

# INTERNATIONAL STUDENT HANDBOOK



**OBLATE**  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
[www.ost.edu](http://www.ost.edu)

Greetings from the Oblate School of Theology!

We look forward to your arrival on campus. Whether you plan to study at the Oblate School of Theology for one semester or for several years, we hope your time here will be educational, enjoyable, and memorable.

This handbook contains information that should help orient you to student life at the Oblate School of Theology and adjust to living in the United States. The handbook is not a source of legal advice and should not be used or understood as such. Information in the *Handbook* is subject to change without notice. For the latest information concerning immigration regulations, contact the Registrar's Office.

While you are at the Oblate School of Theology, feel free to stop by our office anytime. If you have a question about the School and life in the United States, or if you just want to talk, our door is always open to you!

Sincerely,

Brenda Reyna  
Primary Designated School Official (PDSO)  
Director of Admissions/Registrar

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## **DISCLAIMER**

The *International Student Handbook* is intended to provide general guidelines on numerous topics. Laws and regulations in the United States are subject to change at any time; therefore, you are encouraged to seek legal or other advice should you be faced with a situation involving the interpretation of such laws and regulations. Likewise, the offerings and requirements of the Oblate School of Theology are continually under examination, and revisions are common. This handbook is not a contract; it merely reflects the offerings and requirements in effect at the time of publication and in no way guarantees that such information will remain the same. If changes are made, the Registrar's Office will notify you via OST email.

In addition to this handbook, all students studying at Oblate School of Theology are required to become familiar with and abide by the rules contained in *Student Handbook*, the official guide to student life at OST, which contains important School policies. It is the responsibility of all OST students to be aware of the expectations in the *Student Handbook* and to conduct themselves accordingly.

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## APPLYING FOR ADMISSION TO OBLATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

A citizen of a foreign country who wishes to study at the Oblate School of Theology (OST) must first be admitted to OST. Foreign applicants must follow all general requirements for admission found on page 12 in the OST catalog. The catalog can be accessed at [www.ost.edu](http://www.ost.edu).

The school must admit the prospective F-1 student for a full course of study before it can issue a Form I-20 (I-20). The admission officials must determine that "the prospective student's qualifications meet all standards for admission." If a school has a conditional or provisional admission policy, the nature of the admission would have to be carefully examined when determining if a Form I-20 could be issued on the basis of such an admission. The general rule is that a Form I-20 should only be issued for a full course of study that has been approved on the School's Form I-17; for which the student's qualifications meet all standards for admission; to which the student has been fully admitted; and which the student can begin as of the program start date on the Form I-20.

In addition to the general requirements for admission, the foreign student must submit the following documents:

1. Financial Support Documentation Requirements
2. Immigration Documents
3. Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)

### **1. FINANCIAL SUPPORT DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS**

The Oblate School of Theology makes a reasonable estimate of all expenses -- including tuition, fees, books, supplies, maintenance (lodging and food), health insurance, taxes, and miscellaneous expenditures (clothing, local travel, recreation, toiletries, telephone, etc.) -- and review the estimate each year. Calculation of fixed costs for tuition, fees, and health insurance will be relatively straightforward. Calculation of variable costs, such as living expenses, may be more complex, and is generally an institutional decision. To arrive at a standard budget for variable expenses, the Designated School Official (DSO) works with their own institutional financial aid offices.

The DSO records in SEVIS what amount and sources of financial support the student will use to meet his or her educational and living expenses. These amounts and sources are entered into SEVIS, and will also appear on the student's Form I-20. The financial information should be provided based on the academic term specified in SEVIS.

Although the financial fields in SEVIS are completed with reference to a single academic term, the School requires actual documentation that funds exist at least for the student's first year of study and that, barring unforeseen circumstances, adequate funding will be available from the same or equally dependable sources for subsequent years. This is the same standard that consular and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) officers will use to determine a student's financial ability.

Funds may come from any dependable source, including scholarships, fellowships, sponsoring agencies, personal funds, or funds from the student's family. Documentation of scholarships and fellowships may be in the form of an official award letter from the school or sponsoring agency. Documentation of personal or family funds should be on bank letterhead stationery, or in the



form of a legally binding affidavit. Form I-134, "Affidavit of Support," can be used to document support being provided by a U.S. citizen or U.S. legal permanent resident.

If the student will depend on funds from a source outside the United States, the School determines if restrictions exist on the transfer of dollars from the country holding the funds, if the situation of the country warrants such inquiry. If there are restrictions, the student is asked to present evidence that they will not prevent the funds from being transferred. Alternatively, the School may wish to require an advance deposit of tuition and perhaps living expenses as well before issuing the Form I-20. An advance deposit for tuition or living expenses is not considered a fee for issuing Form I-20.

## **2. IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS**

Non-U.S. citizen applicants must submit a copy of any and all documents issued by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for entry into the United States as a non-immigrant student, religious worker, or permanent resident. These documents include:

- a) Current Passport
- b) U.S. VISA
- c) Non-Immigrant Information Sheet (found on OST website)

## **3. TEST OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (TOEFL)**

Non-native English speakers must develop the capacity to do theological studies and to minister in English. It is recommended that students whose native language is not English undertake intensive English language studies before admission to Oblate School of Theology. They must present the official results of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) before admission to the School.

To be an effective leader of ministry in the United States, a sufficient level of English must be achieved. This level includes being able to celebrate the liturgy, preach, and converse in a pastoral setting in English. Because the pastoral leader must relate with and be a part of the U.S. Church and society, the pastoral leader must be able to communicate well in oral and written English.

The further development of English language proficiency for seminarians will be monitored during the seminarian evaluations. Suitable proficiency must be demonstrated before admission to Candidacy.

It is the policy of Oblate School of Theology that students whose native language is not English are permitted to do at least some of their course requirements (papers and examinations) in Spanish (or in another language), in accord with the capabilities of the instructor, especially in the initial year of study at Oblate. Nearly all full-time faculty members read and/or write Spanish.

Non-U.S. citizens whose native language is not English are exempt from the MAT; however, the foreign-born student in Master level courses must present a score of at least 71 on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) to begin full-time studies. The foreign-born student in Doctoral level courses must present a score of at least 79 on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) to begin full-time studies. TOEFL scores older than two years are not accepted. Non-U.S. citizens, whose native language is not English, but who have completed their 4 years of undergraduate studies at a U.S. institution, should complete the MAT. Test results must be sent directly to the school.

The Oblate School of Theology code numbers is 6527 for the TOEFL. Note that these OST code numbers are normally not available in the information booklet or at the test centers.

## ACCEPTANCE TO OBLATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Once you have been admitted to the Oblate School of Theology (OST), your Designated School Official (DSO) will give you a document called a Form I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Status." Students who (1) are fully admitted, (2) need a student Visa to enter the U.S. to study at OST (except Canadian citizens), and (3) have documented their ability to finance their education will receive a "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Status," Form I-20. This document certifies eligibility for an F-1 Visa. You must apply for the F-1 Visa at a U.S. consulate abroad, and must show Form I-20 to the immigration inspector when you enter the U.S. The Form I-20 is processed and issued through SEVIS (the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System).

Upon receiving your Form I-20, check your Form I-20 against your passport information to make sure that your name and date of birth (DOB) are correctly listed and spelled. If it is not correct, contact the school official who sent you the Form I-20 and ask the DSO to correct it.

Before you apply to pay the SEVIS I-901 fee, use that Form I-20 to pay the I-901 fee and to apply for the student Visa. You must pay the SEVIS I-901 Fee. (Visit the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) website to learn more about SEVIS and the SEVIS I-901 Fee.)

The Oblate School of Theology will provide you with a Form I-20 to present to the consular officer when you attend your Visa interview. If your spouse and/or children intend to reside with you in the United States while you study, they must obtain individual Form I-20s, but they do not pay the SEVIS fee.

You must obtain an F-1 Visa in order to seek admission to the U.S. for full-time studies, unless you are a citizen of Canada or Bermuda. Citizens of Canada or Bermuda do not require F-1 Visas but must present appropriate means of documentation at the U.S. port-of-entry to seek admission for full-time studies.

### **FORM I-20**

The Form I-20 (or I-20) is a multi-purpose government form used in connection with many F-1 procedures and benefits. The new SEVIS Form I-20 prints as a 4-page document. (The previous I-20 printed as a 3 page document.) A unique SEVIS student ID number is printed on the left corner of page 1. Page 1 contains program and biographical information; Page 2 (previously on page 3) contains employment authorization data, change of status/Cap-Gap extensions, event history, and spaces for travel authorizations; and Page 3 (previously on page 2) consists of pre-printed instructions. Page 4 is left intentionally blank.

The SEVIS Form I-20 is retained by the student. In instances of travel and employment, page 2 of the I-20 has space for DSO signatures authorizing travel, and also reflects recommendations or grants of employment authorization that were placed in the student's SEVIS record by the DSO.

The SEVIS system generates the I-20 as a PDF file, using data from the SEVIS database. Data is inputted into the SEVIS database by DSOs either through the Web-based Real-Time Interactive (RTI) interface or through batch uploads from school data systems (Batch interface).

Dependents accompanying the F-1 student in F-2 status must each have their own SEVIS Form I-20, issued in the name of the dependent, that identifies them as a dependent.

The I-20 is only a "certificate of eligibility" for F-1 status. Issuing the form alone does not grant F-1 status itself. After an I-20 is issued, the student must use it to acquire F-1 status in one of two ways:

1. Use the I-20 to obtain an F-1 Visa at a U.S. Consulate and then enter the U.S. with the F-1 Visa and I-20, to be admitted by DHS in F-1 status at the port-of-entry (Visa not required if exempt from the Visa requirement, like Canadians).
2. Use the I-20 to apply to USCIS for a change of status from one nonimmigrant status to F-1 status, if already in the United States in another nonimmigrant category.

If a student does not use the I-20 in one of these ways, he or she is not in F-1 status.

### **VISA WAIVER PROGRAM (VWP)**

Students cannot travel on the Visa waiver program or with visitor Visas. Citizens of Visa Waiver Program (VWP) participating countries who intend to study cannot travel on the VWP or on Visitor (B) Visas, except to undertake recreational study as part of a tourist visit. Students must travel to the United States with student (F-1) Visas. You cannot enter the U.S. on a B-2 (tourist) Visa and expect to change to F-1 status after you arrive. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services will likely deny this request, and you will have to leave the U.S. to obtain a proper Visa.

### **VISITOR (B-1/B-2)**

Enrollment in a short recreational course of study, which is not for credit toward a degree or academic certificate, is permitted on a Visitor (B) Visa. However, study leading to a U.S. conferred degree or certificate is not permitted on a Visitor (B) Visa, even if it is for a short duration. For example, distance learning that requires a period of time on the institution's U.S. campus requires an F-1 Visa.

## **APPLYING FOR F-1 VISA FOR STUDY IN THE U.S.**

An F-1 Visa can be *issued* no more than 120 days before the reporting date listed on Form I-20, but a student can enter the U.S. no earlier than 30 days before I-20 program start date.

A student can *apply* for an F-1 Visa earlier than 120 days before the start date, to allow for Visa processing and security clearance delays. Even if the student applies earlier than 120 days, though, the consulate still cannot actually issue the Visa until 120 days before the program start date. Visa processing times vary widely by consulate, and by whether or not a security clearance must be requested. The general rule: apply as early as possible.

There are several steps to apply for a Visa. The order of these steps and how you complete them may vary at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate where you apply. Please consult the instructions available on the embassy or consulate website where you intend to apply.

### **HOW TO APPLY FOR YOUR VISA**

When applying for a Visa, the student must do the following:

- 1. Complete the Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application (Form DS-160)**  
Complete the online nonimmigrant Visa application at <https://ceac.state.gov/genniv/>.
- 2. Print the Application Form Confirmation Page to Bring to Your Interview**
- 3. Upload A Photo While Completing The Online Form DS-160**  
Your photo must be in the format explained in the Photograph Requirements.
- 4. Paying Your I-901 SEVIS Fee**  
Regulation requires all prospective F students to pay the I-901 Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) fee before the Department of State issues you a Visa. To pay the I-901 SEVIS fee, visit [FMJfee.com](http://FMJfee.com) to access the Form I-901.

#### **Who needs to pay the I-901 SEVIS fee?**

- All prospective F students from countries where a Visa to travel to the United States is mandatory
- All prospective F students from Visa waiver countries (before seeking admission at a U.S. port of entry)
- Any nonimmigrant in the United States applying for a change of nonimmigrant status to F-1 status (before applying for a change of nonimmigrant status)
- An F student applying for reinstatement of student status because of a violation of status (before applying with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services)
- An F student who has been absent from the United States for more than five months and wishes to re-enter the United States to return for further study in the same course of study (before re-entry into the United States)
- There is an exception for students who have been working toward completion of a course of study for a Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP)-certified school in authorized overseas study. Contact your designated school official (DSO) if you believe this applies to you.

- A dependent of an F-1 student who will be applying for an F-2 Visa does not have to pay an I-901 SEVIS fee

### **Paying the I-901 SEVIS fee**

- A prospective F student with a country of citizenship or country of birth of Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria or Gambia must pay by money order, Western Union Quick Pay or certified check drawn from a U.S. bank. All other prospective F students also have the option to make a credit card payment on FMJfee.com.
- SEVP will accept third party payments, meaning someone else can pay your I-901 SEVIS fee using the same method of payment. For students who cannot pay the fee by credit card, third party payers are also restricted from paying the fee by credit card.
- For instructions on how to complete the Western Union Quick Pay/Quick Collect form, please visit SEVP's website.
- You can access the PDF version of the Form I-901 on SEVP's website. Print and mail in your paper Form I-901 with your check or money order, according to the instructions on the form.
- For detailed instructions or for assistance on how to make an I-901 SEVIS fee payment, call the SEVP Response Center at 703-603-3400.

### **Print Receipt**

In order to get your student Visa, you must present proof of your I-901 SEVIS fee payment at your Visa interview. **PRINT THE RECEIPT.**

- The printed confirmation will serve as proof of payment for the I-901 Fee
- Print a receipt of payment after you have completed your I-901 payment on FMJfee.com.
- If you would like to request corrections to your I-901 SEVIS fee receipt because you have noticed misspellings, would like to go to a different school, or would like to transfer your payment to a new SEVIS record, you must first e-mail a detailed request to [FMJfee.sevis@ice.dhs.gov](mailto:FMJfee.sevis@ice.dhs.gov).

