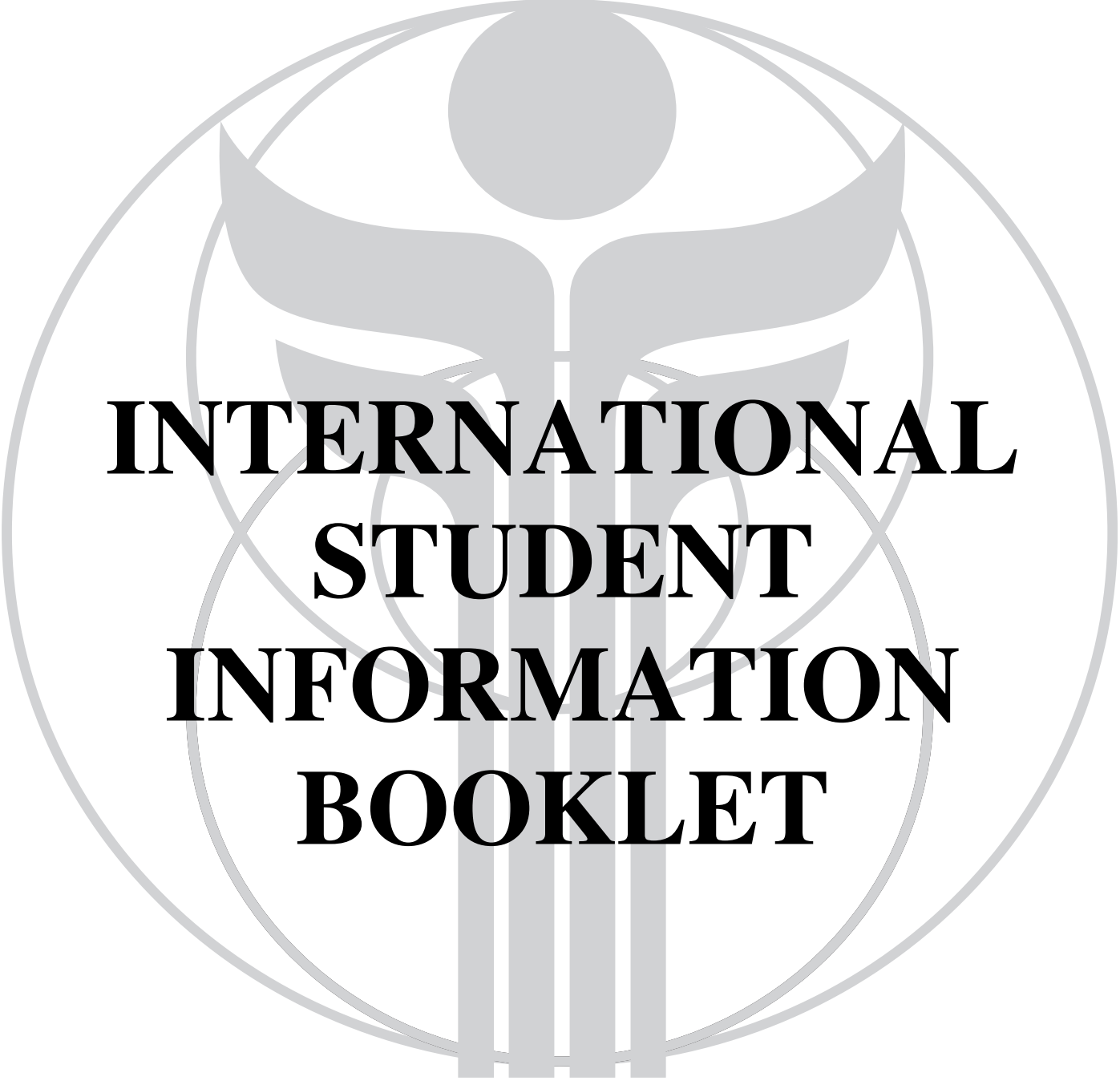


UNIVERSITY OF SANTA MONICA

The logo of the University of Santa Monica is a large, light gray watermark in the background. It features a central figure with a circular head, two large, curved wings or arms extending outwards, and a vertical base consisting of three parallel lines. The entire logo is enclosed within a large, thin circular border.

