

## 7 INTERNATIONAL STUDENT AND SCHOLAR SERVICES

---

### 7.1 DIRECTORY

International Student and Scholar Services  
(979) 845-1824

Pavilion Room 110  
1226 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-1226

<https://global.tamu.edu/iss>

### 7.2 OVERVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT AND SCHOLAR SERVICES

International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) supports international students, scholars and their families as they navigate the U.S. immigration system and life in the U.S. ISSS educates on policies and regulations and provides programs to enhance the Texas A&M international community experience. ISSS assists students and scholars in complying with the Department of State and Department of Homeland Security regulations and updates the Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). Annually, ISSS supports approximately 6,000 currently enrolled international students from over 130 countries, 2,000 incoming students who need documentation from ISSS prior to enrolling, and 2,000 former students who are still in the U.S. with work authorization through an immigration status that is monitored by ISSS. ISSS supports international students at the College Station campus, Galveston campus, Health Science Center locations, McAllen Higher Education Center, Bush School D.C. Teaching Site, Houston City Centre, and the School of Law. ISSS provides resources to students on adjusting to life in the United States and the local community, coordinates and presents workshops on various subjects such as work authorization and taxes, and manages compliance with the Texas A&M System mandatory health insurance requirement for F-1 and J-1 students.

Texas A&M University defines an international student as any individual who is not a U.S. Citizen or U.S. Lawful Permanent Resident. While most international students have F-1 or J-1 immigration status, there are international students enrolled at Texas A&M in many other immigration statuses as well. All international students, regardless of immigration status, are **required** to complete an online check-in with ISSS prior to their first academic term of enrollment at Texas A&M. Additional information about the ISSS check-in requirement can be found at <https://global.tamu.edu/iss/students> All international students are **strongly encouraged** to review the ISS online New International Student Orientation at <https://iss.tamu.edu/Events-and-Programs/NISO> to learn about the various Texas A&M campuses, F-1 and J-1 immigration status requirements and benefits, health and safety tips, numerous campus and community resources, and even the Aggie Network.

NOTES:

---

---

---

---

---

### 7.3 INFORMATION ABOUT F-1 AND J-1 STATUS

#### Steps after Admission to the University

After international students are admitted to the University and have accepted their offer of admission, they will need to follow the instructions on the ISSS website at <https://global.tamu.edu/issc/students>. At minimum, all international students must complete a mandatory online check-in.

If the student will need a U.S. F-1 or J-1 visa to enter the United States, the student will then apply for a Form I-20 (F-1 status) or a Form DS-2019 (J-1 status). After obtaining the I-20 or DS-2019, the student can then schedule an appointment with a U.S. embassy or consulate to apply for the visa. New incoming students may enter the United States no earlier than 30 days prior to the program start date on the I-20 or DS-2019, which should correspond with the first day of classes. After arriving in the U.S., the student must complete the mandatory online check-in with ISSS.

If the student is already in the U.S. in F-1 or J-1 status and wants to maintain that status at Texas A&M, they will first need to transfer their SEVIS record from their current U.S. school to Texas A&M University and then apply for a Form I-20 or DS-2019 from ISSS. After receiving the Form I-20 or DS-2019 from ISSS, then the student must complete the mandatory online check-in.

#### Maintaining F-1 or J-1 Status

It is important for F-1 and J-1 students to maintain their immigration status while pursuing their academic program. Here are the main ways an F-1 or J-1 student can maintain status:

1. Keep their documents up-to-date.
  - a. I-20/DS-2019: Students should not let their I-20 or DS-2019 expire prior to graduation.
  - b. Passport: Students should never let their passport expire.
  - c. Visa: It is okay if the F-1 or J-1 visa stamp in the student's passport expires while they are in the U.S. F-1 and J-1 students can continue to maintain status and remain eligible for all benefits of their F-1/J-1 status even if the visa stamp in the passport has expired. If the student travels internationally, they will likely have to renew the visa in order to return to the U.S.
2. Maintain full-time enrollment.
  - a. Fall and Spring: Graduate F-1 and J-1 international students are required to enroll in a minimum of 9 credit hours during fall and spring terms.
  - b. Summer: If summer is a student's first or last term of enrollment in a new academic program or with a new F-1 or J-1 status, the graduate student must enroll in a minimum of 6 credit hours .
  - c. Reduced Course Load (RCL): If an F-1 or J-1 international student needs to drop below full-time

NOTES:

---

---

---

---

---

enrollment, then they must first receive an approved Reduced Course Load (RCL) from ISSS. If a student drops below full-time enrollment without ISSS permission, then the student may lose legal status.

