

Student Immigration Definitions

It is important to become familiar with the following terms, as they are used repeatedly in information you will receive from the International Students Program Coordinator as you prepare to arrive and during your stay in the United States.

Certificate of Visa Eligibility – Students who (1) have been admitted to the University, (2) need a student visa to enter the United States to study at FVCC (except Canadian citizens who do not require a visa), and (3) have documented their ability to finance their education, will receive a Certificate of Visa Eligibility, either a Form I-20 for F-1 Student status or a Form DS-2019 for J-1 Exchange Visitor Student Category status. The document certifies eligibility for an entry visa, obtained at a U.S. consulate abroad, and must be shown to a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) official at the time of entry into the U.S. in order to enter in student status. Also known as a Visa Certificate, the I-20 or DS-2019 is processed and issued through SEVIS.

SEVIS – SEVIS is an acronym for Student and Exchange Visitor Information System. It is a data collection and monitoring system that creates an interface between institutions of higher education, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), consulates and embassies abroad, and ports of entry. Schools are required to make regular electronic updates in SEVIS throughout each semester on the records of their enrolled students in F-1 and J-1 status-and their dependents-and their researchers and faculty in J-1 status. This includes, but is not limited to enrollment status, changes of address, changes in level of study, employment recommendations, and school transfers.

Form I-94

The I-94 paper form is now electronic. You will be responsible to generate and print your own form prior to your departure/travel outside the US. Instructions can be found at [US Customs and Border Protection](#).

Form I-20 – The Certificate of Visa Eligibility for Nonimmigrant F-1 Student Status is the I-20. This is the document issued by a school through SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) for presentation at a [U.S. consulate](#) abroad to apply for an F-1 Student visa. It must also be presented to an immigration official upon entry into the U.S. When traveling outside the U.S., those in F-1 status must carry both a recertified I-20 and financial documentation if they intend to return to the U.S. in F-1 status to continue their studies or practical training. The I-20 and its corresponding electronic updates in SEVIS are a permanent record of one's activities as a student in the U.S.

It is your responsibility to keep all I-20's issued to you throughout your student status, no matter how long you stay in the U.S. or how many times you travel abroad. The initial I-20 used when you enter the country and stamped by the DHS is a very important immigration document. Make a copy of both sides to keep with your records. If you were not issued an I-20, or if you lose it, please come to the International Student Program Coordinators' office in LRC 139 or contact Gerda Reeb at greeb@fvcc.edu. Under most circumstances, we can provide you with a replacement form within five working days.

Form DS-2019 – The Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant J-1 Exchange Visitor Status is the Form DS-2019. This is the document issued by the program sponsor – the university, government agency or other organization sponsoring the visit – through SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) for presentation at a U.S. consulate abroad to apply for a J-1 Exchange Visitor visa. It must also be presented to an immigration official upon entry into the U.S. When traveling outside the U.S., those in J-1 status must carry both a recertified DS-2019 and financial documentation if they intend to return to the U.S. in J-1 status to continue their studies or academic

training. The DS-2019 and its corresponding electronic updates in SEVIS are a permanent record of one's activities as a student in the U.S.

It is your responsibility to keep all DS-2019's issued to you throughout your student status, no matter how long you stay in the U.S. or how many times you travel abroad. The initial DS-2019 used when you enter the country and stamped by the DHS is a very important immigration document. Make a copy of both sides to keep with your records. If you were not issued a DS-2019, or if you lose it, please come to the International Student Program Coordinators' office in LRC 139 or contact Gerda Reeb at greeb@fvcc.edu. Under most circumstances, we can provide you with a replacement form within five working days.

Immigration Status – This is often confused with “visa” but your immigration status, e.g., F-1, B-2, J-1, etc., is determined at the time of your entry into the U.S. by an immigration official and is noted on the Form I-94. You may have many visa stamps in your passport but, upon entry into the U.S., an immigration inspector will admit you in only one immigration status which is noted on the I-94 card (see above). Be sure the correct status is written on your I-94 card. Unlike your entry visa, your immigration status may be changed in the U.S. The U.S. Department of State website provides further clarification on visa and status differences. Several important differences between the F-1 and J-1 immigration status are described at the end of this section.

Passport – Students in F-1 or J-1 immigration status must keep their passports valid at least six months into the future at all times. You may obtain extensions of your passport through the nearest consulate or embassy of your country.

Entry Visa – Your entry visa is issued by a [United States Consulate](#) abroad and affixed into your passport. The only purpose of an entry visa is to apply for admission to the United States at the port of entry. The entry visa itself may expire while you are in the U.S., but your permission to stay in the U.S. remains valid. All international students – with the exception of Canadian nationals – requesting F or J immigration status are required to have a valid F-1 or J-1 entry visa in their passport at the time of entry into the U.S. Your visa specifies the type of immigration status you will hold (F-1, J-1, etc.), the date until which you may enter the U.S., and the number of entries you may make before you must apply for a new entry visa stamp. The length of validity of each visa type is determined by an agreement between your home country and the U.S. government and is not necessarily tied to the length of your program of study. Please refer to the State Department's [Visa Reciprocity](#) information on their website for more details.

