list of assets, income and expenses.
6. Check or money order for \$340.00 made payable to the USCIS. (Checks are recommended for tracking purposes)

USCIS Federal Regulation Code 8 CFR Sec. 214.2 (f) 9ii

Off Campus Employment –

(ii) Off-campus work authorization

(iii)

1) General. An F-1 student may be authorized to work off-campus on a part-time basis in accordance with paragraph (f)(9)(ii)(B) or (C) of this section after having been in F-1 status for one full academic year provided that the student is in good academic standing as determined by the PDSO. Part-time off-campus employment authorized under this section is limited to no more than twenty hours a week when school is in session. A student who is granted off-campus employment authorization may work full-time during holidays or school vacation. The employment authorization is automatically terminated whenever the student fails to maintain status. In emergent circumstances as determined by the Commissioner, the Commissioner may suspend the applicability of any or all of the requirements of paragraph (f)(9)(ii) of this section by notice in the **Federal Register**. (Amended 6/10/98; **63 FR 31872**)

2) Reserved. (Removed and reserved effective 1/1/03; **67 FR 76256**)

3) Severe economic hardship. If other employment opportunities are not available or are otherwise insufficient, an eligible F-1 student may request off-campus employment work authorization based upon severe economic hardship caused by unforeseen circumstances beyond the student's control. These circumstances may include loss of financial aid or on-campus employment without fault on the part of the student, substantial fluctuations in the value of currency or exchange rate, inordinate increases in tuition

and/or living costs, unexpected changes in the financial condition of the student's source of support, medical bills, or other substantial and unexpected expenses.

- 4) Procedure for off-campus employment authorization due to severe economic hardship. The student must request a recommendation from the PDSO for off-campus employment. The PDSO at a non-SEVIS school must make such a certification on Form I-538, Certification by Designated School Official. The PDSO of a SEVIS school must complete such certification in SEVIS. The PDSO may recommend the student for work off-campus for one-year intervals by certifying that: [Revising paragraph (f)(9)(ii)(D); **67 FR 76256**]
- a) The student has been in F-1 status for one full academic year;
 - b) The student is in good standing as a student and is carrying a full course of study as defined in paragraph (f)(6) of this section;
 - c) The student has demonstrated that acceptance of employment will not interfere with the student's carrying a full course of study; and
 - d) The student has demonstrated that the employment is necessary to avoid severe economic hardship due to unforeseen circumstances beyond the student's control pursuant to paragraph (f)(9)(ii)(C) of this section and has demonstrated that employment under paragraph (f)(9)(i) of this section is unavailable or otherwise insufficient to meet the needs that have arisen as a result of the unforeseen circumstances.
 - e) Reserved. [Removed and reserved effective 1/1/03; **67 FR 76256**]
 - f) Severe economic hardship application

The applicant should submit the economic hardship application for employment authorization on Form I-765, with the fee required by **8 CFR 103.7(b)(1)**, to the service center having jurisdiction over his or her place of residence. Applicants at a non-SEVIS school should submit Form I-20, Form I-538, and any other supporting materials such as affidavits which further detail the unforeseen circumstances that require the student to seek employment authorization and the unavailability or insufficiency of employment under paragraph (f)(9)(i) of this section. Students enrolled in a SEVIS school should submit the SEVIS Form I-20 with the employment page demonstrating the PDSO's comments and certification. [Paragraph (f)(9)(ii)(F)(1) revised effective 1/1/03; **67 FR 76256**]

The Service shall adjudicate the application for work authorization based upon severe economic hardship on the basis of Form I-20 ID, Form I-538, and Form I-765, and any additional supporting materials. If employment is authorized, the adjudicating officer shall issue an EAD. The Service director shall notify the student of the decision, and, if the application is denied, of the reason or reasons for the denial. No appeal shall lie from a decision to deny a request for employment authorization under this section. The employment authorization may be granted in one year intervals up to the expected date of completion of the student's current course of study. A student has permission to engage in off-campus employment only if the student receives the EAD endorsed to that effect. The Service may renew off-campus employment authorization only if the student is maintaining status and good academic standing. The employment authorization is automatically terminated whenever the student fails to maintain status.

Social Security Numbers

What is "Social Security"?

