International Orientation
Understanding your Student Immigration Status
Can you answer these questions?

• Do you know where your important documents are, and do you know how to understand them?

• Do you know what is required to stay in status?

• Do you know what options you have for work?

• Do you know what to do when you travel?

• Do you know what you can do at the end of your degree program?
Understanding Your Documents

http://international.ua.edu/isss/currentstudents/maintaining-student-visa-status/#documents
Your passport is your most important document.

It must remain valid at all times while in the U.S.

If your passport expires or is lost, you will not be able to leave the U.S., renew your license, or extend work authorizations.

If you are within 6 months of your passport expiration, you may not be able to re-enter the U.S. after a trip abroad.
Visa

Your visa is allowed to expire as long as you are maintaining status (e.g. your I-20 or DS-2019 is valid) and you are pursuing the same objective.

Your visa only needs to be valid at the time you enter or re-enter the U.S. after travel abroad.

Some exceptions if returning from travel to Canada, Mexico, and the Adjacent Islands (automatic visa revalidation).
Form I-94

The I-94 is your Arrival and Departure Record, which confirms your “official” visa status while in the U.S.

Access online at https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/

Your class of admission must always be correct - F1 for student visa and J1 for exchange visitor.

Your “Admit Until Date” should be D/S, which stands for Duration-of-Status.

If your I-94 says something different or if you cannot access your I-94 record, you should schedule an appointment with ISSS right away.
Form I-20 (F-1 Students)

The I-20 is a 3 page document, and it is divided into sections. The links below explain each section in detail:

- **SEVIS ID**
- **PERSONAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION**
- **SCHOOL INFORMATION**
- **PROGRAM OF STUDY & START/END-DATE**
- **FINANCIALS**
- **SCHOOL AND STUDENT ATTESTATIONS**
- **EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATIONS**
- **TRAVEL SIGNATURES**

**SEVIS #**

**Program of Study** = Major and Degree Level

**I-20 End Date**

This is your F-1 expiration date. The I-20 must be extended before this date if you need more time to graduate.

**Travel Signatures and Work Authorizations are on page 2**
Form DS-2019 (J-1 Students)

The DS-2019 is a 2 page document, and it is divided into sections. The links below explain each section in detail:

- SEVIS ID
- PERSONAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION
- PROGRAM SPONSOR INFORMATION
- PROGRAM START/END DATE INFORMATION
- EXCHANGE VISITOR CATEGORY AND STUDY FIELD CODE
- FINANCIALS
- SCHOOL ATTESTATIONS
- TRAVEL VALIDATION SIGNATURES
- EV CERTIFICATION

If you require more time for your degree, the DS-2019 must be extended before this date.
Understanding Your Student Status

As a student visa holder, you have a few key responsibilities:

1. Study **full-time**.
2. Make continuous progress towards your degree.
3. Never **work without authorization** from ISSS.
4. Keep all of your **immigration documents** up-to-date and 100% accurate.
5. Consult ISSS before making changes to your academic program or immigration status.
Who is involved in my status?

- **DOS – Department of State**
  - Bureau of Consular Affairs
  - U.S. Embassies, Consulates, and Missions

- **DHS – Department of Homeland Security**
  - SEVP - Student Exchange Visitor Program
    - SEVIS - Student Exchange Visitor Information System
  - USCIS – US Citizenship and Immigration Services
  - CBP – US Customs and Border Protection
  - ICE – US Immigration and Customs Enforcement

- **The University of Alabama**
  - ISSS – Serve as the F-1 Designated School Officials and J-1 Responsible Officers

- **You**
General Enrollment Requirements

**Graduate Students**
- 9 credit hours minimum
- 6 credit hours with a .5 FTE Assistantship

**Undergraduate Students**
- 12 credit hours minimum
Online Class Limitations

F-1 Online Limits

• Only one 3-credit hour course can be counted towards enrollment minimums.
• You may take more than one online class, but additional courses will not be counted toward the minimum enrollment for immigration purposes.

