



QUINSIGAMOND

Community College

INTERNATIONAL

STUDENT HANDBOOK



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Introduction

The *International Students' Guide to QCC* provides information about government and academic regulations that pertain to students on an F-1 visa. Strict observance of these regulations is extremely important for all F-1 international students so that they can continue their studies in the United States and avoid possible deportation. As an international student, one of your main priorities is to make certain that you remain in status. You must abide by the many immigration rules and regulations to do this. If you have further questions about these regulations, you should contact one of the International Student DSOs.

Key Terms

International Student Designated School Officials (DSO)

The DSOs are here to advise all F-1 students about staying in status, program extensions, transferring to other schools, obtaining work permits, how to obtain social security cards and driver's licenses or anything pertaining to their F-1 visa. If you are on an F-1 visa and would like to meet with one of the International Student DSOs in person, they are located in the Admissions Office on the second floor of the Harrington Learning Center building. You can also send any questions you may have to the international student email address, international@qcc.mass.edu or call 508-853-2300.

After you have been accepted into the college, if you have questions about registering for classes or what classes you

should take, please contact Academic Advising. They are also located on the second floor of the Harrington Learning Center.

For more information about the international student application process, please visit www.qcc.edu/int.

Report ANY Change of Information

If you have any change in your information, **immediately** report it to a DSO. QCC is required to keep your Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) account up to date with the following information:

- Your local and home addresses
- Your program of study
- Your enrollment status
- Any employment we have authorized or recommended
- Program extension
- Dismissal from QCC
- Transfer to another school/program in the U.S.

We will do our best to update each student's SEVIS record as we become aware of your changes. However, it is ultimately **YOUR** responsibility to inform your DSO of any changes in your circumstances. All reporting in SEVIS must be completed within specific time frames, thus it is **VERY** important that you inform us immediately when you change your address, major, etc.

Because we must report your enrollment status every semester, it is very important that you adhere to the enrollment dates. **You must complete your enrollment and registration no later than the Friday before the first week of classes.**

The federal government considers you, the student, 100% responsible for maintaining ACTIVE STATUS.

With the latest changes in immigration regulations, it has become increasingly important that you maintain your status! Being out of status can have serious consequences for your academic plans and ability to remain in the U.S. Government rules and regulations are subject to change. It is your responsibility to stay updated and informed. When in doubt, contact a DSO. You should keep a copy of your Form I-20 and your passport on you at all times.

Passport

Before coming to the U.S., you were issued a passport by your government, allowing you to leave and re-enter your own country. Your passport must always be valid for at least six months beyond your date of arrival. Your own consulate or embassy in the U.S. will extend your passport. Consult with them to learn what forms and fees are required. If you have a valid U.S. visa in an expired passport, you can still use the visa as long as it is presented at the point of entry together with a new and valid passport.

Visa

The United States visa is the label placed by the U.S. consular office on your passport. It indicates that the consular office has determined that you are qualified to apply for entry into the U.S. in a particular immigration classification. A valid visa does not ensure entry into the country. An immigration officer at the point of entry makes this decision.

A visa contains the following information:

- Your visa number
- The location of the issuing consular post
- The visa classification (F-1, J-1, etc.)
- The date of issuance
- The expiration date
- The number of dependents accompanying you, if any

The expiration date on the visa does not have any relationship to the length of time you can stay in the U.S. It only indicates the length of time it is valid to present to immigration when applying for entry into the U.S. The duration of your legal stay in the U.S. will be noted on your Departure Record, also known as Form I-94, as well as your Form I-20.

Form I-20

The Form I-20 is your student permanent record of non-immigrant F-1 student status in the United States. The Form I-20 is used to record work and practical training. It should remain with you at all times when traveling.

Suggestion: keep a picture of your Form I-20 on your phone.

F-1 Visa

If you were issued a Form I-20 in order to obtain your U.S. visa, you are on an F-1 visa. Any accompanying spouse or child will be on an F-2 visa, unless they are full-time college students as well.

Form I-94

Form I-94 records your arrival date in the U.S. and should remain in your passport until you leave the country again. It also indicates the type of visa you hold and your expected date of departure from the country. F-1 and J-1 visa holders will get a notation, Duration of Status.

