Radford University welcomes and values the enrollment of international “non-immigrant” students from all over the world! As you pursue your degree at RU, you will be asked to comply with city, state and federal laws, including federal immigration regulations for non-immigrant students. This brief introduction is designed to inform our international students about immigration regulations and policies for F-1 Student and J-1 Exchange Student visa holders. Students classified in F-1 status are governed by regulations of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS), a branch of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Students in J-1 status are governed directly by the regulations of the United States Department of State.

The Assistant Director/Immigration Counselor at the Radford University International Education Center assists international students with their immigration needs. Nothing can replace the advice from your Immigration Counselor. Friends, family members, fellow students, faculty and community members may offer you advice about your immigration status and visa rules. They mean well, but immigration regulations are very complex and very highly scrutinized. Before making decisions to change your course of study, transfer to new schools, travel outside the U.S., drop a class, or accept employment, you should seek advice from the RU International Education Center.

It is the Student’s responsibility to maintain his/her legal status in the U.S.

U.S. Immigration laws are very complex, with frequent changes. The information herein is not intended to be construed as legal advice, and contains only general information specifically for RU international students. Sometimes, the services of an immigration attorney may be advised. Students must meet with the RU Immigration Counselor before completing applications or seeking benefits from USCIS. New international students holding any non-immigrant status are required to meet with the Assistant Director/Immigration Counselor within the first week of classes.

TIPS FOR YOUR NON-IMMIGRANT STUDENT VISA APPLICATION PROCESS

1. TIES TO YOUR HOME COUNTRY – Applicants for non-immigrant visas are viewed, under U.S. law, as intending immigrants until they can convince the consular officer that they are not. Basically, you must show that your reasons to return to your home country after studies are stronger than those to remain in the U.S. Things that bind you to your hometown, homeland or current place of residence (job, family, financial prospects that you own or will inherit investments, etc) are some of the types of “ties” to your home country that you should be prepared to talk about. The interviewing visa officer may ask for your specific intentions for future employment, family or relationships, educational objectives, grades, long-range plans, and career prospects in your home country. Since each applicant’s situation is different, there is no standard explanation or
single document or letter which can guarantee visa issuance. Be prepared to answer questions and provide documents that demonstrate your intentions to return home.

2. **ENGLISH ABILITY** – Your interview will likely be conducted in English, not your native language. Practice English conversation with a native speaker before the interview. Be prepared to show your TOEFL or other English language test scores.

3. **SPEAK FOR YOURSELF** – Do not bring your parents, friends or family members to the interview with you. Bringing someone else in the room for your interview could create a negative impression that you are not prepared to speak for yourself. If someone does accompany you, they should wait in the waiting area.

4. **KNOW THE PROGRAM OF STUDY** – How does your intentional program of study prepare you for your career intentions? What are you career intentions? How does studying in the U.S. relate to your career when you return home?

5. **BE CONCISE** – What you say first, and the initial impression you create are critical to your success. Consular officers are under a very small time constraint, and usually make a decision within the first two minutes of the interview. Keep your answers short and to the point.

6. **SUPPLEMENTAL DOCUMENTATION** – Remember that you’ll only have 2-3 minutes for the interview. Make sure your documents are clear and concise. Lengthy written explanations cannot be quickly read or evaluated.

7. **EQUALITY** – Applicants from countries with severe economic problems or countries with a high immigrant rate to the U.S. have more difficulty obtaining their visa. The intent to return home are often more difficult to demonstrate if you are from one of those countries.

8. **EMPLOYMENT** – Your student visa will be specifically for study, not for the ability to work before or after graduation. You sole purpose is to study, not to work.

9. **DEPENDENTS** - If your spouse or children are remaining behind in your country, be prepared to talk about how they will support themselves during your absence. If you are the primary source of income, this can be rather tricky. If it appears that your family will need money from you during your studies in the U.S., your visa will most likely be denied.
10. **ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING** – If you are denied a visa, ask for a list of documents he or she could suggest that you bring to overcome the refusal. Try to get the reason for denial in writing, but under no circumstance should you engage in an argument with the consular officer.

**YOUR IMMIGRATION “TO DO” LIST**

- **Pay SEVIS I-901 fee prior to making your visa appointment.** This fee may be paid electronically with credit card, or by mail. The fastest method is by credit card.

