



MARYMOUNT CALIFORNIA
UNIVERSITY
Office of International Services

International Student Guide

A Compilation of Information, Rights and Responsibilities
For Marymount California University F-1 International Students

*Prepared by Ryan W. O'Connell - Director of International Services
Updated: 8/2017*

A Warm Welcome to the MCU Community!

Welcome to MCU – a diverse community of students from around the world. The University greatly values its international students, faculty, and administrators who enliven the community and generously share their cultural traditions, perspectives, and interests. Over the years, MCU has welcomed students from over 57 countries, including:

Angola
Armenia
Albania
Bahamas
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Belgium
Brazil
Burma
Canada
Chile
China
Colombia
Cote d'Ivoire
Czechia
Egypt

Ethiopia
France
Germany
Ghana
Hong Kong
India
Indonesia
Italy
Israel
Japan
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Lithuania
Malaysia
Mexico

Mongolia
Netherlands
New Zealand
Nigeria
Panama
Pakistan
Peru
Philippines
Portugal
Russia
Saudi Arabia
Serbia &
Montenegro
Singapore
South Africa

South Korea
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
Taiwan
Thailand
Turkey
Ukraine
United Arab
Emirates
United Kingdom
Venezuela
Vietnam



International Student Advising at MCU

First and foremost, the OIS offers advising on how to maintain your visa status while in the U.S. Much of that is academically centered, and the OIS is the campus expert on how MCU's academics intersect with federal visa regulations. Beyond that, the OIS offers advising on immigration matters including:

- Initial Form I-20 creation and Travel/Arrival Advising
- Overall F-1 Visa and Immigration Advising
- Academic Support Related to F-1 Visa Status Maintenance
- Form I-20 Travel Signatures & Regulations
- SEVIS Record Maintenance and Transfer
- Form I-94 Arrival/Departure Record Printing
- On & Off Campus Employment Regulation Advising for F-1 Students
- Social Security Number Applications
- Annual Income Tax Prep Software
- Driver's License Application Guidance

Stay Informed

Immigration information is subject to change without notice and often does. International students will receive important communications related to their immigration status from the Office of International Services via their MCU e-mail. It is important that you check your mail regularly in order to stay informed.



**Also, be sure to follow us on Facebook and Instagram!
Click each icon to be taken to our pages.**

Contact Information for the Director of International Services

International students are welcome to drop by the Office of International Services (OIS) at any time with questions or concerns. However, it is advisable to make an appointment to meet with the Director of International Services ahead of time.

Ryan W. O'Connell – Director of International Services

Office of **I**nternational **S**ervices (OIS) – Located in TDW 209 within the International and Intercultural Center (off Chapel Circle)

E-mail: roconnell@marymountcalifornia.edu

Phone: 310.303.7382

Don't wait until the last minute:

When you need immigration assistance, please allow proper time for processing.

- Signature on Form I-20 for travel – 1-3 days
- Program Extensions – 1-2 weeks
- School Transfer – 1-2 weeks
- Curricular Practical Training – 1 week
- Optional Practical Training – 3 months or more

Adjusting to a New Culture and Country

Culture Shock

Adjusting to life in a new country is an on-going process with many challenges. You may experience a wide range of emotions and reactions to your new environment. There are ways to make this process enjoyable and rewarding.

Most people who travel to another country to work or study for a significant period go through an adjustment period to the new culture. The amount of disorientation one feels in the new situation depends on one's own background and experiences. Although there are some common traits to the culture shock syndrome, no two people will experience it the same or go through what are called the 'Stages of Cultural Adjustment' in the same order or with the same intensity. Sometimes the transition to a new culture has an immediate impact, and sometimes it is a delayed reaction.

What is Culture Shock?

It is the abrupt loss of the familiar, which leads to a sense of isolation and diminished self-importance. Culture shock is brought on by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social interaction. These signs include ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life. When you first arrive in a new culture, you feel a sense of excitement and anticipation. Later, you may feel that the differences between your culture and those in the culture of the place you are visiting are overwhelming and frustrating. It is important to remember that this is a normal reaction to sudden changes and is something that passes as you spend more time in a second culture. If you experience any of the symptoms for an extended period, it is important to talk to someone about it - friends, family, or an advisor. The Director of International Services is always available to talk with you about your experience as you adjust to life in the United States.

What Are the Symptoms and Effects of Culture Shock?

The effects of culture shock range from mild uneasiness to temporary homesickness to acute unhappiness. Irritability, hypersensitivity, and loss of perspective are common symptoms. Some other signs are loss of appetite, lethargy, depression, insomnia, headaches, and digestive problems.

What Can I Do to Alleviate the Effects of Culture Shock?

Be prepared: Be aware that it exists and that it will probably affect you in one way or another.

Know yourself: Clarify your own values and examine your own assumptions. Your responses to situations and people in the new culture will make more sense if you have a clear idea of what is important to you personally.

Be philosophical: Understand that this is a learning process and that you will benefit from it.

