

UNDERSTANDING YOUR I-20

The I-20 is a multi-purpose document issued by a government approved, U.S. educational institution certifying that you have been admitted to a full-time study program and that you have demonstrated sufficient financial resources to stay in the U.S. The I-20 is officially titled the "Certificate of Eligibility" because with it, you are "eligible" to apply for an F-1 student visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate abroad. Your spouse or children will also each need their own I-20 to obtain F-2 dependent status, if desired.

Getting the I-20 from a U.S. school is not enough to become a legal F-1 student; you must also be allowed entry to the U.S. as an F-1, or be approved for a change of status from another type of nonimmigrant visa.

How the I-20 is created

After a school completes their admissions process, the admitted students' names and other biographic information are entered into a U.S. government database called **SEVIS** (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System). The SEVIS database processes the information and produces a "PDF" file of the I-20 that is sent back to the school via the internet. The school official (called the Designated School Official or DSO) prints and signs the I-20 and then delivers it to the student. If a student needs to update or change information on the I-20, the DSO makes these requests through SEVIS and the document can be easily reproduced.

How the I-20 is used by the student outside the U.S.

After receiving an I-20 from their school, an international student must make an appointment to **apply for the F-1 visa** at the local U.S. embassy or consulate in their country). The visa is the document needed to be allowed entry into the U.S. The student must present both the F-1 visa and the I-20 to a U.S. Immigration inspector upon **arrival at the port-of-entry**.

How the I-20 is used by a student inside the U.S.

Once you have arrived in the U.S. and passed through the border inspections process, it is used as identification purposes and proof of your legal status. If you get a job on or off-campus, you will be required to show the I-20 to your employer during the hiring process. **Off-campus employment** information will be printed on page 3 of your I-20.

Traveling with the I-20

If you will be **traveling abroad and then returning** to the U.S. to resume your studies, you must take your I-20 with you. The I-20 is required to **reapply for a visa** if you need one and for re-entering the U.S. Before your departure from the U.S., make sure that you have an unexpired travel endorsement from the Coordinator on page 3 of your I-20, at the bottom. This signature is valid for one year for multiple visits outside the U.S. In most cases, a travel endorsement can be done quickly and easily at Coppin International Office; however, be sure to plan ahead and get your travel endorsement several weeks before you depart the U.S. to avoid the holiday rush.

Immigration regulations governing the F-1 status are listed on page 2 of the I-20. It is important that F-1 students read this page to understand the rules that apply to their stay in the U.S.

Your I-20 Completion Date

A "completion date" was entered into item #5 on page 1 of your I-20 based on your particular major and degree level. This is an estimate of time the University feels it may take you to fulfill all degree requirements. However, if you are not able to finish your program on that date, you must **request an extension** from the Office of International Students at least one month before the completion date expires.

According to U.S. immigration regulations, the "completion date" is defined as the day you complete your final degree requirements. Your actual completion date may not necessarily be the day of your graduation ceremony or the date on your I-20 (In fact, many students actually finish their degree requirements before the completion date on their I-20).

Undergraduate Students:

Your completion date is considered to be the last day of final exams of the semester your degree requirements are fulfilled.

Graduate Students:

Your completion date is the day on which all degree requirements are fulfilled, such as filing the thesis or dissertation in the Graduate Division. If you do not have a research component to your degree program (such as in the MBA program or other professional schools), your completion date would be the last day of final exams of the semester your degree requirements are fulfilled.

The 60-day Grace Period

When you complete your study program, you are allowed a 60-day grace period to depart the U.S., request a school **transfer**, or change your status. Note: Students who are interested in working in the U.S. following their program completion must apply for **Optional Practical Training** work authorization at least 90 days before the actual program completion date.