Social Security is a retirement and medical benefits program administered by the United States government. It is financed by mandatory contributions from employers and employees. International students on an F-1 or J-1 visa do not need to have a Social Security Number (SSN) unless they are authorized to work. People will ask you for your Social Security Number at the Enrollment and Registration office, the bank, etc. When a Reformed University staff member asks you for that number, give them your Student ID number. When someone at a bank asks you for an SSN, tell him/her you are an international student and you do not have one. It is not necessary to have a Social Security Number to

have a bank account in the US, although it is necessary to have a social security number to obtain an ATM, Debit, or Credit Card. You may read about social security numbers for international students directly from <http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/10181.html>

Even if your friends tell you it is true....

A SOCIAL SECURITY CARD DOES NOT GIVE YOU PERMISSION TO WORK IN THE UNITED STATES!!

Who is eligible for a Social Security Card?

An F-1 student who has been approved to work on or off campus **and** has found employment may apply for a Social Security Card. NOTE: Your employer will require you to have a Social Security number in order to pay your taxes according to Federal Government regulations.

Documents required to obtain a Social Security Card

You must take your passport, I-20, I-94, a letter promising employment from your employer, and a letter from the International Student Services Center PDSO.

Where can you obtain a Social Security Card?

There are many Social Security offices in the Atlanta area. The office is very busy, so you should plan to arrive early. There is no fee for this service. The toll free telephone number is (800) 772-1213. You can access the website for the nearest location to your address. <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/reach.htm>

In summary, follow these simple steps to help with Social Security Number application process:

1. Complete the Social Security Card application form. (*You can get this application from entry Services for International Students or <http://www.ssa.gov/online/ss-5.pdf>*)
2. Have your employer prepare a written offer of employment.
3. Request a Social Security letter from the office of International Student Services.
4. Take the above two items, your passport, form I-94, and your I-20 (endorsed by the International Student Advisor for on-campus employment) to the Social Security Administration office in person. (DO NOT MAIL)
5. You are also advised to take evidence of legal employment, such as your Employment Authorization Document from immigration, a letter from your employer, a pay stub or, an on-campus job offer letter.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

International Student Health Insurance

WHAT DO I DO IF I GET SICK???

Reformed University **does not** have a student health clinic. It is highly recommended that every F-1 student obtain health insurance before arriving in the United States.

Driving in the United States

You must have a driver's license and car insurance to drive in the United States. Driving without a valid driver's license and failure to have automobile insurance are both violations of the law. Your international driver's license authorizes you to drive in the United States for one year, but local laws and driving procedures may be very different from those in your home country. It is advisable to enroll in a driver's education course or safe driving course prior to operating a motor vehicle in the United States. You may also wish to obtain a Georgia driver's license or state identification card. You will need to take a written test and a driving test in order to obtain your Georgia driver's license, and there is a fee involved. For general driver's license information, for locations of the driver's license office nearest you,

to view a driver's license manual or for fee information, please go to <http://www.dds.ga.gov/>.

You will need to take the following items with you to the driver's license office when applying for a driver's license:

2. Passport
3. I-20
4. I-94
5. Two forms of legal documents with your name and address on them (such as a bank statement or electric bill).
5. Social Security card – OR – a letter of denial from the Social Security Administration. If you do not have a Social Security card, you will need to apply for one before you can even apply for a driver's license. **If the Social Security Administration denies your application for a social security number, get a letter of denial from them. You can use this to apply for your driver's license.**

IF YOU ALREADY HAVE A DRIVER'S LICENSE FROM YOUR COUNTRY, YOU MAY NOT NEED A GEORGIA DRIVER'S LICENSE!

There are some problems with this option.

- 1) The average police officer may not be familiar with this particular provision of law.
- 2) Not having a valid Georgia driver's license will make the cost of automobile insurance higher.

What this means – a summary.

In short, ***YOU DO NOT NEED TO GET A GEORGIA DRIVER'S LICENSE*** as long as you have a valid driver's license in your country, are registered as a student at Reformed University, and have paid your tuition for that semester.

What you should do if you decide not to get a Georgia driver's license.

If you have a driver's license of a classification that would allow you to drive your car in your country, then you should have the following things in your car whenever you drive:

- Your foreign driver's license
- Your Reformed University student ID card
- Proof of payment of tuition for the current semester, and
- A print out of the gray box below to show any police officer who may not understand this law.

