

Electronic Filing Procedures for a Change of Status To an F-1 Student Visa

This handout describes the application process you must do in order to ask the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to change your existing immigration status to that of an F-1 international student. *It is highly recommended that you meet with an International Student Advisor to receive assistance.*

NOTE: In requesting this new status, it is important to understand that you are NOT asking the USCIS for a new visa. It is impossible to obtain an F-1 visa while you are physically in the United States. A change of status application only affects your current period of stay in the United States. It does not allow you to enter the United States as an F-1 student. If you plan on traveling outside the United States and re-entering within the six months, it is recommended that you apply for an F-1 visa in your home country.

Here is a list of the main documents needed for a complete Change of Status application:

1. **I-539 Electronic Filing:** Go online to USCIS ELIS to complete the “Application to Extend/Change Nonimmigrant Status” <https://elis.uscis.dhs.gov/cislogin/createOnlineAccountAction.do>. If you have questions about completing the online form, make an appointment with an ISSS advisor. Be sure to also pay the \$290 I-539 filing fee through your online account.
2. **Certificate of Eligibility (Form I-20):** For students wishing to change to F-1 visa status (be sure to sign the bottom of page 1). *You will need to scan this form and upload it to your online application.*
3. **Form I-94:** This white card can be found in your passport. *You will need to scan the front and back of this form and upload it to your online application.*
4. **Statement of Financial Support:** You need to show documentation that you and/or your sponsor have sufficient funds available to cover your estimated expenses---specifically, the amount listed on the Certificate of Eligibility. This documentation can be in the form of bank account balance statements, bank letters, and/or a letter of support from your sponsor(s) (if appropriate). If you are submitting bank account balance statements as evidence of your financial support, please note that the USCIS usually wants to see the account holder’s bank account balance statements for the past 4 months and not just the most recent balance statement. *You will need to scan these documents and upload it to your online application.*
5. **Evidence of SEVIS I-901 Fee Payment:** If you are applying for a change to F-1 status, you are subject to the \$200 Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) I-901 fee. You will need to receive your Certificate of Eligibility, which will contain your SEVIS ID number, before paying the fee. The most convenient way to pay this fee is by credit or debit card via the Internet. Please see the SEVIS fee web site at: www.FMJFee.com for more information. Once you have paid your I-901 fee, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security will issue you a Form I-797 receipt notice. *You will need to scan this receipt and upload it to your online application.*
6. **Photocopy of the visa page in your passport.** *You will need to scan this and upload it to your online application.*
7. **Photocopy of the biographic page in your passport.** *You will need to scan this and upload it to your online application.*
8. **Letter explaining why you are seeking F-1 status.**
Your letter should mention your exact arrival date in the United States, as well as the reasons that you have now decided to apply for a change to a student status. Your letter should be written in as much detail as possible as this will be your opportunity to explain your situation to the USCIS office. The International Student Advisor can assist you with your final draft. *You will need to scan this letter and upload it to your online application.*
9. **Other Documents**
Depending on what your current status is, it is recommended that you submit additional documentation. For example, if you are currently a dependent (such as F-2, H-4, etc.), you should include a copy of the primary status holder’s visa and I-94. If the primary status holder has a work-authorized visa status, you should include a least two of the primary status holder’s most recent pay stubs as evidence of maintenance of status. Some applications may also need a letter of support from the International Student Advisor. Be sure to speak with the International Student Advisor for specific detailed instructions on what further documentation might be needed. *You will need to scan these documents and upload it to your online application.*

After you have prepared all documents, we suggest that you have them reviewed by an ISSS advisor. At this time you can also ask the advisor any questions you may have with the online form.

Tips for Using the USCIS E-File System for the I-539 Application:

- Save your application on every page before advancing to the next
- Do not submit your work until your application is complete because you will not be able to make changes. ISSS recommends having an advisor in our office review your application before submission.
- You will need to submit more documents than the ones that are listed as “required” in the electronic system. The listed docs are the minimum for all applicants; you will need to submit additional docs for your status and the status you are changing to.

A special note about the timing of change of status applications: It usually takes the USCIS approximately 2-3 months to process a Form I-539 petition for a change of status, although the electronic application should shorten the processing time (you can check the current processing times at: <https://egov.uscis.gov/cris/Dashboard.do>). Therefore, before you apply for a change of status you must consider the following:

1. The expiration date of your current U.S. immigration status: if there is more than a 30-day “gap” between the date your current U.S. immigration status expires and the expected F-1 program start date noted in Item #5 of your Certificate of Eligibility, your request to change to F-1 status will most likely be denied.
2. The Certificate of Eligibility that has been issued to you for a change of status is valid for only 30 days after the F-1 program start date noted in Item #5. Therefore, if your change of status is not approved by the F-1 program start date on the Certificate of Eligibility, you must notify the ISSS office. The USCIS has stated that if a student’s change of status petition has not been approved by the student’s expected F-1 program start date, then the school must defer the student’s F-1 program start date in SEVIS (usually the F-1 program start date must be deferred to the start of the next available academic term).

After you have filed your application USCIS will send any communication via mail to the mailing address you provided. If you prefer to have USCIS email you, you can update this setting in your online account. Soon after filing, you will receive an I-797 Notice of Action showing that you filed and requesting any further documentation if necessary. You should submit any additional documentation electronically by logging into your online account and uploading the needed documents. (We recommend consulting ISSS if you need to submit more documentation so that we can help you determine what is needed.)

If you are approved for F-1 status, you will get an approval notice and a new I-94 card in the mail. Your Certificate of Eligibility (Form I-20) will not be stamped to show the change of status. This should not be a problem, but if you apply for a driver’s license or Social Security Number with these new documents and the Department of Motor Vehicles or the Social Security Administration asks for a stamped Certificate of Eligibility, you will need to contact ISSS for assistance. The reason for this is that the electronic filing procedures are new, and the other government offices may not have been trained properly.

Once your change to F-1 status has been approved, you must bring your Form I-797 approval notice and new Form I-94 to the ISSS office so that we can make a copy of your documents for our files and activate your F-1 record in SEVIS.