### **Other information**

Because of the high volume of fee transfer and change requests, please e-mail your request a minimum of two weeks before your Visa interview to ensure enough time to complete the changes. You can check the status of your request by logging into FMJfee.com to review the status of your correction and print your I-901 SEVIS fee receipt. Within two weeks, if your requested changes are not complete, please contact the SEVP Response Center at 703-603-3400.

Contact your DSO if you are applying to do the following:

- Extend your student status
- Transfer to another school
- Receive authorization for Optional Practical Training (OPT)

## **5. Schedule An Interview**

While interviews are generally not required for applicants of certain ages (13- younger and 80 and older), consular officers have the discretion to require an interview of any applicant, regardless of age. You must schedule an appointment for your Visa interview, generally, at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in the country where you live. You may schedule your interview at any U.S. Embassy or Consulate, but be aware that it may be difficult to qualify for a Visa outside of your place of permanent residence.

Wait times for interview appointments vary by location, season, and Visa category, so you should apply for your Visa early. We recommend up to six months in advance.

### ***New Students***

F-1 student Visas can be issued up to 120 days in advance of your course of study start date. However, you will not be allowed to enter the United States in F-1 status earlier than 30 days before your start date.

### ***Continuing Students***

F-1 students continuing their program may renew their Visas at any time, as long as they have maintained student status and their SEVIS records are current. Continuing students may enter the United States at any time before their classes start.

## **6. Prepare For Your Interview**

- Pay the non-refundable Visa application fee, if you are required to pay it before your interview. When your Visa is approved, you may also pay a Visa issuance fee, if applicable to your nationality.
- Review the instructions available on the website of the embassy or consulate where you will apply to learn more about fee payment.

### **Gather Required Documentation**

Gather and prepare the following required documents before your Visa interview:

- ***Passport valid for travel to the United States***  
Your passport must be valid for at least six months beyond your period of stay in the United States (unless exempt by country-specific agreements). If more than one person is included in your passport, each person who needs a Visa must submit a separate application.
- ***Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-160 confirmation page***
- ***Application fee payment receipt***, if you are required to pay before your interview
- ***Photo***  
You will upload your photo while completing the online Form DS-160. (If the photo upload fails, you must bring one printed photo in the format explained in the Photograph Requirements.)
- ***Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Student Status-For Academic and Language Students***  
Your school will send you a SEVIS-generated Form I-20 once they have entered your information in the SEVIS database. You and your school official must sign the Form I-20. All students, their spouse and minor children if they intend to reside in the United States with the student, must be registered in the Student and Exchange Visitor System (SEVIS). Each person receives an individual Form I-20.

### **Additional Documentation May Be Required**

Review the instructions for how to apply for a Visa on the website of the embassy or consulate where you will apply. Additional documents may be requested to establish that you are qualified.

For example, additional requested documents may include evidence of:

- Your academic preparation, such as:
  - Transcripts, diplomas, degrees, or certificates from schools you attended; and
  - Standardized test scores required by your U.S. school;
- Your intent to depart the United States upon completion of the course of study; and
- How you will pay all educational, living, and travel costs.

### **7. Attend Your Visa Interview**

During your Visa interview, a consular officer will determine whether you are qualified to receive a Visa, and if so, which Visa category is appropriate based on your purpose of travel. You will need to establish that you meet the requirements under U.S. law to receive the category of Visa for which you are applying.

Ink-free, digital fingerprint scans will be taken as part of your application process. They are usually taken during your interview, but this varies based on location.

After your Visa interview, your application may require further administrative processing. You will be informed by the consular officer if further processing is necessary for your application.

When the Visa is approved, you may pay a Visa issuance fee if applicable to your nationality, and will be informed how your passport with Visa will be returned to you. Review the Visa processing time, to learn how soon your passport with Visa will generally be ready for pick-up or delivery by the courier.

### **Additional Information**

- We cannot guarantee that you will be issued a Visa. Do not make final travel plans or buy tickets until you have a Visa.
- Students who are outside the United States, and who have not been attending classes for five (5) months or more, should apply for a new student Visa to reenter the United States.
- Spouse and children
  - Your spouse and unmarried, minor children who intend to reside with you during your study may apply for F-2 Visas. Although SEVIS fee payment is not required, your school must issue them an individual Form I-20, which is required to apply for their Visas. You must provide a copy of your F-1 Visa and provide proof of relationship.
  - Your minor children are permitted to attend school in the United States while accompanying you.
- Unless canceled or revoked, a Visa is valid until its expiration date. Therefore, a valid U.S. Visa in an expired passport is still valid. If you have a valid Visa in your expired passport, do not remove it from your expired passport. You may use your valid Visa



in your expired passport along with a new valid passport for travel and admission to the United States.

Here are some tips from the NAFSA Resource, “10 Points to Remember When Applying for a Nonimmigrant Visa”:

### **1. Ties to Your Home Country**

Under U.S. law, all applicants for nonimmigrant Visas, such as student Visas, are viewed as intending immigrants until they can convince the consular officer that they are not. You must therefore be able to show that you have reasons for returning to your home country that are stronger than those for remaining in the United States. "Ties" to your home country are the things that bind you to your home town, homeland, or current place of residence: job, family, financial prospects that you own or will inherit, investments, etc. If you are a prospective undergraduate, the interviewing officer may ask about your specific intentions or promise of future employment, family or other relationships, educational objectives, grades, long-range plans and career prospects in your home country.

Each person's situation is different, of course, and there is no magic explanation or single document, certificate, or letter which can guarantee Visa issuance. If you have applied for the U.S. Green Card Lottery, you may be asked if you are intending to immigrate. A simple answer would be that you applied for the lottery since it was available but not with a specific intent to immigrate. If you overstayed your authorized stay in the United States previously, be prepared to explain what happened clearly and concisely, with documentation, if available.

### **2. English**

Anticipate that the interview will be conducted in English and not in your native language. One suggestion is to practice English conversation with a native speaker before the interview, but do NOT prepare speeches! If you are coming to the United States solely to study intensive English, be prepared to explain how English will be useful for you in your home country.

### **3. Speak for Yourself**

Do not bring parents or family members with you to the interview. The consular officer wants to interview you, not your family. A negative impression is created if you are not prepared to speak on your own behalf. If you are a minor applying for a high school program and need your parents there in case there are questions, for example about funding, they should wait in the waiting room.

### **4. Know the Program and How It Fits Your Career Plans**

If you are not able to articulate the reasons you will study in a particular program in the United States, you may not succeed in convincing the consular officer that you are indeed planning to study, rather than to immigrate. You should also be able to explain how studying in the United States relates to your future professional career when you return home.

### **5. Be Brief**

Because of the volume of applications received, all consular officers are under considerable time pressure to conduct a quick and efficient interview. They must make a decision, for the most part, on the impressions they form during the first minute of the interview.

Consequently, what you say first and the initial impression you create are critical to your success. Keep your answers to the officer's questions short and to the point.

#### **6. Additional Documentation**

It should be immediately clear to the consular officer what written documents you are presenting and what they signify. Lengthy written explanations cannot be quickly read or evaluated. Remember that you will have 2-3 minutes of interview time, if you are lucky.

#### **7. Not All Countries are Equal**

Applicants from countries suffering economic problems or from countries where many students have remained in the United States as immigrants will have more difficulty getting Visas. Statistically, applicants from those countries are more likely to be intending immigrants. They are also more likely to be asked about job opportunities at home after their study in the United States.

#### **8. Employment**

Your main purpose in coming to the United States should be to study, not for the chance to work before or after graduation. While many students do work off-campus during their studies, such employment is incidental to their main purpose of completing their U.S. education. You must be able to clearly articulate your plan to return home at the end of your program. If your spouse is also applying for an accompanying F-2 Visa, be aware that F-2 dependents cannot, under any circumstances, be employed in the United States. If asked, be prepared to address what your spouse intends to do with his or her time while in the United States. Volunteer work and attending school part-time are permitted activities.

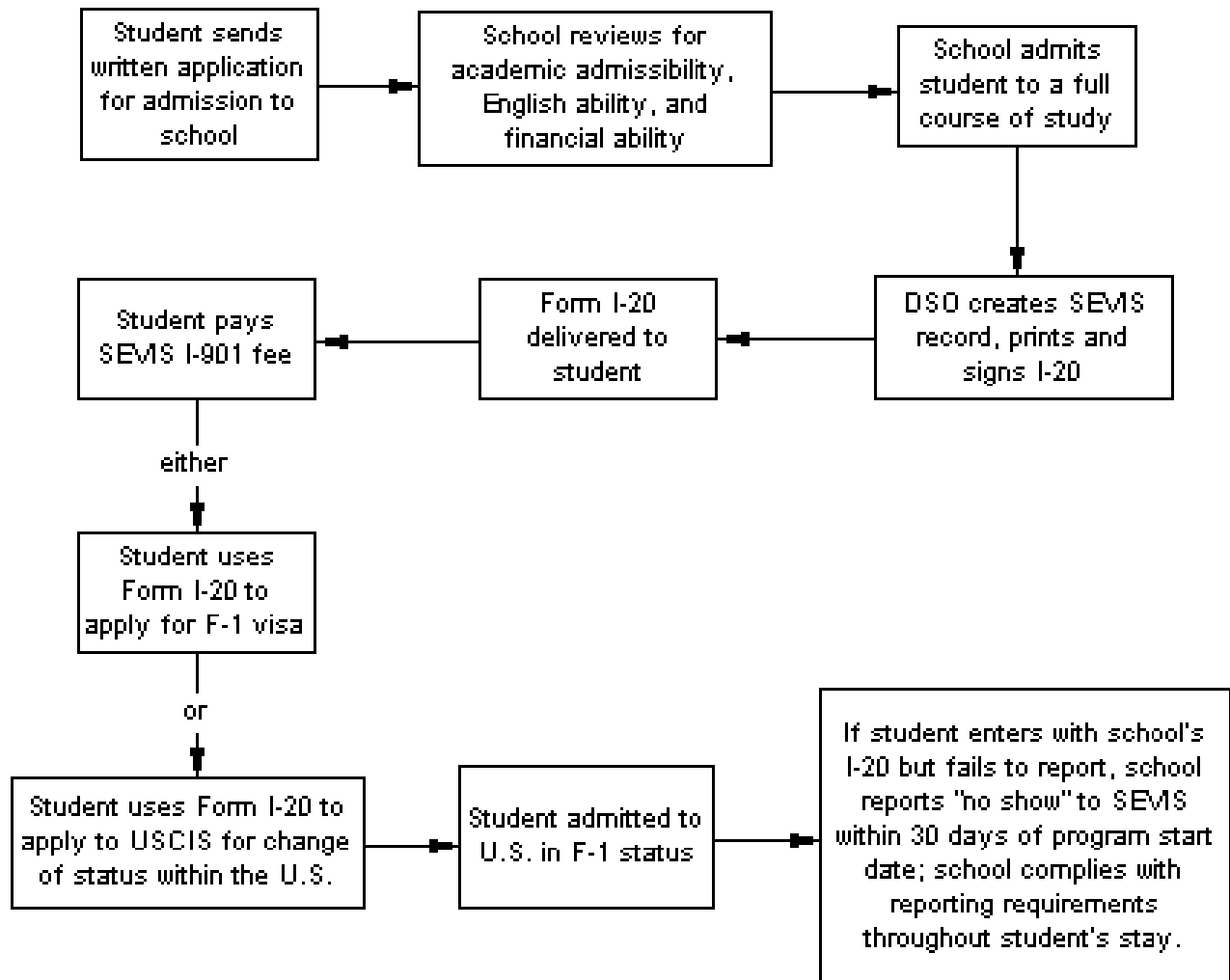
#### **9. Dependents Remaining at Home**

If your spouse and children are remaining behind in your country, be prepared to address how they will support themselves in your absence. This can be an especially tricky area if you are the primary source of income for your family. If the consular officer gains the impression that your family will need you to remit money from the United States in order to support themselves, your student Visa application will almost certainly be denied. If your family does decide to join you at a later time, it is helpful to have them apply at the same post where you applied for your Visa.

#### **10. Maintain a Positive Attitude**

Do not engage the consular officer in an argument. If you are denied a student Visa, ask the officer for a list of documents he or she would suggest you bring in order to overcome the refusal, and try to get the reason you were denied in writing.

## FLOW CHART OF F-1 STUDENT PROCESS



## TRAVELING TO THE UNITED STATES

### **Documents Necessary To Enter The U.S.**

You will need to have the following documents to enter the U.S. in F-1 status. You may apply for admission to the U.S. if all of the following documents are in order at the time you plan to enter the U.S.:

- a) Valid and unexpired Form I-20.
- b) Valid and unexpired F-1 Visa (Not required for citizens of Canada or Bermuda).
- c) Valid and unexpired Passport.

### **Travel Tips**

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has issued important reminders to assist international students and exchange visitors expected to arrive in the United States.

These reminders for international students and exchange visitors registered in the Student Exchange and Visitor Information System (SEVIS) are intended to ensure that legitimate students and exchange visitors are quickly processed at ports of entry. A comprehensive list of answers to frequently asked SEVIS questions has also been posted online at [www.ice.gov](http://www.ice.gov) and [www.cbp.gov](http://www.cbp.gov). DHS offers the following recommendations for international students:

1. Hand carry (do not check with your baggage) the following documents:
  - Your passport;
  - Your SEVIS Form I-20;
  - Evidence of financial resources;
  - Evidence of student or exchange visitor status, such as tuition receipts, transcripts or letter of acceptance;
  - Paper receipt for the SEVIS fee; and
  - The name and contact information of your Primary Designated School Official (PDSO) or Designated School Official (DSO).

**Important Note:** If you are a new international student or a new exchange visitor program participant, remember to carry with you the sealed envelope given to you by the U.S. Department of State's Consular Officer and attached to your passport. It is important that you do not open this envelope.

2. Inform the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Officer at the port of entry as soon as possible that you will be a new or returning (in case you previously attended school in the U.S. and are transferring to the Oblate School of Theology) international student in the United States.
3. Report to your school or program upon arrival so that your school official can validate your participation in SEVIS.
4. Maintain contact with your Primary Designated School Official (PDSO) or Designated School Official (DSO) throughout your stay to ensure your SEVIS data is updated and accurate.

## **Secondary Inspection**

Whether traveling by sea, land or air, if your information cannot be automatically verified by the inspector or you do not have all the required documentation, you may be directed to an interview area known as “secondary inspection.” Secondary inspection allows inspectors to conduct additional research in order to verify information. Verifications are done apart from the primary inspection lines so that an individual case will not cause delays for other arriving passengers.

