



# Student Handbook for International Students

# Office of International Student Services Student Handbook

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## **OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICE (ISS)**

### **F-1 IMMIGRATION INFORMATION FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

#### **CERTIFICATE OF ELIGIBILITY FOR NON-IMMIGRANT STATUS (FORM I-20)**

A Form I-20 is a certificate of eligibility for non-immigrant status, and it is issued by a college or university to enable a student to apply for a visa and come to the United States to engage in a full course of study. An F-1 student must report to the college or university that is listed on the Form I-20 that he or she used to enter the United States. The student must always also keep the Form I-20 valid by keeping the information updated. The Form I-20 is created, updated and maintained in the SEVIS database. This is done by communicating any changes to the P/DSO within 10 days of the change.

#### **SIGNING FORM I-20**

Only a designated school official (P/DSO) at the Office of International Student Services can sign a Form I-20 as a representative of the Department of Homeland Security. Students who anticipate traveling outside the U.S. should plan ahead and visit ISS well before their anticipated travel dates to secure the required travel endorsement signature. Check on page 2 of your Form I-20, the travel endorsement is valid up to 1 year (6 months for students on OPT) from the date next to the signature of the P/DSO. Students must sign the first page of their I-20 in the space indicated.

#### **FORM I-94, THE ARRIVAL-DEPARTURE RECORD CARD**

The Form I-94 is the official record of a student's lawful arrival into, and departure from, the United States. It is also the immigration document showing the status in which an individual entered the country. Once you arrive in the United States, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) will create an electronic I-94 record for F-1 students.

Please visit [I-94 Website](#) after you arrive to print I-94. You will need to do this every time you enter the United States.

#### **WHAT DOES THE D/S ON THE I-94 STAND FOR?**

D/S stands for 'duration of status' the notation allows an F-1 student to complete their course of study and any subsequent educational levels or series of programs. An F-1 international student's passport should read 'F-1' and 'd/s' to show that the student was lawfully admitted to the U.S. in F-1 student status for the duration of their program of study. The passport and I-94 must be marked with d/s. The student should consult with an international advisor immediately if they notice a discrepancy with their passport stamp or I-94.

## **IMMIGRATION ADVICE**

F-1 students should only obtain immigration advice from a Primary DSO or DSO (P/DSO) in the International Student Services office. No one else at the college has access to student immigration records, nor has the authority to give immigration advice. It is the student's responsibility to know the F-1 status maintenance requirements, and, as such, students should always consult with an international advisor (P/DSO) if in doubt. (Refer to "additional resources" at the end of the Student Handbook).

## **MAINTAINING LEGAL IMMIGRATION STATUS**

Maintaining legal immigration status is very important and is dependent on the student's understanding and meeting certain requirements as outlined by both the College and the United States Government. Failure to maintain lawful F-1 student status will result in the suspension of all benefits associated with the F-1 status, such as on-campus employment and practical training, and could even lead to deportation from the United States. Maintaining lawful F-1 status is ultimately the student's responsibility! However, we want to ensure that each student has the tools and resources necessary to succeed at LWC while avoiding any problems with their immigration status. Please note that the following information is not all-inclusive, and students should always consult with an international advisor (P/DSO) whenever in doubt or check with an immigration attorney.

## **F-1 STATUS CHECKLIST**

### **TO MAINTAIN STATUS, AN F-1 STUDENT MUST:**

- Notify ISS of your local address upon arrival and within 10 days of any address changes.
- Enroll in a full course of study during the academic year.
- Make normal progress towards completing a course of study and be engaged in your classes, submit assignments on time.
- Extend the Form I-20 before its expiration, if necessary, by notifying the P/DSO.
- Obtain approval from ISS before reducing enrollment, withdrawing completely, or taking a leave of absence.
- Inform ISS and update the Form I-20 due to a change in major, degree level, or financial support.
- Keep the passport valid for at least 6 months into the future.
- Follow proper procedures for transfer of schools. Limit on-campus work to a maximum of 20 hours per week while school is in session.
- Not engage in off-campus work unless it is specifically authorized by the P/DSO at ISS.