Be positive: Sometimes, with a change of perspective, frustrating circumstances can be humorous and endearing. Try not to be overly critical.

Be patient: Give yourself time to adjust. Take time to learn about the community you are living in. Read local newspapers and magazines. Go to local art shows and performances. Most importantly, participate in the University community.

Set goals and stay busy: Don't sit around being negative and critical. Be adventurous, make plans and try new things.

Avoid stereotypes: Labeling, such as stereotypes, block realistic or fair-minded appraisal of your new surroundings and delay your emergence from the state of culture shock.

Talk about your culture and adjustment process: Your peers are interested in learning about the experiences you bring as an international student. They are also interested in helping you learn about their culture. If you don't understand something, don't be afraid to ask questions!

Keep a sense of humor: Hold on to your own personal sense of humor, this will help you cope with possibly frustrating and confusing situations. Often the first sign of recovery from culture shock is the reappearance of one's sense of humor.

Be open to meeting new people: Go to MCU events and events around the area. Be open to starting a conversation with other students, staff, faculty, and people in the community. Connect with others from your home country that have gone through this experience and can offer you advice and comfort.



Social Customs and Cultural Differences

There are many nuances to life in the U.S. that you can only learn by living here. www.edupass.org offers information about the following common customs and cultural differences:

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| Stereotypes | Smoking |
| Personal Space | Gestures |
| Forms of Address | Noises |
| Demeanor | Numbers |
| Toilets | Calendar Dates |
| Tipping | Time and Temperature |
| Social Visits | American Holidays |
| Business Visits | Weights and Measures |
| Business Clothing | Electronic Equipment |
| Telephone Etiquette | Religion |
| Dining | |
| Gift Giving | |

Resources to Help You Get Settled

Marymount California University has a variety of services to ensure your transition to campus and the U.S. is smooth and seamless. These services are broken down into two categories:

Student Services

- [Campus Ministry](#)
- [Career Services for Students](#)
- [Clubs and Organizations](#)
- [Student Wellness Center/Counseling](#)
- [First Generation Student](#)

- [Office of International Services](#)
- [New Student Orientation](#)
- [Residential Life](#)
- [Title IX - Know Your Rights](#)

- [Mariners Athletics](#)

- [Service and Justice Opportunities](#)

- [Campus Safety and Security Information](#)
- [Bistro by the Sea Cafe](#)
- [Shuttle Bus Schedule](#)

- [Parking and Transportation](#)
- [Maps and Directions](#)

Academic Services

- [Academic Programs](#)
- [Faculty Directory](#)

- [Service Learning Program](#)

- [Academic Calendar](#)
- [Classes and Catalogs](#)

- [Undergraduate Programs](#)
- [Honors Programs](#)

- [Graduate Programs](#)

- [4 & 5 Year Graduate Pathway Program](#)

- [Office of the Registrar](#)
- [Library](#)
- [Advising Services](#)

- [Educational Technology](#)
- [Prior Learning](#)
- [Disability Resources](#)



Immigration Information: Common Terminology

Passport: This official government document is issued by your home country's government. While in the U.S., you must keep your passport valid for at least 6 months into the future. If your passport will expire while you are in the U.S., extensions can be granted only by your country's consulate or embassy. If you lose your passport, remember to see the OIS to get help to replace it!

You may use your passport for identification purposes while in the U.S.; however, it is important to keep your passport in a safe and secure place. Instead of carrying your passport around with you to use as an ID, you may want to acquire an official [California State ID](#) to use instead.

Visa: This is the stamp in your passport that allows you to apply for admission into the United States at the port of entry (an airport for example). A visa is normally obtained at a U.S. Embassy outside the United States. It classifies the visit as business, tourism, etc. and is usually valid for multiple visits to the United States during a specified period. A U.S. visa does not guarantee entry into the United States. A visa is issued by a Department of State Consular Office abroad, but a separate U.S. agency, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), has authority to deny admission at the port of entry. Although a visa has an expiration date, it does not determine how long you can remain in the U.S. (a visa is an ENTRY document only). The period for which you are authorized to remain in the U.S. is determined by your immigration status, which is generally equal to the length of your academic program. A visa may expire while you are in the U.S. without consequence, you will only need to renew the visa if you are travelling outside of the U.S. and plan to return.

F-1: This refers to the visa category under which non-immigrants are allowed to enter the United States to pursue a "full course of study" towards a specific educational or professional objective at an academic institution that has been designated by the U.S. Government to offer courses to such students. Once the educational or professional objectives have been attained, the F-1 student is expected by the U.S. government to return to her or his residence abroad.

Form I-20 – Certificate of Eligibility: The Form I-20 is a multi-purpose document issued by a government approved, U.S. educational institution certifying that you have been admitted to a full-time study program and that you have demonstrated sufficient financial resources to stay in the U.S. The Form I-20 is officially titled the "Certificate of Eligibility" because with it, you are "eligible" to apply for an F-1 student visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate abroad.

