



How to Maintain Legal Student Status in the United States

If you follow the guidelines below, you should have few problems maintaining your F-1 or J-1 status. If you are an F-1 student, you should also read the "Instructions to Students" printed on page 2 of your I-20. Designated School Official (DSO) can provide guidance, but ultimately it is your responsibility to make sure that you meet all the requirements for maintaining your status.

1. Keep your passport valid.

At least 6 months prior to the expiration of your passport, contact the Consulate or Embassy of your country in the US for renewal procedures. A list of embassies in the US is available at: <http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/fco>. If your passport is lost or stolen immediately contact the Embassy or Consulate of your country, and notify the Designated School Official.

2. Maintain fulltime enrollment and normal fulltime progress toward your degree.

The measure of *normal progress* is the rate at which the average fulltime student in your department advances toward his or her degree or certificate objective. Full-time enrollment for international students at Claremont School of Theology is defined as 8 units per semester. Doctoral students enrolled in Dissertation Research or Doctoral Continuous Registration (after all coursework is completed) are considered to be enrolled full-time for 3 years. Working to complete exams, projects, or courses designated as incomplete from previous semesters is not maintaining normal progress. If you find yourself in this situation, contact the Designated School Official to discuss your options.

3. Accept no employment of any kind, either on or off campus, without first contacting the Designated School Official.

Working without proper authorization is considered by the US Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) to be the most serious violation of its regulations. If you refer to your form I-20 or I-94 you will see the statement "Warning—a nonimmigrant who accepts unauthorized employment is subject to deportation." It is most important, therefore, that you consult with the DSO before you accept an offer of employment or begin to work. Please bear in mind that it is illegal to begin to work in anticipation of being granted permission to do so; you must have permission first. Students in F-1 or J-1 status who are authorized to work are permitted to work a *maximum* of 20 hours per week during the academic term.

4. Have health insurance at all times.

CST requires all its international students to maintain adequate health insurance throughout the duration of their visa status. US government regulations require those in J status to also have insurance for their dependents. If you do not have insurance at the time of registration, you will automatically be charged for the school plan. Information about this plan is available from the Business Office.

5. Do not accept assistance which can cause you to be designated a "Public Charge."

International students and scholars should not, under any circumstance, accept public benefits from the federal, state, county or any other local government agencies in the United States. This includes, but is not limited to, participation in programs such as Medicare/Medicaid, Supplemental Social Security Income, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, food stamps, and subsidized housing. Accepting such benefits can cause you to lose your legal status in the United States and create a bar to your re-entry to this country.

Cooperation between state social service agencies and the USCIS and Department of State makes it possible for a USCIS inspector or U.S. Consular officer to become aware of an individual who has accepted public benefits. The acceptance of public benefits is interpreted as a declaration that the individual is unable to meet his/her financial obligations (a requirement of obtaining and maintaining status) and

thereby rendering himself/herself ineligible for F-1 or J-1 status.

Occasionally a well-meaning social service agency, hospital or public housing administrator may offer such assistance not realizing that non-immigrants are ineligible for such benefits. Additionally, even though U.S. citizen children of non-immigrant parents may be eligible for pre and post-natal public benefits, the non-immigrant parent may be denied a visa or re-entry based on the child's receiving the benefits. Again this is interpreted as the non-immigrant individual not being able to meet his or her financial obligations.

A condition of maintaining non-immigrant F-1 or J-1 status is that you, in addition to meeting your educational expenses, are able to provide shelter, food, clothing and health care for you and your dependents. Please contact the Designated School Official if you have questions or need assistance in meeting your financial obligations.

6. If you move, notify Designated School Official within ten days.

The USCIS requires that all student SEVIS records include valid foreign and local addresses. The local address must be the student's physical address, not a Post Office box.

7. Obtain extensions, as needed, of your permission to stay in the United States.

The USCIS imposes severe penalties for overstaying one's immigration status in the United States. Depending on the length of the overstay, one can be barred from entering the United States for up to 10 years.

Should you require additional time to complete your program, for valid academic reasons, beyond the completion date on your I-20 or DS-2019, contact the DSO at least 60 days before the expiration date to discuss your program extension.

To continue at CST in a different academic level (e.g. masters to PhD), you must also apply for an extension. You must verify your admission to the new program and your ability to finance the program. The DSO will issue a new I-20 indicating your change in academic program.

8. Once you have completed your studies—and practical or academic training, if authorized—you must leave the United States or change to another immigration status within the appropriate time allowed.

If you are in F-1 student immigration status, you are allowed to stay in the United States for 60 days beyond the completion date. Those in J-1 status are allowed to stay for 30 days after the completion of their programs. In view of the serious repercussions for overstaying, it is essential that you do not let your visa certificate (I-20 or DS-2019) expire while you are continuing your academic program nor that you remain in the U.S. beyond your duration of status.