

F-1

Student

Handbook

**The U.S. immigration system is complicated!
This is a guide to help you understand it better and avoid future problems
during your journey in this country.**



Important Definitions

SEVIS – Student & Exchange Visitor Information System

This is the information database used by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and Department of State to monitor international students and exchange visitors in the United States.

Designated School Officials (DSOs) and U.S. government employees are the only individuals that have access to SEVIS. A DSO enters required information into the database to issue your I-20 and maintain your record.

USCIS – United States Citizenship and Immigration Services

USCIS is the government agency that adjudicates applications for immigration benefits such as Optional Practical Training (OPT) employment authorization and changes of visa status.

Immigration Resources

Study in the States: www.studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students - This is a great resource. It will help you find out about how to maintain your student status, bring dependents, obtain a driver's license, avoid immigration scams, transfer to another university, change your immigration status, and much more.

USCIS: www.uscis.gov – Here you can access updates on immigration laws, application forms for OPT, information on changing visa status, and more.

Maintaining Lawful F-1 Status

In order to remain lawfully in the U.S. as an international student, you must follow these rules to maintain your F-1 status:

HAVE VALID DOCUMENTS

Please ensure that the follow documents are always current:

- Passport
- I-20

REGISTER FOR CLASSES FULL-TIME

Undergraduate students: At least 12 credit hours each fall and spring semester.

Graduate students: At least 9 credit hours each fall and spring semester.

Law students: At least 12 credit hours each fall and spring semester.

Distance Learning: Students may only take 3 credits **or** one course per semester that is online or distance learning (more can be taken if you have fulfilled the 9 or 12 credit hour requirement for that semester). If it is your last semester and you only need one course, it cannot be distance/online.

***Exceptions** – Apply and obtain an approval for a Reduced Course Load (RCL) through our office before you drop below full-time for the following reasons:

1. Academic difficulties (first semester only)
 - a. Difficulty with English Language/Reading
 - b. Difficulty with the American Teaching style
 - c. Improper course level placement
2. Medical reasons – must be recommended by a licensed doctor or clinical psychologist
3. Last semester of program

****SUMMER SEMESTER** – If summer is your first or final semester, you must enroll full-time.

INFORM THE INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF CHANGES

Changes to your Academic Program

If you **change one of the following**, please visit our office to update your I-20:

- Program of study – for example, if you switch from Mechanical Engineering to Psychology
- Length of study – if you need more time to complete the program
- Education level – for example, if you complete a Bachelor’s degree and want to start a Master’s or PhD program

Extending your I-20

Your I-20 was issued for a “normal” length of time usually needed to complete your program of study. However, there can be instances where you may need to apply to have your I-20 extended because you will not finish your program in the time allotted. Some of these reasons include:

- Changing research topics
- Unexpected research problems

***You must apply for the extension BEFORE the end date on your current I-20. Failure to do so will put you out of status.**

Address Change or Name Change

- Report the change to the International Center within 10 days of the change.
- Complete the **Change of Address** form and email it to us at immigration@uakron.edu, or bring it in person. The form can be found here: www.uakron.edu/international/forms/index.dot
- Also update your address in your MyAkron account.

COMPLY WITH THE GRACE PERIOD

From the time you finish your program, you have **60 days** to remain in the United States to prepare for your departure. If you are admitted to a new program, you must take action on your SEVIS record *before your grace period expires*.

- No employment is allowed during these 60 days.
- If you fail to maintain status, or withdraw from your courses, **you are not granted a grace period**.

Employment

ON CAMPUS

Students are allowed to work on The University of Akron campus while taking courses full-time to maintain F-1 status. The following rules apply:

- **New** students can apply/start jobs any time **within 30 days before** the start of classes.
- The job must be located “on campus” (for example – dining services, athletics, library, administrative offices in departments).
- The job does not have to be related to your studies.
- You are limited to **20** working hours per week **while school is in session**, and **29** hours per week **during breaks** (winter, spring, summer).
- No approval is required by a DSO or USCIS.
- NOTE: Students cannot work during their 60-day grace period.

*Find on-campus jobs here: <http://www.uakron.edu/student-employment/students/on-campus.dot>

OFF CAMPUS

As an F-1 student, you are also eligible to apply for the following practical training:

Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

Apply if you have an offer for an internship, cooperative education (co-op), or a practicum that is sponsored by an employer through an agreement with The University of Akron.

Requirements:

- Must be an integral part of your program,
- Must be related to your major, and
- You must be a **full-time student for one academic year** before applying (*Exception: graduate students who are required by their program to start the training immediately*)

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Apply if you would like to obtain temporary employment with real-world training directly related to your major area of study. There are two types of OPT: **Pre-** and **Post-Completion**.

Requirements:

- Must be related to your major area of study,
- You must be a **full-time student for one full academic year** before applying, and
- You must apply before the end of the 60-day grace period after finishing your academic program.

*Students enter their **60-day grace period after finishing their post-completion OPT Training.**

**Students in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) programs have the option of a 24-month extension of post-completion OPT.

Travel and Re-entry

If you plan to travel outside of the U.S. for a short time, you will need the following:

- A valid I-20 with a **travel signature** endorsed by a DSO from UA,
- Your valid passport, and
- A valid F-1 visa to re-enter the U.S.
 - If your F-1 visa expires while in the U.S., you must get a new F-1 visa when you travel abroad to seek re-admission to the U.S.
 - **Exception:** If you and your dependents travel **less than 30 days** to Canada, nearby Caribbean islands (excluding Cuba), or Mexico, you do not need a new visa. *This exception does not apply to students from certain countries.

I-20 Travel Signature

For a travel signature, please complete our Travel Signature Request form and allow three days for processing. The following DSOs on campus are authorized to sign the I-20:

- Robyn Brown, The International Center
- Tracy McCune, The International Center
- Emily Aronson, The International Center
- Nicola Kille, The International Center
- Sherri Niesz, English Language Institute
- Tom Swinscoe, English Language Institute

Welcome to the United States!

Please contact our office if you have any questions about the information in this packet.

The International Center
Buchtel Hall, Room 202
The University of Akron
Phone: 330-972-6349 Email: Immigration@uakron.edu