

F-1 Overview

5-Jan-12



OISA handouts do not replace professional legal advice and you should not rely on them solely when making decisions about your immigration status or reporting requirements. The information below is of a general nature and may not apply to any particular set of facts or circumstances.

1. Process all documents related to your F-1 stay through the OISA. We are responsible for Grinnell's compliance with the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). Forms regarding any change must be processed through a Grinnell Designated School Official (DSO), Karen Edwards or Brenda Strong.
2. Data on your Passport, F-1 Visa, I-94 Card and Form I-20 (paper copy of your SEVIS data) must be consistent and accurate. Keep these documents in a secure location. Carry them when you travel outside of Grinnell (domestic or international). They are always required upon re-entry of the U.S. Use registered mail if you need to put these documents in the mail. Contact the OISA if these documents are lost or stolen. If they are lost or stolen at an off campus location, file a report with the local police department. In addition, you may need to notify your home embassy. An attempt to reenter the U.S. without these documents will likely be denied. In a best case scenario, you might be allowed temporary entry pending completion of Form I-515.
3. You are advised to consistently present your name exactly as it appears on your passport for all official record keeping (with the College, immigration, SSA, banks, taxes, etc).
4. Your passport must always be 'date-valid' for a minimum of 6 months into the future. Passports are renewed through your home country's consulate.
5. F-1 students are eligible to work on campus. You can apply for a Social Security Card after you have been in the U.S. for 10 days and once you have a specific employment assignment. A personal visit to Social Security Administration is required. The OISA will support the initial application process. Students who do not qualify should secure an Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN) instead.
6. You must have a valid DSO's travel endorsement (signature) on Form I-20 if you travel out and will re-enter the U.S. Signatures are valid for 12 months (for 6 months during the post-completion OPT period). ONLY Karen Edwards or Brenda Strong are authorized to issue travel endorsements for Grinnell students and scholars.
7. You are responsible to monitor your Visa expiration. You may remain in the U.S. on an expired F-1 Visa (since your I-94 is marked D/S, which stands for Duration of Status), but any time you travel out of the country (with the potential exception of Automatic Revalidation for travel to Canada, Mexico, or adjacent islands) you must have a valid Visa to re-enter the U.S. Visa renewal is only processed at an U.S. Consulate outside of the country. You may request a letter of support for Visa renewal from the OISA (allow for 3-5 day processing). If you are out of the U.S. for over 5 months (with the exception of participation in an approved Off Campus Study program) your visa must be renewed regardless of its validity dates.
8. Notify the OISA in writing within 10 days of any change in your foreign address; U.S. address (including dorm room changes and summer moves); major field of study; and/or official name (email is sufficient for an address change, but a name change requires official documentation). The OISA will notify the DHS of the change within 21 days, using SEVIS.
9. The OISA will issue a new I-20 when applicable (as you declare your major, etc). You must use/present the newest document for travel, but must also keep all old documents as a matter of record keeping (you may have several by the time you graduate!)
10. You must maintain full-time enrollment (at Grinnell, a minimum of 12 credits per term) with limited exceptions. A drop below full-time must be documented, approved by the OISA, and entered into SEVIS prior to the reduction of courses. Potential exceptions include: initial academic / linguistic difficulties; improper placement; documented medical conditions; or if fewer courses are needed during the final academic term.
11. F-1 students must make 'normal progress' toward degree completion. Any change of your program end date must be requested prior to the expiration date of the I-20. Extensions require new financial documents and written support from your academic advisor recommending the extension, explaining the reasons for the extension, and specifying a new completion date.
12. If you change institutions during your program or following the completion of your Grinnell degree, you must follow SEVIS Transfer procedures. Communicate *in advance* with the OISA regarding this type of decision.
13. Secure a State of Iowa ID card to use for identification purposes, in lieu of presenting your passport. You can apply after securing your Social Security Card. The OISA offers a handout with more detailed instructions.