- d. Distance Learning: Only 3 hours of distance learning courses may count toward the full-time enrollment immigration requirement for F-1 students. One distance learning course may count towards the full-time enrollment immigration requirement for J-1 students.

3. Obtain work authorization.

- a. On-Campus Work: F-1 students are automatically eligible to work on campus while they are in legal status. J-1 students need to apply for ISSS authorization prior to working on campus and must receive annual renewal of the work authorization.
- b. Off-Campus Work: Both F-1 and J-1 students need ISSS authorization and possibly also federal government authorization to work off-campus. It can take months for the student to receive the appropriate work authorization.
- c. Working without authorization is considered a serious violation of status and will result in significant financial and other costs to the student. If you believe a student has worked without authorization, advise the student to consult with ISSS right away.

**Mandatory Health Insurance**

Texas A&M University System rules require students with F-1 or J-1 status to be automatically enrolled in and billed for the System Student Health Insurance Plan. The Department of State also requires all exchange visitors in J-1 status as well as their dependents in J-2 status to always maintain acceptable health insurance coverage. Visit the ISSS Health Insurance webpage for more information: <https://global.tamu.edu/iss/health-and-safety/health-insurance>.

**Travelling Inside and Outside the United States**

Texas A&M University System rules require students with F-1 or J-1 status to be automatically enrolled in and billed for the System Student Health Insurance Plan. The Department of State also requires all exchange visitors in J-1 status as well as their dependents in J-2 status to always maintain acceptable health insurance coverage. Visit the ISSS Health Insurance webpage for more information: <https://global.tamu.edu/iss/health-and-safety/health-insurance>.

**7.4 ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS AND ISSS**

Each academic term, ISSS must report to the U.S. government that F-1 students are continuing to make progress toward completing their academic program and that they are maintaining F-1 status. Many of the ISSS processes for international students involve the academic departments. Academic departments provide ISSS with valuable information regarding the students’ academic status and progress. More resources can be found at <https://global.tamu.edu/iss/departments-and-partners/international-students-101>.

NOTES:

---

---

---

---

---

### Common ISSS Processes that involve Academic Departments

- Reduced Course Loads – permission to drop below full-time enrollment
- Extensions – permission to extend the I-20 or DS-2019 expiration date for academic purposes
- Curricular Practical Training (CPT) – U.S. work authorization for F-1 students to participate in an internship that is a required part of the academic program
- Optional Practical Training (OPT) – U.S. work authorization for F-1 students to apply the skills learned in their academic program through U.S. employment typically after completion of the program
- Academic Training – U.S. work authorization for J-1 students to participate in either an internship during an academic program or employment after completion of an academic program
- On Campus Employment for J-1 students – U.S. work authorization for J-1 students to engage in on-campus employment while completing their academic program

### International Student On-Campus Employment

Students on F-1 or J-1 status are limited to 20 hours per week of on-campus employment during the fall and spring semesters. Students may work more than 20 hours per week in the summer, winter, or spring break periods. Eligibility for on-campus employment automatically ends if a student graduates, if their I-20/DS-2019 expires, or if they violate their status. If a student exceeds 20 hours per week of on-campus employment during a fall or spring semester, or if a student continues to work on-campus after their eligibility to do so expires, they may lose legal status.

### Texas A&M University Funding Offer Letters

F-1 and J-1 students must submit evidence of financial resources to ISSS in order to receive an I-20 or DS-2019. If the student is offered a Texas A&M assistantship, fellowship, scholarship, or grant, they are strongly encouraged to use that funding offer for the purpose of I-20 or DS-2019 issuance. This will significantly reduce (or fully eliminate) their requirement to show personal or third-party funding and University funding is viewed more favorably by the U.S. government for the purpose of showing reliable financial resources. The following information about the content of award letters is important, not only when the letters are prepared for newly admitted students, but also whenever federal regulations require currently enrolled international students to obtain letters proving financial support.