- **Check your passport and I-20 to make sure they are identical for name and your birth date.** If not, contact the RU IEC immediately.

- **Prior to your visa interview, read the Embassy Website carefully and review your documents.** Make your appointment as soon as possible because significant delays can occur.

- **Read and understand the obligations to maintain your status, listed on page two of your I-20.** If you have questions, contact the IEC Immigration Counselor, tjdalton2@radford.edu. When you are sure you understand your obligations to maintaining legal status in the U.S., sign your I-20.

- **After obtaining your visa, begin preparing for your arrival at the port of entry.**

- **Upon your arrival, visit the RU IEC in Cook 105.** Bring your original passport and I-20 as copies are required by the IEC.

**SEVIS AND SEVIS FEE**

**What is SEVIS?**

SEVIS is an internet-based federal system that all U.S. schools must use to maintain current academic and immigration information on non-immigrant students (with F-1 or J-1 visas) and their dependents. Electronic information and event notification is sent, via internet, to USCIS and Department of State throughout the student’s stay in the U.S.

**How does SEVIS work?**

*For new international students:*

After a student is admitted to RU, SEVIS and USCIS approve the issuance of an I-20 (for F-1 students) or DS-2019 (for J-1 exchange students). The form is then mailed to the student.
The student pays the SEVIS fee by credit card or by mail.

The student presents the I-20 or DS-2019 document and receipt of the SEVIS fee to the U.S. consulate or embassy when applying for the F-1 or J-1 visa. The documents are then verified, and the visa issued.

An USCIS officer at the port of entry reports the students’ entry into the U.S. to SEVIS

When the student arrives on-campus, the school notifies SEVIS of the student’s enrollment. Every semester thereafter, the students’ enrollment and many event updates are entered into SEVIS.

When the student departs the U.S., the departure is recorded into SEVIS.

For continuing students:

Each semester, the university is required to report every international student’s enrollment, changes of address, and event updates (i.e. change of major, change of financial sponsor, etc)

Student applications for immigration benefits, such as Optional Practical Training, are reported into SEVIS

Finally, the student’s departure will be recorded in SEVIS

What “events” or data is reported in SEVIS?

- Enrollment or Failure to enroll
- Change in student’s address or legal name
- Failure to maintain a full course-load with prior authorization from the Foreign Student Advisor
- Authorizations to drop below full course-load
- Changes of major or academic level
- Program extensions
- Premature termination of study – date and reason
- Employment authorizations
- School transfers
- Academic or disciplinary actions taken due to criminal convictions
- Information regarding any student who fails to maintain status or complete their program

SEVIS Fee payment

Anyone seeking a visa from an embassy or consulate abroad for initial attendance at an approved school (for F-1 visa), or for initial participation in a student exchange program (J-1 visa), must pay the SEVIS fee. Currently, the fee is $200 for F-1, $180 for J-1. This amount is subject to change. Spouses or dependents (F-2 or J-2) are not required to pay the SEVIS fee. The fee must
be paid by internet or mail; it cannot be paid at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate OR at the port of entry. The SEVIS fee is separate from and in addition to the visa application fee.

**To Pay SEVIS fee by Mail:**

a. Obtain a form I-901 “Fee Remittance for Certain F, J, and M Non-immigrants” by downloading from the web at [https://www.fmjfee.com/index.jhtml](https://www.fmjfee.com/index.jhtml) or by phone at 1-800-870-3676 1-800-870-3676 (inside the U.S.)

b. Complete the Form I-901. Be sure to write your name exactly how it appears on your I-20 form and your passport.

c. Prepare a check, international money order or foreign draft *drawn on a U.S. bank only in the amount of $200 USD (for F-1) or $180 USD (for J-1), made payable to “The Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement”.

d. Mail the completed I-901 form and payment to the address listed on the Form I-901.

e. A form I-797 Receipt confirmation letter should be sent to you within 3 days of processing the fee. Be sure to make copies of this receipt letter and keep it with your other important immigration documents.

