

# 2015/2016

## International Student Handbook

*Welcome to SFAI!* SFAI's Global Programs Office is your resource to navigate rules and regulations related to international student immigration status. We are here to support academic, artistic and personal success throughout your SFAI experience and beyond. We are excited to welcome you to our thriving cultural community at SFAI. We currently host over 140 international students from 35 countries!

Please contact the Global Programs Office with questions about any aspect of SFAI student life. The Global Programs Office is located in the Student Affairs Office at 800 Chestnut Street, San Francisco, CA 94133.

Global Programs Office Hours: Monday - Friday, 9 am - 5 pm

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PDSO (Primary Designated School Official)  
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Events will be held throughout the academic year to encourage and support multi-cultural understanding, experiences and opportunities. We encourage students to present ideas for forums and host discussions at SFAI. Some options: student organizations, clubs, luncheons, film screenings, language exchanges, and art shows. Suggestions are always welcome. Please talk with us about new ideas!

### **F-1 Rights and Responsibilities**

F-1 visa status international students must follow U.S. government immigration regulations to maintain legal international student status. The following set of rules and regulations is a guide to understand what is required to maintain international student status at SFAI.

### **What is SEVIS?**

SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) is the U.S. immigration database for monitoring and tracking international students. All information changes to F-1 student visa holder immigration records will be entered and administrated through the SEVIS system by SFAI's Designated School Officials (DSO).

Jill Tolfa, Global Programs Advisor, Primary Designated School Official (PDSO)

### **US Government Agencies**

There are several U.S. government agencies responsible for maintenance of student visa status. The U.S. government "Study in the States" website is the aggregate information resource for all agencies involved in

international student regulations and policy administration. It is the best resource for anything related to international student status. Please bookmark this page:

<http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students>

#### *Department of State (DoS)*

Primary diplomatic branch of the Federal Government responsible for all overseas embassies and consulates. This branch issues visas to enter the United States. For information about travel guidelines, visa application and renewals:

<http://www.travel.state.gov>

#### *Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE)*

This agency supervises Immigration and Customs border agents at every United States Point of Entry. A visa does not guarantee entry in to United States; rather, border patrol officials will make the final determination allowing entry into the United States. This agency maintains SEVIS, the government database and tracking system for international students. For information about maintaining status, benefits and responsibilities:

<http://www.ice.gov/sevis/students>

#### *Department of Homeland Security (DHS), United States Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS)*

USCIS governs student status while in the United States, approves or denies employment authorization/practical training requests, requests for reinstatement of student status after violation, changes of status from one visa classification to another (example: H-4 visa status to F-1 student visa status), as well as managing other benefits of F-1 status. For information related to government regulations for international students:

<http://www.uscis.gov>

### **Maintaining Status**

NEVER THROW DOCUMENTS AWAY. Future U.S. immigration applications may require documents from any past stay in the United States. For example, if applying for a work visa 20 years from now, the consular officer may ask for old I-20 forms or other documents from a previous stay as an F-1 student visa holder. Please keep everything in one place and have a back-up copy of all immigration documents.

### **Important Documents**

- Passport
- F-1 Visa
- I-20
- I-94 (Admission Number)

## **Passport**

A passport is permission from your country of citizenship to travel abroad, as well as a request for other countries to allow you to enter. Passport must be current and valid for at least six months into the future at all times. Do not allow your passport to expire while in the United States.

### **Passport Renewal**

If expiration date is approaching, contact your country of origin's consulate or embassy and make arrangements to extend or renew. Students with an expired passport that contains a valid visa are allowed to use the visa in the old expired passport. The old expired passport with visa stamp and new valid passport will both be required when traveling to re-enter the United States.

## **Visa**

A visa confirms authorization to enter a country. Many requirements must be satisfied before obtaining a visa to enter the United States. An F-1 student visa is a non-immigrant visa type. This means the applicant does not intend to immigrate to the United States and will depart upon completion of studies (or upon completion of Optional Practical Training).

Students are legally authorized to remain in the United States with an expired F-1 visa, as long all other immigration documents are valid and good visa status is maintained. If departing the United States, a valid visa will be required to re-enter.