You can obtain a copy of your I-94 at this website:

<https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov>

Follow the instructions on the form on the website.

Duration of Status (D/S)

Duration of status is defined as the period of time necessary to complete a full course of study in any educational program. This also includes any authorized period of practical training (OPT) following completion of that program plus 60 days in which to depart the United States. The term “duration of status” is NOT an indication that you can stay in the United States indefinitely as long as you are enrolled at a university.

Termination

If you are out of compliance with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) rules for F-1 students, your Form I-20 is subject to termination in the SEVIS database.

Termination means that you are no longer in legal status as an F-1 student and could be subject to deportation. If your Form I-20 is terminated, you may also have difficulty re-entering the U.S. in the future. To stay in status with USCIS and avoid termination, follow the rules outlined in this guide. If you are unclear about the situation, please get in contact with a DSO.

The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRAIRA)

The provisions of IIRAIRA affect all non-immigrants, and in some cases, even immigrants (green card holders). As an F-1 student, you need to know, at a minimum, the following about IIRAIRA:

Unlawful presence in the United States can result in up to a 10-year ban from re-entering the country. For the purpose of this regulation, you are unlawfully present when an immigration judge or USCIS officer determines that a status violation has occurred.

Reinstatement

If you discover that you have violated one of the F-1 visa rules, contact a DSO immediately. Reinstatement is not guaranteed for all international students – certain violations of these immigration laws may make you ineligible for reinstatement. If your Form I-20 is terminated and you wish to file for reinstatement, see a DSO immediately.

Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS)

SEVIS is the database the government uses to track and record information on international students and exchange visitors who are in the U.S. on F or J visas. All F-1, F-2, J-1, and J-2 visa holders have a permanent SEVIS ID number. All actions taken by a DSO, the US Consulate issuing the initial visa, and immigration inspector at the point of entry, are recorded in the individual's SEVIS record.

Department of Homeland Security

The Department of Homeland Security has 22 different agencies and government organizations, all under the same department. The primary objective of the DHS is to protect the United States and enhance public service. There are three major Bureaus that you need to know about.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)

ICE is a federal law enforcement agency under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, responsible for enforcing immigration and customs laws. The primary functions of ICE are: customs investigations, customs air and marine interdiction, immigration and customs intelligence, and detention and removal.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)

As a single unified border agency, CBP is responsible for border patrol, customs service, and immigration inspection at the points of entry in the United States. When you enter the U.S., your first contact will be with a representative from this agency.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)

Most determinations of immigrant and non-immigrant benefits will be done by USCIS either at the local USCIS Office or by mailing applications to the USCIS Service Center. As a student, you might be filing an application for a change of status, Optional Practical Training (OPT), or reinstatement for example.

F-1 Visa Rules and Regulations

The following information is meant to make you aware of your rights and responsibilities as an international student. It is not meant to be a complete listing of all government regulations as they pertain to you.

The United States immigration law classifies international students in the U.S. as temporary non-immigration aliens (“aliens” means any person not a citizen or national of the United States). As an international student, you are in the United States on a non-immigrant visa.

Important Rules to Follow for Maintaining Active F-1 Status

The federal government considers you, the student, 100% responsible for maintaining ACTIVE STATUS. Being out of status can have serious consequences for your academic plans and ability to remain in the U.S. Please be aware of some of the most important rules you must follow:

- **Keep your passport valid.** Your passport must be valid for a minimum of 6 months into the future. You should carry your passport with you at all times.
- **Keep a copy of your Form I-20 with you at all times.** (suggestion: electronic copy, picture on your phone)
- **Maintain full-time enrollment and normal progress toward your degree.** You must be enrolled in a minimum of 12 credits for fall and spring semesters. (A minimum of 9 credits must be in-person classes.)

- **Do not withdraw from any of your courses.** Even if a professor or advisor suggests it, speak with one of the DSOs first before withdrawing from any class. Falling below 12 credits can jeopardize your active status.
- **Do not work off campus.** International Students are not authorized to work off campus in any capacity.
- **Limit any on-campus employment to 20 hours per week while school is in session.** If job opportunities are available, you are allowed to work a maximum of 20 hours per week. Full-time on-campus employment is only permitted during vacation periods, such as summer, as long as you are enrolled full-time the semester before and intend to be full-time the following semester.
- **Follow the F-1 reporting requirements** for any changes. Report all changed to a DSO or international@qcc.mass.edu
- **Attend the school you are authorized to attend.** Unauthorized attendance of another institution is a violation of your F-1 visa.
- **Complete all graduation requirements prior to the end of your authorized period.** Contact a DSO if you need an extension to your end date.