In addition to being used for the F-1 visa application, the I-20 must also be presented, along with the valid passport and visa, each time you, as a student enters the U.S. Once you have arrived in the U.S. and passed through the border inspections process, the I-20 is used for identification purposes and proof of your legal status. It is important that your I-20 reflects accurate information about you and your course of study in the U.S. You may need to have the I-20 updated in certain circumstances such as change in program, educational level, and date of completion of studies.

SEVIS I-901 Fee: This refers to the mandatory \$200 fee that must be paid in order to complete your visa application. This fee must be paid no later than three (3) days before your appointment with the U.S. Consulate or Embassy in your home country. Before paying this fee, you must have already received your Form I-20, as you will need information from this form to pay the I-901 SEVIS fee. To pay the fee, please visit www.fmjfee.com. This is a secure United States Customs and Immigration Service website. Upon payment, you must immediately print your 'Payment Confirmation' as you need to submit this with your application at your visa appointment. ***If you have not paid this fee, you will not be able to be registered in SEVIS, which is required every term.*** This can quickly put you "out of status" which will prevent you from being able to study.

I-94 – Arrival/Departure Record: When you enter the country as a nonimmigrant, a U.S. immigration inspector examines your passport and visa and then gives you a stamp in your passport, validating your entry into the United States. Previously, the I-94 document was a small white sheet of paper stapled into your passport. This has been replaced by just a stamp and an electronic record that can be accessed [here](#). This stamp indicates how long you are allowed to stay in the U.S. and proves that you arrived in the country legally. Upon leaving the country again, the USCIS will electronically record the date of your departure for future reference. Any time you return to the U.S. you will receive a new I-94 stamp and electronic record for that particular stay which can be found [here](#). This form is required for many benefits such as seeking a Social Security Number or CA Driver’s License.

Status: This is the agreement under which students remain in the U.S. and dictates the regulations governing each student’s stay. ***It is the responsibility of each student to maintain her or his status.*** A student is said to be “in status” if she or he is abiding by the regulations governing her or his status (see *Responsibilities of an F-1 Student*). A student is said to be “out of status” if she or he is not abiding by those regulations. Serious consequences, including dismissal from the U.S. may apply to students who fall out of status. In some circumstances, it is possible to apply for reinstatement to student status. Contact the Office of International Services (OIS) if you have any concerns about your status.

Office of Biometric Identity Management: OBIM is a “check-in system” which collects biographic information and biometric identifiers on all foreign nationals applying for visas and entering the U.S. OBIM entry procedures are currently in place at U.S. airports and seaports with international arrivals and in the secondary inspection areas of U.S. land border ports of entry. Upon arrival at a port of entry where OBIM is in place, you are required to comply with the procedures. Procedures involve photographing and digital fingerprinting. Your information will be stored and checked against various national security and law enforcement databases. For more information, refer to OBIM on the U.S. Department of Homeland Security [website](#).

SEVIS – Student and Exchange Visitor Information System: SEVIS is a web-based system that the U.S. government uses to track and monitor schools and programs, students, exchange visitors, and their dependents throughout the duration of their approved participation within the U.S. education system.

F-1 students are first entered into the SEVIS database when the initial I-20 Certificate of Eligibility is created. Each student has a unique SEVIS identification number that is printed on the I-20. This SEVIS ID number will stay with you for as long as you study continuously in the U.S. even if you change your major or transfer to a new school. When you enter the U.S., your arrival is recorded in SEVIS at your port of entry. After you begin your studies in the U.S., SEVIS maintains personal information about you and your academic status. In other words, SEVIS tracks whether you are maintaining F-1 status or not. MCU is required to transmit electronic information and event notifications to U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) throughout your enrollment at the School. See *Responsibilities and Reporting Requirements of MCU*

DSO – Designated School Official: This is the term that the U.S. government uses to refer to the school administrator designated as the official representative to the U. S. government and who will maintain the official government records for international students. The DSO is responsible for reporting the required information through SEVIS to the Department of Homeland Security.

The Director of International Services is the Principle Designated School Official for MCU and handles all of your immigration advising in SEVIS.

Common School-Related Immigration Procedures

Change to a New Program

When a student changes programs within the same institution, MCU must indicate the change in the student's SEVIS record and create an updated I-20 to reflect the new program and date of completion of the new program. For example, if you start your studies at the MCU in a Bachelor's program, and then change to a Master's program, you will need to obtain a new Form I-20 with the new program information. You are also required to provide new financial documentation for the new program. If you are changing programs at MCU, you should notify the Office of International Services as soon as you know about the change. Failure to do so may result in a loss of student status.

Program Extension

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) require that you finish your program of study by the completion date on your I-20. The end date on the I-20 is established by the Office of International Services and reflects the average length of time it should take a student to complete the program requirements. If during the course of your studies, it becomes necessary to extend your I-20, the OIS in conjunction with approval from the Office of Academic Advising can provide I-20 extensions to those who are eligible and apply in a timely fashion. A petition for a program extension must be requested by the student prior to the program end date listed on the Form I-20 and approved by an academic advisor and the OIS. This petition can be sought from the Director of International Services.