### **STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- Retain all immigration documents. F-1 students must make a copy of all important travel and immigration documents and keep them in a safe and accessible location. In addition, F-1 students must keep ALL their original Forms I-20. A student may receive several Forms I-20 throughout their stay in the U.S. It is common for a United States government agency to request copies of all Forms I-20 issued to a student when they are applying for a benefit or a change in immigration status. Therefore, students should not discard any immigration documents issued to them.

### **PASSPORT VALIDITY**

The passport must be valid for at least 6 months into the future at the time the student enters the U.S. Students should contact their home country's embassy for instructions on extending their passport from within the U.S.

### **FULL-TIME ENROLLMENT REQUIREMENT**

Every term, LWC is required to report on each student's enrollment to the Department of Homeland Security by updating the student's individual SEVIS record. In order to maintain lawful F-1 nonimmigrant student status, international students must be enrolled for a full course of study during the academic year and maintain full-time enrollment each semester.

- Students and advisors should report any plans to withdraw or drop any classes, or that a student has withdrawn or dropped a class, to the Primary and/or Designated School Official.
- Students who fall below full-time enrollment without prior authorization may have to leave the country.

### **EXCEPTIONS**

1. Summer Term
  - Undergraduate students may enroll part-time or full-time in the summer.
  - Graduate students whose programs include summer as a regular term must maintain full-time enrollment in summer.
  - A student not staying in the U.S. during the summer term may take any number of online courses approved by the college/program.
2. Some circumstances allow a reduced course load. This must be authorized in advance by the P/DSO.

### **ATTENDANCE**

If an international student remains in the U.S. without reporting to any classes, this becomes a security issue and cannot be allowed. Instructors and advisors should notify the designated P/DSO promptly should an international student be absent for the first week of class, or for any week thereafter.

## **ONLINE AND HYBRID/BLENDED CLASSES**

1. According to the F-1 (student visa) regulations, an online class is defined as one that “does not require the student’s physical attendance for classes, examination or other purposes integral to the completion of the class.”
2. Hybrid/Blended classes must have a physical presence requirement.

At LWC, an international student needs to maintain a minimum number of seated classes in order to be eligible to take online classes. See the tables below.

***International students residing in the U.S. are not allowed to be enrolled in online-only programs.***

### **International Student Enrollment Requirements**

#### **Undergraduate Students**

	Full-Time Enrollment: Minimum Credit Hours	Minimum Seated Credit Hours Per Semester	Allowed Online Credit Hours Per Semester
Fall	12	9	3 and above
Spring	12	9	3 and above
Summer	0	0	3 and above* (consult ISP and Academic Affairs)

#### **Graduate Students**

	Full Time Enrollment: Minimum Credit Hours	Minimum Seated Credit Hours Per Semester	Allowed Online Credit Hours Per Semester
CES Fall, Spring, Summer	6	3	3 and above
CHD (Seated Programs) Fall, Spring, Summer	10	7	3 and above
MSTM (Blended) Fall, Spring, Summer	6	3	3 and above
MBA (Blended) Fall, Spring, Summer	6	3	3 and above

## **EXTENSION OF FORM I-20**

Students must obtain an extension of their Form I-20 and F-1 status at least 30 days before the program end date noted on their current Form I-20, if necessary. If the student is not approved for the extension and/or does not obtain a new Form I-20 prior to the current program end

date, the student is in violation of F-1 status. IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO EXTEND THE FORM I-20 AFTER IT HAS EXPIRED.

### **CHANGE OF MAJOR**

ISS must be notified of a change of major during the semester in which the change takes effect. A change in major must be reported to the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office within 21 days of the change going into effect, and it is the student's responsibility to ensure that their immigration record is updated accordingly.

### **AUTHORIZED EARLY WITHDRAWAL – LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Overview and Your Responsibility

Your F-1 status is based on your full-time enrollment. If you are not going to be enrolled in courses full-time, you will need to take immigration action and must notify the International Student Services (ISS) or submit a Help Form Ticket as soon as possible. If you are taking a leave of absence, **working with ISS is required and a separate requirement from anything you must do or file with our [Academics Affairs](#) Department.**

If you fail to notify ISS about your leave, even after arranging a leave with our Academics Affairs Department, your record will be terminated for "Failure to Enroll" – this could have serious consequences if you want to visit, study or work in the U.S. in the future.