In the case your admission/participation needs to be verified, **we strongly advise** that you have readily available the name **and phone number of the Registrar’s Office,** **210.341.1366.** *Failure to provide proper documentation and to comply with entry/exit procedures is cause to refuse the student or exchange visitor admission into the United States.*

In limited circumstances, if a student or exchange visitor is mostly, but not fully in compliance, he/she may be issued a **Form I-515A** “Notice to Student or Exchange Visitor”. This form authorizes temporary admission into the United States and requires the student or exchange visitor to immediately bring the **Form I-515A** and all of your immigration documents to **OST Registrar’s Office.** Noncompliance with the directions contained on this form may result in denied re-entry.

## DURING YOUR TIME AT OBLATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

### **F-1 DURATION OF STATUS (D/S) AND GRACE PERIODS**

You are admitted to the United States for "duration of status (D/S)," defined as the period during which you are pursuing a full course of study in a bachelor's or master's degree, doctoral or post-doctoral program, and any periods of authorized practical training, plus 60 days within which to depart from the U.S. If you fail to comply with the immigration regulations that apply to F-1 status, you may be liable to expedited removal from the U.S., and your eligibility for employment authorization will be seriously affected.

### **F-1 Regulations**

Once you are admitted to the U.S. in F-1 status, you must meet certain obligations in order to maintain your status:

1. **Complete The SEVIS Registration Check-In Process**

Upon arrival to the Oblate School of Theology (OST), all newly admitted F-1 students are required by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and OST to complete SEVIS Registration Check-In by the end of Week 2 of your first semester at OST. Failure to do so will result in a Negative Service Indicator (a Hold) from OST to be placed on your Student Record, which will block your enrollment activity and affect your eligibility to receive services from OST. Failure to timely complete your SEVIS Registration Check-In requirement will also result in termination of your F-1 status.

2. **Have A Passport That Is Kept Valid At All Times**

3. **Attend The School You Were Authorized To Attend**

If you entered the U.S. with the Form I-20 of another school, but are attending Oblate School of Theology, you are out-of-status, and must either apply for reinstatement, or leave the U.S. and re-enter with the Oblate School of Theology's Form I-20. This regulation does not mean you may not take courses at another U.S. institution during the summer vacation period, or even during the school year, if certain requirements are met.

4. **Enroll For A Full Course Of Study**

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) requires that you be enrolled full-time (12 credits, if undergraduate; 8 credit-hours for MAPM or MDIV; 9 credit-hours for MA(Th) or MA(Sp), if graduate; 3 credit-hours for DMIN, or 9 credit-hours for PhD (Spirituality), if doctoral) each academic semester, except during the semester you are graduating, when you need to enroll only for the credits still needed. Completing an "Incomplete" does not count towards enrollment. In order to be enrolled part-time during an academic term, you must have valid justification such as illness.

International students are not required to enroll for the summer sessions.

5. **Apply For Program Extension If You Need To Remain In The U.S. Longer Than The Period Of Time Specified On Your Admission Form I-20**

If you are unable to complete your degree program within the time period indicated on the admission I-20, you may request a program extension if the delay is caused by compelling academic or medical reasons, such as change of major or research topic, unexpected research problems, or documented illnesses. A written letter requesting an extension MUST be made prior to the completion date on your I-20. If your delay in completing your program is not for one of the reasons discussed above, or if you do not

apply prior to the completion date on your I-20, you will be considered to be out-of-status and must apply for reinstatement.

**6. Follow Certain Procedures To Continue From One Educational Level To Another**

If you begin another educational program at the Oblate School of Theology, *e.g., from Master's to Master's, Master's to Doctorate*, you must follow the change in educational level procedures.

**7. Follow Certain Procedures To Transfer From One U.S. School To Another.**

If you are transferring to the Oblate School of Theology and have traveled outside of the United States in the interim, and re-entered the country with the I-20 from OST, then your transfer is complete and you need to complete the SEVIS Registration Check-In requirement within 30 days after the Program start date listed on your I-20. If you have *not* traveled outside the United States, you must complete the SEVIS Registration Check-In requirement within 15 days after the Program start date listed on your I-20.

**8. Limit On-Campus Employment To 20 Hours Per Week While School Is In Session**

International students in F-1 status who are enrolled full-time and in good academic standing are eligible to work on-campus beginning with the first semester. International students are not eligible for "work-study" positions. All employment and assistantships during the academic year are limited to 20 hours or less per week.

**9. Refrain From Off-Campus Employment Without Authorization**

International students are eligible to apply for off-campus employment authorization after having been in F-1 status for one full academic year immediately preceding the application. Employment authorization must be obtained through Oblate School of Theology Primary Designated School Official (PDSO) or Designated School Official (DSO).

**10. Safeguard And Retain Your Documents**

It is your responsibility to retain copies of all your immigration documents and all immigration applications (Form I-20, employment, change of status, program extension, etc.) for your records/future use.

**Length Of Study**

The completion of studies date in Item #5 on the most recent SEVIS Form I-20 is the date by which USCIS expect you to complete your academic program. If you are unable to complete your academic program by that date, you must apply for program extension at least 30 days before reaching the I-20 completion date. If you are eligible for an extension of your time limit, your advisor will assist you to comply with extension requirements.

**EXTENSION OF F-1 STAY**

If you are unable to complete your degree program within the time period indicated on the admission I-20, you may request a program extension if the delay is caused by compelling academic or medical reasons, such as change of major or research topic, unexpected research problems, or documented illnesses. Application for extension **MUST** be made prior to the completion date on your I-20. If your delay in completing your program is not for one of the reasons discussed above, or if you do not apply prior to the completion date on your I-20, you will be considered to be out-of-status and must apply for reinstatement.

## **Eligibility Requirements For Program Extension**

You may apply for program extension if:

1. You have not yet exceeded the program completion date in item #5 on your SEVIS I-20 and
2. You have continually maintained lawful F-1 status, and
3. The delay in completing program requirements has been caused by compelling academic reasons (such as changes of major field or research topics, or unexpected research problems), or documented medical reasons. Delays in completing program requirements which are caused by academic probation or suspension are not acceptable reasons for program extension of a program of study.

If your completion of studies date has expired or if you do not meet the eligibility requirements to apply for program extension, you may need to apply for "reinstatement" to lawful F-1 status. In this case, you must contact your Primary Designated School Official (PDSO) or Designated School Official (DSO) immediately.

## **Application Deadline For Program Extension**

You must apply for the program extension no later than 30 days before completion date on your I-20. You should contact the Primary Designated School Official (PDSO) or Designated School Official (DSO) as soon as possible so that you will have sufficient time to prepare your application. If your completion date has already passed, you will be considered out-of-status and you need to contact the PDSO or DSO immediately.

## **Application Procedures For Program Extension**

Documents needed:

1. SEVIS I-20
2. Original Form I-94
3. Proof of Funds

## **Failure To Comply With Program Extension Regulations**

It is your responsibility to comply with all immigration regulations which apply to F-1 students, including the program extension discussed in this handout. If your I-20 completion of studies date will soon expire or if it has expired, you are urged to immediately contact your Primary Designated School Official (PDSO) or Designated School Official (DSO). Failure to comply with your responsibilities results in loss of your immigration status and an ineligibility for any type of employment or to apply for practical training or other F-1 benefits. In some situations, you may be subject to deportation.



## **CHANGING EDUCATION LEVEL/DEGREE**

This section will provide you with information on what constitutes a change of educational level and the necessary procedures involved when you progress from one academic program to another at the same U.S. institution.

A change of educational level means completing one academic program and beginning another at the same U.S. institution. Examples of this are Master's Degree to Master's Degree; Master's Degree to Ph.D. Degree.

### **PROCEDURES FOR CHANGING EDUCATION LEVELS AT THE SAME SCHOOL**

In order to apply for a change of educational level, you must qualify for a new Form I-20 to pursue the new educational level, and you also must have been maintaining valid F-1 status during your prior program. You must:

1. Follow all institutional and academic requirements for moving to a new degree level.
2. Before the end of the prior program, inform your Primary Designated School Official (PDSO) or Designated School Official (DSO) of the program change, and follow the School's procedures for requesting a new I-20.
3. Once the new I-20 is received, sign the student certification at item 11;
4. That becomes your new I-20.
  - If traveling during the break, make sure to have your new I-20 and valid passport with valid F-1 Visa on you in order to reenter the U.S. after your vacation. Upon your arrival, bring your passport, I-20, and I-94 to the Registrar's Office for SEVIS registration ***after*** you have registered for classes.
  - If not traveling during the break, bring your passport, I-20, and I-94 to the Registrar's Office for SEVIS registration ***after*** you have registered for classes.

### **Failure To Comply**

If you fail to notify U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) through PDSO OR DSO of your change of educational level before the end of your current program, you are considered to be out-of-status. Being out-of-status makes you liable to deportation, and ineligible for any type of employment.

## TRANSFERRING FROM ONE SCHOOL TO ANOTHER SCHOOL

A **school transfer** means changing from one academic institution in the U.S. to another for the purpose of completing a current or starting a new degree. For example, you would require a school transfer if you had been a full-time student at the Mexican American Catholic College (MACC) in the spring semester and wanted to be a full-time student at Oblate School of Theology (OST) beginning in the fall semester.

**Please note:** As an F-1 student, you are eligible for concurrent enrollment at a second institution without requiring a transfer to this school as long as the enrollment in both schools amounts to a full course of study, and you are registered at the institution on whose Form I-20 you entered the U.S. Courses at the second institution may be taken during Fall, Spring, or Summer sessions.

### **Eligibility Requirements**

An F-1 student who is maintaining his/her F-1 status may transfer to another school by following the transfer procedure outlined below. However, if a student has not pursued a full course load (i.e., a minimum of 12 credits for undergraduates, 9 credits for graduates during spring and fall semesters) at the school last authorized to attend or is otherwise not eligible to transfer, he/she is considered to be out-of status and must apply for reinstatement to F-1 status by the Primary Designated School Official (PDSO) or Designated School Official (DSO), or he/she must depart the U.S. and reenter in F-1 status. Please consult with your Primary Designated School Official (PDSO) or Designated School Official (DSO) for further information on reinstatement to F-1 status.

### **School Transfer Procedure From U.S. Academic Institution To OST**

In order to transfer in to OST, you must inform your Primary Designated School Official (PDSO) or Designated School Official (DSO) at your current school of your intention to transfer to OST, and obtain a new Form I-20 from OST's Office of Admission/Registrar's Office.

Whether or not you exit the U.S. and use your OST Form I-20 to reenter the U.S. between transferring from your previous school to OST, you are required to bring your OST Form I-20, Form I-20 from your previous school, passport, and Form I-94 to your Primary Designated School Official (PDSO) or Designated School Official (DSO) within 15 days of the program start date listed on your OST Form I-20.

### **School Transfer Procedure From OST To U.S. Academic Institution**

In order to transfer out of OST, you must use the *School Transfer Out Form for Students in F-1 Status* to notify Primary Designated School Official (PDSO) or Designated School Official (DSO) of your intent to transfer. Upon receipt of this form, we will update your SEVIS record, thereby giving the new school access to your record.

You may be applying to many schools, but your SEVIS record can only be transferred to ONE school. Once we transfer your record out, we CANNOT retrieve it after the release date, and you will have to contact the school you requested that it be transferred to. Your transfer release date will be the end of the current semester unless otherwise requested, provided you have a valid reason. The new school cannot issue you a new I-20 until the record is transferred.

**Failure To Comply**

If you fail to contact Primary Designated School Official (PDSO) or Designated School Official (DSO) regarding your school transfer within the required time limit, you are considered to be out-of-status. Being out-of-status renders you ineligible for any type of employment and makes you liable to deportation.

## RESOLVING STATUS PROBLEMS

### **REINSTATEMENT TO F-1 STATUS**

If you are admitted to the U.S. in F-1 status and fail to comply with F-1 immigration regulations, you will be considered "out of status." In order to regain valid F-1 status you must either 1) leave and reenter the U.S. in F-1 status or 2) request a reinstatement from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). While out-of-status, you are subject to expedited removal from the U.S. and ineligible for any type of employment.

As an F-1 student you may lose your status for any of the following reasons:

- Enrolling for less than the required full course load (i.e., a minimum of 12 credits for undergraduates; 9 credits for graduates during Spring and Fall semesters) without the approval of your Primary Designated School Official (PDSO) or Designated School Official (DSO).
- Failing to complete a timely transfer procedure if transferring from another U.S. institution.
- Entering the U.S. with a Form I-20 from one school but attending a different school, i.e., attending a school you are not authorized to attend.
- Failing to complete a timely notification procedure if changing from one academic program to another.
- Failing to request a program extension in a timely manner, or an invalid reason for program extension.
- Having an expired passport.
- Working on campus for more than 20 hours a week while school is in session.
- Working off-campus without authorization. In this situation, you are ineligible for reinstatement and must leave and reenter the U.S. to regain your F-1 status.

### **Who Is Eligible To Apply For Reinstatement?**

If you are out-of-status, you are only eligible to apply for reinstatement if you meet all of the following criteria:

- You have not been out-of-status for more than five months at the time of filing the request for reinstatement (or you can demonstrate that the failure to file within the five month period was the result of exceptional circumstances and that you are filing the request for reinstatement as promptly as possible under these exceptional circumstances); and
- You do not have a record of repeated or willful violations of USCIS regulations; and
- You have not engaged in unauthorized employment; and
- You are not deportable on any ground other than section 237(a)(1)(B) or (C)(i) of the Act; and
- You establish to the satisfaction of the USCIS, by a detailed showing, either that:
  - The violation of status resulted from circumstance beyond your control (such circumstance might include serious injury or illness, closure of the institution, a natural disaster, or inadvertence, oversight, or neglect on the part of the

Designated School Official, but do not include instances where a pattern of repeated violations or where a willful failure on your part resulted in the need for reinstatement; or

- The violation is related to a reduction in your course load that would have been within a Designated School Official's power to authorize, and that failure to approve reinstatement would result in extreme hardship to you.

