

Procedure to Apply for a Change of Status To F-1 (International Student)

This handout describes the general application process 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. *ISSS strives to keep up to date with changes in law and policy, but the information ISSS provides is not guaranteed to be current or complete. Information provided by ISSS should never replace consultation with informed legal counsel when specific immigration-related guidance is needed.*

NOTE: A change of status does not give you 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 status. It does not grant you an F-1 visa that you can use for travel. If you plan on traveling outside the United States and re-entering within the next year, 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. **Form I-20 (copy) Issues for “Change of Status”:** For students wishing to change to F-1 visa status (be sure to sign the bottom of page 1).
2. **Form I-539:** “Application to Extend/Change Nonimmigrant Status” (Fill in completely). This immigration form is available on the USCIS web site at: <http://www.uscis.gov>. Complete all information and enter “N/A” for any field that does not apply to you.
3. **Form I-94:** You can print this online at <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home>.
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 I-20 form. 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.
5. **Evidence of SEVIS I-901 Fee Payment:** If you are applying for a change to F-1 status, you are subject to the \$350 Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) I-901 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 must submit a photocopy of this receipt notice as part of your Change of Status application.
6. **Photocopy of the visa page in your passport.**
7. **Photocopy of the biographic page in your passport.**
8. **Two separate money orders or checks in the amounts of \$370.00 (application fee) and \$85 (biometric fee) payable to the “U.S. Department of Homeland Security”.** (If you are submitting a personal check, your name and address must be printed on the check by your bank. Immigration will not accept temporary checks that are issued while you are waiting for your final checks.)
9. **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.
10. **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 passport, 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.

After your complete application (all documents) is ready you must mail everything to:

For U.S. postal service:

USCIS
P.O. Box 660166
Dallas, TX 75266

For express mail and courier deliveries:

USCIS
ATTN: I-539
2501 S. State Highway 121 Business
Suite 400
Lewisville, TX 75067

Send your complete Change of Status application to the USCIS by Certified Mail with Return Receipt Service Requested before the expiration date of your current I-94. (**Note: To request the service of “certified mail, return receipt” at the U.S. Post Office requires additional fees.**) Be sure to retain copies of the materials submitted to USCIS for your records.

A few weeks after you mail the application, the USCIS will send you a one-page receipt notice called a “Notice of Action” with the tracking number for your case. If you want to check on the status of your application, you may do so online at: <https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do>. You will also be required to complete a biometrics screening. An appointment will be given to you at the nearest processing center. You need to complete the fingerprints and screening for your application.

If your application is approved, USCIS will issue you a new, original I-94 form that shows your new F-1 status and will return the I-20 form.

The I-20 form and I-94 will note “D/S” (Duration of Status), which means that your new F-1 status is valid for the duration of time that you are enrolled full-time in a degree program and/or any authorized periods of practical training plus 60 days. Remember that in order to re-enter the United States, you will need to apply for an F-1 visa from a US Consulate abroad before re-entry.

Once your change to F-1 status has been approved, you must bring your Form I-20, 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.

A note about the timing of change of status applications: It can take USCIS several months to process a Form I-539 petition for a change of status. 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 Form I-20, your request to change to F-1 status will most likely be denied.
2. The Form I-20 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 Form I-20, 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 (the F-1 program start date will be deferred to the start of the next available academic term).
3. ISSS staff can provide information on the application process and requirements, but we may refer you to an outside immigration attorney if you have specific questions about your situation.