The financial offer letter must be printed on department letterhead and must include the following:

- The student’s name.
- The contact information for the employing/awarding department or office.
- The applicable date(s) or academic term(s) of the offer. ISSS cannot accept financial documentation for past terms as evidence of financial support for current or future terms. To calculate the financial benefit, the funding offer must apply to current or future dates/terms.
- The specific dollar amount(s) being awarded, including any applicable salary or pay rate.
- The frequency by which the financial support will be distributed (e.g., once, each semester, monthly, bi-weekly).

NOTES:

---

---

---

---

---

- The benefits (i.e., insurance), if any, that accompany the financial offer. If the letter does not specify insurance or any other benefit, ISSS cannot assume they are included.
- Any waivers or contributions toward the cost of the student’s tuition and/or fees. It is best to be very specific with wording in the letter. Some examples include:
  - The student is receiving a waiver of the out-of-state tuition only and they can pay tuition at the in-state rate.
  - The student’s tuition is being paid but they are still responsible for fees.
  - All the student’s tuition and fees will be paid.
- Students who receive funding assistance from Texas A&M University are urged to work with their departments to better understand their aid package. In some cases, University funding does not fully cover the ISSS estimated cost of attendance for at least 1 year. If that is the case, the student will be required to show additional financial resources to make up the difference. This could include personal funding, third-party funding, or sponsored student funding. For additional information about ISSS estimated cost of attendance and the financial documentation that can be accepted, visit <https://global.tamu.edu/iss/resources/costs-and-financial-documents>.

## 7.5 FINANCIALLY SPONSORED STUDENTS

Some international students are financially sponsored by government agencies, major corporations, or other sponsoring organizations. ISSS refers to these students as sponsored students. ISSS serves as a liaison among the Office of Admissions, academic departments, financial sponsors, and students regarding matters related to their immigration status and sponsorship. If the sponsor is paying the University directly, then Student Business Services (SBS) processes the third-party billing. All invoices are issued by SBS.

### 7.5.1 Identifying a Sponsored International Student

A Texas A&M sponsored student is a student who, in pursuing his or her educational objective in the United States, seeks admission to TAMU under any of the following conditions:

- The student’s educational program is the result of a written agreement between the United States government and a foreign government or a written agreement between an American and foreign educational institution, or
- The student receives primary financial support from a source other than personal or family funds or a Texas A&M academic department, or
- The student’s educational objective has been agreed to by both prospective student and sponsor and may not be changed without the written approval of the sponsor.

Financial support for a sponsored student may be provided by the United States government, the government of the prospective student’s home country, an international organization, or other private or public entities. Most sponsored students are selected to study in the U.S. under programs designed to enhance the development of their country and

NOTES:

---

---

---

---

---

are required to return to their home country following the completion of the academic objective. As a result, their educational objectives are clearly delineated in agreements (contracts) the students sign prior to receiving funds for academic study. Each sponsor and/or agency representing sponsors who fund students to pursue academic degrees will have a unique set of requirements.

### 7.5.2 Restrictions

In addition to federal regulations governing all international students, sponsors may impose their own, such as:

- **Course Selection and Full Course of Study**

Whereas sponsored students must enroll in required University classes as stipulated by Texas A&M regulations and departmental requirements, students who drop courses or elect to enroll in courses not considered required or related to their sponsor’s academic objectives must obtain their sponsor’s permission.

- **Employment/Payment of Tuition**

Advisors should inquire whether a sponsored student is permitted by their sponsor to seek or accept employment in the U.S. In some cases, sponsors permit employment without a penalty; in other cases, sponsors may authorize employment but reduce their financial contribution to the student. All questions on such matters should be directed to the student. Furthermore, all sponsored students must comply with federal employment regulations. Departments offering assistantships should bear in mind that many sponsored students receive stipends for living expenses that may be tax free.

Sponsored students whose sponsors pay tuition and fees may not be eligible for departmental/grant Graduate and Professional School payment of tuition unless there are special circumstances involved. The student should check with their sponsor should there be questions regarding sponsorship conditions related to payment of tuition and fees.

- **Additional Degrees and/or Practical/Academic Training**

Advisors should not assume a student may remain in the U.S. and/or is authorized to pursue degrees and/or training beyond that which was funded by a sponsor. Permission from the sponsoring agency should be secured prior to offering assistance to a sponsored student for pursuing an additional degree and/or encouraging a sponsored student to obtain practical training authorization.

### 7.5.3 Sponsor Visits

Sponsors or their representatives may schedule visits to Texas A&M. These visits are coordinated through ISSS.

NOTES:

---

---

---

---

---