### **Procedures For Reinstatement To F-1 Status**

If you have failed to maintain F-1 student status, the PDSO or DSO will assist you in preparing the documentation required to request reinstatement from the USCIS. The following documents are necessary for this procedure:

- Form I-539.
- Form G-1145 Applicants filing a Form I-539 at a USCIS Lockbox facility may elect to receive an e-mail and/or text message notifying them that their application has been accepted.
- Original Form I-94.
- Original Form I-20 (you must sign and date item #11).
- Copy of entire passport, including biographical data page, Visa pages, pages with U.S. and foreign admission/departure stamps.
- Copy of initial Form I-20 stamped by USCIS.
- Social Security Number, if you have one.
- Letter from you explaining why you fell out of status.
  - This letter should illustrate that the violation of F-1 status resulted from circumstances beyond your control or that failure to receive reinstatement would result in extreme hardship for you.
  - It has to include the date you realized you were no longer in valid F-1 non-immigrant status, and the date you contacted your PDSO OR DSO advisor to resolve the problem.
- Funding documents covering all your expenses as indicated on Form I-20.
- If you answered, "yes" to any question in Item 3, Part 4 of Form I-539, be sure to satisfy the additional documentary requirements specified.
- Official transcripts and registration statement for the current semester.
- Any other materials supporting your request for reinstatement (i.e., transcripts, registration statement for the current semester, I-20's from previous schools, and the like).
- Money order for \$290.00 made payable to the "Department of Homeland Security."
- Receipt for payment of the SEVIS fee if applicable (only for students who have been out-of-status for more than five months).

The Primary Designated School Official (PDSO) or Designated School Official (DSO) will send the completed application for reinstatement to USCIS. Processing usually takes approximately one year, but may take longer, depending on USCIS workload.

### **Reinstatement And Employment Authorization**

One of the criteria for off-campus employment authorization is that a student must have been in lawful F-1 status for at least one academic year prior to qualifying. If you regain your status through reinstatement, and you had accrued at least one academic year in valid status before the status violation, that time can be used for purposes of qualifying for practical training after reinstatement.

While you are awaiting the USCIS' decision on your application for reinstatement, you are ineligible for any type of employment, either on- or off-campus.

### **Alternatives To Reinstatement: Travel And Re-Entry**

If you do not want to apply for reinstatement through USCIS, you may choose to depart the country and seek reentry with a new Form I-20. Please be aware that in this circumstance, you must first submit payment and obtain a receipt of payment of the \$200.00 SEVIS fee before seeking reentry to the U.S. (see information above for procedures regarding payment of SEVIS fee). Traveling abroad and re-entering the U.S. will put you back in F-1 status; however, it will only put you back in F-1 status from the day you re-enter the U.S. In this situation, you must again accumulate one academic year in F-1 status before you are eligible for any off-campus employment authorization.

## PASSPORT RENEWAL

If you need to renew your passport or have lost your passport, please contact your country's embassy inside the U.S.

The web site of Foreign Embassies in the U.S. is <http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/dpl/32122.htm>.

Below is a list of some Foreign Embassy websites.

### CANADA

<http://www.canadianembassy.org>

<http://www.ambassadeducanada.org>

### COLOMBIA

<http://www.colombiaemb.org/>

### EL SALVADOR

<http://www.elsalvador.org/>

### HONDURAS

<http://www.hondurasemb.org/>

### INDIA

<http://www.indianembassy.org>

### IRELAND

[www.irelandemb.org](http://www.irelandemb.org)

### KENYA

<http://www.kenyaembassy.com/>

### MEXICO

<http://embamex.sre.gob.mx/eua/index.php/es>

### NIGERIA

<http://www.nigeriaembassyusa.org/>

### PHILIPPINES

<http://www.philippineembassy-usa.org/>

### POLAND

<http://www.polandembassy.org/>

### SOUTH AFRICA

<http://www.saembassy.org>

### SPAIN

<http://www.spainemb.org>

### TANZANIA

<http://tanzaniaembassy-us.org/>

### VENEZUELA

<http://www.embavenez-us.org>

### VIETNAM

<http://www.vietnamebassy-usa.org>

### ZAMBIA

<http://www.zambiaembassy.org/>

## VISA RENEWAL

The Visa stamp in your passport is for entry purposes only. Once you are in the U.S., your Form I-20 combined with your I-94 card become the active documents that permit you to remain in the U.S. You are allowed to stay for D/S or "Duration of Status", which means the period of time in which you are maintaining your non-immigrant status. The completion date on your I-20 is the expiration date of your status. Your Form I-20 can be extended at the Registrar's Office if necessary.

### **APPLYING FOR A VISA IN YOUR HOME COUNTRY**

The Oblate School of Theology highly recommends that you apply for a Visa at the U.S. Consulate or Embassy in your home country. Most consulates require a personal interview with a consular officer and collect biometric identifiers (e.g. fingerprints and digital photograph). Always check with the consulate or embassy where you will be applying to determine current application and documentation requirements as well as processing times.

You can find a list of consular websites at <http://www.usembassy.gov>.

### **Requirements For A New Visa**

**1. Valid I-20 with a travel endorsement signature from PDSO/DSO within that last 6 months**

**2. Official OST Transcript in a sealed envelope available at the Registrar's Office**

**3. Proof of financial support**

You should be able to verify the amount shown as the total on your I-20 with a personal bank statement, or sponsor's letter and sponsor's bank statement.

**4. Proof of ties to your home country**

From the Department of State web site: "Student Visa applicants must establish to the satisfaction of the consular officer that they have binding ties to a residence in a foreign country which they have no intention of abandoning, and that they will depart the United States when they have completed their studies. It is impossible to specify the exact form the evidence should take since applicants' circumstances vary greatly."

Examples of such evidence may include: copies of bank statements from a bank in your home country, evidence of ownership of property or residence in your home country, a job offer letter from home or letters from family.

**5. Issuance Fee charged for Visa**

The Visa application fee is \$141 for F-1 Visas. Depending on the country of citizenship, there also may be an issuance fee (also called a Visa reciprocity fee).

Check the following website to determine if you will be charged this fee:

[http://travel.state.gov/Visa/fees/fees\\_3272.html](http://travel.state.gov/Visa/fees/fees_3272.html).

**6. SEVIS Fee, when required**

If you leave and re-enter the U.S. to regain legal status with an I-20 issued after September 1, 2015, or are readmitted to the University and are returning with a new I-20 issued after September 1, 2015, you are required to pay the SEVIS fee. This fee is US \$200 for F-1 students Visa applicants.

**7. Application Form DS-160**



## 8. **One passport-size photograph**

If completing the DS-160 online, see photograph guidelines.

For your reference, a list of U.S. Consulates & Embassies can be found at <http://www.usembassy.gov/>.

### **Automatic Revalidation**

F-1 students from most countries, who plan to travel to Canada, Mexico or adjacent Islands (Bermuda, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Martinique, Miquelon, St. Pierre, Trinidad and Tobago, Windward and Leeward Islands) a less than 30 days, can travel with an expired Visa. You may however be required to apply for a Visa to enter these countries.

In order to be readmitted to the US you need to present to the Immigration Officer, at the port of entry, the following documents:

- Valid Passport. It must be valid for at least 6 months in the future from the time you enter the US.
- Valid I-94 with "D/S" notation
- Valid I-20 or DS-2019 with a travel endorsement signature from the PDSO/DSO within 6 months from the time your plan to reenter the US.
- Proof of Financial Support
- OST Transcript and proof of enrollment in the current and upcoming semester.

### **Exceptions**

Automatic Revalidation does not apply under the following circumstances:

- You applied for a new Visa and it has not been issued;
- You applied for a new Visa and were denied;
- You have a terminated SEVIS record indicating that you are out of status;
- You have been out the United States for more than thirty days;
- You are a citizen of one of the following countries: Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Sudan

### **Background And Security Checks**

Consulates and embassies frequently conduct background checks that can result in possible delays in Visa issuance for individuals. Background/security checks can be triggered by, but not limited to, arrests in the United States, certain courses that appear on your transcript, or by your field of study. Background/security checks can take several months or longer.

### **Applying For A Visa In A Third Country**

F-1 students who apply for a Visa stamp in a third country – including Canada and Mexico – and get denied will not be allowed to reenter the U.S. on an expired Visa stamp. If your application is denied, you would need to depart directly to your home country to apply for a new Visa to reenter the U.S. Please talk to Primary Designated School Official (PDSO) or Designated School Official (DSO) before making the decision to apply for a Visa in a third country.

If you are subject to a background or security check upon application for a Visa renewal in a third country, you will have to remain in that country until the background or security check is completed and the Visa is approved before you are allowed to re-enter the U.S.

Please note that you may need an entry Visa to enter a third country.

The following contacts may be helpful to determine if you need a Visa to enter another country:

Canada: (213) 346-2711 or <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/visit/index.asp>

Mexico: (512) 478-2866 or <http://www.sre.gob.mx/austin/>

Foreign consular offices in the United States: <http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/fco>

### **Visa Application Process In Mexico Or Canada**

An appointment for a Visa renewal in Mexico or Canada is made in advance in one of the following ways:

#### **For consulates in Mexico**

The U.S. Consulates in Mexico process only F-1 Visa renewals for continuing students in full-time degree programs who can demonstrate that their initial F-1 Visa was issued in their home country.

Web Address: [http://www.usVisa-mexico.com/mex/index.jsp?locale=es\\_MX](http://www.usVisa-mexico.com/mex/index.jsp?locale=es_MX)

#### **For consulates in Canada**

Web Address: [http://www.usVisa-info.com/en-CA/selfservice/ss\\_country\\_welcome](http://www.usVisa-info.com/en-CA/selfservice/ss_country_welcome)

## EMPLOYMENT/INTERNSHIP/PASTORAL YEAR

### **CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING (CPT)**

USCIS defines "curricular practical training" as employment which is an integral or important part of your curriculum, and that it is either required for your degree or you receive academic credit for the employment experience. Those going on Pastoral Year or Internship must sign up for CPT.

#### **Eligibility Requirements**

##### **(A) Employment Which Is a Required Part of Your Degree Program.**

If (1) you are a graduate student, (2) you are maintaining lawful F-1 status, and (3) the proposed employment is a required part of your studies, you may apply for permission to engage in CPT whenever your program requires your participation, even if it is immediately upon beginning your studies.

##### **(B) Employment Which Is Not a Required Part of your Degree Program.**

In order to be eligible to apply for permission to work in a job which is not a required part of your study program, but for which you will receive academic credit (i.e., at least one credit in an internship course), you must (1) be in lawful F-1 status at the time you submit your application and continue to maintain valid F-1 status, and (2) you have been enrolled in valid, lawful status as a full-time student for at least one full academic year directly preceding your application. This applies to both graduate and undergraduate students.

#### **Part-Time Vs. Full-Time Curricular Practical Training**

##### **Part-Time Training**

While you are enrolled for classes, you may be employed for 20 hours or less per week; this is considered "part time" curricular practical training. There is no limitation upon the length of time you may participate in part time CPT but you must be simultaneously enrolled in order to maintain lawful F-1 status.

##### **Full-Time Training**

Employment for more than 20 hours per week is considered "full time" CPT. Full-time CPT is only possible during summer vacation unless your degree requires you to complete a full-time internship during fall and/or spring semesters. In the latter case, you may be eligible to engage in full-time CPT during fall and/or spring semesters as well. Please note that CPT for which you receive academic credit (i.e., at least one credit in an internship course) requires enrollment, even during the summer. There is no limitation upon the length of time you may participate in full time CPT but if you participate for 12 months or more, you will not be eligible for optional practical training (OPT).

#### **Curricular Practical Training And Eligibility Requirements For Optional Practical Training**

It is important that you understand that if you participate in 12 months or more of "full time" CPT, you lose eligibility to apply for 12 months of Optional Practical Training.

Authorization dates for Curricular Practical Training are based on the Academic Calendar. If you are engaged in CPT for academic credit during fall or spring semesters, the dates of employment are the same as the beginning and ending dates of the course. However, during the summer,

students who register for a CPT internship course for the first summer session will be given authorization for the entire summer if their professor deems the additional time to be necessary for project completion. Please keep in mind that CPT which is not required for your degree must carry at least one academic internship credit.

### **OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)**

Optional practical training (OPT) is employment designed to provide you with an opportunity to gain actual experience in your chosen profession for a maximum of one year. Its purpose is to "round off" or complement your academic work. It differs from curricular practical training in that it does not have to be required for your degree, nor does it have to be for academic credit. **Optional practical training may be done before you complete your studies, and/or after you complete your studies, but may not exceed a total of 12 months.** An eligible student who has been granted 12 months of optional practical training becomes eligible for another 12 months of optional practical training after changing to a higher educational level.

### **Basic Eligibility Requirements**

In order for you to be eligible to apply for OPT, the following criteria have to be met:

1. You must have been enrolled as a full-time student in valid, lawful status for one full academic year directly preceding the training;
2. You must be in valid F-1 status at the time you submit your application and continue to maintain valid F-1 status;
3. The employment must be directly related to your major field of study, and
4. The employment must be appropriate for someone having your level of education.

You may submit an application for optional practical training up to 90 days prior to being enrolled for one full academic year, provided that the period of employment will not begin until the completion of the full academic year as indicated by your Advisor at International Student and Scholar Services (PDSO OR DSO).

### **Types Of Optional Practical Training**

OPT is available in the following cases:

#### **(A) Before Completion of Studies**

1. Part-time (20 hours per week) or full-time (40 hours per week) during your annual vacation and at other times when school is not in session if you are currently enrolled and intend to register for the next term; or
2. Part-time (20 hours per week) while school is in session; or
3. Part-time (20 hours per week) or full-time (40 hours per week) after completion of graduate course requirements (but before completion of a course of study), excluding a thesis or dissertation.

You may apply no earlier than 90 days prior to being enrolled for one full academic year, provided that the period of employment will not begin until the completion of the full academic year, and no earlier than 120 days before the requested OPT start date. The OPT application must be filed with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) within 30 days of the OPT recommendation being entered in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System.

#### **(B) After Completion of Studies**

Provided you are completing a Bachelor's, Master's or Doctoral Degree Program at the U.S. institution you are authorized to attend. Post-completion OPT must be at least 20 hours of activity per week.

You may apply no earlier than up to 90 days prior to being enrolled for one full academic year and 90 days before the expected degree completion date, provided that the period of employment will not begin until the completion of the full academic year, and no later than 60 days after the degree completion date. If you apply for OPT during the 60-day grace period after degree completion, you must submit your OPT application no less than 15 business days before the end of the 60-day grace period in order for USCIS to receive your application by the filing deadline. The OPT application must be filed with USCIS within 30 days of the OPT recommendation being entered in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System.

