

Florida Atlantic University ~ Division of Student Affairs ~ International Student and Scholar Services

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CHANGE OF STATUS TO “F” OR “J”

Prospective students interested in changing their current non-immigrant visa status to F or J may either

- (1) request a change of status from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in the United States, or
- (2) apply for the F or J visa to a U.S. Consulate abroad (preferably in the home country).

OPTION (1): Application for Change of Status to the USCIS (in the United States)

- Only individuals holding another valid eligible non-immigrant status may apply for change of status (COS). The COS application must be received at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) before (and, preferably, should be approved) before the current non-immigrant status expires.
 - The application is adjudicated by the USCIS – Vermont Service Center (VSC). The decision process **may take as long as six months, and approval is not guaranteed.**
 - An approved COS application grants only valid F-1 status and not the F-1 visa (stamp in your passport). **If traveling abroad after obtaining the COS to F-1, students will have to obtain the F-1 visa at a U.S. consulate abroad (preferably in the home country)** in order to re-enter the U.S. The COS approval does not guarantee issuance of the F-1 visa.
 - Leaving the U.S. while the COS application is pending will automatically void the application and will require applying for the visa at the U.S. consulate prior to returning to the U.S.
 - COS applicants – except B-1/B-2 tourists and F-2 dependents* -- must enroll full-time in the degree program as indicated on the I-20 form. Full-time enrollment for F-1 status is defined as:
 - at least 12 credit hours per academic term for undergraduate students (BA, BS, BBA)
 - at least 9 graduate-level credit hours for graduate students (MS, MA, MBA, PhD, EdD).
- *If you are currently in the U.S. as a B-1/ B-2 (tourist) or F-2 (dependent) you may NOT enroll in classes until your COS to F-1 is approved.**
- Students who are fully admitted or already attending FAU must make an appointment with an ISSS advisor to review the application process and verify that all documents are in order before mailing the COS application.
 - Students who are working with an immigration attorney to handle their COS application must provide a copy of the USCIS receipt notice and final approval notice to ISSS.

IMPORTANT REMINDERS:

- **Tuition:** Students paying in-state tuition fees based on their current non-immigrant status will be **required to pay out-of-state tuition as of the start-date listed on the form I-20/DS-2019.**
- **Employment:** On-campus employment eligibility per F-1 regulations (including graduate assistantships) will commence only after COS to F-1 is approved by the USCIS.
- **Restrictions:** Certain non-immigrant categories – such as visa waiver visitors (WB or WT with green I-94 card), C or D visa holders or J exchange visitors who are subject to 212 (e) – are not eligible to apply for COS to F-1 in the U.S. and must travel to their home country to obtain the F-1 visa.
- **H-1 Visa Holders:** Include a copy of the visa stamp or I-797 Notice of Action and proof of current employment (such as a payroll slips or letter from the employer).
*** Please note that the COS application must be filed with USCIS before termination of H-1B employment.**

OPTION (2): Travel and Re-Entry to the U.S.

- The F/J visa stamp can only be obtained at a U.S. Consulate abroad. It is highly recommended to apply for the F or J visa in the home country. Some consulates do not accept visa applications from third country nationals. Applying at a consulate outside the country of citizenship/permanent residence increases the chance of visa denial, as it is more difficult to prove ties to the home country and nonimmigrant intent.
- Contact the consulate where you wish to apply to determine visa application procedures, wait times, and required forms/fees.

Change of Status while in the U.S. Application Checklist

- ___1. **Form I-20 issued by FAU**
 - A. NEWLY-ADMITTED STUDENTS must obtain the I-20 from Undergraduate Admissions or the Graduate College.
 - B. CURRENTLY ENROLLED STUDENTS must request the I-20 from ISSS. The following documents are required:
 - a. **ISSS Document Request Form** (to request the I-20 for change of status)
 - b. **ISSS Academic Certification Form** (to confirm the expected program completion date)
 - c. **Proof of Funds** (to show sufficient funds for tuition, fees, and all other expenses for at least one academic year). Funding documents **MUST (1) be in English, (2) be addressed to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS), and (3) specify the total amount available for your education (in US dollars). Acceptable sources of funding include:**
 - (1) **current bank letter** in student's name or stating that account holder is your sponsor
 - (2) **original & current assistantship letter** from academic department confirming total funds awarded to you (tuition waiver and stipend)
 - (3) **current scholarship letter** from sponsoring agency or organization
 - (4) **official and current letter** verifying government loan awarded to you.
 - d. **Proof of Medical Insurance Compliance** through purchase of the FAU – approved insurance plan or through a completed/approved Alternate Insurance Compliance Form confirming that the alternate plan meets FAU requirements.
- ___2. **Proof of Funds** (as discussed in #1b above).
- ___3. **Form I-539** – Download, complete and sign the I-539 form from the ISSS web site at www.fau.edu/iss or from the USCIS web site at <http://www.uscis.gov/files/form/i-539.pdf>
- ___4. **Application Cover Letter addressed** to “United States Citizenship and Immigration Services” and including following information:
 - a. Explanation/reasons for applying to COS instead of traveling abroad to obtain the F-1 visa from a U.S. Consulate
 - b. Information about your most recent entry into the U.S. (i.e., date, visa classification)
 - c. Information about application to FAU (i.e., date of application, date of acceptance, date of I-20 issuance, reasons for choosing your program of study at FAU, etc.)
- ___5. **Non-Refundable Application Fee (\$300)**. Obtain Money Order or Cashier's Check payable to "U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service". This is a **NON-REFUNDABLE** fee.
- ___6. **Photocopies of your passport** (and your dependent's passport, if applicable) - Must include (1) copy of identification page, (2) copy of passport expiration page, and (3) copy of entry visa used at last entry to the U.S.
- ___7. **Photocopy of your Form I-94 (front and back)**.
- ___8. **SEVIS FEE (\$200)** – to be paid after the I-20 is issued but before submitting request for COS. **Copy of the I--901 receipt must be included with the application.** Payment information is available at www.fmjfee.com.

Mailing Address

Before mailing the COS application, **make two sets of photocopies of the complete application packet for (1) your personal record-keeping and (2) for your file at ISSS.**

Mail the application to:

USCIS VERMONT SERVICE CENTER
Attn: I-539
75 Lower Welden St
St Albans, VT 05479