Eligibility Criteria for Program Extension

Extension of stay can be granted only for documented academic or medical reasons. You may be eligible for an I-20 extension if the following criteria are met:

- Delays caused by lost credits upon transfer to MCU
- Delays caused by change in major field of study
- Delays caused by change in research topic (Graduate Student)
- Delays caused by unexpected research problems (Graduate Student)
- Delays caused by documented medical illness – (Documentation from licensed M.D, M.D of osteopathy, or licensed clinical psychologist required)

An expired I-20 cannot be extended. If your program end date has expired or you do not meet the eligibility requirements to apply for a program extension, it will be necessary to file for reinstatement to F-1 status with USCIS, for which you will have to pay a substantial fee. In addition, failure to apply for an extension of stay in a timely manner is a violation of F-1 regulations, which can carry heavy penalties.

The following are NOT valid reasons for I-20 extensions:

- To enroll in extra courses for personal/academic interest or to improve one's GPA
- To finish pending coursework for an incomplete grade
- To make up credits from previous failed classes, or withdrawn classes
- To repeat a course for a better grade
- To engage in non-required Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
- To enroll in course work delayed by participation in CPT
- Due to non-availability of required coursework
- To extend a program for reasons in which a Reduced Course load would have been appropriate

To request a program extension, please schedule an appointment to meet with the Office of International Services.

Reduced Course Load Authorization

In very rare circumstances an international student may receive authorization to drop below a full-time course load. You must obtain authorization through the OIS and your Academic Advisor before dropping below full-time enrollment. A reduced course load may be considered in instances of early & extreme academic difficulty, medical conditions, or during your last semester of study when less than a full-time course load would be required to complete the program requirements. There are limits to how many semesters may be spent in less than full-time enrollment. Please schedule an appointment to meet with the Director of International Services if you think you may qualify for a reduced course load authorization.

Note: A reduced course load during your last semester does not require any approval, but should be discussed with your Academic Advisor to ensure that sufficient credits are being attempted to complete a program.

Reinstatement to Valid Student Status

A student who has violated status may be reinstated to lawful F-1 status at the discretion of an USCIS District Director, but only under limited conditions. The District Director may consider granting the request if the student:

- Has not been out of status for more than 5 months at the time of filing the request for reinstatement (or demonstrates that the failure to file within the 5 month period was the result of exceptional circumstances and that the student filed the request for reinstatement as promptly as possible under these exceptional circumstances);
- Does not have a record of repeated or willful violations of USCIS regulations;
- Is currently pursuing, or intending to pursue, a full course of study in the immediate future at the school which issued the Form I-20;
- Has not engaged in unauthorized employment;
- Is not deportable on any other grounds; and
- Establishes to the satisfaction of the USCIS by a detailed showing, either that:
 - The violation of status resulted from circumstances beyond the student's control. Such circumstances might include serious illness, closure of the institution, a natural disaster; or
 - The violation related to a reduction in the student's course load that would have been within a DSO's power to authorize and that failure to approve reinstatement would result in extreme hardship to the student.

Alternately, students who have fallen out of status may opt to depart the U.S. and seek re-entry with a new initial Form I-20. Upon re-entry into the U.S., the student will gain a new F-1 status that is separate from the previous status. This means that the student will have to maintain that status for one full academic year before being eligible for any F-1 student benefits such as CPT and/or OPT. If you feel you may have violated your status, please discuss your situation with the Director of International Services as soon as possible.

Visa Renewal

Your F-1 visa may expire while you are in the U.S. without affecting your immigration status. However, you must always have a valid visa to re-enter the U.S. after travel abroad.

Renewing your visa is similar to obtaining your first visa. To obtain a new visa, you must visit a U.S. Embassy abroad, preferably in your home country, and apply for the visa. (If you apply in a country other than your home country there is a greater risk of having your application denied.) New visas cannot be issued within the U.S. See the Department of State website for a list of U.S. Embassies and Consulates abroad and for visa application information: <http://travel.state.gov>.

At your visa interview, you will need to present to the Consular Official the following items in addition to your visa application and visa fees:

- Your valid Form I-20
- An Enrollment Verification Letter from the OIS
- Your official MCU transcript, reflecting upcoming semester's registration
- Your passport
- New financial documentation showing proof of funds to cover the amount listed on your Form I-20 (suggested)

You may also be asked to prove non-immigrant intent; that you intend to return to your home country after completing your studies. Read more about establishing non-immigrant intent at the [Bureau of Consular Affairs](#).

The U.S. Government and You

U.S. Government Agencies Involved with Immigration

When you apply for entry into the United States in student status, you are essentially agreeing to a contract with the U.S. government. You agree to abide by the rules and regulations set forth by the government in exchange for the ability to pursue your educational interests in the United States. The following is a list of U.S. government agencies that oversee policies and regulations regarding international students.

