Handbook for International Students

Office of International Student Service
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 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 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 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full-Time Enrollment: Minimum Credit Hours</th>
<th>Minimum Seated Credit Hours Per Semester</th>
<th>Allowed Online Credit Hours Per Semester- Immigration Law</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fall</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3 and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spring</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3 and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summer</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 and above*(consult ISP and Academic Affairs)</td>
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#### Graduate Students

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full Time Enrollment: Minimum Credit Hours</th>
<th>Minimum Seated Credit Hours Per Semester</th>
<th>Allowed Online Credit Hours Per Semester- Immigration Law</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CES</strong></td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3 and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall, Spring, Summer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHD (Seated Programs)</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3 and above</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fall, Spring, Summer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MSTM</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 and above</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Blended/Hybrid)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fall, Spring, Summer</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>MBA</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 and above</td>
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<td>(Blended/Hybrid)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fall, Spring, Summer</td>
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#### EXTENSION OF FORM I-20

Students must obtain an extension of their Form I-20 and F-1 status at least one semester prior to the program end date noted on their current Form I-20, if necessary. Students must show proof of funding to facilitate the extension process. 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.

**REDUCED COURSE LOAD**
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 start of the next available semester, excluding vacation terms.

**ACADEMIC DIFFICULTIES**
An F-1 student may be authorized to reduce their course load to six credit hours (no less) one time, due to academic difficulties. (First semester only) The following are acceptable academic reasons for a student to reduce his or her course load:

- Placement in an inappropriate course level
- Initial difficulty with the English language
- Initial difficulty with reading requirements
- Unfamiliarity with American teaching methods

**MEDICAL REASON**
In the case of a reduced course load request based on medical necessity, the student must provide medical documentation from a licensed medical doctor, doctor of osteopathy, or licensed clinical psychologist to ISS to substantiate the illness or medical condition. The regulations state that students experiencing a ‘temporary illness or medical condition’ may reduce their course load ‘for a period not to exceed 12 months while the student is pursuing a course of study at a particular program level.’ If the student’s medical condition does not permit them to pursue a full course of study beyond these 12 months, the student may be required to return to their home country.
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 long weekends. Students may leave the U.S. at any time, and it is the student’s responsibility to ensure that he or she has all the required documentation to return to the United States in 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
An F-1 student may be eligible to engage in temporary off-campus work based on either economic need or practical training (CPT/OPT).

CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING - CPT
An F-1 student may be authorized by the Primary/Designated School Official to participate in Curricular Practical Training Program (CPT) that is an integral part of an established curriculum, meaning it is a required part of an established curriculum. It is not a supplemental training experience but rather a required part of the degree or program of study. CPT “is defined to be alternative work/study, internship, cooperative education, or any other type of internship or practicum that is offered by sponsoring employers through cooperative agreements with the school.” CPT must be required for program completion and may be paid or unpaid.

CPT is authorized on a semester basis.
To be authorized to continue working, students must apply for CPT each semester. Early application is recommended. The application must be completed and signed by the student, the advisor and the prospective employer. The office of Academic Affairs and/or the program director must approve the internship site and experience before the PDSO/DSO can authorize the CPT. Students must receive official authorization from the International Student Services Office before beginning CPT.

ELIGIBILITY FOR CPT: UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS
- Have been lawfully enrolled on a full time basis for one academic year (2 full semesters) before being approved for CPT
- Must be a full-time student in their major for at least one semester before being able to use that major as the basis for their CPT application
- May not take CPT as their only course during the fall or spring semester, because it is considered an online/distance learning course
- May take CPT as their only course if they are enrolled in the qualifying course during the summer break
- As soon as an international student has met his or her degree requirements, the F-1 student status ends and CPT eligibility ends.

ELIGIBILITY FOR CPT: GRADUATE STUDENTS
- May apply for their first semester at LWC
- May not take CPT as their only course in a semester, because it is considered an online/distance learning course
- Graduate students who have completed all required courses except their thesis/dissertation are allowed to add CPT.
  - They must make sure that participating in CPT does not delay completion of their studies past the completion date entered in their SEVIS record, and
  - The proposed CPT employment is integral to their thesis or dissertation research.
● The academic advisor must verify this to the International Student Services Office.
● As soon as an international student has met his or her degree requirements, the F-1 student status ends and CPT eligibility ends.

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 the employment must be directly related to the major field of study.

POST-COMPLETION OPT
You may apply to participate in post-completion OPT after completing your studies. 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.
24-MONTH STEM OPT EXTENSION
To qualify for a 24-month STEM OPT extension, an F-1 student participating in an initial period of regular post-completion OPT must:

- Have a degree in an eligible STEM field from a Student and Exchange Visitor Program-certified school that is accredited when the student submits their STEM OPT extension application to USCIS.
- Pursue their STEM OPT extension through an employer that is enrolled in USCIS’s E-Verify employment eligibility verification program.
- Select a STEM OPT employer that provides the student with formal training and learning objectives.
- Work a minimum of 20 hours per week per employer.

GRACE PERIOD
F-1 international students have a 60-day grace period following the completion of study or the completion of 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