With the latest changes in immigration regulations, it has become increasingly important that you maintain your status! Being out of status can have serious consequences for your academic plans and ability to remain in the U.S. Government rules and regulations are subject to change. It is your responsibility to stay updated and informed. When in doubt, contact a DSO. You should carry a copy of your Form I-20 and your passport on you at all times.

Dependents

Your spouse and/or children may enter the U.S. on an F-2 visa provided you show evidence of additional financial support.

- A person on an F-2 visa may NOT be employed under any circumstances.
- Each dependent will receive their own Form I-20.
- Spouses are NOT allowed to take classes in a degree program. They can take a certificate and study part-time (eight credits or less).
- F-2 dependents are allowed to study part-time. They cannot be enrolled in a major program.
- Children are allowed to study full-time up to twelfth grade. Once a child reaches 21, they must apply for their own F-1 visa and Form I-20.

Illness or Medical Conditions

If you have an illness or other medical condition, it may be possible to interrupt or reduce a full course of study and still be considered in status. You must immediately notify a DSO, and you must have a doctor or licensed clinician explain the need for a less than full-time course load and submit a Medical Excuse Form signed by the healthcare provider. This privilege can only be granted for up to 12 months, and you must resume a full course of study upon recovery.

Academic Regulations

F-1 students must be enrolled full-time during the entire academic year to maintain their international student status. Full-time enrollment is 12 or more credits for each academic semester. Nine of the 12 required credits must be in-person classes.

In your final semester of study, you may enroll in less than full-time credit hours if those are the only credit hours you need to graduate. You will still be considered a full-time student for immigration purposes. Please contact a DSO to approve your request to drop below full-time enrollment. If you fail to maintain full-time status, immediately contact a DSO.

After you graduate, you have 60 days to prepare travel back to your home country.

Failing & Dropping a Class

Q: What happens if I fail a class?

A: If you fail a class, even though you might not earn the credit towards graduation, you are still considered to be a full-time student for the purpose of maintaining your F-1 status.

Q: What happens if I drop a class?

A: Do not drop any class, even if suggested by an advisor or professor, without first speaking with a DSO. Dropping a class can cause you to fall under 12 credits. This can put you out of status.

With the latest changes in immigration regulations, it has become increasingly important that you maintain your status! Being out of status can have serious consequences

for your academic plans and ability to remain in the U.S. Government rules and regulations are subject to change. It is your responsibility to stay updated and informed. When in doubt, contact a DSO. You should carry a copy of your Form I-20 and your passport on you at all times.

Changes in Study or Degree

If you are planning to change classes, change majors, or finish one degree and start another, you must report these changes to a DSO.

At that time, a DSO will issue you a new Form I-20 which will be sent to USCIS.

Program Extension

If you are unable to complete your program of studies by the end date listed on Page 1 of your Form I-20, you must see a DSO. Extensions are only granted due to academic or medical reasons, (such as change of major or documented illness). If you don't apply for and receive a program extension, your Form I-20 will be automatically completed in the SEVIS system upon the end date and will not be eligible for Optional Practical Training (OPT). Under these circumstances you **must** contact a DSO.

Please note that not successfully passing courses is NOT an acceptable reason for a program extension under the USCIS rules.

Transfer

If you are considering transferring to another university in the U.S., you need to inform a DSO once you have decided to transfer. QCC and your new institution will work together to

transfer your Form I-20. You are eligible to transfer to another school if:

- You are in good F-1 status.
- You have been pursuing a full course of study at the school you were last authorized to attend during the semester immediately preceding the transfer.
- You intend to pursue a full course of study at the new school.
- You are financially able to attend the proposed institution.

You must complete a Transfer Release Form and submit it along with your acceptance letter from the college you will be attending. A DSO at your new school will create your new Form I-20. **A transfer request can only be made to transfer to one school.**

Concurrent Enrollment

Concurrent enrollment is when a student is approved to study at more than one college under their F-1 visa. This is not a common situation. Please contact a DSO with any questions about this.