[Department of Homeland Security \(DHS\)](#): The United States Department of Homeland Security is a department of the federal government with the primary responsibilities of protecting the territory of the U.S. from terrorist attacks and responding to natural disasters. The department's structure includes agencies for citizenship and immigration services, customs and border protection.

[U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services \(USCIS\)](#): Division of DHS responsible for applications and petition adjudications of immigration services and benefits.

[Customs and Border Protection \(CBP\)](#): Division of DHS responsible for immigration inspections at U.S. points of entry, border patrol and customs.

[Immigration and Customs Enforcement \(ICE\)](#): Division of DHS responsible for immigration inspections, detention, removal, intelligence and the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP).

[Bureau of Consular Affairs](#): Division of the U.S. Department of State, responsible for visa issuance for foreign nationals.

Responsibilities and Reporting Requirements of MCU

On October 1, 2001, a U.S. law was passed called the "Patriot Act" that mandated schools to use SEVIS to report certain data on individuals with F-1 status to the government. All universities and colleges in the United States that are approved to enroll F-1 students are legally required to notify the government of certain "events" during an F-1 student's stay in the United States. MCU reports to the government only the information that is required by federal law. This includes all the information listed on the student's SEVIS Form I-20: legal name, country and date of birth, country of citizenship, major, program of study, educational level, expected start date of studies, expected completion date of studies, information on F-2 dependents, and funding sources. The University is also required to report on academic, disciplinary, or other events that affect a student's non-immigrant status. These events include, but are not limited to:

Registration/Enrollment Each School Term: At the beginning of each semester and summer (for graduate students), the DSO will confirm a student's full-time enrollment. This will be done by reviewing your academic schedule to ensure you are registered for a full-time course load, as well as ensuring that you are present in the United States and MCU by reviewing attendance records taken for the first two weeks of class.

U.S. Residential Address, Email and U.S. Phone Number: When you arrive at MCU, you must report your local address, email and U.S. cell phone number. If you move or change your email or phone, you must contact the OIS with your new address within 10 days of the change. It is important to maintain your current local address, email and phone with the OIS.

Separation from MCU for Any Reason: Leaves of absence, conduct suspension, academic dismissal, withdrawal from school, or transfer to a new school or program. See *Leaving MCU*.

All Forms of Employment: Employment authorizations through Practical Training or Economic Hardship. As a reminder, all employment should be discussed with the OIS prior to the start of the employment. See *Employment & Social Security Numbers*.

Any Change to Academic Status: Changes in major, program of study, educational level, or expected completion date. See *Common Immigration Procedures*.

Any Major Change to Visa Status: Termination of F-1 status due to degree completion, change of status, failure to maintain status, or other reason. See *Responsibilities of an F-1 Student*.

Maintaining Legal Visa Status in the U.S.

Responsibilities of an F-1 Student

F-1 students are admitted to the U.S. for the sole purpose of studying at the college or university that issues them an I-20. Students in F-1 status are responsible for understanding and complying with United States federal laws and regulations governing the F-class visa. Failure to do so will violate your legal status in the United States, with serious consequences. Your responsibilities include the following:

Maintain Full-Time Enrollment International students must pursue a full-time course of study, defined as 12 units or more for undergraduate students or 6 units for graduate students. Full-time enrollment must be complete by the deadline to add courses each semester. In some very specific instances a student may receive authorization from the Office of International Services for a reduced course load. See *Reduced Course Load Authorization*. Please remember that you must complete your studies by the Program End Date listed on your Form I-20. So although the minimum for full-time enrollment may be 12 units a semester (or 6 units for grad students) you must pursue the correct amount of credits each semester to complete your program on time. Meeting with your academic adviser to ensure on-time completion is critical.

Maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress While many factors contribute to “Satisfactory Academic Progress” at MCU, maintaining a minimum 2.0 grade point average for undergraduates and a 3.0 for graduate students is a must. Please refer to the MCU Catalog for all policies comprising Satisfactory Academic Progress.

Online Course Limitation

F-1 students can take up to one online class per semester to count towards their full course load. During the final semester at MCU, if you have only one class left to complete your degree requirements that last course must be taken as a traditional, in-class course.

Maintain a Valid I-20 Your Form I-20 should accurately reflect your program of study. If you change your program or major, or need longer to complete your program than indicated on your I-20, you must contact the OIS before the Form I-20 expires to make the necessary updates. See *Change to a New Program* and *Program Extension*.

Report Address, Email or Phone Changes Within 10 Days International students should maintain an active foreign (home) address and U.S. (local) address with the OIS. Address, email or phone changes may be submitted via email or in person at the OIS.

Keep a Valid Passport Your passport should be valid for at least six months into the future. If you need to renew your passport, you can do so with your home country’s embassy or consulate in the United States.

Use the Correct Visa When entering the U.S. do not use visas that are not for full-time study such as a tourist visa (B-1/B-2) or visa waiver (ESTA Program).

Do Not Engage in Unauthorized Employment Follow procedures and rules for on-campus employment and authorized off-campus employment. See *Employment*.