### **Visa Renewal**

Visas cannot be renewed inside the United States. The U.S. Department of State recommends students submit a visa application in the home country of citizenship. Please consult with the individual U.S. Consulate or Embassy where the application will be submitted for specific documents and process requirements. The Global Programs Office can provide a "Visa Renewal Support Letter" confirming international student status and enrollment at SFAI. Please plan ahead to make visa renewal arrangements.

## **I-20**

The I-20 form is the official document granting permission for students to legally stay in the United States. The I-20 is necessary to obtain a visa, but it also official authorization to be present in the United States. This is known as *Duration of Status*, meaning you may stay in the United Status as long as you are officially a student and maintaining good F-1 status.

### **I-20, Section 5 - Program End Date**

Please be aware of the expiration date in Section 5 of the I-20. The program end date is how much time an average student will need to complete degree requirements. If you are not able to complete your degree before the program end date, contact the Global Programs Advisor to request a program extension.

### **I-20, Page 3 – Travel Endorsement Signature**

If traveling outside the United States, a valid travel endorsement signature is required for re-entry. An SFAI Designated School Official must sign the third page of the I-20 document to confirm student is

maintaining status. The form indicates the signature is valid for 1 year; however SFAI requires this signature be no more than 3 months old at the time of travel. Please contact the Global Programs Advisor whenever you have plans to travel outside the United States.

**Do not lose your I-20.** Please contact the Global Programs Office immediately to request a new I-20 in case of theft or loss.

### **Admission (I-94) Number**

The Admission Number issued to you during the I-94 process documents your arrival through the United States Port of Entry. Upon granting admission to the United States, the CBP officer will stamp your passport (usually near the visa page) and must write “F-1, D/S” on the entry stamp. This confirms your I-94 is valid for an “F-1” visa holder for “Duration of Status.” Please point this out to the CBP officer if it is not on your entry stamp. Please retrieve and print your I-94 electronic document here:

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

Keep your I-94 document with the rest of your immigration documents. If there are any errors in this process, please contact the Global Programs Office immediately to help correct the situation.

### **Current Address**

F-1 students are required to notify the Global Programs Office within 10 days of moving or changing address. SEVIS will be updated with new address information, thereby notifying the U.S. government of the change. Changing an address with the Registrar’s Office alone does not satisfy this requirement, so please email new address information to: [international@sfai.edu](mailto:international@sfai.edu)

### **Current Major/Minor**

F-1 students are required to notify the Global Programs Office within 10 days of changing or adding a major/minor. SEVIS will be updated and a new I-20 document issued indicating updated major. This notification is not automatically relayed from the Registrar’s Office so please inform the Global Programs Office of any academic changes to ensure your immigration documents are up to date.

### **Health Insurance**

Adequate health insurance is legally required for F-1 international students for the duration of stay in the United States. All SFAI students are required to enroll in SFAI’s Kaiser Permanente Student Health Insurance Plan, unless a waiver is requested and approved. To waive coverage, please submit a signed waiver request form with proof of comparable comprehensive coverage to the Student Affairs Office. For information about the SFAI Student Health Plan Coverage:

<http://studentnet.kp.org/sfai>

SFAI does not require international students to submit a record of their immunizations or prior medical health history.

Once you graduate from SFAI, you are no longer eligible to purchase the SFAI Student Health Insurance Plan. You will be required to purchase an alternative health insurance plan either through your employer or a private carrier.

### **Full Course of Study**

F-1 international students must be registered as full-time students during the regular academic year (Fall and Spring Semesters) to maintain visa status. Full time course load at SFAI:

- Undergraduate students – 12 units or more
- Graduate students – MFA 12 units or more; MA 12 units or more (first 2 semesters) / 9 units or more (last 2 semesters)

Dropping below 12 credit units at any time during the regular academic year will result in falling out of status. International students are not required, but may choose, to enroll in courses during summer semesters.

### **Attendance**

F-1 international students are required to maintain consistent class attendance measured by clock hours and must be in compliance with SEVP full course of study requirements: a minimum of 80% in each individual class and overall session. Attendance below the 80% requirement is a violation of F-1 visa status. Where a pattern of non-attendance is evident, SFAI is required to terminate the student SEVIS record.