Summer Vacation

During the summer, you can still stay in the U.S. You are considered to be in status if you are eligible and intend to register for the next semester. International students can take optional summer classes, as long as it is not their first semester at the school. International students can also work on campus full time during summer vacation, if jobs are available.

Leaving the U.S. Temporarily and Re-Entering

We recommend that any F-1 student who may be planning to travel outside of the U.S. consult with an immigration lawyer regarding concerns of re-entry.

If you are returning to the U.S. from a temporary absence of fewer than five months, you may be re-admitted to the U.S. upon producing a properly endorsed Form I-20.

- **You must alert an International Student DSO before leaving to get your leave of absence approved.**
- **You must have at least 6 months left on your F-1 visa and your Form I-20 must be current to re-enter the U.S.**

F-1 visa holders need the following documents to re-enter the U.S. after a temporary absence:

- A valid Form I-20 endorsed by an International Student DSO.
- Valid passport and U.S. visa.
- Verification of adequate financial support.
- We recommend you carry with you a copy of your transcript or current class schedule.

F-1 Travel

We recommend that any F-1 students who may be planning to travel outside of the U.S consult with an immigration lawyer regarding concerns of re-entry.

If you wish to travel outside of the U.S., you should be in possession of the following documents:

- A passport valid for 6 months beyond date of re-entry and visa for re-entry into the U.S. If you have completed a change of status within the U.S., you will need to go to your home country consular office to obtain a new, valid visa. Please see the next section on visa revalidation.
- Form I-94
- Sufficient funds for the duration of your stay outside of the U.S., particularly if you're traveling to a third country.
- An original SEVIS Form I-20 or a properly endorsed page three of a Form I-20 recently signed by a DSO.
- Depending on the country you are traveling to, you may be required to obtain an entry visa. Visas may be obtained through consular offices located in Boston and New York City.
- The financial support documents you provided to the college for your Form I-20 qualification.

The following documents may not be required, but they should be accessible upon request.

- Proof of full-time registration in a major program.
- A Letter of support from a DSO.

F-2 Travel

A person with an F-2 visa traveling with or without their F-1 dependent needs the following documents:

- The Form I-20, which is endorsed and shows their name and other information.

- Page three of the Form I-20 (dependents entering the U.S.) must be signed by a DSO.
- A valid F-2 visa.
- A passport valid for a minimum of six months from date of re-entry
- Evidence of current financial support.
- Copies of the F-2 holders I-94 card and visa.

Visa Revalidation & Renewal

To re-enter the U.S., you must be in possession of a valid F-1 visa stamp on your passport. If your visa has expired and you need to re-enter, or have been absent for more than five months, you must apply for a new visa.

While it is possible for you to secure a renewal in a foreign country other than your country of citizenship, you may face more strict requirements than those imposed by U.S. consular officials in your home country. In many instances, the consular official will deny these applications. You should be aware that if your visa application is denied, you will not be able to return to the U.S. You are advised to return to your home country for visa renewals.

The documents needed for revalidation include:

- A valid passport.
- A valid Form I-20 or an endorsed page three of a Form I-20.
- Evidence of current financial support.
- At the discretion of a consular official, further documentation may be required, such as Form I-539, if you have completed a change of status.

F-1 Visa Employment

The basic requirement for all types of employment is that you must maintain lawful F-1 status. Employment is defined as work performed or services provided in exchange for money, tuition, fees, books, room and/or board, or any other benefit. **F-1 students should NOT work off-campus without speaking to a DSO and gaining work authorization.**

A Note of Caution;

Working improperly or without authorization is a **serious violation** of your status. Due to several tracking systems established in the U.S., the USCIS can easily trace illegal employment. A record of illegal employment will not only cause you to immediately lose your status, but it may lead to deportation and being barred from re-entering the U.S. for up to 10 years. Therefore, it is important that you carefully follow the rules of F-1 student employment.

Types of Employment

There are five possible ways you can be legitimately employed, according to USCIS regulations. Under specified conditions, you can be employed in the following ways:

- On-campus.
- Summer and winter break employment.
- Off-campus employment based on severe economic hardship.
- Off-campus by being granted Curricular Practical Training (CPT).
- Off-campus by being granted Optional Practical Training (OPT).

