

# INTERNATIONAL STUDENT AND SCHOLAR OFFICE

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The ISSO provides services and programs for several hundred international students, scholars, and non-immigrant faculty from about 75 nations. Approximately 75 percent of international students are here for two to five years, working on undergraduate or graduate degrees. The ISSO provides the following programs and services:

- Issuance of documents and guidance on legal matters which make possible the enrollment of non-immigrant students.
- Advising services necessary for international students to maintain legal status while in the United States, ensuring they understand applicable federal government regulations and university policies.
- Design and presentation of programs to assist international students in their transition to life in the United States and the American academic environment.
- Advising for students regarding personal, academic, legal, career, intercultural communication and cross-cultural adjustment issues.
- Serving as liaison to government agencies and university offices.
- Coordination of programs and ongoing services to enhance international students' social lives, encourage their interaction with Americans, promote ways for them to become involved and appreciated for their unique cultural perspectives.

## Summary of Special Immigration Regulations for Students in F-1 Visa Status

- a. Report any change of local or foreign address to the U.S. government's SEVIS (electronic information system) by editing addresses in TU's Online Services within 10 days of any move.
- b. Enroll at the school which issued the active SEVIS record Form I-20.
- c. Attend a full course of study each semester during the entire academic year. At Towson University this means:
  - i. a minimum of 12 units for undergraduate students
  - ii. a minimum of 9 graduate-level units for master's students
  - iii. a minimum of 6 graduate-level units for doctoral students
  - iv. a minimum of 18 contact hours for English Language Center students
  - v. credits received from CLEP, Languages, Literatures and Cultures Department Credit for Prior Learning Exams, or other proficiency exams do not count toward the full-time attendance requirement minimum
  - vi. students must both **register for** and **attend** classes for the **entire** term
  - vii. a W (withdrawal) for a course means that course cannot count toward the minimum
  - viii. receiving a grade of FX means that the student never attended class, or stopped attending during the term without officially withdrawing; therefore, an FX grade cannot count toward the minimum
  - ix. units taken on an Audit basis do not count toward the minimum

- d. Under extremely limited circumstances, an international student may obtain an exception to the Full Course of Study requirement. Any possible exception must be discussed and approved **in advance** by a Designated School Official (DSO), per federal Immigration regulations. TU's DSOs are the international student advisers at the ISSO.
- e. Make satisfactory academic progress.
- f. Complete the degree or program by the date indicated on the Form I-20. If students are not able to complete the program by that date due to valid academic or medical reasons, they must apply at the ISSO for an F-1 Program Extension **before** the I-20 expires.
- g. For a transfer to another academic institution, special immigration status transfer regulations must be followed.
- h. Have an unexpired passport at all times, valid for at least 6 months into the future.
  - i. Limit employment to a total (all jobs) of 20 hours per week while school is in session. F-1 students are allowed to work full-time in authorized employment at times when school is not in session, i.e., during the summer, winter, and spring breaks.
  - j. Receive written authorization for any and all off-campus employment, via the ISSO.
  - k. Complete special U.S. tax forms each year, even if no U.S. income was received.
  - l. When nearing the end of the degree or program, or within 60 days of completion, these are the only options:
    - i. obtain a new Form I-20 for a new institution or program, and attend the new school/program's next available term within 5 months of the current program completion date
    - ii. apply to change to another immigration status
    - iii. apply for optional practical training work permission
    - iv. depart the U.S.
  - m. Depart the U.S. within 15 days if student withdraws or takes a leave of absence before degree completion.

The ISSO provides the necessary immigration-related information and assistance to students, but it is the **student**, not TU, who is ultimately responsible for maintaining legal F-1 student status. F-1 students should contact an ISSO adviser if they have difficulty meeting any of these requirements **before** they have a problem. The ISSO is here to assist students in reviewing options and making wise decisions. The ISSO staff do **not** work for the Department of Homeland Security or the federal government but are employees of TU who want international students to be successful.

*The ISSO staff is available Monday through Friday from 8:00 am. to 5:00 pm. Any student who has an emergency outside of normal business hours may contact Towson University Police at 410-704-2133. The police may assist or may contact an ISSO staff member at home.*