

Carnegie Mellon University

Office of International Education

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Change of Non-Immigrant Status to F Status

The issuance of an I-20 does not give someone F status. If you are currently in the US in another status and you wish to change to F-1 or F-2 status you can accomplish this change in one of two ways:

1. Leave the US, apply for an entry visa for the new status at a US Consulate abroad and reenter the US with the appropriate documentation for the new status, **OR**
2. File an application for a change of non-immigrant status with US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).
Note: Because a change of status does not grant the applicant a new visa, during your next trip abroad, you will need to obtain an F-1/F-2 visa stamp from a [US Embassy or Consulate](#) in order to reenter the US in F-1/F-2 status.

This handout contains information about how to change non-immigrant status within the US by filing a change of status application with USCIS. While a change of status application allows someone to change their status without traveling, sometimes travel and re-entry in the new status can be the better option. **OIE recommends that you consult with an OIE advisor, and possibly an [immigration attorney](#), to discuss your specific situation prior to filing a change of status application with USCIS; as it may be better to travel and make a new entry.**

Conditions and Limitations

Your non-immigrant status should always accurately reflect your primary purpose for being in the US. For most full-time students, that means F-1 student status. If you have any questions about the proper status for your activity, you may make an appointment to speak with an OIE advisor, even prior to your enrollment at CMU.

- **Special note for people changing from F-2 to F-1 status**
Non-immigrants in F-2 status (spouses and minor children of F-1 students) are prohibited by law from studying **full time** towards a degree at the post-secondary (university) level while in F-2 status. F-2s who will study full-time in a degree program at CMU are strongly encouraged to proceed with the change of status process described herein and are **discouraged from beginning their studies until the change of status has been approved**. Failure to do so in a timely manner may jeopardize legal non-immigrant status. Questions may be directed to an [OIE advisor](#).
- **Special note for people in B-1/B-2 status or Visa Waiver status changing to F-1**
Non-immigrants in B status are prohibited by law from beginning a course of study prior to receiving an approved change of status to F-1 student status. Change of status applications from non-immigrants in B status who do not have “prospective student” notation on their visa are commonly denied. Students without this notation will likely need to leave the US, apply for a student visa at a [US Embassy or Consulate](#) abroad, and re-enter the US in student status **prior** to beginning their program. **People who entered the US using the Visa Waiver program cannot change status within the US and should consult with an OIE advisor regarding making a new entry.**
- **Special note for people in J-1/J-2 status changing to F-1**
Non-immigrants in J-1 or J-2 status who are/were subject to a [212\(e\)](#) (2-year home residency requirement), and who have not received a [waiver](#) of that requirement are **prohibited** from changing status inside the US. You must travel with a new I-20 and apply for an F visa from a [US Embassy or Consulate](#) abroad.

Timing the Application

Applications for change of status must be filed before your current status ends, but should not be filed shortly after you have arrived in the US. Discuss the appropriate time to file the change of status application with your OIE advisor. Applications submitted too early may be returned or rejected. However, applications submitted too late may not be processed prior to the start of classes. Additionally, processing times may vary. Change of status applications may take a very long time (close to a year) for USCIS to process so it's important to time applications carefully. Students may begin their studies while their application is pending - **except for students changing from F-2 to F-1 or B-1/B-2 to F-1 as indicated above**. Students with a pending change of status **may not work on or off campus**. Applicants in H-1B status need to pay particular attention to timing of the application both to insure they are in legal status when they file the application and to be able to work until their preferred employment end date.

SEVIS Fee Payment Comes First

The application to change status within the US requires the submission of [Form I-539](#), along with the required [fees](#), and documentation. In addition, USCIS may require that you appear for an interview or provide [biometrics](#) (fingerprints, photograph, and/or signature).

Before completing the I-539 application to change your status to F-1 status, you must pay the SEVIS I-901 fee. Read the SEVIS I-901 [Fee Frequently Asked Questions](#). The SEVIS fee is paid separately from and in addition to the fee for the I-539 application fee and biometrics fee. The SEVIS Fee must be processed **before** USCIS will take action on the application.

Note: If changing to F-2 status, the SEVIS fee is not required.