**INTERNATIONAL
STUDENT
INFORMATION
BOOKLET**

UNIVERSITY OF SANTA MONICA

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT INFORMATION BOOKLET
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GENERAL INFORMATION FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Introduction

Established in 1985, USM enrolls International Students for the Master's Degree Programs in Spiritual Psychology. We welcome your participation and trust that your time spent here will be enjoyable, educational, and transformational.

USM has been approved to grant I-20s by the U.S. government. As such, part of our responsibility is being in compliance with the law, which means providing the necessary documentation (i.e., reporting) and the ongoing monitoring of all our International Students.

We at USM are here to provide information to you regarding immigration matters. However, it will ultimately be your responsibility to maintain your status and meet all USCIS requirements. It is important that we point out the significance that the Homeland Security Act brings to the matter of compliance with USCIS regulations. Be advised that rumors and information you may receive from friends and/or relatives (even those meaning well) will be outdated and most likely inaccurate given these swiftly changing times and the current political climate.

These materials have been prepared to assist you in having the information you need to ensure that your program participation is grace-filled and trouble-free. Please take the time to read the entire packet and keep it with your important papers.

USM's Registrar is the *Primary Designated School Official* (for USCIS purposes), and will be your resource in all matters pertaining to USCIS regulations. The Registrar has access to forms and updated information regarding the USCIS system. Please be sure to keep in close contact with the Registrar's office and bring forward any questions you may have, and to promptly respond in the event you are contacted for required information.

This information is intended to provide guidelines for International Students in support of their compliance with U.S. Immigration laws and regulations. It is not intended to address every situation that could potentially arise, nor is it intended to be a substitute for independent legal advice or consultation from an Immigration Officer or Immigration Attorney. When using such information as a guide, be aware that laws and regulations are rapidly changing, and thus it is the student's responsibility to verify and update any references or information contained herein. USM makes no claims and accepts no responsibility regarding an international student's ability to secure and maintain lawful status in the U.S.

International Student Documents

Many of the required USCIS forms, as well as information and facts regarding USCIS updated regulations, are available via the Internet at www.uscis.gov. You can call (800) 870-3676 to request any forms you may need by number.

Following are the types of documents you will be required to have in your possession and keep current at all times. You are responsible for keeping your records up-to-date.

Passport: Your passport must be valid at all times. When applying for a visa, the passport expiry date must be later than six months at time of application. Before your passport expires, have your Consulate or Embassy renew it. There are many Consulate offices located in the Los Angeles area. Please check the Internet for the most updated addresses and contact information.

Visa: Official documentation authorizing entry into the U.S. This is not authorization to remain in the country. A visa is usually a stamp or page printed in the passport and authorizes entry for a certain number of entries ranging from *one* to *multiple*. For more information about U.S. visas, visit <http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/>, or www.f1studentvisa.com.

The visa has an expiration date, and it must be valid only on the day that you enter or re-enter the U.S. However, if you leave the U.S. and the visa stamp has expired, it must be revalidated at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate abroad before you can return. **This revalidation cannot be done in the U.S.**

I-20: Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status: A USCIS form issued by USM and used by the student to obtain an F-1 visa from the American Consulate/Embassy in the student's home country. An Immigration Official stamps the I-20 at the Port of Entry to the U.S. When you arrive at USM for the first time, you will need to present your I-20, passport with visa and I-94 card to a DSO. The DSO will sign your I-20, make photocopies of your documents, and return them to you. You will need to present the I-20 each time you re-enter the country. You must keep the I-20 with your passport. It is imperative that the I-20 remain valid throughout your course of study.