The specific law can be found on page 147 of Title 40 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated (OCGA) at <http://www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/GaCode/Title40.pdf>

You can still get an official State of Georgia ID card from the Department of Driver Services. A State ID will make things much easier for you, such as getting a bank account, renting an apartment, etc.

<http://www.dds.ga.gov/drivers/>

O.C.G.A. Notwithstanding any contrary provisions of Code Section 40-5-20 or subsection (a) of this Code section, a nonresident of this state who is attending a school in this state shall be exempt from the driver's licensing requirements of this chapter if and only if:

- (1) He or she is at least 16 years of age and has in his or her immediate possession a valid license issued to him or her in his or her home state or country; provided, however, that any restrictions which would apply to a Georgia driver's license as a matter of law would apply to the privilege afforded to the out-of-state license; and*
- (2) He or she is currently enrolled in a school in this state, has paid for the current period of enrollment the tuition charged by the school to nonresidents of Georgia, and has in his or her possession proof of payment of such tuition for such current period of enrollment.*

Things to remember when driving in the US

While driving, it is important to obey all traffic laws, speed limits, and posted signs. If you break the law and are spotted by the police, the police officer will indicate that you need to pull over by turning on a siren and by flashing the car's blue lights. As soon as you can do so safely, pull over to the side of the road without impeding the flow of traffic, or turn into a parking lot. **Do not get out of your car.** Park and roll down the window when the officer approaches, and remain courteous, even if you are angry or puzzled about why you were pulled over. You will need to provide the officer with your driver's license, proof of auto insurance, and the car's registration, but **wait until the police officer asks you for these items before reaching into the your glove compartment, purse or wallet to retrieve them.** If you are issued a citation (ticket), you will probably be subject to a fine and may be required to appear in traffic court. If you are issued a warning, you will not need to appear in court or pay a fine, and you should thank the officer for only issuing you a warning.

Accidents

If you are involved in an accident involving another car, call 911 immediately and alert them to the need for an ambulance if you or other passengers are injured. It is best to avoid a confrontation with the other driver, so it might be a good idea to avoid speaking to the driver until the police officer arrives. In the event of an accident your insurance company will need to be notified, and you could be subject to an increase in your insurance premium. Each insurance company has different requirements. Please familiarize yourself with your specific company's accident reporting procedures.

Emergency Weather Plan

When severe weather creates hazardous conditions in Gwinnett County regular class schedules may be suspended. The first condition for making a decision to suspend operations is student and staff safety. The final decision for closing the institution is made by the President. He is in contact overnight with specialists who monitor reports of existing weather hazards. The decision is made prior to 5:00 a.m. and sent to the news media regarding school system closures. This information is normally broadcast on local radio and television stations by 6:15 a.m.

Emergency Contact Information

On occasion a student may have an emergency situation which demands school notification. Please notify Reformed University as soon as possible following an emergency that may impact your F-1 visa status or by calling the school at 770-232-2717 and leave a voicemail message for International Student Services Center. Please state the emergency and any other information you have so we may contact you at with any other questions or assistance we can provide. Please refer to your F-1 Visa Maintenance List if there are any questions on situations which may impact your visa status.

SEVIS Tips for Emergency Evacuations

1) Remember to take important documents with you:

These include: passport, visa, SEVIS-issued I-20 or DS 2019, 1-94, Social Security Card, financial records, and plane tickets, checks and credit cards.

2) Take any contact numbers or email addresses to keep in touch with your designated school officials (P/DSOs):

Check the school's web site or designated school official (P/DSO) office to find out how they would like you to contact them if you are displaced.

3) Take the SEVP contact information:

If you cannot get in touch with your designated school official (P/DSO), contact SEVP to let us know where you are and how we can reach you. Email to SEVP at SEVIS.source@dhs.gov, or call free from any phone: (800) 961-5294.

4) If you decide to transfer to a different school:

Check the SEVP web site at <http://www.ice.gov/sevis> or call (800) 961-5294 to determine if your new school is on the list of certified schools.

