

F-1 Regulations

MOST IMPORTANT RULES

1. Always take a full course of study
 - a. Undergraduate: **12 credits** per semester
 - b. Graduate students: **9 credits** per semester
 - c. **If you want to withdraw from any courses and by doing so you will DROP below the full course load, you must consult with Jesús first.**
2. Enroll full time for 2 semesters in a row. You must consult with your international student advisor before you take any semester(s) off.
3. Make normal progress towards completing your course of study.
4. Don't engage in any unauthorized off-campus work - "any product or service performed for any form of remuneration" (ie. babysitting, manual labor jobs, etc.)
5. Limit on-campus work to no more than **20 hours** during academic terms. You may work full-time **40 hours only** during authorized academic breaks, like interim, spring break, or summer.
6. Report a change of address **within 10 days** to: Center for Global Education (CGE) and the NCC Registrar's Office.

IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS

1. Keep a valid passport, 6 months into the future
2. Keep your I-20 valid and current.
 - a. You need to report to CGE **at least 30 days prior** to the program completion date on line 5 of your I-20. If your level of education/major changes, you need to report to CGE with the following documents **within 10 days** of the change:
 - i. A letter from the academic advisor with a new education level/major and expected graduation date
 - ii. For change of level you also need new financial documentation: a new affidavit and bank letter (if previous financial documentation is more than six months old).
3. Pay attention to your visa. The VISA stamp on your passport is a traveling document. If your visa is expired or if you changed your status from one visa category to another while in the U.S. (e.g., H4 to F1), you need to renew your visa in your home country **BEFORE** you come back to US. If you are not traveling outside of the U.S., it is OK to have an expired VISA.

4. Be sure that copies of your **current** passport, visa, I-94 (now retrievable online), health insurance card, and social security card are on file in the Center for Global Education. Provide copies of all correspondence with USCIS, including copies of any application, receipt notice, approval notices, or requests for additional evidence and new I-94's issued by USCIS. Only with complete documentation can we responsibly advise you.

TRANSFERRING TO A DIFFERENT SCHOOL

1. Before Graduation: Inform CGE of your intention to transfer and what school you are transferring to at least two weeks before the end of your last semester at NCC. The new school should issue you a Transfer recommendation/release form for our office to fill out. Bring us the form and acceptance letter from the new school.
2. After Graduation: Inform the CGE of your intention to transfer. A 60-day grace period is given after the graduation date. The new school should issue you a Transfer recommendation/release form for our office to fill out. Bring us the form and acceptance letter from the new school.
3. At your new school:
 - report to the new advisor **within 2 weeks** of the start of the semester
 - the new school should issue a new I-20 to you, and notify USCIS of the transfer
4. The start date at the transfer-in school must be within 5 months following the release date set by the transfer-out school, or within 5 months of the program completion date in SEVIS, whichever date is *earlier*. *You must start at the new school at their next available start date. **You may not take a term off in between schools.***

EMPLOYMENT

All Off-Campus Employment requires permission from the Center for Global Education and often from USCIS.

1. *On-campus Employment* – see the Career Development Center for current campus job openings. Maximum 20 hours a week on campus when school is in session – No limit per week during authorized breaks (spring break, interim, and Christmas holidays)
2. *Off-campus Employment* – Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

This is often an internship, work study, or practicum for most majors. You can apply for CPT after one academic year of study (9 months). Once you have completed your degree you are **NOT** eligible for CPT. You CANNOT start working on an employment site until you have:

- Stopped by the CDC (Career Development Center) and filled out the appropriate internship paperwork. The CDC can also help you to investigate opportunities specific for your major and research possible employers.
- Registered the internship for academic credit (Registrar, Old Main 3rd floor)
- **Have a job offer in writing including the employment start and end date, the employers name and company address and contact details, your supervisor's name and contact details, if the CPT is part/full time, paid/unpaid, and a brief description of your responsibilities.**
- **Make an appointment with CGE staff to complete the necessary paperwork, record your CPT authorization, update your record in SEVIS, and receive a new I-20.**
- CPT employment approval does not require USCIS authorization, only CGE authorization, therefore please allow one week to process.

Caution: F-I students who engage in 12 months or more of FULL-TIME Curricular Practical Training (CPT) become ineligible for Optional Practical Training (OPT).

