

# **XIII. ADVISING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ON AN F-1 VISA**

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## Advising International Students on an F-1 Visa

The primary category of international students that Messiah College accepts is students who are citizens of a country other than the U.S. and have been admitted entry into the United States on an F-1 Visa. These students have particular precautions that they need to take in order to remain in compliance with their visas.

### Commonly Used Terms

**I-20:** Certificate of Eligibility for Non-immigrant (F-1) Student Status, issued by Messiah College and other approved institutions. The form contains information such as student's major, program start and end dates and student's financial information.

**F-1 Visa:** An entry permit issued by a U.S. embassy/consulate abroad for students who wish to enter the U.S. for the purpose of pursuing full-time studies.

**DSO:** This stands for Designated School Official. A DSO is a regular employee of the college approved by the Department of Homeland Security to access SEVIS. A DSO is responsible for issuing I-20s; approving - reduced course load, internship and other work authorization; and reporting and updating student's information in SEVIS. A DSO is also the one who can endorse a student's I-20 for travel.

**Maintaining Status:** This means the students are complying with immigration regulations pertaining to their F-1 student status. Students are considered to be "in status" or maintaining status if they are complying with the regulations. If they are in violation of their status they are considered to be "out of status" and therefore, ineligible for certain benefits of their status.

**SEVIS:** The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System is an internet-based automated system that maintains current information on non-immigrant students and scholars. Schools must report information on students and scholars in SEVIS, which is accessible the government.

## Advising Issues that Impact F-1 Students

### Change of Major

If an F-1 international student changes a major or adds a major they must inform the Intercultural Office, as the student needs to obtain a new I-20 to reflect their current degree programs.

### Extension of Program

A student who is unable to complete his or her studies by the end date indicated on his or her I-20 must apply for an extension prior to the expiration of their I-20. *A delay caused by academic probation or suspension is not an acceptable reason for extension.*

### Full-Time Enrollment

F-1 international students are required to study full-time each term by enrolling in and completing a **minimum of 12 credit hours** each semester. \*

### **Internship for F-1 Students and Curricular Practical Training (CPT):**

F-1 international students who wish to do an internship or practicum **MUST** apply for Curricular Practical Training (CPT). CPT is granted for an internship or practicum that is directly related to the student's degree program. This includes student teaching, paid and unpaid internships. To be eligible for CPT an F-1 student must:

- Have been enrolled full-time for at least one full academic year
- Be maintaining legal F-1 immigration status
- Work with the Intercultural Office to properly apply for CPT
- Register for academic credit in order to be authorized to do the internship
  - If the internship/practicum is not required for their major, they must enroll in the internship class offered by the Career and Professional Development Center.
- Have an internship job offer

### **Online Courses**

F-1 international students are required to take most of their classes in a traditional classroom setting. Only 3 online credits hours per semester or term will be counted towards full-time enrollment. Students who are taking overload courses may take more than 3 credits hours of online classes. *If a student only needs one course to complete his or her degree program, that course **cannot** be taken online.*

For more information, please contact the Intercultural Office:

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*\*Under certain academic or medical circumstances, international students on F-1 status may receive authorization from the Intercultural Office for a Reduced Course Load (RCL), which gives them permission to enroll in less than 12 credits.*