### **Authorized Early Withdrawal (AEW)**

AEW allows students to temporarily suspend their immigration status while they are outside the U.S. to more easily return to active status to continue their studies. Students must request AEW prior to withdrawing from class and departing the U.S. Students with an approved AEW must depart the U.S. within 15 days of the approval. Again, AEW is an immigration action and does not relieve students of academic or financial obligations. When possible, students should withdraw before the start of the semester to minimize tuition and fee liability.

### **Leave of Absence (LOA)**

There is no true "leave of absence" for Immigration purposes. Your F-1 record is based on your full-time registration. If there is a change in your registration or you are not going to be enrolled, some immigration action or process will need to occur.

Important Considerations: If your record is terminated, you cannot remain in the U.S. during your leave. You must leave the U.S.



If your leave is for a documentable medical reason, [Study In the States Reduced Course Load Information](#), you can be authorized for a reduced course load based on medical conditions, and your SEVIS record will remain active.

You cannot be authorized for work authorization while you are on an official school leave.

### **Requesting a Leave of Absence (LOA)**

Submit a signed LOA form [Leave of Absence Form](#) to an International Student Advisor at LWC. Discuss options as soon as possible- **plan ahead!** You must leave the U.S. within 15 days after submitting this form. LOA's must be requested prior to the start of the semester.

### **Returning from a Leave of Absence**

#### **5 months or less:**

Your SEVIS record will be terminated for "Authorized Early Withdrawal" (AEW), which will not adversely affect your immigration record. If your gap in your enrollment will be fewer than five months, ISS can usually request that your F-1 status is "reactivated" by USCIS. Reactivation allows you to use the same I-20 and visa (if not expired). Students must have their SEVIS record reactivated before returning to the U.S. ISS can only request that your record is reactivated. USCIS approves the actual reactivation and often requires additional documentation from the school and the student to make the change. This process can take anywhere from 2 – 4 weeks or more. We cannot request reactivation more than 60 days before the next semester begins. Confirm with our [Academics Affairs](#) department that you are eligible to return to the College as you must be enrolled full-time.

#### **5 months or more:**

Your SEVIS record will be terminated, and your current I-20 is no longer valid. You will have to pay the I-901 SEVIS fee, and receive a new Form I-20 and SEVIS ID#. [What is the Five Month Rule](#)

You will not be eligible to apply for any off-campus employment such as OPT, CPT, and Economic Hardship for one academic year upon your return. You will be required to provide current supporting financial documentation to ISS. [International Student Financial Resources Form](#)

### **REDUCED COURSE LOAD (RCL)**

The federal regulations list very few situations in which an exception to the full course of study, or typical full course enrollment requirement, may be deemed appropriate. The F-1 student must meet with a P/DSO and seek approval PRIOR to dropping or withdrawing from courses when the drop would put the student below the required minimum number of credit hours.

If the student does not follow proper procedures, he or she will lose lawful F-1 status. A student authorized for a reduced course load based on the following options must resume a full course of study at the next offered semester.

<u>Reasons</u>	<u>Guidelines</u>
<u>Illness or Medical Condition</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <u>Cannot exceed 12 month aggregate per program level</u></li> <li>● <u>May excuse a student from all classes</u></li> <li>● <u>Student must provide medical documentation from a licensed:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>Medical Doctor</u></li> <li>○ <u>Doctor of Osteopathy</u></li> <li>○ <u>Clinical Psychologist</u></li> </ul> </li> <li>● <u>DSO must renew the RCL each term, based on new or continuing medical information</u></li> <li>● <u>May be used nonstop or at different times during a program level</u></li> <li>● <u>Start date should be the date DSO approved the RCL</u></li> </ul>

