

ACADEMIC ADVISING FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

What Are the Common Student Visa Types for International Students?

Concord University is authorized by The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to issue an immigration document through the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) that is used by foreign nationals to apply for a student visa to study in the United States. Concord also has partnerships with programs authorized by the Department of State to use SEVIS to invite exchange visitors to come to their institution in the U. S. to study, teach, or perform research.

F-1 student

F-1 is the most common immigration status for degree seeking international students at Concord University. Prospective F-1 students will receive a Form I-20 (Certificate of Eligibility) document from Concord University, which they will generally use to apply for an F-1 visa at a US consulate or embassy. F-1 students are then admitted to the United States in F-1 status to study and must attend school full time except for their vacation break.

J-1 student

The J-1 student category is also used by international students. J-1 students will receive a Form DS-2019 (Certificate of Eligibility) document from their program sponsor, which they will use to apply for the J-1 visa. The J-1 exchange visitor category is regulated by the U.S. Department of State (USDOS). J-1 students are in the United States to study and can be degree or non-degree seeking and must attend school full time in their program except for their vacation break.

Do All International Students Have to Follow the Same Rules?

Know the student's immigration status. Students in the U.S. may have a variety of statuses.

Some may be here for another reason besides studying, but are allowed to attend classes in their current status. In these cases, study does not maintain their immigration status and is considered "incidental to status" (e.g., H-1B, H-4, J-2, E's, etc.). Unlimited study (part or full time) or not studying at all would be acceptable for these students.

Some types of immigration statuses do not allow studying, so in order to begin studying the future student would have to leave and reenter in a student status or change their status within the United States. Examples of statuses that do not allow study are B tourists and business visitors, and F-2 dependents of F-1 students. Students in categories that do not allow study who would be considered in violation of their immigration status if they begin study before their status is changed.

Many dependent statuses (given to individuals who are accompanying the principal nonimmigrant) are limited by age—most dependent children "age out" at 21 (e.g. J-2, H-4, etc.), and can no longer enjoy derivative status based on their parents' status. So this may affect college-aged students; they will be in one status through age 20, and then need to change to another status that might have different requirements, before they turn 21.

What is Full-time Enrollment for International Students?

International students in F-1 or J-1 status are required to enroll in a full course of study during the academic year, as a condition of maintaining their immigration status. Concord University considers a course load of 12 credit hours to be full-time.

What if an International Student Changes Major or Degree Level - Does the Student Need to Do Anything?

Yes, students need their immigration documents to reflect their current degree program and level of study. If a student plans to change majors or degree level, please have them contact the international office for procedures on how to obtain updated immigration documents.

Does a Student Need to Enroll Full-time in the Summer?

No. Summer is considered to be the vacation period of students on an F-1 visa. Students may take courses in the summer but they are not required to do so.

Can International Students Take Online Courses?

F-1 international students can only count ONE online class toward their minimum number of credits as their full-time enrollment during their normal semesters. If you only need one course to complete your program of study, the course cannot be online or distance learning. A full course of study for J-1 students must consist of "enrollment in an academic program of **classroom** participation and study". This focus on classroom participation probably means that J-1 students should not rely on distance or online courses to meet the enrollment needed to maintain their status.

International students in other visa categories (i.e. H-4, L2) are exempt from this limitation.

Can International Students Pursue Online Degree Programs?

According to U.S. immigration regulations, F-1 students cannot pursue online degrees.

International students in other visa categories (i.e. H-4, L2 etc.) are exempt from this restriction.

Can Students Ever Register Below Full-time?

Under certain circumstances, F-1 students may receive authorization for a Reduced Course Load (RCL), which gives them permission to enroll below full-time and still maintain valid immigration status. These exceptions include:

Illness/medical condition, Initial Difficulty with English Language, Initial Difficulty with Reading Requirements, Unfamiliarity with American Teaching Methods, Improper Course Level Placement, and Completing a Course of Study in Current Term.

Concord University's DSO must approve the RCL in SEVIS before the reduction in course load takes place, so any reduction should be discussed in advance with the International Office.

J-1 students should consult with their program sponsor to discuss reduced course load options.

Can Students Enroll Concurrently at More Than One Institution?

F-1 students may enroll concurrently as long as the combined enrollment amounts to a full time course of study. Students must attend another SEVIS-approved institution and consult with the International office.

The J-1 regulations do not address concurrent enrollment. J-1 students should consult with their program sponsor or international office to discuss options.

Can Students Transfer to Another Institution?

International students wishing to pursue their study objectives at another SEVIS-approved institution must ensure the transfer of their immigration and academic record to another institution.

F-1 and J-1 students must consult with the International Office to complete immigration SEVIS transfer if they wish to pursue their study objectives at another SEVIS approved institution. F-1 & J-1 students will need to initiate the process to transfer their SEVIS record.

On the transfer release date entered into SEVIS by the transfer-out school, the new school can access the SEVIS record and process a new document for the program at the new school.

Can F-1 and J-1 Students Work On-campus?

U.S. immigration regulations, under certain circumstances, allow international students to pursue part-time or full-time employment during the course of their studies.

F-1 and J-1 students pursuing a full course of study may work on campus up to 20 hours per week while classes are in session. When classes are not in session, they may work more than 20 hours. J-1 students need advance authorization from the responsible officer of the exchange program that issued their DS-2019 before beginning on-campus employment. If students have specific questions about working on-campus, have them consult the International Office.

Can F-1 and J-1 Students Work Off-campus?

Off-campus work is prohibited in all categories unless it is specifically authorized under the regulations governing the student's particular immigration category. Working without authorization is an immigration status violation that can make the student subject to deportation. Before accepting or engaging in any kind of employment, students should consult the International Office.

Taken from NAFSA (Association of International Educators) resources and adapted by Nancy Ellison.