On-Campus Employment

When you are issued a Form I-20 by a specific school, you may work on that campus up to a maximum of 20 hours per week when school is in session. During the summer and holidays, you can work up to 40 hours per week.

If you have been issued a Form I-20 to begin a new program and intend to enroll for the next regular academic year, term or session at that school, you may work on campus up to 30 days before your classes begin.

If you exceed 20 hours of work per week, you will automatically fall out of status and be terminated in the SEVIS system. It is your responsibility to keep track of your hours. For this reason, you should not allow anyone else to sign off on your timecard for you (this includes your supervisor). If you fall out of status or are waiting for a pending change of status to F-1, you are not eligible to work on campus until USCIS reinstates you. *You may not engage in on-campus employment after completing a course of study.*

Summer and Winter Break Employment

After completing your first semester, you may seek employment during semester breaks. You may work up to 40 hours per week and must follow the rules above for on-campus employment.

Off-Campus Employment

You cannot work off campus as an international student. This will put you in terminated status. The only potential option for off-campus work is through the Optional Practical Training (OPT) or Curricular Practical Training programs (CPT). You must see a DSO before applying.

Off Campus-Employment Based on Severe Economic Hardship

If you are experiencing severe economic hardship based on unforeseen circumstances beyond your control, you may be eligible to apply for Employment Authorization from USCIS. You must see a DSO before applying.

Employment Eligibility Verification

When you begin work, you and your employer must complete a form entitled “Employment Eligibility Verification” (USCIS Form I-9), which the employer retains. The I-9 must be updated each time you receive a renewal of your work permission. Your Form I-20 will have an employment authorization on page three. If you are working on campus, this is handled at our Human Resources department.

Social Security Card

If you receive a job offer, please bring that letter or email to a DSO before accepting. Once you have accepted a job offer, please let us know, and a DSO will issue you a letter explaining you are in status and have a job. You will need this letter in order to get your social security card, which you need to be able to earn money. You will then take this letter, along with your Form I-20, Form I-94 and passport, to the Social Security Office at 51 Myrtle St, in Worcester. The 30, 31, and 14 bus lines can take you to the Social Security Office.

Social Security and Other Taxes

In general, F-1 students who have been in the U.S. fewer than five years are exempt from Social Security (F.I.C.A) taxes. Your wages, however, are subject to applicable federal, state, and local taxes. Students must file a tax return on or before April 15th each year, which will determine if any of the withheld taxes can be refunded. An F-1 student on curricular practical training does not need Social Security and Medicare taxes withheld from their salary.

Practical Training

Practical training can be defined as approved off-campus employment for the purposes of your degree program, or post program related work. There are two types of practical training available to you, Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT). If you have any questions about one of these training programs, please contact a DSO.

Remember, the federal government considers you, the student, 100% responsible for maintaining ACTIVE STATUS.

With the latest changes in immigration regulations, it has become increasingly important that you maintain your status! Being out of status can have serious consequences for your academic plans and ability to remain in the U.S. Government rules and regulations are subject to change. It is your responsibility to stay updated and informed. When in doubt, contact a DSO. You should keep a copy of your Form I-20 and your passport on you at all times.

The International Student Organization

The International Student Organization (ISO) is a support organization built by international students, for international students. They have a focus on the cultural changes you may experience as a new international student. They bridge the knowledge gap by providing real-life experience and help to make your transition smoother. Here is their mission statement:

“The ISO is where **international students find clarity, direction, and support**. Whether you're dealing with immigration questions, struggling to register for classes, or just trying to find where you belong—this is your home base.

We offer **experience-driven advice** that speaks to your real-life challenges. But we don't stop there—we also connect you to the **right people and resources at QCC**, so you're not just informed, you're empowered. We have also developed a 5-part model shaped by real-life experiences to guide you toward meaningful student success. It is designed to build community and offer support in areas that can be challenging to navigate alone.”

The club meets throughout the year, so keep an eye out for meetings or contact the ISO.

For more information about the ISO, see a DSO or send an email to QuinsigISO@gmail.com.



QCC INTERNATIONAL STUDENT HANDBOOK

Contact information:

international@qcc.mass.edu

508.853.2300

QCC.edu/int



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Community College