<p><b><u>Academic Difficulties, including:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b><u>Improper course level placement</u></b></li> <li>● <b><u>Initial difficulty with reading requirements</u></b></li> <li>● <b><u>Initial difficulty with the English language</u></b></li> <li>● <b><u>Unfamiliarity with U.S. teaching methods</u></b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b><u>Can only be used for the initial academic term</u></b></li> <li>● <b><u>Student must maintain a minimum six-credit course load, or half the clock hours required for a full course of study</u></b></li> <li>● <b><u>Student must begin a full course of study at the next offered term</u></b></li> <li>● <b><u>RCL start and end dates must correspond to the school session start and end dates</u></b></li> <li>● <b><u>RCL start dates may be backdated, if necessary</u></b></li> </ul>
<p><b><u>To Complete Course of Study In Current Term</u></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b><u>Used in a student’s final term if he/she can complete the program with fewer classes</u></b></li> <li>● <b><u>Student must be enrolled in at least one required class</u></b></li> <li>● <b><u>RCL start and end dates must correspond to the school session start and end dates</u></b></li> <li>● <b><u>RCL start dates may be backdated, if necessary</u></b></li> </ul>

## **TRAVEL**

F-1 international students may choose to travel outside the United States during their course of study at Lindsey Wilson College, during school breaks, or on long weekends. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that he or she has all the required documentation to return to the United States with valid F-1 status.

### *Required documentation:*

- Passport valid at least 6 months into the future.
- Valid F-1 visa (except for Canadian citizens)

Valid Form I-20 endorsed (travel signature) on page two by an international advisor at ISS. Note: A travel signature is required as it indicates that the student is in good standing at LWC and is eligible to return. The signature is valid for one year (6 months for students on OPT)

### *Recommended documentation:*

- Copy of financial support documentation
- Enrollment verification (download an unofficial transcript in your LWC portal, or order a transcript from the Registrar)

## **OBTAINING A NEW F-1 STUDENT VISA**

Students renewing their visa should also obtain an official enrollment verification. Students must also take a copy of their I-901 SEVIS payment receipt.

## **EMPLOYMENT**

A student holding lawful F-1 visa status in the United States is here for the primary purpose of obtaining an education by engaging in a full course of study. To qualify for employment, an F-1 student must be eligible based on one of the following options:

### **ON-CAMPUS EMPLOYMENT**

As a benefit of F-1 status, an F-1 student may work on the campus of LWC for a maximum of 20 hours per week while school is in session, provided he or she has a valid Form I-20 issued by LWC. F-1 students may work more than 20 hours per week on campus during official semester breaks. An F-1 student may not begin on-campus employment more than 30 days before the start of a semester. Any other type of employment requires authorization by ISS and/or USCIS. The F-1 student must consult with the P/DSO at ISS if they are uncertain if the employment qualifies as on-campus employment. Unauthorized employment is a violation of F-1 nonimmigrant status.

## **OFF-CAMPUS EMPLOYMENT**

Off-campus employment is a benefit available for some F-1 students who are:

- Experiencing economic hardship.
- Seeking special student relief due to emergent circumstances.
- Participating in an internship with an international organization.

## **CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING - CPT**

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is an alternative work/study, internship, cooperative education or other types of required internship or practicum that is an integral part of an established curriculum and that a sponsoring organization/company offers through agreements with Lindsey Wilson College. A degree-seeking student on a student visa may be approved to participate in a CPT opportunity that is an integral part of an established curriculum.

Undergraduate students must be enrolled full-time at a U.S. college or university for one full academic year before CPT may be authorized. For some graduate students, CPT may be authorized from the first semester of enrollment because the programs require immediate participation in academic training. In some cases, because of the ongoing requirement for application of course-work in a professional setting, CPT may be authorized to continue between semesters for students who are pre-registered. Under no circumstance may CPT be authorized beyond the program end date listed on a student's I-20.