I-94: Arrival/Departure Record: The small white card that is stapled in your passport by the Immigration Official when you arrive in the U.S. It is placed next to your visa page (make sure it has been stapled so you don't lose it). The 11-digit Admissions Number is recorded on this card. This card is also taken by Immigration when you make a departure from the U.S. A new card with either the **original 11-digit number** or a new number will be issued to you each time you re-enter the U.S.

Financial Support Documentation: Applicants holding or requiring F-1 student immigration status are required to provide appropriate documentation of financial support before a Form I-20 can be issued. The *International Student Application Supplement* has specific information on USM's requirements for financial support documentation.

I-134: Affidavit of Support: A form used to verify a sponsor's financial status.

Health Insurance: Due to the high costs of medical care in the U.S., it is strongly recommended that you obtain personal medical insurance for the duration of your stay. For information, see *Internet Resources for International Students*.

Social Security Number

For information on applying for a social security number (for employment), please contact:

Social Security Administration (West Los Angeles)
11500 W. Olympic Blvd. Suite 300
Los Angeles, CA 90064
(310) 575-3697
(800) 772-1213 – National Center

The office is located in the City National Bank Building and office hours are 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday (closed on federal holidays).

Internet: www.ssa.gov. Go to the "search" field and type in "F-1" for information relative to International Students.

Note: F-1 students who apply for a Social Security Number (SSN) are often asked to submit a letter from their DSO stating that the student is authorized to engage in on-campus employment. Since USM is a small school and does not offer on-campus employment, USM's DSO will not be able to provide this documentation.

SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT U.S. GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Eligibility to Enroll

USM is approved to enroll nonimmigrant students for the Master's Program who hold the equivalent of a U.S. Bachelor's degree. International students are not eligible for UCX or COC status. All holders of a B status visa will be required to have an approval notice for F-1 visa status before being allowed to enroll at USM. This reflects Immigration Regulations effective 4/12/02.

In order to change status from B-1/2 to F-1, a student will need to leave the U.S. and apply for an F-1 visa from outside the country, or they may apply for a Change of Status. This procedure can take anywhere from 90 to 120 days. Students will not be permitted to enroll at USM until the Change of Status has been approved and they have been granted F-1 status.

Obtaining a Visa

All applicants for visas are interviewed by the Consulate/Embassy prior to being granted a visa. The earliest that an F-1 visa can be granted is 90 days before the reporting date listed on the I-20. It is possible to schedule an appointment or ask questions to USCIS officers through InfoPass, an Internet based system (www.uscis.gov).

Following is a list of items you will most likely need to bring to your interview appointment. Please check with your local Consulate/Embassy for their requirements:

- USM Acceptance Letter
- Financial Support Documents (same as provided to USM)
- USM-issued SEVIS I-20
- Passport valid for at least six months
- Visa application, Form DS-156
- Photograph
- SEVIS I-901 fee

Part of the interview process will include your meeting additional criteria for granting the visa. The official will need to be satisfied that:

- Your English proficiency is sufficient for the course of study.
- You intend to return to your home country at the completion of your course of study.

For complete information on the visa application process, go to <http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/>

Note to Canadian Citizens: Procedures for receiving the F-1 visa vary. Please contact your local Embassy for details.