Always Carry the Proper Immigration Documents when traveling outside of the U.S. See *Travel Outside of the U.S.*

Follow Proper Procedures When Transferring to a New School See *Transferring to a New School*.

Maintain Required Health Insurance All MCU students are required to have the MCU health insurance policy to maintain enrollment at MCU.

Stay Informed The Office of International Services will keep you updated on changes in immigration policy, it is your responsibility to read and, if necessary, act upon those updates.

There are strict penalties enforced if you should fall “out of status.” If you find yourself out of status, please notify the Director of International Services in the OIS at once to file for “reinstatement of status.” See *Reinstatement to Valid Student Status*. Please remember that a reinstatement is not guaranteed and will be reviewed by MCU and then by the USCIS.

International Students Should:

- Keep copies of all official documents related to your immigration status. Never throw away old forms regardless of whether or not they are valid.
- Keep all I-20s that have been issued to you from every school you’ve attended even after they expire – you’ll need them later.
- Keep a photocopy of your passport and visa. The Office of International Services (OIS) keeps a copy of your visa and passport as well.

Travel Outside of the U.S.

When traveling outside of the United States, international students should be certain to have all documents related to their visa status in the U.S. in order and with them before leaving the country. International students should also be aware of possible delays in international travel and potential procedural changes at U.S. consulates and U.S. ports of entry.

Required Documents for Re-Entry

- A valid passport (must be valid at least six months into the future)
- A valid F-1 visa – If your F-1 visa has expired (or you have been out of F-1 status for more than 5 months) you will need to obtain a new visa in order to return to the U.S. See *Visa Renewal*
- Current and valid form I-20 with a recent signature of the Director of International Services (not more than 6 months old)

Suggested Additional Documents for Re-Entry

- [Official MCU Transcript](#) or “Verification of Enrollment” letter available from the OIS
- Current financial documentation (not more than 3 months old)
- Print out of your [I-94 Departure Record](#) to verify previous status

Other Suggestions

- Be mindful of what you pack in your luggage and know what you can and cannot bring.
- Do NOT pack immigration documents in your checked bags. You will need them on hand at the Point of Entry.
- Check the Transportation Security Administration’s [website](#) for current information. If you are carrying gifts, etc., do not wrap them in such a way that they cannot be opened.
- All baggage is subject to inspection and wrapped packages will be opened.
- Stay up to date on news and events happening around the world - and be aware of the potential difficulties with travel as well as re-entry to the United States.
- Be patient and respectful. Do not make inappropriate jokes in the airport.

Travel to Mexico

International students at MCU often take advantage of our close proximity to Mexico. Keep in mind that some students may need a Mexican visa to enter Mexico. Consult the Mexican Secretary of State’s [website](#) for more information.

Travel Within the United States

When you are traveling around the U.S., you should bring your passport, [I-94 Departure Record](#) and I-20 with you. A little-known regulation exists which says that international visitors to the U.S. must carry their “registration document” with them. The “registration document” for F-1 students is the Form I-94.

Travel Outside of the U.S. Post-Program End Date

Travel outside of the U.S. after your program end date without an OPT application filed, terminates your 60-day grace period and effectively ends your F-1 visa status and any ability to file for OPT.

Traveling During Post-Completion OPT

Students who are applying for post completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) may travel outside of the United States while the OPT application is pending (show your I-765 receipt notice along with your passport, visa, and I-20 when you re-enter the U.S.) Once your OPT application is approved and you have received your Employment Authorization Document, you may travel outside of the country and re-enter only if you have proof that you are employed or have a job offer. If you cannot prove that you have a job to return to, you may not be allowed to re-enter. See the OIS for more details on OPT and travel.

Employment & Social Security Numbers

Employment, as defined by the USCIS, is any type of work performed or services provided in exchange for money or other compensation. International students in F-1 status are permitted entry into the U.S. for specific purposes (study, research, etc.). The USCIS has restrictive employment regulations, particularly for off-campus employment. **Any off campus employment, paid or unpaid, must be authorized before engaging in work.**

On-Campus

International students may work on-campus up to 15 hours per week while school is in session and over 20 hours per week (budget permitting) during official University breaks and holidays. On-campus employment encompasses jobs at the MCU for students in all programs. International students may find it difficult to locate on-campus employment because many on-campus jobs are reserved for U.S. students receiving financial aid in the form of federally funded work-study positions. The Office of Career Services and Internships has streamlined the on-campus job search process [here](#). The Office of Human Resources can also assist you with finding on-campus employment and with completing the necessary paperwork that will allow you to be paid for your work.

