

Section 3: Frequently asked Questions Regarding F-1 Rules



If you are an ELI student and you have questions about your visa status or your I-20, you should make an appointment to see one of the ELI Advisors. You may want to talk to them if:

1. You lost your I-20 or your current I-20 is about to expire and you need to extend it;
2. You have a question, such as your eligibility for a vacation;
3. You need your I-20 signed for travel; or
4. You have questions about transferring to another school.

◆ Visa/Status Questions

1. What is a visa?

A visa is a page in your passport that tells us why you are here in the United States. A visa tells us if you are a tourist, student, professional worker, diplomat, etc. It also tells the ELI when you may enter the USA and for how long you may stay here. If you have questions about your visa, please see one of the ELI Advisors.

2. What is an F-1 visa?

An F-1 visa is an international student visa. The date stamped on your visa allows you to enter the USA.

3. What if my F-1 visa expires?

That's okay as long as your I-20 is current and valid. However, if you are leaving the USA, you must renew your F-1 visa in order to re-enter the USA.

4. What is an I-20?



This is a government document that states that you have permission to be in the United States as a full-time student. Your I-20 has information about where you are from, what you are studying, how long you may study, and how much money your studies are expected to cost.

5. What if my I-20 expires before I have finished studying?

If you will not be able to complete your studies on or before your I-20 expires, you must talk to an ELI Advisor well in advance about extending your program. If your I-20 expires, you must file for reinstatement with USCIS. This is expensive and very difficult to do, so

you should try not to get into this situation! If you forget to extend your I-20 the USCIS assumes you are planning to go home and you will depart within 60 days of the date your I-20 expires.

6. What if I have finished my studies, but I don't leave the country or begin a new program of study within 60 days?

You will be out of status, or "illegal." This has serious consequences if you want to enter the U.S. in the future. For example, if you overstay 180 of days, you will be banned from entering the U.S. for 3 years.

7. What if I want to travel outside the country for a short vacation and then return to finish studying?

If your I-20, F-1 visa, and/or passport have expired, you will need to renew the document that has expired. If your documents are still valid, just take your I-20 to an ELI Advisor for an official signature. You must do this BEFORE you leave the US!

Upon re-entry into the US, you will be asked to show your I-20 with this signature. Your F-1 visa must still be valid for re-entry. If not, you must apply for a new F-1 visa before the re-entry.

If you have changed your status to F-1 within the US, you will have to apply for an F-1 visa in your home country before you are allowed to be readmitted into the US.



8. When can I take a vacation?



The ELI summer vacation is from mid-May to mid-August. However, there are classes available for students who are interested in furthering their education during the summer. There is also a winter break from mid-December to mid-January. If you have begun full-time studies at ELI during the summer session, you will need to take both fall and spring terms before you are eligible for a break. You will, however, have a 3 week break in August between summer and fall semesters and a 6 week break in December between fall and spring semesters.

9. What if I get sick while I am an ELI student?

You need to try to contact your teacher before you miss class. If you are not able to inform your teacher beforehand, contact your teacher and explain your situation as soon as you can.

If you get sick and miss more than two weeks of classes, you must get a letter from a doctor that explains your absence. You should submit this letter to an ELI Advisor. This letter must document what is wrong, what treatment you are receiving, and how long the treatment will last. If your illness requires you to take a Reduced Course Load (RCL), you must first meet with an ELI Advisor to get an RCL



Recommendation form to be filled out by a medical doctor.

10. What if I become pregnant?

Pregnancy is NOT considered an “illness” and, except in cases that develop into serious medical conditions (i.e. complications arising from a pregnancy which would require special treatment), students who become pregnant are still expected to maintain full-time status until their due date



nears. If a hospital stay becomes necessary prior to this date, she may provide the appropriate medical documentation to request an RCL/Withdrawal from studies. If the student expects to be absent from classes for more than 2 weeks then an RCL will be necessary.

11. Can I work if I am on an F-1 visa?

If you are in the United States on a student visa, it means that your main reason for being here is to study. Therefore, you cannot work. The only exception to this USCIS rule is that you may work on campus for up to 20 hours a week during the academic term and up to 40 hours a week during official college vacation. However, this work can be very difficult to find and you should not count on being able to work in order to pay for school. Contact an ELI Advisor for more information.

12. Will I need a new I-20 if I want to study in a degree program at HCC?

Yes. You need a new I-20 any time you begin a new program of study. You must first consult with an ELI Advisor, declare your intent to transfer, and then follow procedure. You need to be at Level 4 or above before you can transfer to an HCC degree program. And you will need to fill out the HCC degree program application.*

13. What if I want to transfer to a different college?

You must first contact an ELI Advisor with your intent to transfer, contact the school you wish to attend and fill out their application, and then request their transfer approval



form for an ELI Advisor to complete. In order for us to release this form to the school, we need either a copy of the completed application or an acceptance letter from the transferring school.*

**Please refer to the transfer policy on page 12 for more information.*

15. What if I will not be returning next term or I don't know yet?

In order for us to properly update your SEVIS I-20, you must inform an ELI Advisor of your intent, even if you are not sure of what your plans are for the following term. This is done after every semester. If your situation changes, please inform an ELI Advisor before the new term begins.

◆ Visa Violations

We know that immigration regulations can be very confusing and difficult to understand. However, it is VERY important for you to know what you need to do to stay in-status, or “legal.” This is a very challenging time for international visitors to the United States and now, more than ever, you need to make sure that your status is secure.

It is your responsibility to make sure you are in-status and aware of the important regulations which affect you. Remember that we are here to help and inform you. If you have any questions about studying full-time, stopping your studies, traveling out of the USA, taking a vacation, transferring to or from a different school, please see an ELI Advisor.

Please do NOT rely on what your friends or other students tell you! Always ask an ELI Advisor! Also, please make an appointment as soon as you have a question or problem. Do not wait until a problem becomes too big! Your advisors will send you email regarding important regulation changes. Please check your email regularly!