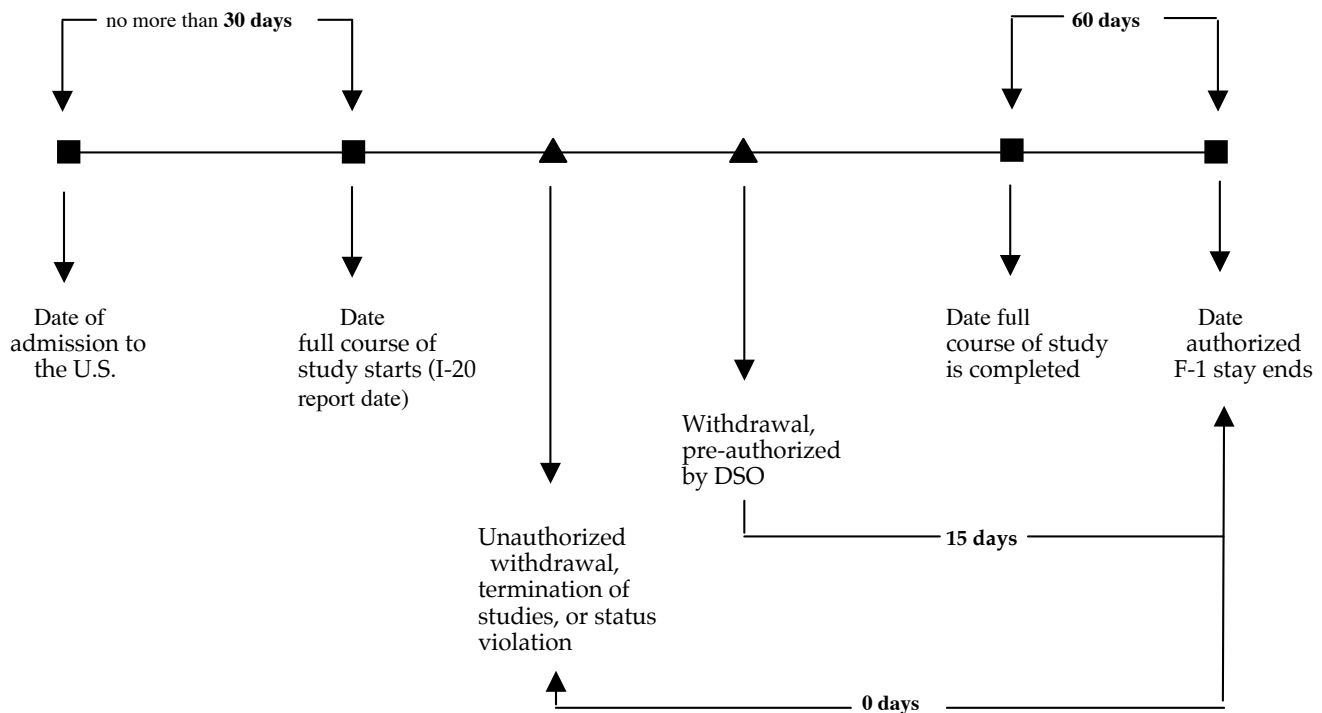
Change of Status – B-2 to F-1 Status

Requests for change from B-2 (tourist) status to F-1 (student) status receive special scrutiny by USCIS. A visitor in B-1 or B-2 status **is not permitted to begin a course of study** until USCIS approves the change of status application. An individual who has a "prospective student" notation on his or her B-2 visa may be able to obtain a change to F-1 status. Similarly, if USCIS believes that an applicant's intention to study arose after entry in B-2 status, a change in status may be granted. However, if USCIS determines that the intention to study arose before entering the U.S., they will generally deny an application for change of status, inferring that the individual misrepresented his or her purpose in entering the U.S.

In all change of status cases, no F-1 benefits are available to applicants, including authorization to enroll, until the application has been approved. To apply for a change of status, contact the Registrar's office for further information.

Duration of Status Timeline

The timeline below illustrates the duration of status concept in a linear way. It reflects important events during your course of studies.



Admission to the U.S. in F-1 Status

An F-1 student may be admitted for a period of up to 30 days before the start date of the academic year (the program start date listed on the I-20). Upon arrival at the U.S. port of entry, you must present to immigration officials:

- ❑ Passport valid for at least six months.
- ❑ F-1 visa – Unless exempt from visa requirement, as for Canadian citizens, for initial entry, the name of the school on the F-1 visa stamp must match the name of the school on the Form I-20.
- ❑ Evidence of financial support, including the same financial support information used to obtain the F-1 visa.
- ❑ Form I-20, properly signed by a DSO and the student.
- ❑ In certain cases, proof of having paid the SEVIS fee may also need to be provided.

Maintaining Status

After obtaining a visa to enter the U.S., and entering the country in F-1 status, you must continue to maintain that status in order to continue to stay in the country legally. The need to follow the F-1 regulations begins immediately upon entry and continues until final departure.