14. You must purchase (or formally waive) the mandatory Student Health Insurance Plan. This will be billed each year as part of the comprehensive fee. Carry your health insurance card with you at all times. We link to the plan via the [OISA web site](#), and copies are available in SHACS or the JCC. Insurance does not eliminate costs. A visit to the E.R., for example, carries an automatic co-pay of \$50.
15. All non-immigrant visitors are required to file a U.S. Federal Tax Return, reporting presence in the U.S. as well as any taxable income - even IF you don't have income. Employers issue documents to support your tax compliance in February (e.g. W-2 or 1042S). The OISA provides access to on-line support (or referral) for you to comply with this, and annual tax returns are due each April 15. Keep copies for your permanent records.
16. F-1 students are allowed to work on-campus up to 20 hours per week when school is in session and may work full-time during school breaks (fall, winter, spring & summer). This is monitored by the Accounting Office, and if you violate the 20 hour limit you will receive a warning via email (copied to your supervisor and the OISA). You may not hold student employment after your program completion.
17. F-1 students may not accept employment (internships or research) that results in payment (wages, stipends, fellowships, housing, transportation, food, etc) from a source other than Grinnell College, without first securing employment authorization. The options are: Optional Practical Training (OPT); Curricular Practical Training (CPT); and Economic Hardship. Consult with the OISA well in advance of needing employment authorization.
18. Internships that are funded entirely through [Grinnellink](#) or Grinnell's [grant funding](#) are ideal for F-1 students, since most stipends for these experiences come solely from the College and Employment Authorization will not usually be required. Work closely with the Career Development Office and the OISA.
19. The MAJOR you declare impacts employment options before and after graduation, if you wish to work in the US, since OPT and CPT are limited to work that is directly related to your major. In addition, STEM majors benefit from access to an additional 17 months of work authorization, subject to specific conditions. Grinnell's STEM majors are: *Computer Science; Biology; Biochemistry; Mathematics; Chemistry; Physics*.
20. F-1 students CAN typically participate in off-campus study or internships abroad. There may be unique visa and employment issues to consider, so advanced planning is very important. The OISA offers a detailed Handout.
21. Criminal arrests, even misdemeanor charges, can have serious consequences for non-immigrant visitors. Arrests include, for example: possession of alcohol under 21; smoking in non-smoking space; vandalism; public intoxication; possession of drugs or drug paraphernalia, etc. The OISA can advise or refer you for consultation with attorneys who specialize in immigration and/or criminal law. We also caution non-immigrant students about participation in political activism, as this can also result in legal difficulties.
22. If you have family who wish to visit you in the U.S. the OISA can issue a 'Letter of Invitation' to confirm your enrollment at the College. (allow for 3-5 day processing)
23. F-1 Seniors receive guidance from the OISA about next steps through a *Senior Packet*, group information session, and individual appointments. You typically have the following options: 1) transfer your SEVIS record to a graduate program in the U.S.; 2) apply for employment authorization through *Post Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT)*; or 3) leave the U.S. within an authorized grace period (60 days). F-1 students who remain in the U.S. for OPT or the STEM Extension maintain F-1 status and are required to maintain reporting with the OISA during this period. We provide handouts about these options, including tips on presenting your status during interviews, basic information about the H-1B petition, and advice about *Re-Entry* for those who return home.
24. Do not throw away old immigration or tax documents. Maintain a file of important documents and photo copies of documents as a matter of permanent record. You may visit the OISA if you need advice about what documents you need to keep, and what you might be able to throw away.

This information is not exhaustive and is subject to change with little notice. It is your responsibility to maintain status, and to read guidance and updates shared by the OISA. You may contact the OISA to arrange an appointment to discuss any questions or concerns related to your lawful status in the U.S. If you need emergency assistance from the OISA when we are closed, you may contact the Office of Safety & Security (#4600) and ask them to reach us.