Money & Money Management

Most foreign students, like many American students, live on limited budgets. It is best to manage your money wisely in order to make sure it lasts as long as possible. It is important to be cautious about spending money until you have become accustomed to the value of the dollar and have developed a thorough realization of what your essential living expenses will be. In thinking about the value of the dollar, it helps to realize that students working part-time on campus generally earn \$7.25 per hour. It is also important that you know what your expenses are going to be; how much money will be available to you during the time you will be in the United States; when you will need large amounts of money for tuition; and how much money your budget allows you to spend in a month. *It is not wise to carry large amounts of cash with you or to keep in your residence. Instead, deposit it in a bank.*

Expenses

The total amount of tuition and fees must be paid before you register for class each semester. You should contact Student Accounts in the Business Affairs Office to make arrangements for payment. You will not be cleared for registration unless your bill is paid or you have made other arrangements. Payment must be in the form of a bank draft in US funds (drawn on a US Bank), a payment by credit card, or an international money order made payable to Reformed University.

US Currency

American coins come in three colors and seven sizes. Unfortunately, smaller sized coins are not always lower in value than larger coins.

- The **penny** or cent, worth 1 cent, is the only copper-colored coin
- The **nickel**, worth 5 cents, is silver-colored and is larger than a penny
- The **dime**, worth 10 cents, is silver-colored and is the smallest coin
- The **quarter**, worth 25 cents, is silver-colored and is larger than the nickel
- The **half-dollar**, or 50-cent piece, is silver in color and larger than a quarter, but is not in common use
- The one dollar or **golden dollar** is the only coin that is gold in color, but is not in common use

All US paper money is the same size and basically the same color other than the \$5, \$10, and \$20 bills, which have added colors. Denominations include \$1, \$5, \$10, \$20, \$50, \$100 and larger amounts. Paper money for amounts over \$100 is generally not seen in public circulation.

Banking

There are three types of banking services available: Full Service Banks, Savings and Loan Associations, and Credit Unions. Their services are similar in that they offer savings and checking accounts and loans to qualified customers. The interest rates for these may be more competitive at Credit Unions and Savings and Loans, but they vary only slightly. Banks offer additional services, such as the safety deposit boxes and international currency exchanges.

Opening an Account

To open any kind of bank account you must go to the bank of your choice and tell the receptionist that you want to open an account. The receptionist will direct you to a person who can explain to you the kinds of accounts that you can open. Married people can initiate a joint account. The banks provide a number of services and have a variety of different kinds of accounts that may be of great importance. You need to show identification of some kind—passport, student I.D. card, driver's license or Georgia I.D., Social Security card, etc. to transact business at a bank.

Things you should ask about when choosing an account:

- What is the interest rate (if any)?
- Is there a minimum balance I must maintain?
- How much do checks cost?
- What is the monthly service charge?
- What is the "returned check" cost?
- What are the overdraft charges?

Banking Terms**Savings Account**

A savings account earns interest at relatively low rates. You can withdraw money from the savings account either at the bank or by using an Automatic Teller Machine (ATM).

Automatic Teller Machine (ATM)

The ATM is a computerized device through which bank customers can make deposits or withdrawals any time of the day, any day of the week. To operate an ATM, the customer needs a particular plastic card and a personalized secret number that the bank provides. Instructions for operating the ATM are given on the machine itself. ATMs are all over the United States, not just in New Concord. However, there may be a service fee charged to your account if you use an ATM that does not belong to the bank where you have your account.

Money Order

If you do not have a checking account and need to send money through the mail, you can use a money order. The bank will take the money from your account and issue you a money order in paper form. Money orders can be purchased with cash (for a small extra fee) at many convenience stores and at stores such as Wal-Mart.

Traveler's Checks

Traveler's checks are useful if you plan to travel. They can be replaced if lost or stolen and are available through local banks or the AAA Travel Agency in Cambridge. Traveler's Checks are provided free of charge at the AAA Travel Agency if you have made your travel arrangements through the agency.

Checking Account

A checking account offers you "personalized checks" which you can write out and give to stores, companies, and individuals instead of always carrying cash. You should never send cash in the mail; therefore it is convenient for people to pay bills by mail to use personalized checks. Nearly all banking customers use personalized checks. Personalized checks have your name, address or other information you choose to have printed on them. You must pay a few dollars for your supply of personalized checks, so it is wise to wait until you have an address and phone number before you have your checks printed. In the meantime, the bank will issue you a temporary supply of bank checks. A checking account will usually also give you a debit card, which you can use instead of a paper check, whereas most savings accounts do not offer debit cards.