Please note that it is your responsibility to know the following information and to communicate appropriately with the PDSO in order to retain your F-1 status and remain in the U.S. Violation of any of these conditions could result in a serious situation—investigations, hearings, and even arrest and deportation.

- ❑ Report to the DSO for SEVIS Registration upon arriving at the school.
- ❑ Attend the authorized school—the school listed on the visa and on the I-20 must be the same, and that is the school the student must attend.
- ❑ Pursue a full course of study and make normal academic progress towards completion of the Program.
- ❑ Keep I-20 valid by following proper procedures for extension of stay / changes in educational levels or programs of study.
- ❑ Report a change of address to the DSO within 10 days of the change so the SEVIS record can be updated.
- ❑ Transfer or extend program in a timely manner—to transfer, the student must not only have a new school to go to but must also be eligible to transfer based on having maintained status at the old school.
- ❑ Keep continuity in the program of study—in general, an absence from the U.S. of more than five (5) months terminates F-1 status.
- ❑ Refrain from unauthorized work—all F-1 employment must be approved by the DSO or the USCIS. Any work outside these parameters is unauthorized work and is a violation of student status. This will make the student ineligible for any of the normal benefits of F-1 status including reinstatement.
- ❑ When traveling abroad, always return in proper F-1 status; if a student returns as a B-2 tourist, this will create a break in status.
- ❑ Abide by rules requiring disclosure of information and prohibition on criminal activity.
- ❑ Abide by any special requirements, such as Special Registration requirements.
- ❑ Upon completion of studies, depart from the U.S. within 60 days.

Employment

USM does not offer on-campus employment to International Students. Also, International Students are not eligible for off-campus employment authorization, including Practical Training, during the first 12 months of study. See below for information on Practical Training.

Under the circumstances of urgent economic hardship, as determined by USCIS, a student may be authorized for off-campus employment.

SEVIS Reporting Regulations

USM is required to create, maintain, and update each quarter the SEVIS (Student Exchange Visitor Information System) records for each F-1 visa student attending our Programs. USCIS must know when each student reported to school and that they are enrolled as a full-time student.

Any current students who are not reported by USM will be considered “out of status” and could be subject to deportation. It is therefore essential, as well as the nonimmigrant student’s responsibility, to understand these regulations and maintain regular contact with the Registrar’s Office.

Each time you change your address within the U.S., you are required to notify the USM office

within 10 days of your move. USM is required by regulations to report a change of address in SEVIS for each F-1 student within 10 days of a change of address.

Revalidating Your Visa

If your visa has become invalid, it cannot be revalidated in the U.S. You must leave the country and apply at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate abroad. Contact the DSO or Registrar for assistance with extending your stay or revalidating your visa. In some cases, you may be referred to an Immigration Attorney. The following items are necessary when applying for revalidation:

- ❑ Your valid passport
- ❑ Evidence of financial support
- ❑ A new I-20 or a properly endorsed valid I-20

Due to heightened security, third country revalidation (i.e., traveling to another country that isn't your home country, such as Mexico or Canada, to have your visa revalidated) is not recommended without advisement from an attorney.

Travel—Leaving the U.S. and Returning

Since USM classes occur one weekend per month, many International Students travel from their home country each month to participate. In order to make this a graceful process, it is important to properly maintain all travel documents:

- ❑ Passport—must be valid for at least six months.
- ❑ Visa—must be valid beyond the date of return.
- ❑ I-20—has been properly endorsed and is valid beyond the date of return.
- ❑ Financial support documentation, as submitted for your I-20. (This information is not always requested, but you should have it available.)

Students are required to carry original documents with them when traveling. Failure to do so may cause delays upon re-entry to the U.S. or may even lead to your not being allowed into the country. You must have a DSO endorse your I-20 prior to any departure. Please be sure to obtain this travel signature during USM's regular office hours (Monday – Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.).