J-1 Online Limits

• J-1 students may not count any online courses toward the minimum enrollment requirement.
• After a J-1 student has enrolled in a full-time load of in-person courses, they may then enroll in online courses above the minimum full-time requirement.
Enrollment Exceptions

- **Last Semester** – Students may take only what the program requires to graduate in their final semester, but at least one class must be in-person.

- **Reduced Course Load** – Used for medical emergencies and initial academic difficulties.

- **Thesis/Dissertation Hours** – Once a graduate student reaches candidacy, they may take the minimum research hours (599 Thesis/699 Dissertation) mandated by the Graduate School.

- **Summer** – Normally, this is a break for continuing students who are returning for fall. NOTE: New students beginning in summer must enroll full-time.
Summer as First Semester

• While summer is normally a vacation period for students, if summer is your first semester on a new initial I-20 or DS-2019, you must enroll full-time in summer.

• For undergraduate students, the minimum enrollment requirement for summer as your first semester is 12 credits for full summer (6 credit hours if starting in Summer 2 session).

• For graduate students who begin their study in summer as their first semester, the minimum enrollment requirement is 9 credit hours for full summer, or 4.5 hours if starting in Summer 2 session.

• Graduate students on a full assistantship (.5 FTE) may be considered full-time with 6 credit hours of registration for full summer.
Remember!

You must have advance permission from ISSS to:

- Enroll less than full-time
- Apply for off-campus employment
- Take a leave of absence
- Withdraw from the university
- Transfer your immigration record to a new university
Violations of Status

• Violating immigration regulations forces ISSS to terminate your status.
• If your status is **terminated due to a violation of status**:
  • you will have no **Grace Period** and must depart the U.S. immediately;
  • you will lose all employment eligibility immediately;
  • you will not be able to enroll at UA for future terms until issue is resolved.
• Regaining status is never guaranteed!
  • You may have to travel to regain valid visa status; or
  • file for **reinstatement with Homeland Security**.
  • There will always be fees to pay!
• Get your immigration advice from ISSS. Friends are not a good source of immigration information.
• If you think you have an issue, meet with an ISSS advisor right away.
What Causes Violation of Status?

The most common violations of status result from the following:

• Failing to attend class
• Not enrolling full-time or dropping below a full-time course load without permission
• Failing to pay tuition or fees and having schedule dropped for nonpayment
• Academic suspension
• Working without authorization
• Failing to update address within 10 days of a change
• Failing to extend your program before it ends
Updating Address

You must keep your address updated. All non-U.S. citizens residing in the U.S. are required to update their address within 10 days of any change of address.

When you move, you should update your address in myBama, and ISSS will report the change to the Department of Homeland Security in SEVIS.

ISSS must have the following information to report to immigration:

- Local Address – This is where you physically live in Tuscaloosa.
- Permanent Address – This is your address in your home country.
Updating Your I-20 or DS-2019

Contact ISSS for a new I-20 or DS-2019 if:
• Your major changes or you add a second major.
• Your level of study changes (Bachelors, Masters, Doctorate).
• Your funding changes (scholarships or assistantships).
• Your graduation date changes – either you graduate earlier than your I-20/DS-2019 end-date or you need additional time to complete your degree.

You can submit an I-20/DS-2019 Update Form to ISSS for these changes.
F-2 and J-2 Dependents

Dependent Status:
• Their legal status is linked to the F-1 or J-1 primary.
• Their status is valid as long as the F-1 or J-1 maintains status.
F-2 and J-2 Dependents

Dependent Studies:
• F-2 – can study part-time at University (children can enroll in K-12 full-time).
• J-2 – can study part-time or full-time at University (children can enroll in K-12 full-time).

Dependent Employment:
• F-2 – cannot work.
• J-2 – can work, but must apply for work authorization with USCIS.

Dependent Insurance:
• F-2 & J-2 Dependents require medical insurance.
• Dependents can be added to the UA Insurance Policy.
On-Campus Employment

F-1 and J-1 Students may work on-campus under the following conditions:
1. Must maintain valid status.
2. May not exceed 20 hours of work per week total during fall and spring semesters.
3. May work more than 20 hours per week during the summer and official university breaks.