**NOTE:** You must continue to be registered even if you are preparing a thesis or dissertation and have finished all your course work, including during a summer session if you expect to complete your degree in that summer session. If you fail to maintain your registration, you will forfeit your opportunity for optional practical training.

### **Authorization Procedures**

The items listed below are required to apply for OPT:

1. Letter requesting OPT, including where you will be located and what you will be doing
2. Form G-1145, "E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance."  
[www.uscis.gov/i-765](http://www.uscis.gov/i-765)
3. Form I-765 (enter eligibility code (c)(3)(A) in item #16 if you are applying for pre-completion OPT, and eligibility code (c)(3)(B) in item #16 if you are applying for post-completion OPT) [www.uscis.gov/i-765](http://www.uscis.gov/i-765)
4. Two U.S. passport-style photos as specified in the I-765 instructions (with name and I-94 number written on back in pencil) *(Please note that it is your responsibility to ensure that the photographs comply with the I-765 instructions, and that it is your decision and responsibility if the photographs are sent to USCIS as part of this application. OST does not assume any responsibility for USCIS' decision whether your photographs meet the Form I-765 specifications.)*
5. Original SEVIS Form I-20 (signed by student on page 1)
6. Copy of all previous Form I-20s
7. Original Form I-94
8. Copy of passport pages (biographic data, photo, F-1 Visa, and passport page with last entry stamp)
9. Copy of any previously issued EAD, if applicable
10. Money order for \$380.00 made payable to the Department of Homeland Security (obtainable from your bank, any US Post Office, CVS, Western Union)

Applications for optional practical training authorization must be submitted to PDSO OR DSO for processing before they can be sent by OST to USCIS Dallas Lockbox for adjudication. Please be aware that it will take USCIS from 120 to 150 days to adjudicate OPT applications, and that you may not begin employment until you have received your Employment Authorization

Document (EAD) from USCIS and until the start date on the EAD has arrived.

## **OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

### **Expanded Definition of OPT**

Traditionally, OPT has been defined as employment that is related to the student's degree major and appropriate for the degree level. This requirement remains in place; however, the government has expanded the types of activity that qualify as OPT. OPT may be in any of these forms:

1. Working for one or multiple employers (short or long term).
2. Working on a contractual basis.
3. Working as a self-employed business owner on a full-time basis (with evidence of the proper business license).
4. Working through an agency.
5. Volunteering or holding an unpaid internship (as long as the position does not violate any labor laws).

### **Limited Periods of Unemployment during Optional Practical Training after Completion of Studies**

During post-completion OPT, your F-1 status is dependent upon employment. Once your post-completion OPT begins, you are not allowed to accrue an aggregate of more than 90 days of unemployment during any post-completion OPT carried out under the initial post-completion OPT authorization. Exceeding this limit may negatively affect your immigration status and future immigration benefits. You are allowed to volunteer or engage in unpaid internships during your post-completion OPT carried out under the initial post-completion OPT authorization, provided that no labor laws are violated and that the volunteer work or internship is for at least 20 hours per week. Volunteering or engaging in unpaid internships will be considered employment during your post-completion OPT carried out under the initial post-completion OPT authorization.

### **Travel Outside of U.S. While Engaged in Optional Practical Training before Completion of Studies**

Before completing your studies, you must present the following documents to USCIS at the port-of-entry in order to seek reentry to the U.S.:

1. SEVIS Form I-20, endorsed for travel by your PDSO OR DSO advisor within the last 12 months;
2. Valid passport; and
3. Valid F-1 Visa.

You do not need evidence of a job or a valid EAD issued for OPT to return to the U.S.

### **Travel Outside the U.S. While Engaged in Optional Practical Training after Completion of Studies**

After completing your studies and before your EAD has arrived, you must present the following documents to USCIS at the port-of-entry in order to seek reentry to the U.S.:

1. SEVIS Form I-20, endorsed for travel by your PDSO OR DSO advisor;

2. Form I-797 receipt notice for pending application for EAD issued by USCIS;
3. Valid passport; and
4. Valid F-1 Visa.

After completing your studies and after your EAD has arrived, you must present the following documents to USCIS at the port-of-entry in order to seek reentry to the U.S.:

1. SEVIS Form I-20, endorsed for travel by your PDSO OR DSO advisor within the last six months;
2. EAD issued by USCIS;
3. Valid passport;
4. Valid F-1 Visa; and
5. A letter from the U.S. employer regarding the employment for Optional Practical Training.

**Students who do not meet these requirements may not be allowed to re-enter the U.S.** Be sure to consult with PDSO OR DSO when contemplating travel outside the U.S. and reentry to continue optional practical training after completion of studies.

### **Importance of the Actual Date You Complete Your Program of Study**

USCIS regulations refer to the date you complete all requirements for a program of study, not to the date you participate in graduation ceremonies and receive a certificate or diploma. USCIS ignores your graduation date because it realizes that many students, especially graduate students in thesis or dissertation programs, may complete requirements for a degree any day during the year. This means that the last day of an academic term may not be the date you complete program requirements. Your lawful F 1 status expires 60 days after the date you complete degree requirements, and you are expected to leave the country by that date unless you have filed a timely application for optional practical training or made other arrangements to lawfully remain in the U.S.

### **Actual Date Optional Practical Training Employment May Begin and End**

You may not begin work until the following requirements are satisfied:

- 1) you have obtained an EAD from USCIS, and
- 2) the date is reached when the EAD authorizes employment to begin.

Your beginning date will be the date USCIS assigns at the time it processes your application. This is the date from which your optional practical training time starts counting, not from the date you begin employment.

All Optional Practical Training must be completed during the 14-month window following date of completion of studies. Therefore, depending on when you apply, you may not be granted the full 12 months of optional practical training.

### **Change of Employer after Optional Practical Training Has Been Authorized**

You may change employers after you have begun authorized employment provided the new job is

- 1) directly related to your major field of study and

2) appropriate for someone having your level of education.

You must immediately report any change of name or address, or disruption of employment during OPT to PDSO OR DSO for the duration of the authorized training

### **H-1B CAP-GAP EXTENSION**

Duration of status and work authorization will be automatically extended for a student on OPT who is the beneficiary of a timely-filed H-1B petition requesting change of status and an employment start date of October 1 of the following fiscal year. The extension of duration of status and work authorization automatically terminates upon the rejection, denial, or revocation of the H-B petition filed on the student's behalf.

To request an updated I-20 for H-1B cap-gap extension, you must provide to PDSO OR DSO the following evidence via fax or e-mail:

- For a properly filed H-1B petition: A statement from the employer that you are the beneficiary listed on a properly filed H-1B petition and proof of delivery to a USCIS Service Center showing the date of receipt
- For a wait-listed H-1B petition: A copy of the wait list letter from USCIS to the employer
- For a receipted or approved H-1B petition: a copy of the Form I-797 and/or the I-797 receipt number

Students on H-1B cap-gap extension must continue to report all changes of name and address, and interruptions of employment just like all other students on OPT.

### **MAKING A DECISION REGARDING OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING**

**12 Months of Optional Practical Training is Available After Change to a Higher Educational Level.** If you have used 12 months of OPT, you will be eligible for another 12 months after changing to a higher educational level (i.e., if you use the entire 12 months for a Master's Degree, you will be eligible for 12 more months after your Doctoral Degree).

**Authorization May Not Be Rescinded.** Once authorization to engage in optional practical training is granted, it may not be rescinded or canceled. This means that after optional practical training is authorized by the USCIS, unexpected delays in completing degree requirements, inability to find an appropriate job or loss of a job may result in loss of otherwise eligible time to work. Once permission to work has been given, it cannot be taken back regardless of subsequent occurrences.

**Termination of Optional Practical Training.** Authorization to engage in optional practical training is automatically terminated when you transfer to another school or begin study at another educational level.



## R-1 RELIGIOUS WORKER VISA

The R-1 classification is for nonimmigrant workers coming to the U.S. temporarily to work for a qualified religious organization or a qualified organization affiliated with the religious denomination, as a minister, or to perform a religious vocation or occupation specified in the regulations.

To be eligible for R-1 classification, an alien must:

1. Be a member of a religious denomination having a bona fide non-profit religious organization in the United States for at least two years immediately preceding the time of application for admission;
2. Be coming to the United States to work at least in a part time position (average of at least 20 hours per week);
3. Be coming solely as a minister or to perform a religious vocation or occupation;
4. Be coming to or remaining in the United States at the request of the petitioner to work for the petitioner; and
5. Not work in the United States in any other capacity.

The U.S. petitioning organization must be a nonprofit religious organization granted 501(c)(3) tax exempt status, or a 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization affiliated with the denomination.

The R regulations also provide for inspections, evaluations, verifications, and compliance reviews of religious organizations.

The I-129 petition Q-1 and R-1 Supplement contains the following attestation items required by the regulations:

1. That the prospective employer is a bona fide non-profit religious organization or a bona fide organization which is affiliated with the religious denomination and is exempt from taxation;
2. That the alien has been a member of the denomination for at least two years and that the alien is otherwise qualified for the position offered;
3. The number of members of the prospective employer's organization;
4. The number of employees who work at the same location where the beneficiary will be employed and a summary of the type of responsibilities of those employees duties at its discretion;
5. The number of aliens holding special immigrant or nonimmigrant religious worker status currently employed or employed within the past five years by the prospective employer's organization;
6. The number of special immigrant religious worker and nonimmigrant religious worker petitions and applications filed by or on behalf of any aliens for employment by the prospective employer in the past five years;
7. The title of the position offered to the alien and a detailed description of the alien's proposed daily duties;

8. Whether the alien will receive salaried or non-salaried compensation and the details of such compensation;
9. That the alien will be employed at least 20 hours per week;
10. The specific location(s) of the proposed employment; and
11. That the alien will not be engaged in secular employment.

The petition must also be accompanied by detailed evidence relating to the petitioning organization, evidence relating to compensation (salaried or non-salaried compensation, or self-support), and evidence of the alien's qualifications.

An alien can be granted R-1 status for an initial period of up to 2 and one-half years (30 months). Extensions of stay of up to 2 and one-half years (30 months) may be granted, for a cumulative total of 5 years in R-1 status.

An alien can spend a maximum total of 5 years in R-1 status. After spending 5 years in the United States in R-1 status, an alien is not eligible to be readmitted or extend his or her stay in R-1 status until he or she "has resided and has been physically present outside the United States for the immediate prior year."

An exception to the 5-year time limit exists for the following R-1 aliens:

- a) R-1 aliens who reside abroad and regularly commute to engage in part-time employment in the United States;
- b) R-1 aliens who "did not reside continually in the United States and whose employment in the United States was seasonal or intermittent or was for an aggregate of six months or less per year."

R-1 nonimmigrants can only work as described in the R Visa petition for the qualifying organization.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### **BANKING**

#### **Opening a Checking Account**

Even though many banks allow new customers to open accounts online or by phone, international students should plan to open an account in person at a local branch. Bring the funds you want to deposit, as well as the following documents:

1. Passport,
2. School ID,
3. State Driver's license or ID,
4. Visa, and
5. Form I-20.

You do not need a social security number to open an account.

#### **Questions to Consider When Shopping For a Checking Account:**

- How much will the bank charge you to maintain your account?
- Will your checking account come with a debit card?
- Is there a charge to withdraw money from your bank or another bank's ATM?
- Will the bank charge you for your checks?
- Is a minimum balance required for the type of checking account you are opening?
- What are the fees if your balance drops below the minimum?
- Does the bank offer overdraft protection? How does it work and what is the cost?
- When you deposit a check into your account, will you have same-day access to the funds or will there be a waiting period before your money is available to you?

## **DRIVER LICENSE**

International students may drive with both a license from their country of origin and an International Driver License for 90 days in the US before they have to obtain a driver license issued by the state of residence.

A Texas driver license or a State of Texas identification card can be obtained at any Texas Department of Public Safety location.

All customers - regardless of their citizenship status - may go to any Driver License Division office in Texas to apply for a new driver license or State of Texas identification card.

Driver licenses are issued for one year at a time, renewable until the end of the student's program. F-1 students who have completed a course of study or optional practical training can be granted a license for an additional 60-day period to allow them to prepare for departure or to process a transfer.

Dependents of F-1 students (i.e. dependents in F-2 status) are allowed the same period of driver's license validity as the F-1 students.

If you are a US citizen, lawful permanent resident (immigrant), refugee, asylee, or non-immigrant, you must provide proof of your lawful presence in the United States. Most documents will be verified through the US Department of Homeland Security's SAVE Program. Verification through SAVE is often instantaneous, but when it is not, receipt of the DL/ID may be delayed for up to 30 days.

### **Requirements For A Texas Driver License**

For first-time issuance of a State of Texas driver license or identification card, Texas law requires the following items from students in F-1 status:

1. Passport; and
2. Proof of non-immigrant classification provided by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (Form I-94); and
3. F-1 status documentation (Form I-20); and
4. Letter from PDSO/DSO of proof of status; and
5. SSN cards *if* one has been issued.

It is recommended that you take your foreign driver license, if one has been issued. You may be exempt from the otherwise mandatory drug and alcohol traffic education course, the driving test, or parts of it.

You are strongly advised to make an appointment. If you go without an appointment, expect a four to six hour wait for your turn. To schedule an appointment and for the most up-to-date information on driver license requirements, check the Texas Department of Public Safety website: <https://www.txdps.state.tx.us/DriverLicense/>.

## **EMPLOYMENT**

### **On-Campus Employment**

F-1 students are generally permitted to work part-time on the premises of the school that issued their currently valid I-20, while they are attending that school and maintaining their F-1 status, subject to the restrictions outlined here. This type of employment is "incident to status," and does not require DSO authorization, nor does it require an update to the SEVIS record.

### **Characteristics Of F-1 On-Campus Employment**

**Preconditions:** Eligible immediately upon obtaining F-1 status; no waiting period

**Location:** Must be considered "on-campus"

**Duration:** Can be used throughout the period student is pursuing a full course of study

**Hours per week:** Limited to 20 hours per week while school is in session; can be full-time during official school breaks for students who are eligible and intend to register for the subsequent academic term

**Field/level of work:** Can be in any on-campus position that does not displace a U.S. worker; does not have to be related to course of study

**Offer of employment:** Not required as a condition of eligibility

**Effect on other work:** All on-campus work is treated the same for the 20 hours per week limit; e.g., a teaching assistant working 15 hours per week can only work 5 additional hours per week in another on-campus job

**Approval process:** Employment is "incident to status," and does not require DSO or DHS approval

**Miscellaneous:** Employment must not displace a U.S. resident [8 C.F.R. 214.2(f)(9)(i)] This has been interpreted to mean that an on-campus employer may not remove a U.S. worker to hire an F-1 student.