### **Exceptions to the Full Course of Study Requirement**

There are specific circumstances when you may be authorized to drop below full-time enrollment. Approval must be granted by the Global Programs Office before dropping below full time enrollment. Please contact the Global Programs Office for required forms, approval and advice. You may request authorization for a reduced course load in the following circumstances:

#### **Medical**

If you have a medical condition, an official verifiable letter from a medical doctor or licensed clinical psychologist clearly stating a reduced load of classes is necessary due to a medical condition. A total of 12 months medical reduced course load is allowed while pursuing a degree program. This can be broken up in to separate instances.

#### **Complete Course of Study (Last Term)**

If it is your final semester, and you have less than 12 units to complete degree requirements, F-1 visa regulations allow for authorized reduced course load.

#### **First Term Only Reduced Course Load**

Written verification is required from Academic Advisor or Administration to document any of the following:

- Initial Language and/or Reading Difficulties: Course load may be reduced to a minimum of six credit units if difficulty with English and/or reading does not allow for academic progress.
- Unfamiliarity with U.S. Teaching Methods: Course load may be reduced to a minimum of six credit units if student is confused by U.S. academic system or classroom environment and needs more time to adjust.
- Improper Course Level Placement: Course load may be reduced to a minimum of six credit units if student was incorrectly placed in an advanced course level beyond abilities.

### **Grace Periods**

The grace period is the amount of time after degree completion F-1 visa status students are authorized to remain in the United States. This allows for additional time to make preparations to depart the United States. F-1 visa status ends upon departure from the U.S. during the grace period:

- F-1 students who complete a degree program or Optional Practical Training (OPT) have a 60-day grace period. Meaning 60 days maximum to remain in the U.S. once degree program/OPT is complete.
- F-1 students with authorization to withdraw from classes have 10 days to depart the United States after withdrawal date.
- F-1 students that withdraw from classes without prior authorization are not eligible for a grace period and must depart the United States immediately.

### **Hiatus**

Students may request to take a semester off from SFAI. Please contact the Global Programs Office to discuss your options and how this affects your F-1 visa status. If you are not attending school during Fall or Spring Semester, you will not be allowed to remain in the United States on your F-1 visa. Students on hiatus are advised to leave the United States for the duration of the leave of absence. Since F-1 students are only allowed to be outside of the U.S. for a maximum of 5 months without losing student status, student must return to the U.S. 5 months of departure. If that is not possible, a new initial status I-20 will be required and new F-1 visa will be required to reenter the United States. Please contact the Global Programs Office for forms, approvals and advice.

### **Transfer Out**

If you have gained acceptance to another school, and you have completed at least one academic semester at SFAI, you may be eligible to request a SEVIS transfer. Please notify the Global Programs Office of intent to transfer. Proof of admission, completed Transfer-Out form, and any other SFAI required documents must be submitted to the Global Programs Advisor. SFAI can then transfer your SEVIS record to the new school/campus. Any further administration of the SEVIS record will officially be managed by the new school. Once the SEVIS transfer process is complete, on-campus employment at SFAI and/or Practical Training must cease.

### **“Out of Status”**

The phrase “out of status” means there has been a violation of the rules and regulations of F-1 status and your student visa is no longer valid. The situation must be corrected to be authorized to stay in the United States. Reestablishing status is difficult and expensive.

If out of status, there are two options:

- Apply for reinstatement
- Depart the United States for more than 6 months and possibly return on a new initial status I-20

Please follow all U.S. immigration rules and regulations. It is the responsibility of the student to review and understand the requirements of maintaining status. Corrections are not guaranteed so please do not take any risks. If there is any concern or questions about being “out of status” please contact the Global Programs Office immediately.

### **Reinstatement**

Reinstatement is acknowledgement submitted to U.S. immigration authorities a violation of immigration regulations has occurred and request to be granted F-1 status and reinstate good visa status. Please be aware denial rate is high. If you are denied a reinstatement request, you must leave the U.S. immediately.

To be eligible to apply for reinstatement, you must not have been out of status for more than 5 months and the violation must have been due to something beyond your control. Reinstatement requests require an expensive, non-refundable fee. The process is lengthy, risky and you are required to return to your home country for any future visa applications.

