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F-1 AND J-1 STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER SEVIS

** Note: the Office of International Student & Scholar Services (OISSS) was formerly known as the International Center.*

The purpose of this notice is to inform our F-1 and J-1 international students of their responsibilities under the immigration regulations that are now in effect under the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). SEVIS is a database system employed by the U.S. government to track the arrival, enrollment, and departure of international students and their dependents. Since February 2003, every institution in the U.S. that enrolls international students in F or J status has been required to use SEVIS.

Data UNC at Chapel Hill must report under SEVIS for F-1 and J-1 students:

- Name, date of birth, country of birth, country of citizenship, source and amount of financial resources, academic program, level of study, program start and end dates
- Arrival on campus and enrollment or failure to enroll
- A change of the student or dependent's legal name or address
- Graduation prior to the end date listed on the I-20 or DS-2019
- Academic or disciplinary actions taken by the school due to a criminal conviction
- Registration for less than a full course of study without PRIOR authorization from the OISSS
- Termination of studies date and reason for termination
- Other data generated by standard procedures such as program extension, school transfer, change in level of study, employment authorization, and reinstatement
- Failure to complete the academic program or program objective

Though SEVIS has increased our reporting obligations, OISSS and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill are NOT part of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) or any other federal agency. Our staff is dedicated to the University's mission and to our international students and exchange visitors, and we want to assist you in achieving your educational goals at the University. We must also follow federal regulations in order to ensure the continued ability to bring international students and scholars to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Please help us in this goal and protect your immigration status by reading and heeding the following requirements.

The following is a list of regulations you MUST follow in order to maintain your status in the United States. The ability to correct any action that results in a violation of your status has been *greatly* reduced in the current regulations. It is very important that you understand the following information.

- ❑ **Address Reporting:** You MUST update your physical address (place of residence) in the United States (no Post Office Boxes) within 10 days of any move you make within the U.S. while in F-1 or J-1 status (this includes temporary moves for the summer, if residing in the U.S.). The University of North Carolina allows you to do this address reporting online through Student Central <http://studentcentral.unc.edu>. There are four address fields for international students. The "Immigration" address is the address that will be used for immigration reporting. In order to prevent any interruption in your mailing, you must also have an address in "Local" address. This may be a duplicate entry, but both address fields must be filled in. For reporting to SEVIS, OISSS will be connected to the Student Information System (Student Central), and will report the address listed in Student Central under "Immigration" as your current address with the immigration service. Students who have graduated (or who are no longer enrolled at UNC-Chapel Hill) and are on F-1 Optional Practical Training or J-1 Academic Training are also required to report changes in address, but those changes should be emailed directly to oiss@unc.edu with the subject heading "ADDRESS CHANGE".
- ❑ **Enrolling Full-time:** Undergraduate students MUST be enrolled for at least 12 credit hours per semester. Graduate students must generally be registered for 9 credit hours unless enrolled in research hours (992, 993, 994) for thesis or dissertation. However, regardless of the number of hours, you must be considered full-time by the Graduate School in order for you to be considered full-time for immigration purposes.

- ❑ **Distance Learning:** New regulations have also limited the number of distance and on-line courses you may apply towards full-time enrollment. No more than one course per semester or 3 credits may be used to reach full-time enrollment. All other credits in that semester must be regular credits.
- ❑ **Dropping Below Full-Time:** If for some reason you do not intend to enroll full-time during a semester (taking a leave of absence, medical problem, or initial difficulties with course level placement or the English language, or if you are an undergraduate in your final semester and you do not need 12 hours in order to graduate, etc) you **MUST** talk with an advisor at OISSS *BEFORE* you drop below full-time. No other office in the university has the authority to approve under-enrollment and report it to the Immigration Service. **OISSS must approve this action prior to it taking place or you will be out of status.**
- ❑ **Change of academic level:** If you are considering changing your educational level (i.e. Bachelor's, Master's, PhD) talk to OISSS first. The timing of this change may have an impact on your status and plans for the future, so it is important to get information before changing your degree level. This information must be updated in the SEVIS system and OISSS must make a new I-20 or DS-2019 to reflect that change. Changes of level can be either from a lower to a higher level or from a higher to a lower level.
- ❑ **Changing your degree program or major:** If you change your degree program, talk to OISSS first. This information must be updated in the SEVIS system and a new I-20 or DS-2019 created as soon as you know about the change.
- ❑ **Extension of program of study:** It is very important that your Form I-20 (for F-1) or Form DS-2019 (for J-1) remain valid at all times. If your document will expire soon, notify OISSS immediately. You will be out of status if you allow your I-20 or DS-2019 form to expire and you have not *completed* your degree program (even if you are on F-1 OPT). Knowing your date of expiration is **YOUR** responsibility. ***Failure to extend your I-20 or DS-2019 is a violation of your F-1 status and work on or off campus with an expired I-20 or DS-2019 may be considered illegal employment (even if you have an EAD for F-1 OPT).***
- ❑ **Transfer of schools:** In order to transfer from one school to another, you must first inform OISSS of your intention to transfer. You must know which school you will transfer to, and in what session you will start at the new school so that the transfer can be set via SEVIS. Please discuss the transfer process with an advisor when you come to inform us of your intention to transfer.
- ❑ **Leaves of absence or withdrawing from school:** If you are planning on taking a leave of absence or withdrawing from school completely, you must notify OISSS before withdrawing from classes. The preparation to depart "grace period" is different for F-1 and J-1 students. F-1 students who withdraw from school in the middle of a term without **PRIOR** authorization from OISSS, must depart the U.S. immediately, and will not be entitled to a grace period to depart. F-1 students who *notify OISSS and receive authorization from OISSS **BEFORE** withdrawing from UNC-Chapel Hill*, are afforded a 15-day departure period. Only F-1 students finishing their program are afforded the 60-day grace period for departure. For J-1 students, a 30-day preparation to depart "grace period" is allowed, though if your program is terminated by the University, there is no grace period allowed.
- ❑ **Employment regulations:** It is important that you abide by the employment regulations. International students in J-1 status must have **prior** approval in SEVIS from their sponsor (i.e. the institution or organization that issued your DS-2019) for on-campus or off-campus employment including Academic Training. International students in F-1 status are allowed to work on-campus no more than 20 hours per week while school is in session but may work full-time on-campus during their summer and winter vacations between semesters of study. (On-campus does **NOT** include positions paid by UNC Hospitals, the Carolina Inn, or Businesses on Franklin Street). All off-campus employment for F-1 students must be approved **prior** to beginning employment either by OISSS, or in the case of F-1 Optional Practical Training or F-1 Economic Hardship, by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (formerly INS). Unpaid internships or practicums may still be considered "employment" depending on certain factors and so they may still require employment authorization. Please discuss any "work" or "volunteer" opportunities with an advisor at OISSS before beginning the opportunity.

