

# **Welcome to the Manual for Advisors of F1 International Students**

**Created by Office of International Programs**

**Please contact us with any questions:**

Office of International Programs

Presidents Hall 9

Telephone (973) 761-9072

Fax (973) 275-2383

Email [oiip@shu.edu](mailto:oiip@shu.edu)

## **Staff:**

Maria Bouzas, Director

Dorothy (Geri) Sabia, Immigration Specialist

Michael Paultz, OIP Coordinator

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The Office of International Programs (OIP) has created this manual to assist advisors of F1 international students with common situations they face when advising them. OIP is responsible for reporting information on international students' academic progress to the U.S. government. In order to be compliant, we need to collaborate with academic advisors and other campus offices to obtain this information.

We are providing this manual as a resource to inform advisors that international students have restrictions on the topics below. We do not expect that advisors memorize this information, but just to recognize that these topics affect an international student's visa status and therefore to coordinate with OIP for a solution.

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## **Section 1 - General Information**

### **1.1. What is the role of the Office of International Programs?**

The Office of International Programs (OIP) assists international students to obtain the F1 visa and to maintain their visa status throughout their time at Seton Hall University. OIP is authorized by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to generate the form I-20 on behalf of Seton Hall University. The form I-20 verifies to DHS that the student has been accepted to SHU and has provided enough financial evidence to prove they can pay for their educational and living expenses for the duration of their academic program. OIP generates the form I-20 in DHS' database called SEVIS (Student Exchange Visitor Information System) and the student uses this form to apply for the F1 visa at the U.S. embassy in their home country.

OIP is also in charge of assisting exchange students and research scholars to obtain the J1 Exchange Visitor visa and American students through the study abroad process, but that's for another manual!

### **1.2. What is the F-1 visa?**

An F-1 visa allows foreign nationals to study full-time in the United States.

### **1.3. Basics of the F-1 Visa**

- The student has met all standards of admission
- The student has the financial resources to pay for their education and living expenses
- Students must always be full-time. That means:
  - 12 credits for ESL and undergraduate students
  - 9 credits for graduate, PhD and law students
- Students must be enrolled in an on-campus program (not online) with a specific educational objective
- Students must make normal progress towards completing their degree. That means:
  - Students must take courses on track as outlined by the program. If not, students may need to take more semesters than needed, add unnecessary classes in order to be full-time, etc.
  - Students cannot fail a class due to excessive absences or not completing assignments
- Students must be authorized by OIP for any off-campus work/internship
- OIP must report all changes regarding the student to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

### 1.4. How OIP Reports Student Information to DHS

- OIP must report information to DHS regarding the student’s change in major, credit hours every semester, expected date of graduation, internships/work
- OIP receives information about students’ major and credit hours from Banner into another software called ISSM and uploads it to SEVIS.
- OIP emails students before the semester starts to remind them to be full-time and begins confirming full-time enrollment to DHS after the drop/add period is over.
- OIP sends automatic emails to students whose I-20 will be expiring to remind them to take action.

### Section 2 – Full-time vs. Part-time Enrollment

- Students must always be full-time during fall and spring semesters. That means:
  - 12 credits for ESL and undergraduate students
  - 9 credits for graduate, PhD and law students
- Students do not need to enroll in summer classes unless required by their program to stay on track or student is starting in the summer semester.

### 2.1 - Acceptable Reasons for Part-time Enrollment

- Students must always be full-time as outlined above, unless they qualify for one of the reasons below. If they do not qualify for a reason below, they must add classes to be full-time.

Reasons	Guidelines
<b>Illness or Medical Condition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cannot exceed 12 month aggregate per program level</li> <li>• OIP must renew this authorization each semester, based on new or continuing medical information</li> <li>• May be used nonstop or at different times during a program level</li> <li>• Student may be part-time or be excused from all classes</li> <li>• Student must provide medical documentation from a licensed:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Medical Doctor</li> <li>○ Doctor of Osteopathy</li> <li>○ Clinical Psychologist</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Academic Difficulties, including:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improper course level placement</li> <li>• Initial difficulty with reading requirements</li> <li>• Initial difficulty with the English language</li> <li>• Unfamiliarity with U.S. teaching methods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can only be used for the <u>initial academic semester</u> (of a degree-seeking program)</li> <li>• Student must maintain <u>a minimum six-credit course load</u>,</li> <li>• Student must begin a full course of study at the next semester (excluding summer)</li> </ul>
<b>Student Will Complete Program In Current Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used in a student’s final term if he/she can complete the program with fewer classes than full-time</li> <li>• Student must be enrolled in at least one required <u>on-campus</u> class (cannot be enrolled in only online classes)</li> </ul>