The rules for participating in CPT are:

- You must be in good academic standing. Students on academic probation are ineligible to participate in CPT.
  - Students enrolled in the School of Graduate Business and Technology must maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale. GPA will be checked at the end of each academic term.
- Students should complete at least two (2) semesters of full-time study unless they are enrolled in a degree program that requires or offers CPT as an integral part of the school's established curriculum.
- The applied practical training opportunity must be directly related to your major.
- For students in our undergraduate programs, CPT is limited to part-time (up to 20 hours a week) during school sessions and CPT can be full-time (21 + hours) during school breaks. One year (12 months) of full-time CPT makes you ineligible to apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT) after you complete your studies. Manage this carefully.
- CPT does not count against the 20 hours per week rule for any on campus employment.

- You must register for the appropriate internship course as well as apply for and receive CPT. Students must apply for CPT authorization from a DSO.
- May not take CPT as their only course during the fall or spring semester, because it is considered an online/distance learning course if the student is in his/her last semester and the internship requirement has not been fulfilled, the student must contact the DSO and Academic Advisor.
- May take CPT as their only course if they are enrolled in the qualifying course during semester breaks.
- As soon as an international student has met his or her degree requirements, CPT eligibility ends.
- Students must secure the training opportunity before CPT can be authorized.
- CPT requires a signed cooperative agreement or letter from the sponsoring company/organization.
- Any academic changes and/or changes to the current CPT authorization as listed on the SEVIS Form I-20 requires the student to complete a new CPT authorization.
- The training opportunity is specific to the course, the sponsoring company/organization and authorized start/end dates.

Paperwork is required and must be completed and signed by the student, and the prospective employer. The academic advisor must approve the internship site and experience before the PDSO/ DSO can authorize the CPT. Students must receive official authorization from the International Students Office before beginning CPT.

### **CPT REQUIRED FOR THESIS OR DISSERTATION**

CPT may be authorized for thesis or dissertation research credits (3 credit hours) and/or maintenance of matriculation (1 credit hour) with full-time equivalency, if applicable, only if the following criteria are met:

- CPT activity must be directly related to the major area of study.
- CPT experience and/or data must be directly and clearly used in the student's dissertation, research, or thesis work.
- The academic department must write a letter of support and explanation how the applied learning experience is related to their thesis/dissertation.
- The student must show full-time enrollment and a U.S. address throughout the CPT period.
- CPT authorization for thesis or dissertation credits cannot be extended beyond the authorized dates due to student failure or a grade of incomplete.
- Please also note the following regarding CPT for thesis or dissertation research:

- The academic department should meet with the student when requested, to:
  - Review the thesis or dissertation academic requirements;
  - Discuss the appropriateness of the employment considering these academic requirements;
- Ensure the student is registered for the proper thesis or dissertation credits, or for maintenance of matriculation and full-time equivalency, as applicable.

**SEVERE ECONOMIC HARDSHIP**

This is very hard to obtain, as you must have lost your original source of funding due to no fault of your own. Contact the P/DSO for more information.

**PRE- AND POST-GRADUATION OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)**

**PRE-GRADUATION (PRE-COMPLETION) OPT**

You may apply to participate in pre-completion OPT after you have been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis for one full academic year at a college, university, conservatory, or seminary that has been certified by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) to enroll F-1 students. You do not need to have had F-1 status for the one full academic year; you can satisfy the “one full academic year” requirement even if you had another nonimmigrant status during that time.

USCIS will deduct that amount of time from your post-completion OPT authorization period. For example, if you participated in 10 months of pre-completion OPT; you would be eligible for only up to 2 months of post-completion OPT.

- Even though you can apply for pre-completion OPT up to 90 days before you complete a full academic year, and up to 90 days before you plan to begin working, it will take USCIS most of that time to process your application. If you apply late, you may not receive your authorization until much of the time that you wanted to work has already passed. You may not begin your work until your application has been approved by USCIS and your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) has been received.
- Like all other Forms of OPT, employment must be directly related to the major field of study.

## **POST-COMPLETION OPT**

You may apply to participate in post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) by filing Form I-765, up to 90 days before, but no later than 60 days after your program end date. If you are authorized for post-completion OPT, you may work part-time (20 hours or less per week) or full-time for the time indicated on your EAD card.