### **Travel**

Please contact the Global Programs Office if planning to travel outside the United States. The following documents are required to re-enter the United States on F-1/J-1 visa:

- Valid Passport (must be valid for at least 6 months beyond date of re-entry to the United States)
- Valid F-1 student visa in passport (except students with Canadian Citizenship)
- Current I-20 with a valid travel endorsement signature from SFAI DSO (no more than 3 months old recommended)

### **Optional Documents:**

- Financial support documents that prove you can support yourself while in the U.S.
- Proof of full-time enrollment at SFAI

### **Important Travel Information for F2 Dependents**

If you are an F-1 student with a dependent spouse or children with F-2 status, you are not allowed to travel outside of the United States while the dependent remains in the country. If you travel internationally, your dependent *must* go with you. Conversely, a dependent *may* travel outside of the U.S. while the F-1 student remains in the United States.

Please be aware, your I-20 becomes invalid for entry if out of the United States for more than 5 months.

## Employment Options

### **On-Campus Employment**

A benefit of your F-1 student visa is that you are allowed to work on campus for up to 20 hours per week during the school year, and full-time during summer, winter, and spring breaks. Be aware that on-campus jobs are scarce, and you are not guaranteed a position. Therefore, you should not rely on the possibility of working in order to pay living expenses.

### **Unauthorized Off-Campus Employment**

You are not allowed to work off-campus without prior written authorization. This is of paramount importance since working without authorization is considered to be a very serious offense. If you are discovered to be working by Immigrations & Customs Enforcement (ICE), you will be stripped of your visa, you will be sent home immediately at your own expense, and you may be banned from the U.S. for at least ten years.

### **Authorized Off-Campus Employment**

In order to apply for any type of off-campus work authorization, you must have been an F-1 visa holder for at least one academic year and maintaining status. The only exception to this rule applies to those students who are in degree programs that require an internship or practicum hours to fulfill degree requirements.

There are four categories of off-campus employment that are available to students in F-1 status. Each of these requires the authorization from the Global Programs Office, and in most cases, requires the approval of the USCIS. These categories are:

- Employment Based on Severe Economic Hardship
- Curricular Practical Training
- Optional Practical Training

### **Employment Based on Severe Economic Hardship**

Immigration regulations allow F-1 students to work off-campus if they have been in F-1 status for one full academic year and have suffered a severe economic hardship that was beyond the student's control and occurred after obtaining F-1 status. The student must present documentation as proof of the urgent need for employment. Examples of situations that have resulted in approval by CIS have included severe devaluation of the currency of the student's home country or the country of the person providing financial support to the student, and loss of employment of the student's parents.

### **Curricular Practical Training (CPT)**

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is work authorization that allows F-1 international students to participate in paid off-campus employment/internships related to their degree program. CPT can only be authorized during an F-1 student's degree program. The purpose of CPT is academic, not just for employment purposes, and the employment/internship must be considered an integral part of an F-1



student's program of study. Students must have a specific job/internship offer to apply for CPT authorization. CPT requires the authorization of the Global Programs Advisor, and students must have completed at least one academic year in continuous F-1 status. Please contact the Global Programs Office for request forms, approval and advice.

### **CPT and OPT**

CPT does not interfere with your eligibility for Optional Practical Training (OPT) after graduation unless you have completed a total of 12 months of full-time CPT during your degree program. In this very rare case, you would then lose the option of applying for OPT.

### **Optional Practical Training (OPT)**

OPT is the most commonly known work authorization. As a benefit of your F-1 student status, you are eligible for up to 12 months of off-campus employment directly related to your degree of study. Although the vast majority of students prefer to use their OPT benefit immediately after graduation, there are other categories of OPT. All of these require the authorization of not only of the Global Programs Office, but also the USCIS Service Center. It takes a minimum of 90 – 120 days to process any OPT application request. Please contact the Global Programs Office for request forms, approval and advice. The three options of OPT are:

- Part-time Pre-Completion OPT
- Full-time Pre-Completion OPT
- Full-time Post-Completion OPT

#### **Part-time Pre-Completion OPT (Not Recommended)**

You may not work more than 20 hours a week while you are enrolled as a student and classes are in session. This option is not generally recommended. However, in some instances this may be an option. For instance, if you are certain you will be returning to your home country immediately upon graduation, you may wish to work part-time during your last year at SFAI. Be aware you will lose some or all of your Post-Completion OPT if you choose this option.