NOTE: Although F-1 and J-1 entry visas may be issued up to 120 days in advance of the start date on the I-20 or the DS-2019, you are not permitted to enter the U.S. more than 30 days in advance of that date.

If you have been out of the U.S. for more than 5 months and not registered in your current degree program, any valid student visa you may have is subject to cancellation and you are required to obtain a new visa to return to the U.S.

F-1 or J-1 entry visas cannot be obtained within the U.S. Application for a new visa must be made in person at a U.S. consulate or embassy outside the U.S. The validity period of your visa does not determine the length of time you may remain in the U.S. after you enter. Your length of stay is determined by the expected completion date of your program as indicated on your I-20 or DS-2019. You are admitted to the U.S. for “duration of status” in F and J. This is notated as “D/S” on your I-94 card. The U.S. Department of State website provides further clarification between the expiration date of an entry visa and the duration of time you are permitted to stay in the U.S. in your status.

Differences Between F-1 and J-1 Status

There are two types of entry visas issued to nonimmigrant students who intend to study full-time at Flathead Valley Community College – the F-1 Student visa and the J-1 Exchange Visitor Student Category visa. A student's accompanying spouse and children are given an F-2 or J-2 visa.

- **Source of Funding** – J-1 Exchange Visitor status is available to those students who are supported substantially by funding other than personal or family funds. Such funding may include that which comes from the U.S. government or the student's home government, an international organization, or, under exceptional circumstances, FVCC. Students who are supported by personal or family funds are ineligible for J-1 immigration status, and must come to the U.S. to study in F-1 immigration status.
- **Foreign Residence Requirement** – Students in J-1 immigration status and their J-2 dependents may be subject to a **foreign residence requirement**. This applies to those who have received U.S. or home country government funding or those who are on the "Country Skills List". The foreign residence requirement means that upon completion of the J-1 program they must reside in their countries of last legal permanent residence for two years before they are eligible to apply for entry into the U.S. on a specialized work visas (H or L) or an immigrant visa. J-1 students who receive direct or indirect U.S. or home government funding, or who are studying in fields for which personnel are considered in short supply in their home countries (most developing nations have "Country Skills" lists of varying lengths), are ineligible to apply for a change to another nonimmigrant status (except A or G) or permanent residency in the U.S. until they have satisfied the "two year home country physical presence requirement". To see if your country is on the Skills List and which fields of study are included, consult the **Exchange Visitor Skills List** in PDF format. There is no foreign residence requirement for F-1 student status. Refer to the Department of State's website for additional information on the Exchange Visitor Program.
- **Medical Insurance** – Students in J-1 status and their J-2 dependents **are required to have comprehensive medical coverage** in order to fulfill U.S. government regulations governing the J Exchange Visitor status.
- **Work Permission** – Students in either F-1 or J-1 immigration status may work part-time (up to 20 hours per week) on campus with permission from the International Student Program Coordinators' office — contact Gerda Reeb at greeb@fvcc.edu. For both statuses, permission to work off campus based on economic need may be requested only after the first full academic year of student status, and only under extraordinary circumstances of unforeseen need. The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) authorizes F-1 students to work off campus, whereas J-1 students submit an application for work permission to their visa sponsor, i.e. the agency or school that issued the DS-2019 form.

- **Practical Training** – Students in F-1 and J-1 immigration status are eligible to engage in differing lengths of practical or academic training during their studies and at the completion of their academic programs. Practical training, a benefit of F-1 immigration status if you are eligible, is employment in one's field of study. Those in F-1 immigration classification may be eligible for "curricular" practical training during their programs, in addition to one year of "optional" practical training that may take place during or after one's program of study. Permission to engage in practical training may be granted only after you have been in valid student status for one academic year. International Student Program Coordinators' office may recommend optional practical training and the USCIS authorizes it. Refer to the [Practical Training Overview](#) for complete information on both curricular and optional practical training.
- **Dependent Employment** – Immigration regulations allow **no** circumstances under which the F-2 spouse of an F-1 student can apply for work permission while in the U.S. The J-2 spouse of a J-1 Exchange Visitor may apply to USCIS for permission to be employed, if he or she can demonstrate a need for supplemental support for self or children. The spouse cannot obtain work permission in order to support the J-1 student. The [I-765 Form](#), required to apply for J-2 employment authorization, may be downloaded in pdf format from the USCIS website. The form may also be obtained from the International Student Program Coordinators' office in LRC 139 or by contacting Gerda Reeb at greeb@fvcc.edu.