Transfer of Funds to the US

Most international students receive remittances periodically from their own countries. It is a time-consuming process and can be a source of difficulty at times. Someone at home goes to a bank and pays whatever sum of money is to be sent to you. The bank sends the money, sometimes after obtaining government approval, to an international bank and then the money is sent to your bank account. If you are having money transferred, make sure you start the process two or three weeks before you need the money.

Tax Returns

International students who earn money in the United States *have to pay taxes*. Many students earn so little that any income tax withheld might well be refunded. Examine all options for exemptions or rebates, and do not hesitate to seek advice from the Internal Revenue Service. Keep records of expenditures throughout the year so that filling out returns will be easier.

Credit

For many international students, this is the first exposure to credit on any scale. For those who arrive in the United States with few household possessions, it's very helpful, but beware of over-extending yourself. Remember that you may be paying from 13 to 30 percent per year in interest on some accounts. It is often useful to have a credit card, but it is difficult to get your first card, since you have no "credit rating" to establish reliability in the eyes of the creditor.

Buy Used Rather Than New

Garage and yard sales advertised in the newspapers are frequent events and you can buy used appliances and household goods at very reasonable prices. Sell them the same way when you leave. Consignment shops, thrift stores, and secondhand stores also offer cheaper items.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

Off-campus work authorization available before an F-1 student completes academic coursework for an internship that is an integral part of the academic degree program, provides training in the field of study, and is required or recommended of all students in the academic program. The student must be enrolled in an elective internship class for credit to be authorized for CPT.

Department of Homeland Security

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is responsible for securing American borders and managing the immigration process. Three bureaus exist within DHS and all share responsibility for immigration functions:

USCIS: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services is responsible for most of the application and petition adjudication that had been done by USCIS.

ICE: Immigration and Customs Enforcement is responsible for immigration investigations, detention, removal, intelligence, and the Student & Exchange Visitors Information System (SEVIS).

CBP: Customs and Border Protection is responsible for immigration inspections at U.S. ports of entry, for the Border Patrol, and for the Customs Service.

Department of Labor

The Department of Labor (DOL) has the responsibility of interpreting and administering statutes related to U.S. workers. Key components of immigration law encountered on a college or Seminary campus relate to the employment of aliens. The DOL has the duty of protecting both U.S. and alien workers from abusive employment environments.

Department of State

The Department of State (DOS) has the responsibility of managing U.S. embassies and consulates abroad, and therefore, of interpreting and administering statutes that affect visa issuance. DOS also has an important role in the academic environment. Within the DOS, its United States Educational and Cultural Affairs administers the Exchange Visitor Program (the J-1 program).

DSO/PDSO

The Designated School Official (DSO) and/or Primary Designated School Official (PDSO) are in charge of overseeing and advising the F-1 student. These officials issue the Certificate of Eligibility (I-20) and conduct official communications with the DHS and the USCIS on the student's behalf.

Employment Authorization Document (EAD)

This document is given to non-immigrants who are authorized to work off campus while attending school in the United States.

E-1/F-2 Visa

Each nonimmigrant who enters the country has a Visa. There are over 60 nonimmigrant Visa categories. The "F" category distinguishes those who are academic students. An F-2 distinguishes those who are the spouse and/or dependants of an F-1 student.

Form I-20

This is the immigration document issued by a school through SEVIS for presentation at a U.S. Consulate abroad to apply for an F-1 Student visa; it must also be presented to an immigration official upon entry into the U.S. Students in F-1 status must carry a valid I-20 with a DSO authorization that is less than 12 months old, in addition to a valid passport and valid visa to facilitate re-entry to US.

I-94

This is a small green or white card given to a nonimmigrant when they enter the United States. The I-94 card serves as evidence that a nonimmigrant has entered the country legally. It is stamped with a date indicating how long the nonimmigrant may stay for that particular trip. It is this date--and not the expiration date of the visa--that controls how long a nonimmigrant can remain in the United States. A new I-94 card with a new date is issued each time the nonimmigrant legally enters the United States.

