



Changing Immigration Status to F-1

Do I need a change of status?

Not everyone needs to be in F-1 student status to study. *However, individuals presently in B1/B2 status are not permitted to study legally. These prospective students need to change to F-1 status before they begin classes or they will violate their current status.* Individuals in other immigration categories may wish to change their status to F-1 to be eligible for certain student benefits, such as OPT or CPT. Change of status applications are submitted to and adjudicated by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). The success of this application depends on your particular situation as well as your current visa status. You should make an appointment to meet with an advisor at the Office of International Student Services (ISS) to discuss your case.

Can anyone apply for a change of status?

No. If your current status has expired, you cannot apply for a change of status. You must leave the United States and re-enter in your desired status. Also, if you are in WT (visa waiver) status or in J status with a two year home residency requirement, you may not apply for a change to F-1 student status in the United States. Lastly, if you are in C, D, K or M status, you are not eligible for a change of status to F-1.

Can I travel outside the US to change my status?

Yes. Once you have been admitted to SJU and have completed the necessary paperwork, ISS will issue an *Initial Attendance I-20*. Prior to your program start date, you will need to travel outside the U.S. and apply for the F-1 visa stamp at a U.S. Consulate or Embassy. (There are no U.S. Consulates in the U.S. so this must be done overseas). It is generally preferred that students return to their home country when applying for a visa.

After the visa stamp is issued, you may return to the U.S. with the new visa, your I-20, and other travel documents. Upon clearing immigration inspection, you should be admitted to the U.S. in F-1 student status. You are thus eligible to begin your academic program as scheduled.

How do I apply for a change of status from within the United States?

First you must be accepted by Saint Joseph's University into a full time program of study and you will need an *I-20 for Change of Status* from ISS. To apply for an I-20 you must provide a copy of your acceptance letter and submit documents showing financial support for your first year's educational expenses, as well as a copy of your valid passport. This should include a bank statement and a letter of support from your sponsor, if you are not supporting yourself. If you have any questions about this, please contact an ISS advisor at internationalstudents@sju.edu

Submitting a Change of Status request to the U.S. government allows the petitioner to remain in the U.S. while the decision is pending. Your current nonimmigrant status must be valid and remain valid while your Change of Status application is pending.

Once you receive your I-20 you can apply for the change of status by mailing in an application.

General Change of Status Application Materials needed to apply:

- ❑ A copy of both sides of your signed I-20 Form – don't forget to sign it before you copy it
- ❑ Print current I-94 at – <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov>
- ❑ I-539 form completed using black ink or completed online and printed - <https://www.uscis.gov/i-539>
- ❑ Receipt of SEVIS I-901 fee payment of \$200 - payable online at <https://fmjfee.com> (see below for more information)
- ❑ Financial Documents & University Admission Letter
- ❑ Copy of the main information page in your passport (and copies of dependents' passports)
- ❑ Personal Check for \$370 made payable to: "US Department of Homeland Security"
- ❑ Form G-1145 E-Notification - available at <http://www.uscis.gov/g-1145>
- ❑ Personal statement or letter of request: This is the opportunity to present your case for a Change of Status; the officer reviewing your application will refer to this letter to address any questions of intent. Your letter should specifically request the change to F-1 status and briefly explain your reasons. It is important that this letter also indicate your plans for departure from the U.S. upon the completion of your program to satisfy the requirement for nonimmigrant intent.
- ❑ Other relevant documents: depending on your situation you may also need to submit copies of your spouse's I-20 Form (if F-1) or letter from employer (if H-1), your spouse's I-94, your marriage certificate, your children's birth certificates (if they are included in the application), etc.

Send the above items by a mail service that provides a tracking number to:

For mailing via the U.S. Postal Service

USCIS
P.O. Box 660166
Dallas, TX 75266

For mailing via courier or Express Mail

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

*Make copies of all documents before sending them to USCIS. Change of status applications can take up to 6 months. If your change of status is approved you will receive a Notice of Action with a new I-94 card attached. Bring your new I-94 card to ISS so that we can make a copy and update your record.

What should I do while I am waiting for an answer from USCIS?

Individuals in B-1/B-2 must wait to begin classes until the change of status is approved. Those holding other immigration statuses might be able to attend classes while their application is pending at USCIS.

It is recommended for those changing from H4 to F1 to enroll full-time while the change of status is pending. For some benefits of F-1 status, such as CPT and OPT, you must be a full-time student for one academic year (two semesters) before you are eligible to apply for work permission. The time that passes while you are waiting for your change of status will count if you are a full-time student. Those in F-2 status can only study part-time.

You MUST register to be a full-time student for all semesters once your change of status is approved. You are not eligible for any benefits of F-1 status (for example, on-campus work permission, which includes assistantships) until your application is approved.

What is the SEVIS I-901 fee? How do I pay it?

The SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) I-901 fee is mandated by Congress to support the program office and the automated system that keeps track of students and exchange visitors and ensures that they maintain their status while in the United States. Each student or exchange visitor issued an initial Form I-20 or DS-2019 is responsible for paying this fee to SEVP (Student and Exchange Visitor Program). For more information, visit <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/index.htm>

On the I-901 Form, enter **PHI 214F 00361000** for the SJU School Code. Your SEVIS Identification Number is the 10 digit number on the upper right-hand side of Page one, above the bar code.

The fee can be paid to DHS online by you or by a third party.

To Pay Online

1. Find the Form I-901 at <http://fmiffee.com>

Be sure to write your name exactly as it appears on your I-20 form.

2. Complete the online form and supply your credit card details.

3. Print at least 2 copies of the online I-901 receipt. *You can always print copies of your I-901 payment receipt by visiting <http://fmiffee.com> and clicking on "Check I-901 Status / Print Payment Confirmation" from the menu on the left.

Are there any special circumstances I need to know?

If you are applying to change from B-1/B-2 status to F-1 status, you will need to prove to USCIS that your intention to become a student happened AFTER you arrived in the United States. Applications for change of status filed shortly after arrival raise suspicion that you misrepresented yourself by failing to reveal your intention to study when applying for a visa to enter the United States. Your cover letter should clearly explain how and when you decided to go to school. USCIS will occasionally ask the university to verify when a student first contacted us.

If you are applying to change from a non-immigrant status with a date specific expiration on your I-94 (examples would be B-1/B-2, H-1B, H-4) your current status must be valid until your change of status is approved.

What if my change of status application is denied?

USCIS rarely denies an application without first asking for additional documentation in the form of a Request for Evidence (RFE). *If you get a letter from USCIS requesting additional documentation, you should bring it to ISS so that we can advise you on what you need to submit.*

If your application for a change of status is denied and you can choose to leave the U.S. by the date indicated on your Notice of Action and apply for an F-1 entry visa outside the U.S. (preferably in your home country), or you can seek the advice of an immigration lawyer to discuss your options.

Updated August 2017