**“Drawn on U.S. Bank” – sources for such checks and money orders include banks chartered or operated in the U.S., subsidiaries of U.S. banks, or foreign banks that have arrangements with a U.S. bank to issue a check, money order or draft that is drawn on a U.S. bank.**

💡 **Please Note:** Mailing the fee does not constitute payment. The fee is processed when it is received by the Department of Homeland Security. If you mail your payment, it can take a considerable amount of time to receive the receipt by return mail.

**To Pay SEVIS fee Online**

a. Find the Form I-901 at [https://www.fmjfee.com/index.jhtml](https://www.fmjfee.com/index.jhtml)

b. Complete the form online and supply the necessary Visa, MasterCard or American Express information. **Be very careful to write your name exactly as it appears on your I-20 form.**

c. Print a copy of the online receipt. Make multiple copies and save them with your other important immigration documents.

If you pay by internet, payment is processed immediately. At the time you make payment you can print the receipt directly from your computer.
Whether you pay the SEVIS fee by mail or internet, a paper receipt will be mailed to the address you provide on Form I-901. You may choose to have the receipt sent by regular mail, or at an additional charge, by express delivery.

You should bring the receipt of fee payment with you to the visa interview. However, if you have lost the receipt and if the payment was made far enough in advance of your interview, the embassy or consulate should be able to verify your fee payment without a receipt in most cases.

The SEVIS fee is non-refundable even if your visa is denied or you choose not to come to the U.S. However, if you resubmit for a new F-1 or J-1 visa within 12 months of denial, you do not have to pay again.

If you are transferring schools, extending your program, applying for F-2 dependent visa, or have paid this fee and been denied a visa within the last twelve months, you do not need to pay the $200 or $180 SEVIS fee.

**Where can I find more information about SEVIS?**

Stay informed. Don’t rely on your friends or the media for accurate information regarding immigration issues. As well meaning as they may be, they may not be aware of recent developments and practice. If you are not sure, check with your Radford University Immigration Counselor (tjdalton2@radford.edu).

Check out these websites:

- USCIS – [https://www.uscis.gov](https://www.uscis.gov)
- State Department – [https://www.travel.state.gov](https://www.travel.state.gov)
- NAFSA – [http://www.nafsa.org](http://www.nafsa.org)

**MAINTAINING STATUS**

**Maintaining Status While in the United States – F-1**

It is extremely important to maintain your status while in the United States. Failure to maintain the terms and conditions of nonimmigrant status is grounds for removal from the United States (deportation). **It is the student’s responsibility to maintain his/her legal status.**

**What are the basic rules I must follow while a student in the U.S.?**

- Never drop below full-time course of study without permission from your Foreign Student Advisor
- Never accept employment without specific permission from your Foreign Student Advisor and the Immigration Service
- Never stay in the U.S. beyond your authorized time; there are severe penalties
- Never forget deadlines
- Never fail to maintain your student status
Maintain status: Your eligibility for opportunities such as employment, transfer from one university to another, and changes in your academic program depends upon maintaining lawful status. To maintain your status you must:

1. Report to the Immigration Counselor during the first week of classes;

2. Report changes of address to the Immigration Counselor immediately upon obtaining the address;

3. Pursue a full-course of study at the school listed on the currently valid Form I-20 during every academic session or semester except during official school breaks, or unless approved under a specific exception IN ADVANCE by the Immigration Counselor. 12 credit hours UG, 9 GR. No more than one on-line distance course or 3 credits per semester may be counted toward the full course of study requirement;

4. Make normal progress by completing studies before the expiration of the program completion date on the Form I-20;

5. Keep Form I-20 valid by following proper procedures for extension of stay, change in educational levels (undergraduate to graduate) or programs of study (change of major) or transfer of schools;

6. Abide by the F-1 grace period in the U.S. (60 days) or J-1 grace period (30 days) after completing a full-course of study;

7. Obey all federal and state laws that prohibit the commission of crimes of violence and disclose fully and truthfully all information requested by the Department of Homeland Security’s immigration bureaus. If the school takes disciplinary action against a student as a result of the conviction of a crime, the school is required to report this information to immigration in SEVIS.

8. Do not work unless specifically authorized under the regulations at 8C.F.R. 214.2(f)(9) or 214.2(f)(10). Limit on-campus employment to 20 hours per week while attending school and refrain from off-campus employment without authorization.