Additional note on Curricular Practical Training: If your degree program has a requirement that you do work off campus (such as with a practicum, internship, field research) you will need to talk to an advisor at OISSL about Curricular Practical Training (CPT) before you begin this work. Students without a requirement but that have a course in their degree program titled “internship, practicum, field study” or something similar can also speak to an advisor at OISSL to see whether they qualify for CPT. CPT must be approved before work can begin.

Additional note on Optional Practical Training: In the case of F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT), new regulations also require that you apply BEFORE the completion of your degree (date of completion of all coursework or date of defense of thesis or dissertation). OISSL will NOT be able to process a request for OPT that is turned in after the date of completion, and the application **must** be turned in *at least three weeks prior* to the date of completion to ensure timely processing. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services must receive applications for OPT **no later** than the program completion date. In order to ensure your application is approved prior to your requested start date, please plan to apply for OPT two to three months prior to the completion of your program. Under new regulations, students may now have 12 months of OPT per academic level. More detailed information regarding OPT is available on our website and in the application materials.

- ❑ **Dependents:** SEVIS will create separate records for all F-2 and J-2 dependents. For the purposes of address reporting, it will be assumed that your dependents are residing with you. If the dependents will live separately from the F-1 or J-1 student, the address of the dependent must be reported directly to OISSL by sending an email to oisss@unc.edu. Please put “DEPENDENT ADDRESS” in the subject heading, and be sure to include the name of the F-1 or J-1 student as well.

Dependent Travel: Besides creating a separate record for F-2 and J-2 dependents, SEVIS will create a separate form for each dependent. If your dependents will travel outside the U.S., their Forms I-20 or DS-2019 must be signed prior to the travel. If your dependents will depart the U.S. for a considerable length of time, OISSL must be notified so that we may inactivate the SEVIS record for your dependents. Contact OISSL when such dependents wish to return, so that we may reactivate their SEVIS records to enable their re-entry to the U.S.

Note for F-2 dependents: F-2 children are only allowed to study full-time in an elementary or secondary school (kindergarten through 12th grade). F-2 spouses and children are no longer eligible to be enrolled full-time in the United States at the post-secondary level, and continuing to do so is considered a violation of the F-2’s status. If the F-2 engages in study to pursue a hobby or if the study is that of an occasional, casual, or recreational nature, such study may be considered as avocational or recreational, and that is considered appropriate. F-2 dependents should avoid taking classes that will later be counted toward a degree.

Note for J-2 dependents: The new regulations have kept the employment eligibility of J-2 dependents intact. At this time J-2 dependents may also pursue a full-time degree program. However, institutions have been put on notice that the study provision may change in the near future. We will continue to keep you updated as the situation develops.

- ❑ **Travel:** All travel requires a valid and unexpired SEVIS issued I-20/DS-2019, signed for travel by OISSL (or J-1 program sponsor), valid passport and visa for re-entry to the country. You should travel with a certificate of enrollment (available from the Registrar’s office), and proof of funding. Visa and travel requirements have changed often lately, so always check with OISSL before you travel outside of the U.S. to make sure that you know the latest travel requirements.

It is imperative that you are receiving email from OISSL, which, along with our website at <http://oisss.unc.edu/> will be our primary method of communication with students. If you are NOT receiving email messages from OISSL, this is because your email address in the UNC directory/student central is not correct. Please check your email address in student central and in the UNC directory so that you receive information from OISSL.

If you have any questions regarding any of the above material or any other matter, please do not hesitate to contact us.

We wish you the best of luck with your experience at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill!

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