## **TYPES OF ON-CAMPUS EMPLOYMENT**

### **Work On The School Premises, Employed By The I-20 Issuing Institution**

On-campus employment includes work done as a teaching or research assistant as well as jobs in the school library, cafeteria, and administrative offices. If the school is the employer, the only general restriction on the type of work that can be done is that the work cannot "displace United States residents," which has been interpreted to mean that an on-campus employer may not remove a U.S. worker to hire an F-1 student.

### **Work On The School Premises, Employed By On-Campus Commercial Firms**

"On-campus" also includes employment with "...on-location commercial firms which provide services for students on-campus, such as the school bookstore or cafeteria." *Exception:* On-campus employment does **not** include employment on the school's premises for a commercial firm that is not providing on-campus services for students, for example, at a construction site for a new school building.

### **Work Done At Off-Campus Locations, But Treated As On-Campus**

"On-campus" may also include work "at an off-campus location which is educationally affiliated with the school...the educational affiliation must be associated with school's established

curriculum or related to contractually funded research projects at the post-graduate level...[and] be an integral part of the student's educational program."

### **Limitations Of On-Campus Employment**

Initial entry students cannot begin work more than 30 days before class start.

- On-campus work is limited to no more than 20 total hours per week while school is in session. On-campus employment may be full-time during vacation periods for students who are eligible and intend to register for the subsequent academic term.
- A student may not engage in on-campus employment during the 60-day grace period following the completion of a course of study or thereafter, except in the following situations:
  - The student has employment authorized for post-completion OPT and will work at OST. Although the services in fact are performed "on-campus," the source of the student's work authorization in this case is OPT.
- The student wishes to work on-campus between academic levels at the same school. When transferring schools, the student may engage in employment at the school having jurisdiction over the SEVIS record.
- Students temporarily attending two institutions concurrently may work only on the campus of the institution that issued their Form I-20.

### **Eligibility for On-Campus Employment**

Eligibility to engage in on-campus employment is "incident" to F-1 status. This means that anyone currently maintaining F-1 status may engage in on-campus employment at the institution that issued his or her current I-20, within the limitations outlined above and without requesting formal authorization from either a DSO or USCIS, and without updating the student's SEVIS record. Employment eligibility ends whenever a student fails to maintain status.

### **Procedures For On-Campus Employment**

No formal authorization is required for on-campus employment.

### **EMPLOYMENT BASED ON SEVERE ECONOMIC HARDSHIP**

Provided that other employment opportunities are not available or are otherwise insufficient, an eligible student may request off-campus employment work authorization based upon severe economic hardship caused by unforeseen circumstances beyond the student's control. These circumstances may include loss of financial support (i.e., assistantship or scholarship) or loss of on-campus employment without fault on part of the student, substantial fluctuations in the value of the 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, medical bills, or other substantial and unexpected expenses.

### **Eligibility Requirements**

An F-1 student who experiences unexpected financial difficulties of the sort described above may be authorized to work off-campus if the following conditions are met:

1. The student has been in F-1 status for at least one full academic year;

2. The student must be in good academic standing (i.e., G.P.A. of at least 2.0 for undergraduates, at least 3.0 for graduate students);
3. The student must continue to carry a full course load (i.e., 12 credits per semester for undergraduates; 9 credits for graduate students); and
4. The student has demonstrated that the employment is necessary to avoid economic hardship due to unforeseen circumstances beyond his/her control, and that on-campus employment is unavailable or otherwise insufficient to meet the needs that have arisen as a result of the unforeseen circumstances.

### **Application Procedures for Work Authorization Based on Severe Economic Hardship**

If you are unable to find adequate employment on-campus, you may then request off-campus employment authorization based on severe economic hardship. The request is made to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and requires all the following items:

1. Form G-1145, "E-Notification of Application/Petition Acceptance."
2. Form I-765, enter eligibility code (c)(3)(iii) in item #16)
3. Two photos (with name and I-94 number written on back in pencil) (*Please note that it is your responsibility to ensure that the photographs comply with the I-765 instructions, and that it is your decision and responsibility if the photographs are sent to USCIS as part of this application. OST does not assume any responsibility for USCIS' decision on whether your photographs meet the I-765 specifications.*)
4. Original SEVIS Form I-20 (signed by student on page 1)
5. Original Form I-94
6. Copies of passport biographical page, expiration date page, F-1 Visa page, and page bearing stamp of last entry into the U.S.
7. Money order for \$380.00 made payable to the "Department of Homeland Security."
8. Supporting materials. You need to provide strong evidence detailing the unforeseen circumstances as discussed on page 1 that require you to seek employment authorization based on severe economic hardship. You should include a budget showing your expenses (tuition, rent, food, utilities, etc.) and your sources of financial support.

Applications for employment authorization based on severe economic hardship must be submitted to the PDSO/DSO for processing before they can be sent by the PDSO/DSO to the USCIS Dallas Lockbox for adjudication.

It is estimated that it will take USCIS from 120 to 150 business days to adjudicate these applications. You may not begin employment until you receive your employment authorization document. Please note that the decision whether you will be granted this type of employment authorization rests entirely with USCIS. In case your application is denied, USCIS does not provide you with the opportunity to appeal the decision.

### **Duration Of Work Authorization**

The employment authorization may be granted in one-year intervals up to your expected date of graduation in your current program of study. It may be renewed by USCIS if you are maintaining status and good academic standing.

**Please note:** If your application is approved by USCIS, your employment authorization allows you to work on a part-time basis. Part-time off-campus employment is limited to no more than 20 hours a week while school is in session (i.e., during spring and fall semesters). A student who is granted off-campus employment authorization may work full-time during holidays or school vacation.



## **HOLIDAYS IN THE UNITED STATES**

The United States adopted legislation to move the celebration of several holidays to the Monday nearest the date of the actual holiday. The purpose of this legislation was to create as many three-day weekends (that is, Saturday-Sunday-Monday) as possible. Four principal national holidays—New Year’s Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas—are not subject to this date-changing legislation. Another principal holiday, Labor Day, has traditionally been on Monday. Many businesses and all government offices close in observance of these holidays.

Of the holidays on the following list, not all are celebrated throughout the United States, and not all are celebrated by everyone. Some are holidays only for members of certain religions; others are for particular groups.

### **Holiday Calendar**

The following list indicates which holidays are *legal holidays* (when government offices are closed) and which are *business holidays* (when many businesses, except some drugstores, service stations, and food stores, are closed).

#### **New Year’s Day** (January 1)

Celebration of New Year’s Day usually occurs the night before, on New Year’s Eve, when it is common for groups of people to have a party to celebrate the coming of the New Year. Alcoholic beverages are usually served. It is customary to make loud noises at midnight, when the new year officially arrives; embracing or kissing others at midnight is also customary. *A legal and business holiday.*

**Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s Birthday** (January 15) (but celebrated the third Monday in January), *a legal holiday in many states, including Texas.*

#### **Abraham Lincoln’s Birthday** (February 12, or nearest Monday)

See Presidents Day.

#### **St. Valentine’s Day** (February 14)

Usually simply called Valentine’s Day. A day for lovers to exchange cards and/or gifts. Children in primary school usually exchange “valentine cards” with their classmates, and it has become common for even relatives and casual friends to exchange cards and tokens.

#### **George Washington’s Birthday** (February 22 or nearest Monday)

See Presidents Day.

#### **Presidents’ Day** (February, third Monday)

Commemorates Abraham Lincoln’s and George Washington’s birthdays. *A legal holiday.*

#### **St. Patrick’s Day** (March 17)

A day dedicated to the patron saint of Ireland. Many people wear something green on this day. Some communities have parades. Many bars sell green-colored beer.

#### **Mother’s Day** (the second Sunday in May)

Gifts, cards, and/or special attention are given to mothers and grandmothers.

#### **Memorial Day** (observed the last Monday in May)

*A legal and business holiday* on which homage is paid to U.S. soldiers who have died in wars.

#### **Passover**

Is a Jewish holiday and festival. It commemorates the story of the Exodus, in which the ancient Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt. Passover begins on the 15th day of the month of

Nisan in the Jewish calendar, which is in spring in the Northern Hemisphere, and is celebrated for seven or eight days. It is one of the most widely observed Jewish holidays.

**Father's Day** (the third Sunday in June)

Gifts, cards, and/or special attention are given to fathers and grandfathers.

**Flag Day** (June 14)

Flags are flown to mark the adoption of the American flag.

**Independence Day** (usually termed the Fourth of July) (July 4)

Parades, fireworks, and flags celebrate the signing of the U.S. Declaration of Independence from Great Britain. *A legal and business holiday.* (Note: Some types of fireworks are for sale to consumers around this time of the year. They all can be dangerous, and some are legal in certain cities and states but illegal in others. Check with local law enforcement agencies regarding local laws. A few types of fireworks, especially very large firecrackers, are illegal everywhere in the United States.)

**Labor Day** (the first Monday of September)

*A legal and business holiday* noting the importance of workers and labor organizations.

**Rosh Hashanah**, the Jewish New Year, and **Yom Kippur**, the Jewish Day of Atonement. The principal Jewish holidays. Both are celebrated on varying dates in September or October, based on fixed dates on the Jewish calendar that vary from year to year from the Gregorian calendar commonly used in the Western world.

**Columbus Day**, (October 12, or nearest Monday)

Commemorates the landing of Italian explorer Christopher Columbus on the shores of North America. *A legal holiday.*

**Halloween** (October 31)

From All Hallows' Eve, the evening before the Christian celebration of All Saints' Day. Halloween is a children's holiday, associated with carving faces on pumpkins called jack-o'-lanterns and making witches, cats, and ghosts for decorations. Children often go to parties in costumes or go trick-or-treating. Trick-or-treating means putting on a costume, carrying a bag, and going door-to-door in a neighborhood saying "trick or treat," and being given a piece of candy by the occupant of the house or apartment. Young children should be accompanied by an adult when trick-or-treating.

**Election Day** (the Tuesday after the first Monday in November)

Not a legal or business holiday, but people may leave work briefly to vote in municipal, county, state, and/or national elections.

**Veterans Day** (November 11)

*A legal holiday* honoring veterans of armed service.

**Thanksgiving Day** (the fourth Thursday in November)

A harvest 2014 - 2015 handbook for international students and scholars celebration, stemming from harvest-time festivities in the original American colonies. *A legal and business holiday* on which, traditionally, families gather to eat a large meal that includes turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, and pumpkin pie.

**Hanukkah**, sometimes spelled Chanukah, celebrated in late November or (usually) December, based on fixed dates on the Jewish calendar that vary from year to year from the Gregorian

calendar. An eight-day Jewish holiday marking the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem.

**Christmas**, (December 25)

The major U.S. holiday is *a legal and business holiday*. It began as a Christian celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ but is now also a widely celebrated day of feasting and gift-giving.

Preparations, including the buying of gifts and decoration of homes and public places, begin as early as Thanksgiving. Santa Claus, a mythical figure, is said to visit the homes of children on the night of Dec. 24 (Christmas Eve) and leave gifts for them while they sleep. Many people send Christmas cards to their friends. Both home and office Christmas parties are quite common and take place throughout the month of December, a time that is frequently called the “holiday season” because several other holidays are celebrated during this time as well.

**Kwanzaa** (December 26 to January 1)

For seven days some African Americans observe Kwanzaa, a Swahili word for “the first,” or “the first fruits of the harvest.” It is a cultural holiday, celebrating African-American heritage.

## **LAW IN THE UNITED STATES**

The United States is often called a “litigious society,” meaning that people rely heavily on lawyers and courts to formalize and enforce agreements, mediate disputes, and obtain restitution for injuries and injustices. Students and scholars from other countries sometimes find themselves involved in the legal system, either to pursue a complaint or grievance of their own, or to defend themselves from an accusation made by someone else.

### **International Students and Legal Issues**

Here are some matters that often require some type of legal assistance:

- Traffic accidents involving uninsured drivers who face negative financial and perhaps legal consequences.
- Paying too much for used cars, or buying used cars that turn out to be defective.
- Disputes with landlords who fail to maintain health and safety standards in rooms and apartments.
- Overpaying for merchandise sold by area merchants or by people who sell over the telephone.
- Being a victim of “scams,” such as offering “prizes” that turn out to require investments by the student, or selling overpriced merchandise to the student by telephone.
- Divorces and arranging child guardianship or custody.
- An arrest for shoplifting (taking something from a store without paying for it).

Keep in mind that there are many people who try to take advantage of international students by overcharging them or selling them defective goods. Always ask as many questions as you require to make a good decision about a purchase or contract. Remember that signing your name to any housing lease, contract, or sales agreement legally binds you to certain terms and conditions.

Here is a list of suggestions for staying out of trouble with the police and the courts.

- If you want to buy a used car, acquire expert assistance in evaluating the car’s condition and assessing the asking price.
- If you buy a car, buy insurance for it and make sure to keep it active. The state of Texas requires proof of liability insurance before you register your car.
- If you drive someone else’s car, be absolutely certain that the car is insured. If it is not, do not drive it unless you have your own insurance.
- Pay for all merchandise before leaving a store. Do not steal.
- Before you sign a lease, contract, purchase agreement, or any other such document, be sure that you fully understand what it states and that you are prepared to abide by its terms.
- Before you make a major purchase (car, appliance, furniture, electronic equipment), compare the prices of various vendors. Also consider asking for a list of previous customers you can consult about the product or service you are considering.
- If you are angry at your spouse or child, do not hit or abuse him or her. What may be an acceptable means of controlling or punishing a spouse or child in some countries could be illegal in the state of Texas. Under Texas law, striking a spouse or child will result in

incarceration (that is, being put in jail) if the police are called and find any evidence of injury.

- If you have small children, make sure there is always an adult watching them. Inadequate supervision of children—for example, leaving them alone in an apartment, allowing them to be outside the house or apartment on their own without an adult for long periods of time, or leaving them unattended in a car—violates the law.
- Do not present a false identification card to enter a business from which you may be barred on account of your age.
- Take care to abide by the laws governing the use of Oblate’s computer networks and resources.