How to Find On-Campus Employment

- Student employment opportunities at https://uastudentjobs.ua.edu/
- Bama Dining employment at https://ua.campusdish.com/en/Careers
Off-Campus Employment

Off-campus employment is only allowed with specific permission from ISSS using the following types of training and work authorizations:

- F-1 Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
- F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT)
- J-1 Academic Training
- Economic Hardship Authorization from USCIS
F-1 CPT Eligibility

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is typically used for internships and practicum experience during degree program.

CPT work authorization comes from ISSS and is for specific period, employer, and location.

Student must:
• Be in valid F-1-status
• Have completed one full academic year (2 semesters) of full-time study
• Have not completed program of study
• Have a job offer directly related to major field of study (not minor)
• Enroll in an approved Co-op or academic course tied to CPT
F-1 OPT Eligibility

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is typically used for internships and work after completion of the degree program.

Recommendation for OPT comes from ISSS and work authorization approval is handled by USCIS and is for specific period.

Student must:
- Be in valid F-1-status
- Have completed one full academic year (2 semesters) of full time study
- Work directly related to major field of study (not minor)
- Have not utilized 1 year or more of full-time CPT
- Have not utilized 12 months of OPT at the current or higher degree level
- Not be in an ELI or non-degree program
J-1 Academic Training Eligibility

J-1 Academic Training (AT) is typically used for internships and work either during or after completion of the degree program.

Academic Training work authorization comes from ISSS and is for specific period, employer, and location.

Academic Training Eligibility:

• Student must be in valid J-1 Student status
• Work must be directly related to major field of study
• Training must be an integral part of study program
• Training approved by the academic advisor
Economic Hardship

Generally, recommendation for F-1 Economic Hardship comes from ISSS and work authorization approval is handled by USCIS and is for a specific period of time.

Economic Hardship Criteria

- Based on severe and unforeseen economic circumstances
- Student must have completed at least one academic year of study
- Student must be in good academic standing
- The employment must not interfere with studies
- Economic hardship is recommended and approved on a case-by-case basis
Note on work authorization

• Working, **paid or unpaid**, without proper authorization is a serious violation
• Even unpaid internships require authorization - unpaid work is not “volunteering”
• Most off-campus work authorizations must be approved by USCIS, which may take months.
• Always contact ISSS office before engaging in any work or if you have questions international@ua.edu
Travel
Travel Inside the U.S.

When traveling outside Tuscaloosa, carry the following:

- Passport
- Original Form I-20 or Form DS-2019
- Form I-94

Remember, keep photocopies/scans of your main passport page, visa page, I-94 record, I-20/DS-2019 and any other visa documentation with you at all times even when not traveling.
Travel Outside of the U.S.

To depart the U.S., you only need a valid passport.

To re-enter the U.S. after a short trip abroad (less than 5 months), you need the following:

- **Travel Signature** on I-20 or DS-2019 (within the last 12 months)
- Valid Passport (**valid at least 6 months beyond date of return**)
- **Valid Visa** (unexpired on the date of return)

We recommend you carry a copy of your **unofficial transcripts** or **enrollment verification letter** from the Registrar (available on myBama in the student tab).
Travel Signatures

- You can get travel signatures at ISSS.
- Generally, travel signatures are valid for multiple uses for one-year from the date of the signature.
Grace Period and Life after UA
Grace Period

Upon completion of studies, your F-1 I-20 or J-1 DS-2019 will end.

Students have an automatic Grace Period that begins after they complete their program:

• F-1 Students – 60 Days
• J-1 Students – 30 Days
Options During Grace Period

Students have the following options during their Grace Period:

1. Prepare to depart the U.S.
2. Apply for F-1 Optional Practical Training or J-1 Academic Training.
3. Request a new I-20 or DS-2019 to continue at UA in a new degree program.
4. Transfer your SEVIS record and I-20/DS-2019 to a new school to begin a new program.
5. Apply with USCIS to change status to another visa category.
Capstone International Center
International Student & Scholar Services

Hours of Operation: Mon-Fri: 8 am - 4:45 pm
Walk-in/Virtual Advising: Mon-Thur: 11 am - 3 pm

Location: 105 BB Comer Hall
Website: http://international.ua.edu/isss/
Email: international@ua.edu
Phone: 205 348-5402