Off-Campus

Opportunities for authorized off-campus employment are limited and generally must be related to your studies. There are two types of off-campus employment authorization related to field of study available to F-1 students; Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT). Certain international students may also be eligible for off-campus employment authorization based on severe economic hardship. Simply working off-campus at a coffee shop, restaurant or anywhere else that is not part of MCU is strictly prohibited and will lead to the immediate termination of a student's SEVIS record. To be eligible for any type of off-campus employment authorization, the student must have been in legal F-1 status for one full academic year before applying for authorization with the OIS.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT): Defined as training that is an integral or important part of your established curriculum. Employment through CPT must be in the form of a credit-bearing internship offered through MCU's Office of Career Services and Internships. Employment authorization for CPT is made through SEVIS by the Office of International Services, in conjunction with the Office of Career Services and Internships. All paperwork must be completed, signatures sought and CPT authorization granted **before** you begin your internship. Engaging in this type of employment without the CPT authorization is considered a violation of status. Please see the Director of International Services for more information. You must have been in F-1 status for at least one academic year to qualify.

Optional Practical Training (OPT): Defined as temporary employment in the field of study for purposes of gaining practical experience. International students are eligible for twelve months of optional practical training. OPT is available to students both before and/or after completion of their studies. Employment authorization for OPT must be applied for directly to the USCIS. This process can take up to 90 days. You are not permitted to work until you receive your Employment Authorization Document from the USCIS. Engaging in this type of employment without the OPT authorization is considered a violation of status. Please see the Director of International Services for more information. You must have been in F-1 status for at least one academic year to qualify.

Severe Economic Hardship: If other employment opportunities are not available or are otherwise insufficient, an eligible F-1 student may request employment authorization based on severe economic hardship caused by unforeseen circumstances beyond the student's control. These circumstances may include a loss of financial aid or on-campus employment without fault on the part of the student, substantial fluctuations in the value of currency or exchange rate, inordinate increases in tuition and /or living costs, or unexpected changes in the financial condition of the student's source of support, medical bills, or other substantial and unexpected expenses.

Social Security Numbers

Students with authorized off-campus employment or on-campus employment must obtain a Social Security Number (SSN) to be eligible for payment of wages. Social Security Numbers are issued by the Social Security Administration (SSA) of the U.S. and are used by your employer to report your wages to the government. You will need to apply in person at the local Social Security Administration Office. The process usually takes from 2 to 6 weeks. You will receive notification of your SSN in the mail. The number issued to you by the SSA is your number forever. Keep your Social Security Card in a safe place and make a photocopy to keep in another location. For information on applying for a Social Security Number, please see the OIS.

Filing of U.S. Federal and State Taxes

It is the responsibility of every F-1 visa holder to file U.S. Federal and/or State tax paperwork for every calendar year that you are in the U.S. in F-1 status. The Office of International Services annually provides software to aid in the filing of this paperwork. Whether you engage in any employment or not, you are required to file some form of paperwork. Beyond being a regulatory requirement, should you have any interest in staying in the U.S. beyond your F-1 visa status, a thorough review of tax filing will be done in conjunction with any immigrant status application.

Leaving MCU

Graduating

Once you complete all requirements for your program of study at MCU, you have a 60-day grace period during which time you may remain in the United States in legal F-1 status. The 60-day grace period begins the day after all requirements of your program have been fulfilled, usually the last day of the last semester or term you are enrolled. This date is listed as your Program End Date on your Form I-20. The date of your commencement or graduation ceremony is not considered the date that you complete your studies. During the 60-day grace period you may not work or travel and re-enter the U.S. in F-1 student status. During the 60-day grace period you may prepare for departure from the U.S., apply to transfer your F-1 status to a new school, or apply to change to another immigration status. The 60-day grace period also applies to students who have completed their authorized duration of Post Completion Optional Practical Training. The 60-day grace period begins on the day after employment authorization ends. Keep in mind that the end date on your I-20 may change as you get closer to completing your program, as it may need to be rolled back to accommodate your graduation.

Taking an Authorized Leave of Absence or Withdrawing

MCU allows students to take a leave of up to 2 semesters for personal, family, or medical reasons without the need to reapply to the institution. Keep in mind any amount of time beyond 5 months out of the U.S. will require the issuance of a new Form I-20/SEVIS Record. This has many implications on future F-1 benefits. Students who wish to take a leave of absence must complete the proper paperwork with the Office of the Registrar and must also receive approval from the Office of International Services before taking the leave. For international students, taking a leave of absence from MCU directly affects immigration status because it means that you are no longer maintaining F-1 status. From the date that your leave of absence is effective, you have a 15-day grace period to prepare and depart the U.S. When you are ready to return to MCU to resume your studies, you should contact the Director of International Services for instructions on reentry in F-1 status.

If you decide to withdraw from MCU before completing your program of study, you will have a 15-day grace period to prepare and depart the U.S., transfer your F-1 status to a new school, or apply to change to another immigration status. The 15-day grace period begins from the date that your withdrawal is effective. Students who fail to enroll by the add/drop deadline of a given semester will have all courses dropped and the student's SEVIS record will be terminated.