CHANGE OF STATUS APPLICATION PROCESS

FILING FORM I-539:

Step I. WRITE A COVER LETTER. THE LETTER SHOULD:

- Be addressed "Dear Immigration Services Officer"
- Explain what status you are applying for (e.g. change from F-1 to B-1/B-2 status)
- Explain why you are applying for a change of status
- List all of the contents of your application
- Include your contact information and original signature

Step II. READ INSTRUCTIONS & COMPLETE I-539 FORM:

- [Form I-539 and I-539A](#). Download and complete the Form I-539 to Change or Extend Non-Immigrant Status. **Make sure to sign the form.**
 - **NOTE: As of March 2019, when you file Form I-539 you and your dependent(s) will need to prepare to provide Biometrics to USCIS. Instructions can be found [here](#) (page 12).**
 - USCIS may require that you appear for an interview or provide [biometrics](#) (fingerprints, photograph, and/or signature) at any time.
 - After USCIS receives your application and ensures it is complete, they will inform you in writing if you need to attend a biometric services appointment. If an appointment is necessary, the notice will provide you the location of your local or designated USCIS Application Support Center (ASC) and the date and time of your appointment.
- OIE recommends that you use **your Pittsburgh** residential address **ONLY** if you will have access to that address for a year from submission of the I-539 application to USCIS. However, if you will not be at that address for a year in the future, then you should use OIE's address (**5000 Forbes Ave, Int'l Education, Pittsburgh, PA 15213**). **Don't use someone else's residential address as your address unless you are able to receive mail there.**
- Complete all questions and attach all the required documents listed on the next page.

Step III. WHAT TO [INCLUDE](#) IN I-539 APPLICATION TO USCIS:

1. [I-539 filing fee and biometric fee](#). **You and each dependent must pay a biometric services fee.** Check or money order made payable to "US Department of Homeland Security". Place the checks on top of the complete application and clip the entire packet together before mailing.
2. [Form G-1145](#). This form is not mandatory; however, you may file it if you wish to receive email or text confirmation of your receipt number from USCIS. Clip the form to the front of the application.
3. Cover Letter (see above)
4. [Form I-539 and I-539A](#) (see above)
5. **COPY** of new I-20 **signed by student** (and copies of I-20s for each dependent included in the application)
6. *Copies* of all previous immigration documents (front & back)
7. *Copies* of your I-94 (front and back of I-94 card or printed from <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/#/home>)
8. *Copies* of your passport ID page(s) (and copies of each dependent(s) passport included in the application)
9. *Copy* of [SEVIS fee](#) payment receipt
10. *Copies* of financial information in English showing proof of necessary funds to cover all costs of your expenses for the duration you will be in the US.
 - **This can include:**
 - Bank statement or letter in your name
 - A letter from your spouse or another financial sponsor stating the amount they are funding you, *plus their supporting financial documents* such as bank statements or salary statements

NOTE: If applying for a change to or from a dependent status (e.g. F-2/J-2/H4), then you must also include *copies* of:

1. Your spouse's [I-94 record](#) or the front and back of I-94 card
2. His/her I-20/DS-2019/H approval notice
3. Proof of marriage (in English or translated into English)
4. Documentation of financial support

Step IV. SUBMIT APPLICATION FOR MAILING

Prior to your current non-immigrant status expiration date, and when you have completed the entire application, make a digital copy of the entire application for your records, organize the materials neatly, and **if you have indicated a Pennsylvania address on the I-539 Form**, mail application packet to:

**For Express mail and courier deliveries
(e.g. UPS, Fed Ex, DHL, etc)**

USCIS ATTN: I-539

2501 S. State Highway 121 Business

Suite 400. Lewisville, TX 75067

For U.S. Postal Service

(including US Postal Service Express mail):

USCIS ATTN: I-539

P.O. Box 660166

Dallas, TX 75266

It is best to send the application packet via express mail so that you have proof of delivery. Within about one month of sending the application to the USCIS, you should get a standard paper receipt notice stating that USCIS has received your application. The case number in the top left corner of this paper receipt notice can be used to check on your case by calling the USCIS or visiting their [website](#), but be aware that the system is not updated frequently. If you have a particular problem or need to change the mailing address on your application, you should call the USCIS.

NOTE: If you choose to use a mailing address on the I-539 that is not in Pennsylvania, refer to the USCIS application [filing instructions](#) to determine where to mail the application. Once the application has been filed, you cannot leave the US while the application is pending without cancelling the application. If you must travel, consult with your [OIE advisor](#).

Step V. PROCESSING

The change of status may take a very long time (close to a year) to be approved; unfortunately, there is no way to expedite the process. When it has been approved, you will receive a paper approval notice in the mail with your new I-94 number.

Step VI. REQUIRED CHECK IN WITH OIE:

New students changing to F-1 status must attend an OIE [International Student Orientation and Immigration Check In](#), **even if the change of status has not yet been approved**. If the change of status is approved after the orientation dates, you will also need to see an OIE advisor as soon as you receive the approval notice. To schedule an appointment, call OIE at 412-268-5231.

NOTE: OIE cannot provide letters for the purpose of applying for a US Social Security number to students who have a pending change of status application. Once your change of status has been approved and you have completed the mandatory immigration check-in with OIE, you can complete and submit the OIE [Social Security Number Form](#) if you are eligible. Consult the OIE Social Security Number (SSN) Application Instructions [Handout](#) to determine eligibility for a Social Security number.