

# **CHANGE OF STATUS TO F-1**

# OVERVIEW

Persons entering the U.S. with a nonimmigrant visa that does not allow for study, and are accepted to study at the University of Houston may need to change to a F-1 visa. Students who are studying at the university with another visa, e.g. H-4 or F-2, may also choose to change status to F-1. There are two ways to change to F-1 status:

# Option 1: Travel and Re-entry to the U.S.

## Prior to traveling:

- Assemble the financial documents as outlined on the checklist found at this link: [<https://uh.edu/oisss/students/change-status/>];
- Make an appointment with an ISSSO Counselor to request an Initial Form I-20 and submit the financial documents;
- When you receive Form I-20, pay the SEVIS fee [[www.fmjfee.com](http://www.fmjfee.com)]
- Schedule the visa interview at U.S. Consulate [process may take 6 months];
- Travel out of the U.S. and appear for interview

## Traveling:

Apply at a U.S. consulate for the F-1 visa; then re-enter in the F-1 visa classification.

*[Canadians do not need a visa to enter the U.S., and would only need to pay the SEVIS fee and apply at the port of entry for admission].*

You will gain your F-1 status when you are admitted into the U.S.

# Re-entry with F-1 Visa:

- You may only enter the U.S. within 30 days prior to your program's start date as indicated on the Form I-20;
- You must report to ISSS immediately upon your return to the U.S.;
- You must enroll in a full course load\* from the program start date indicated on the Form I-20.

\*  
[<https://uh.edu/oisss/resources/forms/maintaining-f-1-status.pdf>]

**Option 2:  
Filing an I-539 with USCIS  
(Change of Status Application)  
[COS]**

## Filing with USCIS

- It may take up to 120 days or more for USCIS to adjudicate your application.
- If you use this option, the next time you travel out of the U.S., you will need to go to a U.S. consulate, apply for, and obtain the F-1 visa stamp in your passport before re-entering the U.S.



## **Note:**

***If you are a child in a dependent visa classification (e.g., F-2, H-4, L-2, R-2, etc.), you must change your status before you turn 21 years of age. A-1 & A-2 dependents should confer with their consulate and the U.S. Department of State to determine the age at which they need to change status. Other changes in status (e.g. F-1 to F-2 may require additional documentation not listed below. This can be discussed with an International Student Counselor (ISSS) during an appointment.***

# ELIGIBILITY

## **You may be able to change status to F-1, if:**

- You are maintaining your current status;
- Your current status must remain valid to within 30 days of the requested program start date on the I-20;
- You are eligible for the F-1 status.

## **You generally cannot change status, if:**

- Your period of authorized stay has already expired;
- You have otherwise violated the conditions of stay.

# Not Eligible for Filing in the U.S.

The following nonimmigrants are not permitted to change status to F-1 in the United States:

- \*M-1 students
- \*C, D, K, and S nonimmigrants
- \*J-1 physicians admitted to receive graduate medical education or training
- \*J nonimmigrants subject to the 212(e) 2-year foreign residence requirement
- \*Aliens admitted as visitors under 8 C.F.R. § 212.1(e)
- \*WT and WB visitors admitted under the Visa Waiver Program.

# APPLICATION PROCEDURES

1. Assemble the document from the Checklist at this link:  
<https://uh.edu/oisss/students/change-status/>
2. Make an appointment with a Counselor at ISSS to review your documents and to request the Form I-20
3. Submit your application to USCIS by mailing the application to the address provided by the ISSS Counselor or found on the website: [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov)

# APPLICATION PROCEDURES

## USCIS Dallas Lockbox Facility Mailing Address

### For U.S. Postal Service

USCIS  
P.O. Box 660166  
Dallas, TX 75266

### For Express Mail and Courier Deliveries

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

To verify the mailing address check the [USCIS website](#) prior to mailing your application.

# Processing Timeline

Processing time varies, so be prepared to wait three to six months to learn the outcome of your application. To review current processing times and your pending case status, visit the [USCIS Case Status Service Online](#). Keep in touch with your Counselor.

# Decision of USCIS

## Approval or denial:

USCIS will notify you of its decision using Form I-797 Notice of Action. The I-797 is an important document and should be kept with your passport and I-94 record. The approval or denial notice will be mailed to the address listed on Form I-539 in your application. Note that if you change your address, the postal service will not forward mail sent to you by USCIS. Please provide your ISSS Counselor, promptly with a copy of your I-797/Notice of Action and Approval Notice.

## Travel Outside the U.S. After COS:

In order to re-enter the U.S. after traveling abroad (except for brief trips to Canada or Mexico under 30 days), you must visit a U.S. consulate to request a new visa, referred to as a visa stamping, to match your new F-1 status. Make an appointment with an ISSS Counselor before traveling outside the U.S.



# Reminder

## Option 1: Travel and Re-entry

You must notify the advisor if you can not re-enter the U.S. by the program start date indicated on the I-20

## Option 2: Filing an I-539 with USCIS

You must notify the advisor if your application is still pending by the program start date indicated on the I-20

Any Questions?  
Be sure to ask the ISSSO  
Counselor during your  
appointment