Extending Your Stay (Continued Attendance at USM)

There are some circumstances under which you may want to extend your stay after graduating from the two-year Spiritual Psychology Program. For instance, you may decide to enroll in the Consciousness, Health, and Healing Program. If this is the case, you will need a new I-20 and will be required to provide new financial support documentation. It is important that you begin this process before your current I-20 expires in order to maintain status.

Practical Training

There are two types of practical training (off-campus employment authorization) currently available to F-1 visa students. They are:

Curricular Practical Training (CPT): This can be used only before you complete your degree and would only be applicable if the employment is a clear requirement for completion of the degree program. For USM Programs, CPT is usually not applicable

Optional Practical Training (OPT): Optional Practical Training (OPT) is available for F-1 students who have been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis for one academic year. **The student applying for OPT must plan to work in a field related to the course of study.** The forms of practical training approved

include the following:

- ❑ Vacation Period Practical Training—a student may work full-time or part-time during the break between academic years (July – September). If you work full-time in the summer for two months, you will have only 10 months remaining for post-completion OPT.
- ❑ While school is in session—a student may work up to 20 hours per week during the academic year.
- ❑ Post-Completion—full-time work undertaken after the student has graduated.

International Students are entitled to a total of 12 months of Optional Practical Training (OPT). Any portion of this 12-month benefit used prior to completion will be deducted from the amount of time available for Post-Completion OPT.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION REGARDING OPT: Pre- and Post-Completion OPT

- ❑ Post-Completion OPT requires that the student work full-time. An offer of employment is not needed to qualify for OPT.
- ❑ In lieu of employment, a student may volunteer.
- ❑ Students must apply for Post-Completion OPT prior to graduation from the Program. This means the UCIS office must receive your completed application prior to your date of graduation. **You are encouraged to contact the PDSO/Registrar in April prior to graduation to begin the process.**
- ❑ There is an overall limit of 12 months for all forms of OPT.
- ❑ A fee is charged for the OPT Application. Please check <http://www.uscis.gov> for the current fee.
- ❑ An application for OPT requires a recommendation by a DSO and approval by the USCIS Service Center. If OPT is approved, the USCIS will issue an Employment Authorization Document (EAD), Form I-766.
- ❑ You may not begin working until you have received your Employment Authorization Document (EAD).
- ❑ You are required to notify the University every 3-4 months regarding name and address of Employer. Or if you have not secured employment, the same reporting requirement applies with the steps that you have taken to do so. USM is required to report this information in SEVIS quarterly.
- ❑ It is advised that you do not travel out of the country with a pending I-765 (Application for Employment Authorization) as this will constitute “abandonment of the petition.”
- ❑ A DSO will be required to report any change of address while a student is on OPT. It is the student’s responsibility to contact the DSO in this case.
- ❑ Students must also be in lawful status to be eligible for practical training. Any violation of F-1 status terminates OPT authorization (e.g., failure to report change of address). Change of address requirement applies for both pre-OPT or Post-Completion OPT.

Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Regulations Affecting F-1 Students

Anyone entering the U.S. on an F-1 Visa is required to file yearly with Internal Revenue Service (IRS) of the US Federal Government regardless of whether or not income was earned.

If the student did not receive U.S. earned income during the prior calendar year, they must file a form 8843 by June 15 each year. If the student did receive U.S. earned income (via CPT or OPT), they must file a form 1040-NR or 1040-NR-EZ by April 15 each year. In addition, earnings may need to be reported to the Franchise Tax Board (FTB) of the State of California.

Please refer to IRS Publication #519 (U.S. Tax Guide for Aliens). A free copy of this guide and the Form 1040NR-EZ/1040NR are available through the IRS by calling (800) 829-3676 or from their Web site at www.irs.ustreas.gov.

Other Internet resources for information:

www.istaxes.com
www.taxback.com/us

The staff of the USM not trained to assist you with your taxes or to offer any tax advice. However, we understand that tax filing can be confusing, so we encourage you to contact a local tax professional.

Departure Upon Completion of the Program

At the normal conclusion of studies or practical training, a student has a 60-day grace period in which to prepare for leaving the U.S.

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