## 2.2. - How Students Can Request Authorization to be Part-time

<b>Form Required:</b>	Part-time Authorization form available at OIP
<b>Advisor's Role:</b>	If a student qualifies for one of the reasons above, please sign the Part-time Authorization form and indicate the appropriate reason.
<b>OIP's Role:</b>	Review the form and if approved, authorize the part-time enrollment in student's SEVIS record.
<b>Consequence:</b>	If student drops below full-time without approval from OIP, their SEVIS record must be terminated for the reason, "Unauthorized Drop Below".

## 2.3. - Troubleshooting Problems – Full-time vs. Part-time Status

- What if a student qualifies for an initial difficulty reason, but doesn't want to take more than 3 credits?
  - The rule states students must take at least 6 credits.
- What if the student doesn't have enough courses to be full-time in a given semester?
  - Students must add courses of their choice to equal full-time status. Students MUST remember, although these classes may not count towards their degree requirements, they still must attend and complete all assignments.
- What if a PhD student has completed all course requirements and only has dissertation left to work on?
  - If the PhD program considers the student to be full-time at this stage in the program, the student should register for thesis continuation until they are finished with their dissertation. The advisor should indicate that the student is working on their dissertation on the part-time form.

## 2.4. - Other Ways to Achieve Full-time Status

If an academic department considers students in the following situations as maintaining full-time status, then OIP can register them as full-time.

1. Graduate/PhD students who have completed formal coursework and are registered for thesis continuation.
2. Concurrent enrollment in two different schools, as long as the student is counting that outside course toward SHU degree. Student must receive approval from OIP and complete Permission to Study at Another Institution Form, aka Credit Transfer Sheet.

## 2.5. – Factors that can Delay Progress toward Completing Degree

As a result of the following, students may find themselves without a full-time schedule in a given semester.

<b>Factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not following the course registration plan outlined by advisors</li><li>• Not registering for classes on time</li><li>• Taking courses out of sequence, for example:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Taking too many extra classes in summer</li><li>○ Not taking pre-qualifier/prerequisite classes when expected</li><li>○ Starting a program out of sequence</li><li>○ Needing to retake classes due to failing</li><li>○ Taking a semester off</li></ul></li></ul>
<b>Consequences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pay for unnecessary classes in order to be full-time</li><li>• Delay graduation date</li><li>• Return to their home country temporarily</li><li>• Start post-completion OPT earlier than desired</li></ul>

## Section 3 - Restriction on Online Classes

No more than **three credits per semester** may be counted toward the full course of study requirement if the class is taken online or through distance education and does not require the student's physical attendance for classes, examination or other purposes integral to completion of the class. This means a student could potentially take more than 3 credits online per semester, but only 3 credits would count toward their full-time status. If a student only has 1 class left in order to graduate, they cannot be enrolled only in an online class. However, students are permitted to take only online classes during their break periods because they are not required to take classes at this time.

ESL Students: If the F-1 student's course of study is in a language study program, no online or distance education classes may be considered to count toward a student's full course of study requirement.

### 3.1. – Troubleshooting Online Class Restrictions

➤ Examples of acceptable course registration:

- For undergraduate students: 9 credits on-campus and 3 or more\* credits online
- Graduate students: 6 credits on-campus and 3 or more\* credits online
- ESL students cannot take online classes

\*As long as students take the minimum amount of on-campus credits, they may take more than 3 credits online, but only 3 credits of the online classes will count towards their full-time status.

Example, it is acceptable for an undergraduate student to take 9 credits on-campus and 6 credits online. Not acceptable for them to take 6 credits on-campus and 6 credits online.

➤ Is an online class that has a mandatory physical reporting requirement subject to this rule?

- No. It is reasonable to read this regulation as saying that not all online or distance education courses are subject to this restriction, but rather only online or distance education courses that do not “require the student's physical attendance for classes, examination or other purposes integral to completion of the class.

- What if a student only has 1 online class left to take in their final semester?
  - This is not permitted. Students cannot be registered for only 1 online course. If a student remains in the United States without reporting to any class, it becomes a security issue and cannot be allowed. If this happens, they must add another class or start OPT work authorization while finishing this last class.