3. *Off-campus Employment* – Optional Practical Training (OPT)

OPT is defined in the regulations as “temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student’s major area of study.” It is authorized during:

- After completion of all course requirements for the degree
- **After completion of the course of study, post-completion OPT (full-time only)**

OPT can be authorized for a maximum of 12 months per each academic level. **Start applying 90 days BEFORE your graduation date!** The cost of applying for OPT is \$380 and the process can take up to 3 months, so plan ahead. **You DO NOT need to already have an employer to apply for OPT; however, it is MANDATORY that the employment you are seeking is related to your major field of study.**

- Notify CGE when you are hired. Update CGE with any changes to your employment or change to your address during the 1 year of employment.

*** Post-completion OPT is terminated when you transfer to another institution or begin study at another education level.**

TRAVELING - Leaving and Re-entering the U.S.

You must obtain a travel endorsement BEFORE you travel. Come to see Jesús at least TWO WEEKS BEFORE your departure. Travel signatures are valid from one date from the date it was signed. Be cautious of this date when traveling, it is always best to get a new travel signature if you are concerned about dates. When traveling abroad, the following are always necessary to re-enter the U.S. and continue your studies:

- Valid Passport (at least 6 months into the future)
- Valid F-1 Visa (if you entered in a different visa type, you must get a new F-1 visa to re-enter, even if the old B, J or H visa is valid.) **If you have changed your status to F-1 while here in the U.S and you travel abroad**, as soon as you leave the U.S. you lose your F-1 status and have to re-apply for a new F-1 visa while abroad.
- I-20 with Travel Endorsement (Signature on the back of the I-20, get one each and every time you travel out of the U.S.) Each travel signature is valid for one year.
- EAD - if you are on practical training (a letter from your employer is also strongly **advised** when departing the U.S. on an EAD card)

When you are visiting a foreign country, even **if it is CANADA, MEXICO** or the **CARIBBEAN** you need to check whether or not you need a VISA for that country. You should always check with the Embassy or Consulate of that country before traveling and allow plenty of time because visas can take 3-4 weeks to obtain.

TEMPORARY ABSENCE

If you are going back to your home country for **less than 5 months** before completion of your study and intend to return to North Central College after the temporary absence, you need to notify CGE about your intentions.

If you are out of the country for **more than five months** before completion of your study:

- Notify CGE staff of your intentions.
- Before you return, it is necessary to apply for re-admission and a new I-20 to North Central College.
- Send CGE staff new financial documentation: a new affidavit and bank letter to obtain a new I-20.

Caution: USCIS defines temporary absence as no more than FIVE months. If you are going to be absent for more than five months, you need to obtain a new I-20.

GRACE PERIODS

- An F-1 student who has been granted an authorized early withdrawal by the DSO (Jesús) may remain in the United States for **up to 15 days** following the withdrawal date noted in SEVIS, to prepare for departure.
- If a student fails to maintain status or withdraws from school or otherwise terminates or interrupts his/her course of studies without first obtaining DSO approval in SEVIS, **the student is NOT eligible for any grace period and is out of status. He/She must leave the U.S. immediately.**

UPON COMPLETION OF YOUR COURSE OF STUDY (Graduation)

You have four options:

1. **Depart the U.S.** within 60 days of completing the course of study or OPT.
2. **Continue in F-1 status** by pursuing further F-1 studies (change of level) either at the same institution or transferring to another school (within 60 days)
3. **Apply for Optional Practical Training** (post-completion OPT) **MUST APPLY BEFORE COMPLETING THE COURSE OF STUDY**
4. Apply, no later than 60 days after completing your course of study, to **change your status to another nonimmigrant classification** (i.e., H-1B)

F-2 DEPENDENTS (SPOUSES AND CHILDREN)

The spouse or unmarried minor children (under age 21) of an F-1 student may accompany the student to the United States or follow to join the student at a later date. These dependent family members will be admitted to the U.S. in F-2 status.

- Each F-2 dependent is issued a dependent I-20 in his or her own name.
- The status of the F-2 dependent is determined by the F-1 student maintaining his/her status.
- **F-2 dependents CANNOT WORK.**
- F-2 spouses may not engage in full-time study.
- F-2 children may only engage in full-time study at the K-12 level.
- Part-time study is permitted **ONLY** to the extent that it is “vocational or recreational”
- F-2 dependents may apply for a change of status.

