

## **Avoiding Immigration Trouble**

While you are in F or J nonimmigrant status with an I-20 or DS 2019 issued by Valdosta State University, the Center for International Programs is responsible for maintaining your record in the Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), and for helping you understand your obligations under SEVIS. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security created SEVIS to maintain information on non-immigrant students and scholars holding F, M, and J visas.

**You are responsible for notifying the International Student Advisor of the relevant information and changes in your program or status, and for understanding the rules and responsibilities pertinent to your non-immigrant status.** You are responsible for helping us maintain your SEVIS record throughout your period of stay in the U.S. as an F-1 or J-1 student or scholar, or as an F-2 or J-2 dependent. This means that you must continue to provide information to us during any period of post-completion OPT or academic training. SEVIS is an inflexible system with zero tolerance for people who violate the terms of their student or scholar status.

To avoid serious problems with your immigration status:

1. **ENROLL** in a full course of study. (Twelve hours for undergraduate students and six or nine hours for Graduate students.) Do not withdraw, drop a class, or discontinue without consulting an international student adviser first. There are a few circumstances in which an international student adviser can authorize a reduction in course load. Consult an advisor any time you consider a reduced course load. The adviser must authorize the reduction in SEVIS. This is very important because the Center for International Programs is required to report under enrollment to SEVIS within thirty days of the end of registration. Also, please note that you are only allowed to count one on-line course per semester, towards your full-time enrollment.
2. **REPORT** any change in your address to the Center for International Programs within 10 days of the change. This includes address changes during any period of post-completion OPT or academic training. The Center for International Programs must report the changes in the SEVIS System.
3. **MEMORIZE** the completion date on your I-20 or DS 2019 (J students) and do not let it expire! **Ask** the Center for International Student Advisor for an extension, if needed, before the completion date passes.
4. **KEEP YOUR PASSPORT VALID.** To reenter the U.S. if you travel abroad, your passport must be valid for at least six months into the future.
5. **NOTIFY** the Center for International Programs when there are changes in your personal or program information, or changes in information regarding your dependents. For example, notify the Center for International Programs if you complete your program, if you change your nonimmigrant status, or if you or your dependents leave early. (If you

notify the Center for International Programs of an early withdrawal or departure, you have 15 day grace period to leave the U.S. If you do not report this to the Center for International Programs, your non-immigrant status ends immediately. The normal grace period after completion of a degree program or post-completion Optional Practical Training is 60 days.) Notify the Center for International Programs of changes in your major, significant changes in your funding, or changes in your degree level. The Center for International Programs must update SEVIS with new information and issue an update I-20 or DS 2019 when necessary. *Note that J visa holders are not permitted to change their major.*

6. **COMPLETE** an official immigration transfer if you change educational institutions. Remember that you must attend the school that issued your I-20. To transfer, F-1 students must notify the current institution of the intent to transfer, obtain an I-20 from the new school, and report to the Designated School Official at the new school within 15 days of the program start date listed of the Form I-20. J-1 students must notify the current institution of the intent to transfer, obtain a new For DS2019 from the new school, and report to the Responsible Officer at the new school by the start date on the new form.

7. **DO NOT WORK** without authorization. **KNOW** the rules regarding legal employment. The Handbook for Foreign Students provides information about employment options, and an international student advisor can give you more information about your eligibility for authorized employment.

8. **TAKE** your I-20 or DS 2019 (J students) to the Center for International Programs for the International Student Advisor's signature before you travel abroad. Although a signature is valid for a year, it is best to have a signature in the current semester. Dependents should also request a signature on their I-20 or DS 2019 documents before traveling abroad.

9. **BUY HEALTH INSURANCE.** Valdosta State University requires all international students to have adequate health insurance. Federal regulations require J students to have adequate health insurance for their J-2 dependents, or risk termination of their program. We recommend that F students purchase health insurance for their dependents.

10. **REMEMBER** that immigration regulations are subject to change and that this information is subject to change without notice. **It is your responsibility to be sure that you stay informed and that you take required action on time.** Consult an international student advisor when you have questions. You can make an appointment with the adviser by calling the Center for International Program at 333-7410.