## Section 4 - Internships & Work

An F1 student's ability to work and train in the United States is limited by law. Students must be authorized by OIP for paid/unpaid off-campus internships and employment. The F1 visa rules allow for this through Curricular Practical Training (CPT) or Optical Practical Training (OPT).

### 4.1. - Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

<b>Curricular Practical Training (CPT)</b>	CPT is training that is an integral (i.e., required) part of the student's curriculum. It is authorized by OIP.
<b>Examples</b>	In order to graduate from X program, all students must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• complete an internship or</li> <li>• conduct research for dissertation/thesis or</li> <li>• complete elective credits, such as an internship course or independent study</li> </ul>
<b>Form Required</b>	Letter from advisor. See below.
<b>Advisor's Role</b>	Meet with student to discuss whether there is an opportunity in their academic program for CPT. If so, write a letter clarifying how this off-campus position will fulfill this requirement of the student's program. (See CPT packet) For example, "All students in the Masters of Diplomacy program must complete an internship to graduate. The student will register for DIPL1234..."
<b>OIP's Role</b>	OIP will review letter from advisor and employment/ internship offer letter and authorize this in the student's SEVIS record, if approved.
<b>Restrictions</b>	-Student must study full-time for 2 semesters before eligible to apply for CPT.* (FYI: Time spent studying full-time as F1 at other schools or in other visa statuses can apply towards this) -Can be full-time/part-time per week -1 year of full-time CPT disqualifies a student for OPT -Not every student's program allows for CPT
<b>Exceptions</b>	*Graduate students whose program requires CPT in first semester

	**Graduate students in their last semester who only have the 1 CPT-related class to finish, can do CPT full-time
<b>Consequences</b>	Working / training off-campus without authorization is grounds for visa termination

## 4.2. - Optional Practical Training (OPT)

<b>Optional Practical Training (OPT)</b>	<p>12 months of full-time work authorization in student's field of study. Available for every degree level. Students can apply for this authorization while still studying in their program (pre-completion) or after they complete their program (post-completion).</p> <p>The application for OPT is made to U.S. Customs and Immigration Services, costs \$410 to apply and takes 2-3 months to approve.</p> <p><b>Pre-completion OPT:</b> Used <i>before</i> the student's program end date</p> <p><b>Post-completion OPT:</b> Used <i>after</i> the student's program end date; or for a student in a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree program, after completion of all course requirements for degree (excluding thesis or the equivalent).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>24-month Extension of OPT (STEM OPT):</b> Used after regular OPT is completed. Only for students who majored in DHS-approved Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) degrees.</li> </ul> <p><b>Cap-Gap OPT Extension:</b> For students whose future employer files a qualifying H-1B petition.</p>
<b>Examples</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student found a position in their field of study, but there is no mandatory academic requirement in their program to fulfill.</li> <li>• Student found a position in their field of study and they would like to get the experience.</li> </ul>
<b>Form Required</b>	<p>Advisor Form from OPT packet.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fill in expected date of graduation (needed to determine pre-completion OPT vs. post-completion OPT)</li> <li>• Fill in potential positions in student's field of study (needed to determine whether position is in student's field of study).</li> </ul>
<b>Advisor's Role</b>	<p>Meet with student to discuss expected date of graduation, potential positions in student's field of study and completing OPT Advisor's form.</p>



<b>OIP's Role</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Approve OPT in student's SEVIS record and assist student to assemble OPT application for USCIS.</li> </ul>
<b>Consequences</b>	Working / training off-campus without authorization is grounds for visa termination

## Section 5 - How Students Can Request More Time to Graduate

On the I-20 form given to F1 visa students, the average amount of time to complete their degree is indicated. If students need more time to complete their program, they must request an extension on the I-20 form from the OIP before the end date.

<b>Form Required</b>	Extension Request form available at OIP
<b>Advisor's Role</b>	Meet with student to discuss reason needed for extending and if approved, complete Extension Request form.
<b>OIP's Role</b>	Review extension form and additional finances provided by student. If approved, extend the I-20 end date of student's SEVIS record.
<b>Consequences</b>	<p>If the student does not extend before their I-20 end date, they must file an application to USCIS to correct this. The application costs \$370 and it takes 6+ months to receive a decision.</p> <p>Leave U.S. and return with new I-20 form.</p>