9. Report all required notifications to the Assistant Director/Immigration Counselor (see SEVIS section).

EMPLOYMENT

ON-CAMPUS EMPLOYMENT:

Working on-campus is a benefit for F-1 visa holders who are maintaining status, and does not require an application to USCIS. Students are generally permitted to work part-time on the premises of the school that issued their currently valid I-20 as long as they are attending that school and maintaining status. This type of employment is “incidental to status” and does not require USCIS authorization. Students are limited to 20 hours per week per semester TOTAL.
(For instance, if a student has a graduate assistantship for 15 hours per week, they are only allowed to work 5 more hours for any other employment on-campus. On-campus employment may be full-time during summer and “vacation” periods (like school breaks) as long as the student intends to return to the school the upcoming terms and is otherwise maintaining status. Students should inform the Assistant Director/Immigration Counselor of on-campus work.

**TYPES OF OFF-CAMPUS EMPLOYMENT**

**CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING**

Curricular Practical Training is defined by immigration as an alternate work/study, internship, cooperative education, or any other type of required internship or practicum which is offered by sponsoring employers through cooperative agreements with the school. Students must be participating in an internship which is required for their major, or be recommended by the academic department to participate in a specific internship experience or site. The work must be considered by the academic department to be an integral or important part of their curriculum. The student must be registered and receive substantial credit (typically at least 3 credit hours) for the internship experience. An RU faculty member must supervise, monitor, or oversee the internship experience. The Immigration Counselor will submit information into SEVIS, and produce the student a new I-20. This process notifies the immigration service of your CPT approval. Full-time (40 hours per week) or Part-time (20 hours per week) participation in Curricular Practical Training for less than one year does NOT affect eligibility for Optional Practical Training. Part-time curricular practical training DOES require CONCURRENT course work during the academic year to maintain status. If students accumulate 12 months of full-time Curricular Practical Training, they are no longer eligible for Optional Practical Training. **Student must be enrolled full-time for nine consecutive months (or one academic year); Student must have maintained F-1 Student Status for one academic year.** Student must apply with the Immigration Counselor immediately upon the academic advisor’s approval of or assignment to an internship site/experience, and must receive CPT approval prior to beginning the internship experience.

**OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING:**

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a temporary employment authorization to pursue employment in your field of study to gain practical experience. Most students save this year of off-campus work authorization to use immediately upon graduation. **Students must be enrolled in a bachelor’s, master’s or doctoral program full-time for at least one academic year, be in good academic standing, have maintained non-immigrant status,** and the proposed work must be in the student’s field of study. OPT may be possible in the following situations:

- **Upon completion of degree:** Must apply prior to or within 60 days after completion of study.
- **During the annual summer vacation:** if pre-registered for the upcoming term.
• **While enrolled in courses:** A JOB OFFER IS REQUIRED. WORK CAN NOT EXCEED 20 HOURS, and student must continue full-time enrollment.

• **Completed course requirements except for final thesis:** A JOB OFFER IS REQUIRED.

Students **cannot begin employment until the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) has been received from USCIS, and until the EAD card start date.** Processing time is **usually two to three months.** Practical Training is only available one time per higher degree level, and may not be saved from undergraduate to masters to obtain two years.

Students in certain STEM majors (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) might qualify for an extension of 17 months OPT if they are working for a company enrolled in USCIS’ E-Verify program. See the Immigration Counselor for details.

All types of OPT require application and adjudication through USCIS.

**ECONOMIC HARDSHIP:**

This employment benefit, which also must be applied for through USCIS, is intended to address situations where a financial need **beyond the student’s control** arises, which was **unforeseen** at the time the student applied to the school he or she is currently attending and **after all other potential employment opportunities have proven to be insufficient.** Examples of unforeseen economic hardship MAY include “loss of financial aid or on-campus employment without the fault on the part of the student, substantial fluctuations in the value of currency or exchange rate, inordinate increases in tuition and/or living costs, unexpected changes in the financial condition of the student’s source of support, substantial medical bills, or other substantial and unexpected expenses.” Students must be enrolled for at least one full academic year before applying for this type of off-campus work authorization, and the application process requires a substantial amount of documentation.

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