### **Your Legal Rights**

The United States Constitution guarantees certain rights to the people (not just U.S. citizens and permanent residents) who are living in the country. In general, nonimmigrants in the United States (such as international students) enjoy the same constitutional protections as U.S. citizens do. At the same time, however, nonimmigrants are subject to immigration laws that do not apply to American citizens.

International students enjoy the constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, protection from unreasonable searches and seizures, and the other protections included in the “Bill of Rights” (the first 10 amendments) attached to the U.S. Constitution. You may view the U.S. Constitution online at many Web sites, including [www.usconstitution.net/const.html](http://www.usconstitution.net/const.html). Many books are available at bookstores and libraries that include the Constitution as well. Nonimmigrants can own property (land and buildings) if they wish to. Nonimmigrants are protected against discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, color, and national origin. There are federal, state, municipal, and School rules protecting citizens and nonimmigrants from most forms of discrimination.

### **Notarial Services**

Some documents need to be notarized by a person registered as a notary public. A notary public can certify photocopies and authenticate signatures. Some notaries collect a small fee for each document they notarize. They are also available in the San Antonio area at most local banks.

### **Jury Duty**

The American legal system attempts to secure potential jurors, in part, by issuing a summons to those who hold a valid driver’s license. Thus, you may be contacted for jury duty. Since international citizens are not eligible to serve on a jury convened by the federal, state, or city government, you should check the box on the form that states you are not a U.S. citizen and return the form to the address indicated.

### **Identification Documents**

In many countries the law requires that every person, citizen or noncitizen, carry an identity card at all times. There is no such requirement in the United States for its citizens and no national identity card. As an international student, you are advised to carry your passport, I-94 and I-20, especially when traveling outside of the San Antonio area.

Locally, in order to cash or make purchases using a check or when picking up medications from a pharmacy, you may be requested to present a form of identification that bears your Texas

address with a current photograph. On campus your student ID card may be sufficient, but most area businesses prefer that you furnish a Texas driver's license or state ID card. Some businesses will accept a passport, but policies vary.

If you do not plan to drive here you may want to apply for a Texas state ID card instead. The process for obtaining such a card is similar to that for the driver's license.

You are strongly cautioned against creating or presenting false identification for admission to establishments that prohibit those under the age of 21 from entering. If you are found in possession of another person's identification card or a manufactured identification card, with the intent to deceive, you will be prosecuted by local authorities and/or referred to the School for disciplinary measures.

\*Section 264(e) of the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) does require individuals over the age of 18 to carry with them at all times their registration documentation. Section 264.1 of Title 8, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), defines registration documents for different classes of non-citizens, including nonimmigrants.

## **SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER**

Social Security numbers generally are assigned to people who are authorized to work in the United States. Social Security numbers are used to report your wages to the government and to determine eligibility for Social Security benefits. **Social Security will not assign you a number just to enroll in a college or school.**

If you want to get a job on campus, you should contact your designated school official for international students. This official can tell you if you are eligible to work on campus and give you information about available jobs. Also, your school may approve certain limited off-campus employment, as permitted under Department of Homeland Security (DHS) regulations. If your school has authorized you to work either on or off campus, and you meet Social Security's eligibility requirements described in the next section, you can get a Social Security number.

In general, only noncitizens who have permission to work from DHS can apply for a Social Security number. We suggest you wait until you are in the United States for at least 10 days before you apply for a Social Security number. Also, you should report to your school before applying for a number. Taking these actions will ensure we can verify your immigration status with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

## **SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER APPLICATION PROCEDURES**

1. Obtain proof of employment authorization. The nature of the proof depends on the type of employment eligibility being used to support the application for an SSN:

**For F-1 on-campus employment proof of eligibility**, you must have two letters, which include the following:

- A letter from your on-campus employer providing verification of the offer of employment. Per SSA requirements, the letter from your on-campus employer must conform to *the Sample On-Campus Employer Offer Letter*; and
  - A letter from your PDSO/DSO affirming that you are attending OST and have been offered an on-campus job.
2. Take proof of employment authorization, Form I-94, Form I-20 (F-1 students) and passport to SSA along with a foreign or US driver's license or your birth certificate. (Visit [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov) for information and directions to the Social Security office nearest you.)
  3. At SSA, complete *Form SS-5, Application for SSN*. You must include your legal name as the name to be printed on your Social Security Card. Your legal name is the name in your passport. The name you enter on Form SS-5 must EXACTLY match the name reflected in your passport. You should request a receipt at the time that you apply for the SSN for verification that you have applied for a SSN.

Your Social Security Card will be mailed to your home in approximately two weeks. The process may take up to one month if your records do not immediately appear in SAVE.

### **Work Eligibility**

If you are an F-1 student and eligible to work on campus, you must provide a letter from your designated school official that:

- Identifies you;
- Confirms your current school status; and

- Identifies your employer and the type of work you are, or will be, doing.

We also need to see evidence of that employment, such as a recent pay slip or a letter from your employer. Your supervisor must sign and date the employment letter. This letter must describe:

- Your job;
- Your employment start date;
- The number of hours you are, or will be, working; and
- Your supervisor's name and telephone number.

### **Immigration Status**

To prove your immigration status, you must show us the current U.S. immigration document, I-94, Arrival/Departure Record, issued to you when you arrived in the United States. If you are an F-1 student, you also must show us your I-20, Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status.

### **After You Receive Your SSN**

The SSN is an important document and should be safeguarded.

Report your SSN to the Office of the Registrar in order to avoid problems with your records and payments.

### **Social Security Number And Taxes**

Although your employer should withhold any U.S. income tax related to your employment, Social Security Withholding/Medicare (F.I.C.A.) should not be deducted from the salary of F-1 students, unless you are considered a "resident for tax purposes," a situation which normally occurs after a student has been here at least five years.



## **TRAVEL OUTSIDE OF THE U.S AND REENTRY TO THE U.S.**

### **Travel Instructions for F-1 Students**

This section will provide you with information regarding reentering the U.S. after a temporary absence. If you plan to leave the U.S. and return to the Oblate School of Theology, you must have the necessary documents to permit entry to another country and reentry to the U.S.

### **Entry To Another Country**

If you wish to temporarily visit your country of citizenship or permanent residency, you will be allowed to enter that country if you hold a valid passport. Before temporarily visiting a country other than your country of citizenship or permanent residency, you must check on entry Visa requirements for said country. Go to <http://www.embassy.org> for the addresses and phone numbers of all foreign embassies located in Washington D.C.

### **Reentry To The U.S.**

To reenter the U.S. after a temporary absence (i.e., an absence of five months or less), you must have a properly endorsed Form I-20, a valid passport, and a valid F-1 Visa (not required for citizens of Canada).

- 1. Properly endorsed Form I-20:** If you have already used your Form I-20 to enter the U.S. once, then you must have page 3 of your Form I-20 endorsed by your PDSO/DSO. This page, when properly endorsed, may be used for reentry to attend the same school after a temporary absence from the U.S. Each certification signature is valid for only one year from date of signature, or until the Form I-20 expiration date, whichever comes first.
- 2. Valid passport:** You must have a passport that is kept valid at all times while you are in the U.S. If your passport will expire within six months, contact your embassy in the U.S. and make arrangements to renew as soon as possible.
- 3. Valid F-1 Visa:** The U.S. Visa tells you by which date you may enter the U.S. The expiration date of the Visa has nothing to do with how long you may remain in the U.S. – that is determined by your I-20 and I-94. However, if you are traveling abroad and wish to reenter the U.S., then you must have a valid F-1 Visa in your passport.

### **"Automatic Revalidation Of Visa" Benefit**

Under certain circumstances, you may reenter the U.S. with an expired Visa as though the Visa were still valid. An expired F-1 Visa may be considered to be automatically extended to the date of application for readmission to the U.S. (and therefore the Visa in the passport need not have an expiration date that is in the future), provided you do the following:

1. Apply for readmission to U.S. after an absence not exceeding 30 days in contiguous territory (Canada or Mexico) or adjacent islands (Saint Pierre, Miquelon, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Bermuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Jamaica, the Windward and Leeward Islands, Trinidad, Martinique, and other British, French, and Netherlands territories or possessions in or bordering on the Caribbean Sea other than Cuba);
2. Maintain lawful F-1 status and intend to continue doing so;
3. Present a valid passport containing Form I-94 which authorizes a stay beyond the date of entry (e.g., D/S);
4. Present a properly endorsed Form I-20.

Under these circumstances, you may be saved the necessity of applying for a new F-1 Visa even if your Visa has expired. A student whose Visa has been canceled or voided is not eligible for automatic revalidation of Visa benefit. Citizens of “state sponsors of terrorism” cannot take advantage of the automatic revalidation benefit. Any non-immigrant who chooses to apply for a new Visa while in contiguous territory is not eligible for the automatic revalidation benefit during the course of that trip, but has to wait until the Visa is granted in order to enter the U.S.

### **Status Violation and Travel**

If you have violated your F-1 immigration status prior to traveling abroad and wish to seek reentry to the U.S. with a new Form I-20 to resume your F-1 status, you must pay the \$200 SEVIS fee and apply for a new Visa prior to being able to seek reentry to the U.S. with proper documentation.

### **OPT Students and Travel**

If you have applied for post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) and have graduated but have not yet received an Employment Authorization Document (EAD), you must also present the Form I-797 receipt notice for the pending EAD application to reenter the U.S. If you graduated and received the EAD for post-completion OPT, you must also present the EAD and a letter from your current or prospective employer to reenter the U.S. Page 3 of your new Form I-20 with approved OPT dates must be validated for travel within the last six months.

### **Special Instructions**

If you have been approved for a change to F-1 status through a USCIS application while in the United States, you must apply for an F-1 Visa before you can reenter the country.

If you have married to a U.S. Citizen or Permanent Resident, or have been included in a petition for permanent residency (I-485), please consult with PDSO/DSO before you finalize plans for your trip.

If you are on OPT or awaiting a decision on an OPT application, please consult with PDSO/DSO before you finalize plans for your trip.

### **Secondary Inspection**

Whether traveling by sea, land or air, if your information cannot be automatically verified by the inspector or you do not have all the required documentation, you may be directed to an interview area known as “secondary inspection.” Secondary inspection allows inspectors to conduct additional research in order to verify information. Verifications are done apart from the primary inspection lines so that an individual case will not cause delays for other arriving passengers.

In the case your admission/participation needs to be verified, **we strongly advise** that you have readily available the name **and phone number of the Registrar’s Office,** **210.341.1366.** *Failure to provide proper documentation and to comply with entry/exit procedures is cause to refuse the student or exchange visitor admission into the United States.*

In limited circumstances, if a student or exchange visitor is mostly, but not fully in compliance, he/she may be issued a **Form I-515A** “Notice to Student or Exchange Visitor”. This form authorizes temporary admission into the United States and requires the student or exchange visitor to immediately bring the **Form I-515A** and all of your immigration documents to **OST Registrar’s Office.** Noncompliance with the directions contained on this form may result in denied re-entry.

**Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts**

Ensure that you are traveling safely by reviewing the Department of State (DoS) International Travel Information web page. On the DoS website, you will find travel warnings, travel alerts, country specific information, and country background notes. There is also a section titled “Tips for Traveling Abroad” for other important health and safety information. Go to [http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/tips\\_1232.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/tips_1232.html) to access this information.

## **U.S. INCOME TAX**

Oblate School of Theology does not give tax advice, does not guarantee, and is not responsible for any final tax results. It is the responsibility of each international student and dependent to comply with U.S. tax regulations. In general aliens performing services in the United States as employees are liable for U.S. Social Security and Medicare taxes. However, certain classes of alien employees are exempt from U.S. Social Security and Medicare taxes.

### **Persons Who Must Comply With IRS Filing Requirements**

All international students and their dependents in "F" immigration status that were present in the U.S. in 2015 have to comply with certain filing requirements with the IRS:

- International students and scholars and their dependents in "F" immigration status with any U.S. source income in 2015 are required to file a U.S. income tax return (usually Form 1040NR or Form 1040NR-EZ) and Form 8843 with the IRS by April 15, 2016.

Nonresident aliens, in general, are also liable for Social Security/Medicare Taxes on wages paid to them for services performed by them in the United States, with certain exceptions based on their nonimmigrant status. The following classes of nonimmigrants and nonresident aliens are exempt from U.S. Social Security and Medicare taxes:

Nonresident Alien students temporarily present in the United States in F-1 nonimmigrant status are exempt on wages paid to them for services performed within the United States as long as such services are allowed by USCIS for these nonimmigrant statuses, and such services are performed to carry out the purposes for which such Visas were issued to them.

### **Exempt Employment Includes:**

- On-campus student employment up to 20 hours a week (40 hours during summer vacations).
- Off-campus student employment allowed by USCIS.
- Practical Training student employment on or off campus.

### **Limitations On Exemption:**

The exemption does not apply to:

- spouses and children in F-2 nonimmigrant status;
- employment not allowed by USCIS or to employment not closely connected to the purpose for which the Visa was issued.
- F-1 nonimmigrants who change to an immigration status which is not exempt or to a special protected status.
- F-1 nonimmigrants who become resident aliens.

**For more information on International Taxpayers visit**

**<http://www.irs.gov/Individuals/International-Taxpayers/Nonresident-Aliens>**

## **VISA VOIDANCE**

If you have overstayed or been unlawfully present during your studies immediately prior to leaving the U.S., you might be subject to Visa voidance. Such overstayed students would be subject to payment of the \$200 Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) fee and would need to obtain a new F-1 Visa stamp in the home country in order to reenter the U.S. The SEVIS fee must be paid online through use of a credit card, locally using the Western Union Quick Pay service, or by mail through use of a check or money order at least three days prior to the date SEVIS fee payment verification is required by the U.S. Consular Office.

OST highly recommends that you file and pay the required SEVIS fee online with a credit card or in person through the Western Union Quick Pay service instead of by mail with a check or money order since the online option and the Western Union Quick Pay option result in speedier processing of your required fee payment. Please ask your PDSO/DSO for detailed information on options for payment of the SEVIS fee.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

### **ADJUDICATION**

The process that SEVP uses to decide the outcome for schools petitioning for certification, submitting their recertification package or making updates to the Form I-17, “Petition for Approval of School for Attendance by Nonimmigrant Students.”

### **AUTHORIZED EARLY WITHDRAWAL**

A designated school official-authorized temporary absence for F-1 students. Students with records placed in *Terminated* status for authorized early withdrawal have 15 days to depart the United States.