#### **Full-time Pre-Completion OPT (Not Recommended)**

You may work full-time while you are enrolled as a student during summer or winter breaks. This option is not recommended. However, if there is an employment opportunity you absolutely cannot pass up this may be an option. Please be aware you will lose a comparable amount of time from the 12 months of Post-Completion OPT available to you. For example, if a student receives Full-time Pre-Completion OPT for the three months during a summer break, only 9 months of Post-Completion OPT will be available after graduation.

#### **Full-time Post-Completion OPT (This is the only recommended OPT option!)**

This is the best option for students and the only option recommended by the Global Programs Office. OPT maximizes the authorized amount of time in the United States and

allows students to obtain the most on-the-job experience in their chosen field. Students are eligible to submit an application 90 days before graduation and choose an employment authorization start date within 60 days after the official graduation date. Post-Completion OPT authorizes employment for up to 12 months, full-time.

### **Travel While on OPT**

If you have graduated, and applied for Optional Practical Training, *but have not yet been approved*, you may travel out of the U.S. and return, provided that, along with the above documents, you also carry your Notice of Action showing your receipt number (beginning with the letters WAC) and that you have applied for OPT.

If you have graduated, and *have been approved* for OPT, in order to travel in and out of the US, you will be required to be employed, or have been offered a job, and carry a letter from that employer that states so. In addition to your passport, I-20, and the previously-mentioned letter, you will also need to present your EAD at immigrations. Your I-20 will still need to have an up to date signature on page 3 of your I-20 from your International Student Advisor, DSO.

Along with the above documents, F-1 students on OPT are also required to carry the following:

- Valid Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card
- Proof of current employment or offer letter

### **Social Security Number**

A Social Security Number (SSN) serves as the major identification number for U.S. citizens, permanent residents and legal non-immigrants in the United States. A social security number can only be issued to F-1 or J-1 international student status if employment has been obtained. A job offer letter is required to be eligible to apply. Please review the Study in the States information page:

<http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/resources/social-security-number>

Information about international students, social security numbers and application process, found here:

<http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/10181.html#a0=3>

Once an offer of employment is secured, contact the Global Programs Office to review the Social Security application process and obtain the required enrollment verification letters for your application. In general you will need:

- Official job offer letter from employer. Letter must be written on company letterhead with company name and address and include job title, indicate if work is full or part-time, a brief description of job responsibilities and state the employer supports the SSN application.

- Letter from SFAI Global Programs Advisor DSO (Designated School Official) supporting the SSN application.
- Immigration Documents: I-20, Passport, F-1 Visa, I-94

Social Security Number Application can be found here:

<http://www.ssa.gov/online/ss-5.pdf>

When all documents are in order, apply in person at a local Social Security Office. After the application has been processed, it may take approximately two weeks for the Social Security Card to arrive by mail. We recommend the Social Security Office located at:

560 Kearny Street, San Francisco, CA 94108 (at the corner of Kearny and Sacramento Streets)  
Phone: 1-800-772-1213

#### **Tax Information for F-1 International Students**

International student is expected to complete and file tax forms with the U.S. Federal Government and State of California, whether or not you have earned income during the tax year. Even if you received no income, you will still need to file Form 8843. F-2 dependents are also required to file certain tax forms. It is your responsibility to understand your U.S. income tax obligations as an international student and understand how to file your income taxes each year. Please review the Study in the States tax information page:

<http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/2013/01/does-an-f-or-m-student-need-to-pay-income-taxes>

Tax filing deadline each year is April 15. Please contact the Global Programs Office for more information.

#### **California State Identification Card or Driver's License**

The Global Programs Office recommends getting a California State Identification Card. This is a form of official U.S. government identification and is a good option to carry with you while you are in the United States instead of your passport.

#### **Driving in the United States**

If you currently hold a driver's license in your home country, you may be eligible to apply for a California State Driver's License. Please review the regulations for driving in the United States here:

<http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/resources/driving>

Please review the application process for either the California State ID or Driver's License here:

[http://www.dmv.ca.gov/dl/dl\\_info.htm#2501](http://www.dmv.ca.gov/dl/dl_info.htm#2501)