I-901 Fee

A fee paid to the Department of Homeland Security by students getting their visa for the first time. This fee was implemented in September 2004 for those who get an initial I-20 or DS-2019 to begin studies in the United States. This fee is issued by the US government to supplement the administration and maintenance costs of the Student and Exchange Information System (SEVIS). Students who are renewing their visas and dependents of students do not have to pay this fee.

Immigration Status

This is often confused with "visa". Immigration status is determined at the time of entry into the U.S. by an immigration official and is noted on the I-94 card. You may have many visa stamps in your passport but, upon entry into the U.S., an immigration inspector will admit you in only one immigration status, which is stamped on the I-94 card.

Maintaining Legal Status

Abiding by the rules and regulations that pertain to that particular nonimmigrant visa classification.

Nonimmigrant

Persons coming to the US temporarily and has no intention of abandoning residence in foreign country.

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Off campus work authorization authorized to an F-1 student to permit work in their field of study for a maximum of 12 months. The F-1 student must apply through the USCIS and must have a valid EAD card in order to be eligible to work.

Port of Entry (POE)

The POE is the place where one enters the United States. Various ports are located throughout the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS)

SEVIS is an Internet-based system that maintains information on nonimmigrant students and their dependents (F-2). SEVIS enables schools and program sponsors to transmit electronic information and event notifications via the Internet, to the ICE and DOS throughout a student's stay in the United States. The system will reflect international student status changes, such as admission at Port of Entry (POE), change of address, change in program of study, and other details. SEVIS will also provide system alerts, event notifications, and basic reports to the end-user schools, programs, and Immigration related field offices.

Student

A nonimmigrant class of admission, for a person to come temporarily to the United States to pursue a full course of study in an approved program in either an academic (college, seminary, university, conservatory, academic high school, elementary school, other institution, or language training program) or a vocational or other recognized nonacademic institution.

United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)

USCIS provides services formerly offered by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). The USCIS is responsible for the administration of immigration and naturalization adjudication functions and establishing immigration service's policies and priorities.

Visa

A visa is issued by a United States Consulate abroad as a stamp affixed into your passport. The only purpose of a visa is to apply for admission to the United States at the port of entry. The visa itself may expire while you are in the U.S., but your permission to stay in the U.S. may remain valid. The length of validity of each visa type is determined by an agreement between your home country and the U.S. government and is not necessarily tied to the length of your program of study.

Some Reminders

Your responsibilities as an F-1 Student

- Register full-time every semester
- Make normal progress toward the completion of a degree program
- Maintain a current passport (valid for at least 7 months into the future at all times)
- Be aware of grace periods
- Request authorization from ISSC before dropping below a full course load
- Report all changes in address to ISSC within 10 days
- Report all changes in name, dependents and status to ISSC immediately upon occurrence
- Request transfers to another school in a timely manner
- Request travel signature before traveling
- Request an I-20 extension before document expires
- Provide ISSC with copies of any updates regarding passport extensions and visa renewals

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- Be familiar with immigration rules as provided in International Student Services Handbook
 - Know your 1-20 completion date. Be aware that your I-20 is ONLY valid as long as you remain in your degree program
 - Complete an official transfer form if you wish to change educational institutions
 - Work a job only with proper authorization
 - Read Reformed University webmail regularly for communication from ISSC and the university

Restrictions in your F-1 Status:

- You cannot work off-campus without previous authorization from ISSC or immigration, whichever is applicable
- You cannot be under-enrolled (or not enrolled at all) unless previously authorized
- You cannot work more than 20 hours per week while school is in session unless required by your program of study and authorized by ISSC
- You cannot maintain status with an expired I-20

F-1 Status Benefits:

- You can work on campus without authorization from USCIS
- You can work on campus with permission from PDSO/DSO
- You are eligible to apply for 12 months of Optional Practical Training (OPT) per degree level
- You are eligible for unlimited Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
- You can maintain my F-1 status as long as you follow immigration regulations because your status has no fixed expiration date

Remember, SEVIS is an inflexible system with **ZERO tolerance** for those who violate the terms of their student status. If you have any questions, seek information only from the ISSC Office as it relates to your status. **DO NOT seek immigration advice from your friends and family.** Immigration regulations are subject to change and this information is subject to change without notice. It your responsibility to stay informed and that you take the required action on time.

Federal regulations related to F-1 students are found in 8 CFR 214.2 (f). You can search this term on the Internet and read the document itself.