### **BENEFITS**

An application, petition, motion, appeal, or other request relating to an immigration benefit, whether such request is filed on a paper form or submitted in an electronic format, provided such request is submitted in a manner prescribed by DHS for such purpose. Examples include working, driving or obtaining a Social Security number.

### **CAP GAP**

The cap is the limit on the number of individuals who can receive H-1B status every fiscal year. The gap is the period of time between the end of an individual’s F-1 status and the beginning of the individual’s H-1B status.

### **CERTIFICATION**

The process of petitioning the Student and Exchange Visitor Program to enroll F nonimmigrant students. Approved schools can issue these students Forms I-20, “Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status.”

### **CERTIFICATION EXPIRATION DATE**

The date on which a school’s Student and Exchange Visitor certification expires.

### **COMPLIANCE**

To follow all Department of Homeland Security regulations as a Student and Exchange Visitor Program-certified school to enroll nonimmigrant students.

### **CONSULATE**

Department of State offices headed by a Consul General who reports to the U.S. ambassador, which carry out many of the same functions in provincial or regional capitals as the embassies do in national capitals. F students can visit a consulate to apply for their visa to enter the United States.

### **CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING (CPT)**

Employment that must be authorized by the DSO, relate to your major, and be a required part of your program of study. CPT can be full-time and is not restricted by a weekly 20-hour work limit.

**DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (DHS)**

A federal agency whose missions include preventing terrorism and enhancing security, managing U.S. borders, administering immigration laws, securing cyberspace, and ensuring disaster resilience. Through Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Student and Exchange Visitor Program, DHS secures the student visa system.

**DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

A federal agency that issues visas at U.S. consulates and embassies, and offers student-specific information on its websites.

**DEPENDENT**

An F student's spouse and/or minor child (who is unmarried and under 21 years old). Dependents may legally accompany you to the United States or join you in the country while you study. They must apply for either an F-2 visa.

**DESIGNATED SCHOOL OFFICIAL (DSO)**

A school employee dedicated to assist and oversee F and M students enrolled at a school. DSOs must have an office at the school, be accessible to the F and/or M students at their school, and a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident. A DSO may not receive compensation from commissions on the recruitment of foreign students.

**DOCTORATE DEGREE**

The highest form of post-graduate degree that students can earn in the United States.

**E-VERIFY**

A U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services web-based system that helps employers to determine whether their newly hired employees are authorized to work in the United States.

**EDUCATIONUSA**

A Department of State-supported network with over 400 advising centers in 170 countries that provide students with information to help them select a school in the United States.

**EMBASSY**

A Department of State office, usually located in a country's capital city. F students visit embassies to apply for a visa to enter the United States.

**EVIDENCE OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

Proof a student provides to their designated school official of their ability to finance their studies in the United States. Examples of evidence include bank statements, letters from a sponsor, or a scholarship letter.

**F-1 STATUS**

A visa status for students eligible to enroll in academic programs in the United States including at colleges or universities awarding bachelor's, master's, doctorate or professional degrees, community or junior colleges awarding associates degrees, religious seminaries, fine arts conservatories, high school (grades 9-12), public or private, private elementary and/or middle school (K-8), or a language training school.

## **F-2 STATUS**

Nonimmigrant visa status required for dependents (spouse or minor children) of F-1 visa holders to enter the United States.

## **FORM I-20, “CERTIFICATE OF ELIGIBILITY FOR NONIMMIGRANT STUDENT STATUS”**

A form issued to accepted nonimmigrant students from their Student and Exchange Visitor Program-certified school that is required in order to pay their I-901 Student and Exchange Visitor Information System fee, apply for a visa, enter the United States, apply for benefits, and use for employment authorization or travel.

## **FORM I-515A, “NOTICE TO STUDENT OR EXCHANGE VISITOR”**

A form issued by U.S. Customs and Border Protection at the port of entry to students who arrive without all of their required documents. The Form I-515A allows students to temporarily enter the United States, and they have 30 days to submit the missing information to the Student and Exchange Visitor Program before their status is terminated.

## **FORM I-539, “APPLICATION TO EXTEND/CHANGE NONIMMIGRANT STATUS”**

A form students use to request a change to another nonimmigrant visa status (F-2 to F-1, F-1 to H-1B, etc.), or to request reinstatement if they have fallen out of student status. M students also use this form to request to remain in the United States for a longer period of time, to transfer to another Student and Exchange Visitor Program-certified school.

## **FORM I-765, “APPLICATION FOR EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATION”**

An application for employment authorization, managed by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

## **FORM I-766, “EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATION DOCUMENT”**

A form sent by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to students who are authorized to work in the United States. Also known as an EAD, this form lists the dates your employment authorization begins and ends.

## **FORM I-797A, “NOTICE OF ACTION”**

A notice of approval or receipt of a submission that students may receive from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services in various circumstances, like approval of the Form I-539, “Application to Extend/Change Nonimmigrant Status.”

## **FORM I-94, “ARRIVAL/DEPARTURE RECORD”**

An electronic Department of Homeland Security form issued to all nonimmigrants upon entry to the United States that is evidence of their admission and is used to document legal status in the United States, including length of stay.

## **FULL COURSE OF STUDY**

A requirement for F students to maintain their student status by enrolling in a full course of study every academic term. In general, full-time for F students in an undergraduate program is 12 credit hours. In a graduate program, designated school officials certify a full course of study, which is typically six to nine credit hours. Full-time study for an F-1 student in an English as a Second Language or other non-vocational program is 18 clock hours per week if most of the



course is classroom instruction, or 22 clock hours per week if most of the course is laboratory instruction. Your DSO can provide more information.

### **GRADUATE DEGREE**

A degree type for students following a bachelor's degree program or its equivalent. Degree types include master's or doctorate degrees.

### **H-1B STATUS**

Temporary employment authorization for a nonimmigrant who performs services in a specialty occupation and has a bachelor's degree or higher. Employers petition for H-1B status to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services on a nonimmigrant's behalf.

### **HAND-CARRY**

A best practice for students to keep all important documents, like their Form I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status," or passport with them, instead of packing them in checked luggage.

### **I-901 SEVIS FEE**

A fee that all F students must pay before the Department of State can issue a visa. Students pay this fee after receiving their Form I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status," at [FMJfee.com](http://FMJfee.com).

### **IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT (ICE)**

A Department of Homeland Security agency that promotes homeland security and public safety through the criminal and civil enforcement of federal laws governing border control, customs, trade, and immigration. Through the Student and Exchange Visitor Program, ICE helps secure the foreign student visa system.

### **INCOME TAXES**

Fees that everyone, including F students, must pay to the U.S. Government's Internal Revenue Service on any income earned while in the country, including income from wages, reception of a grant, fellowship, scholarship, interest from stock options, or lottery and gambling winnings.

### **INDIVIDUAL TAXPAYER IDENTIFICATION NUMBER (ITIN)**

A tax processing number the Internal Revenue Service issues to an individual who needs to report income (and pay income taxes) but is ineligible to obtain a Social Security number from the Social Security Administration.

### **LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

A DSO authorized absence from class that allows a student to suspend enrollment in a program of study and leave the United States, but the student intends to return and resume the program of study within five months.

### **MASTER'S DEGREE**

A graduate degree that requires the successful completion of the full-time equivalent of one but not more than two academic years of work beyond the bachelor's degree.

**MILITARY ACCESSIONS VITAL TO THE NATIONAL INTEREST (MAVNI)**

A program that allows certain non-citizens who are legally present in the United States to join the U.S. military and apply immediately for U.S. citizenship without first obtaining lawful permanent residence. The program is only available to legal aliens holding critical skills—physicians, nurses and experts in certain languages with associated cultural backgrounds.

**NONIMMIGRANT**

An alien who is admitted to the United States for a specific temporary period of time.

**ONLINE/DISTANCE LEARNING**

Courses without physical attendance requirements that have specific rules F students must follow. If an online or distance course has no physical attendance requirements, F students (besides those in English language programs) may count one course towards their full course of study. F students in English language programs may not count any online or distance courses towards their full course of study.

**OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)**

Employment authorization that must relate to a student's major or course of study. To participate, students must receive approval from their designated school official and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. OPT may occur before or after the program end date, but participants may only work for 20 hours per week while school is in session.

**PASSPORT**

A government-issued travel document that certifies the identity and nationality of its holder for the purpose of international travel.

**PORT OF ENTRY**

An arrival point at a U.S. international airport, seaport or land border crossing, where a U.S. Customs and Border Protection officer will determine whether students can enter the United States.

**PRIMARY INSPECTION**

The process every F student goes through at the port of entry with a U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer. Students will present documents and the CBP officer will determine if they can enter the United States by verifying the information and purpose for their visit.

**PRINCIPAL DESIGNATED SCHOOL OFFICIAL (PDSO)**

The principal designated school official is the primary point of contact for a Student and Exchange Visitor Program-certified school. The PDSO has additional responsibilities from other designated school officials such as submitting certification and recertification packages.

**PROGRAM END DATE**

The date listed on a student's Form I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status," when they will complete their program and must either transfer to another school, apply to change education level, apply to change to another nonimmigrant status or depart the United States within 60 days.

### **PROGRAM START DATE**

The date listed on a student's Form I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status," when they must enroll in a program of study. Students can enter the United States no more than 30 days before this date and need to contact their designated school official no later than this date to inform them they are in the country.

### **REQUEST FOR EVIDENCE**

A request from the Student and Exchange Visitor Program to a school during the certification or recertification process for additional information to supplement their petition.

### **SAVE**

The Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) Program is the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' Web-based service that helps some agencies determine the immigration status of benefit applicants.

### **SECONDARY INSPECTION**

If the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer at primary inspection at a port of entry cannot verify a student's information, or if they do not have all of the required documentation, a CBP officer may direct them to an interview area known as "secondary inspection." Secondary inspection allows inspectors to conduct additional research in order to verify information without causing delays for other arriving passengers.

### **SEVIS**

SEVIS is the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System, an Internet-based system that SEVP uses to maintain information on SEVP-certified schools, Department of State-certified exchange visitor programs, F nonimmigrants, and their dependents.

### **SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER**

A nine-digit number assigned by the Social Security Administration to approved F students that are eligible to apply for employment in the United States.

### **STEM 17-MONTH EXTENSION**

Graduates with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) degrees designated as eligible by DHS may be eligible to work in the United States for an additional 17 months beyond the original 12-month limit of a period of optional practical training (OPT).

### **STUDENT AND EXCHANGE VISITOR PROGRAM (SEVP)**

A part of Immigration and Customs Enforcement that works with government organizations that have an interest in information on international students. SEVP helps the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of State monitor school and exchange visitor programs, nonimmigrant students and exchange visitors, and their dependents.

### **STUDENT AND EXCHANGE VISITOR PROGRAM-CERTIFIED SCHOOLS**

The only schools that are officially authorized to enroll F students.

### **TEMPORARY PROTECTED STATUS (TPS)**

A designation the Secretary of Homeland Security may make about a foreign country "due to conditions in the country that temporarily prevent safe return of the country's citizens; or where,

in certain circumstances, the country is unable to handle the return of its citizens adequately." Benefits of TPS are temporary and vary, based on the designation. USCIS administers TPS.

### **TERMINATING RECORDS**

When an F student has failed to maintain their student status, the designated school official updates their SEVIS record to *Terminated* status and they must depart the country.

### **TRANSFER**

The process of a student leaving one program to enroll in another. F students may be eligible to transfer to another school if they have continuously maintained their status and follow proper procedures.

### **U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES (USCIS)**

An agency within the Department of Homeland Security that authorizes benefits for students and exchange visitors. Students can request benefits such as employment, extending their stay, or changing status from USCIS.

### **U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION (CBP)**

A Department of Homeland Security agency that secures the borders of the United States, including airports, land borders and seaports. When entering the country, F students go through inspections with CBP officers and must present proper documentation.

### **U.S. Department of Education**

A federal agency that establishes the legislation, policies and guidance for educational institutions in the United States, primarily colleges, universities and post-secondary institutions.

### **USCIS ELIS**

An online, account-based system from USCIS students can use to view their benefit requests, receive electronic notification of decisions, and receive real-time case status updates.

### **VISA**

A document issued by the Department of State that enables a student or exchange visitor to travel to a U.S. port of entry and request permission to enter the United States. Students need either an F-1 visa to enroll in U.S. programs of study.

### **VISA-EXEMPT COUNTRY**

Certain countries, including Canada and Bermuda, whose citizens do not need a visa to enter the United States and may apply at the U.S. port of entry for F-1 nonimmigrant status. Citizens of these countries must still:

- Pay the I-901 SEVIS fee
- Receive a Form I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status"
- Maintain status

### **VISA-WAIVER COUNTRY**

A group of 38 countries who have an agreement with the Department of State allowing their citizens to enter the United States without a visa for 90 days or less for "business, tourism, visiting or pleasure." If citizens from visa waiver countries want to study in the United States,

they need to be accepted to a Student and Exchange Visitor Program-certified school and apply for an F or M visa.

### **VOLUNTEER**

People who give time and effort but do not receive any form of payment. F students may volunteer as long as they do not receive any form of taxable income. If the position is one for which an employer would otherwise officially hire someone, you may work there only with all necessary employment authorization.

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENT AGREEMENT FORM

1. I will complete the mandatory International Student Orientation. If I do not attend, I understand that a hold will be placed on my record and I will not be able to register for classes.
2. I will always register for classes no later than my priority registration date and time. I understand that failure to enroll in at least 8 credit hours will put me out of status and I will be terminated in SEVIS.
3. I will not drop below 8 credit hours during the Fall and Spring semesters.
4. Before I stop attending or drop a class, I will go to the Registrar's Office for advice.
5. I will maintain a Grade Point Average of at least 2.5.
6. I will read all the information on the second page of my I-20 and be sure I understand it and sign my I-20.
7. I will keep my passport and I-20 valid at all times. I will provide the Registrar's Office with a copy of my renewed passport.
8. I will not work on or off campus without the approval from the Registrar and/or the United States Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS).
9. I will report to the Registrar any changes in my residence address, phone number, e-mail, major, or other changes within 10 days.
10. I will use my OST email as my primary email address and regularly check my e-mail for important notices from the Registrar's Office.
11. I will come to the Registrar's Office for a travel signature.
12. I understand if I leave the United States for any reason there is no guarantee that I will be able to return.

I further understand that if I violate any of the above, I may be subject to dismissal from the Oblate School of Theology and that my dismissal will be reported to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Students Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_