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

Anyone who intends to work on/off campus **MUST** have a Social Security Card/Number.

1. You must have a “letter of employment” from the on-campus department that will be hiring you in order to get a social security card. **YOU WILL NOT BE ISSUED A SOCIAL SECURITY CARD WITHOUT A “LETTER OF INTENTION TO HIRE” FROM YOUR ON-CAMPUS EMPLOYER.**
2. If you have any questions about obtaining a Social Security Card, please see Jesús.
3. For a list of on-campus jobs, please ask Career Development (Oesterle Library, 1st floor)

TAXES

Once you have a job on-campus and a social security number, you must fill out your TAX paperwork **BEFORE** you start working. Please see Jesús to fill out your tax forms, and--once they are completed--you will go to the Office of Human Resources (4th Floor of Old Main) to watch a video and get your timecard PROCESSED. **YOU NEED TO HAVE APPLIED FOR YOUR SOCIAL SECURITY CARD AND FILL OUT YOUR TAX PAPERWORK BEFORE YOU ACTUALLY START WORKING ON- CAMPUS!!** You may schedule an appointment with Jesús by emailing him at jvelasco@noctrl.edu

F-1 students who are authorized to work should **not** have Social Security taxes withheld by their employer. Refer the employer to “Social Security Coverage for Foreign Students/Exchange Visitors” (SSA 78-10056).

**** All F-1 students must submit tax forms to the Internal Revenue Service by April 15, each year – even if not employed.** Most students will receive a full refund of the income taxes withheld. See “Withholding on Nonresident Aliens and Foreign Corporations” (IRS #515) or “US Tax Guide for Aliens” (IRS #519).

COURSELOAD

As you know, all F-1 students must maintain a full course of study while at NCC – this means a minimum of 12 credit hours for undergraduate students and 9 credit hours for graduate students.

There are limited, but very important, exceptions to the “full course of study” requirement. For each of the following circumstances, an F-1 student is considered to be maintaining status even if not registered for a full course of study and that student continues to be eligible for F-1 benefits.

The special circumstances are as follows:

1. Illness or Medical Condition documented by an M.D. or D.O.
2. Initial Difficulty with the English Language
3. Initial Difficulty with the Reading Requirements
4. Unfamiliarity with American Teaching Methods
5. Improper Course Level Placement
6. To Complete Course of Study in the Current Term
7. Part-Time Border Commuter Student

Please make an appointment with Jesús if you feel like you meet one or more of these requirements or would like more detailed information.

You may take classes at another institution, like College of DuPage, as long as the majority of your credit hours are taken at your home school (NCC). For example, taking 9 credit hours at NCC and 3 credit hours at COD is acceptable for a full course of study as a student at NCC.

General Information

MEDICAL INSURANCE

All F-1 students must have the required health forms on file in the Wellness Center. If you have any questions about your health documents, please ask the Wellness Center. If you do not have the required immunizations, you must make an appointment to get those as soon as possible.

All international students and their families are required by U.S. law to have adequate health insurance. You **MUST** submit evidence of your health insurance plan to CGE. We require that students purchase GeoBlue medical insurance unless they can provide proof of another U.S. plan.

Students should visit the Campus Dyson Wellness Center when any medical issues arise. (2nd fl. Stadium, ext. 5550.)

RESIDENCE LIFE

The Center for Global Education can assist students with housing arrangements when campus residence halls are closed. It is the expectation of The Office of Residence Life that all students leave campus during break periods. If you have questions or conflicts, please contact the Office of Residence Life well in advance: reslife@noctrl.edu

- A. To stay on campus during winter break, summer term, or other breaks, students must apply to the Office of Residence Life **ahead of time.**

This information is not intended to be exhaustive or complete, or to address individual circumstances. It is provided as a basic outline, only for general information purposes. Information provided by the Center for Global Education assumes no legal responsibility for advisee's legal status in the United States, or success of petitions submitted to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, but rather is offered as advice only. Individuals with complicated circumstances may consider retaining specialized immigration legal consul.

April 2020