If you participated in pre-completion OPT, USCIS will deduct that amount of time from your post-completion OPT authorization period. For example, if you participated in 10 months of pre-completion OPT; you would be eligible for only up to 2 months of post-completion OPT. **You must receive a Form I-20 from ISS with the OPT recommendation *before you can apply for OPT*. Contact the International Student Services early- ISS needs at least one month to process your paperwork.**

## **24-MONTH STEM OPT EXTENSION**

### **OPT STEM Extension Eligibility Requirements**

The STEM OPT extension is a 24-month period of temporary training that directly relates to an F-1 student's program of study in an approved STEM field. Students who are currently in an approved post-completion OPT period based on a designated STEM degree may apply for a 24-month STEM extension of their post-completion OPT.

DHS grants STEM OPT extensions to eligible F-1 students once per degree level (i.e., bachelor's, master's, or doctorate). A student may participate twice in the STEM OPT extension over the course of their academic career. To participate twice in the STEM OPT extension, a student must earn a second qualifying degree, at a higher education level, and be participating in an initial period of OPT at the time they apply to USCIS for their second STEM OPT extension. You must pursue your STEM OPT extension through an employer that is enrolled in USCIS's E-Verify <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/understanding-e-verify> employment eligibility verification program. You must select a STEM OPT employer that provides the student with formal training and learning objectives. You must work a minimum of 20 hours per week per employer.

You can apply for the 24-month STEM OPT extension no sooner than 90 days prior to your current OPT end date and no later than the day your current EAD card expires. As long as your application is received by USCIS by your current EAD end date, you will be allowed to remain in the U.S. and continue employment for 180 days or until a decision is made on your application.

**You must receive a Form I-20 with the STEM OPT recommendation by ISS *before you can apply for STEM OPT*. Contact the International Student Services early- ISS needs at least one month to process your paperwork.**



### **GRACE PERIOD**

F-1 international students have a 60-day grace period following the completion of study or the completion of OPT/STEM OPT. Before or by the end of the grace period, F1 international students must depart from the United States, change educational level, transfer to another U.S. institution, apply for a change of status, or apply for OPT. Students may travel within the United States during this time but may not leave the United States and return on the basis of the current F-1 SEVIS record.

### **CHANGE OF EDUCATIONAL LEVEL**

Students who will start a new program of study at LWC (for example a student moving from bachelor's to master's degree) must contact the P/DSO as soon as they decide to pursue a subsequent program.

An F-1 student must receive an updated Form I20 prior to the semester in which he or she is beginning a new level of study.

### **TRANSFER TO ANOTHER U.S. INSTITUTION**

For immigration purposes a student is considered to be a transfer student when he or she leaves one institution to begin attendance at another SEVIS-approved US institution while following proper procedures as outlined by the U.S. federal regulations. Please note that this does not refer to the transfer of academic credits. At the very latest, F-1 students must initiate the transfer process before the end of the 60-day grace period following the current program of study. A student should contact ISS as soon as he or she has decided to transfer to another institution for instructions and options.

### **EARLY WITHDRAWAL OR LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

ISS is required to report on each student's enrollment every semester to DHS; therefore, an F-1 student must inform ISS if he or she decides to leave and not return to resume study for the current or following semester. As such, if a student is not going to be enrolled due to withdrawal from the college or leaving for a prolonged period of time, informing an academic advisor is not sufficient, a student must also inform the P/DSO.

### **DEPENDENTS**

For immigration purposes, dependents are defined as children under the age of 21 and spouses who are issued a dependent Form I-20 to obtain an F-2 visa to join the F-1 status holder in the U.S. for the duration of the student's studies. An F-2 status holder may not engage in any type

of employment. F-2 dependents may study part-time in any certified program so long as the study does not amount to what the regulations define as full-time for an F-1 student. Therefore, F-2 status holders may enroll in fewer than 12 undergraduate hours or 10 (6) graduate hours each term. However, F-2 children may enroll full-time in elementary or secondary school.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

[Department of Homeland Security](#)

[U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services](#)

[U.S. Customs and Border Protection](#)

[U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement](#)

[Department of State](#)

[Study in the States](#)

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