Medical Leave of Absence

The exception that allows an F-1 student to stay lawfully in the U.S. without transferring to another school or changing immigration status is an authorized medical leave of absence. In addition to being approved for a medical leave of absence by MCU's Office of the Registrar, a student must also receive approval from the Office of International Services. For immigration purposes, the determination of a medical leave is made by the Director of International Services and only upon review of proper documentation.

The student is required to provide a letter from a licensed medical doctor, doctor of osteopathy, or licensed clinical psychologist advising the Director of International Services that s/he is unable to register for coursework at the time the leave is granted. The letter is not required to contain specific details about your medical condition, but it must be on official letterhead and bear an original signature (a fax or e-mail will not suffice) stating that the diagnosis would prevent attendance.

Immigration regulations stipulate a maximum of only twelve (12) months of medical leave per degree level. While on an approved medical leave of absence, a student's SEVIS record is kept active. After traveling outside the U.S., a student with an approved medical leave may return to the U.S. using current immigration documents (valid passport, valid F-1 entry visa and I-20 with a valid travel signature).

You are not permitted to engage in any student-based employment in the U.S., (whether on-campus or off-campus) while on a medical leave in the United States. If you wish to take a leave of absence to pursue employment or any other activities in the U.S., you will have to change your immigration status accordingly and should speak with the Director of International Services about your plans.

Conduct Suspension or Academic Dismissal

Students who are found responsible of a conduct sanction resulting in a suspension will have their SEVIS record terminated on the effective date of the suspension. Additionally, each semester grades are reviewed to assess academic status. Students who repeatedly fail to make satisfactory academic progress may be academically dismissed from MCU and have their SEVIS record terminated. When an international student is suspended or dismissed (after any and all options for appeal are exhausted), they have violated the terms of their F-1 student status. Suspended or dismissed students do not receive a grace period to prepare and depart the U.S., transfer to a new school, or apply to change to another immigration status. You must plan to leave the U.S. effective the date of your SEVIS termination. If, at a later date, you are readmitted to MCU, you will need a new I-20 from the school, and depending on if and how long you have been out the country, you may need to apply for a new visa.

Any of the above actions will not be taken without proper notification of the student via MCU email and regular mail. If you are having difficulty socially or in your academic work, please talk to the OIS, or your Academic Advisor. There are many resources at MCU to help you improve your social life and studies.

Transferring to a New School

If you decide to transfer to a new school or program in the U.S., you will need to transfer your SEVIS record to a new school. In order to transfer your SEVIS record, you must notify the OIS of your intention to transfer. You must also supply the OIS with the MCU forms 'SEVIS Transfer Release' and 'Notification of Transfer/Not Returning' and any applicable 'Transfer Verification' Forms from your new institution as well as your acceptance letter to your new school. Once complete, your SEVIS record will then be released to the new school. You should consult the International Advising Office at the new institution regarding their specific transfer procedures. Failure to follow proper transfer procedures is a violation of your F-1 student status.

Also remember to rectify any outstanding holds on your student account. This will prevent any future requests you may make of MCU.

Web Resources

Living and Studying in the U.S.

edupass.org

foreignborn.com

istudentcity.com

[Study in the States](#)

Living in Los Angeles

[Discover L.A.](#)

[City of L.A. Official Site](#)

[L.A. Times Newspaper](#)

Taxes

[Internal Revenue Service – Tax Information](#)

[Sprintax – Tax Preparation Software](#)

Immigration

[U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services](#)

[Foreign Consular Offices in the U.S.](#)



Ryan's List:
International Student Responsibilities

1. You must attend the school for which you are authorized: make sure you use the MCU I-20 to enter the United States.
2. Keep your passport and I-20 valid at all times. I-20s need to be reissued when any information on them changes: name, sponsoring school, etc.
3. Carry a full course of study every term (Undergraduates = Minimum of 12 credits, Graduates = Minimum of 6 credits). This is the minimum to maintain your status. You will need to enroll in more than the minimum each semester to complete your program on time. See you Academic Advisor early and often to keep on track!
4. When continuing from one education level to another (Bachelors to Masters for example) within MCU, you need a new I-20. (See Office of Admissions)
5. On-Campus employment must be limited to a total of 15 hours per week while school is in session.
6. Off-Campus employment may only be granted after applying to USCIS through the Director of International Services. **DO NOT WORK OFF CAMPUS WITHOUT AUTHORIZATION FROM USCIS.** This includes internships, paid or unpaid.
7. Check your travel documents to be certain they are in order before leaving the United States. All trips outside the U.S. require a signature from the Director of International Services (DSO).
8. Be aware of the expiration date or "Program End Date" on your I-20. Remember, if necessary and possible, you can extend your I-20 thirty days **before** it expires. Also know when your date of departure is by checking your I-94 and I-20. Seek permission from the Director of International Services to extend your stay, if needed.
9. Report a change of address, email and phone to the OIS within 10 days of the change.
10. Everyone, whether you have worked the previous year or not, must file an income tax return on or before April 15th of each year you reside in the United States.

If ever in doubt about how an action may affect your visa status, ask OIS **before** doing it.
And don't ever be scared to ask for help.

