



Application Guidelines for Change of Status to F-1/J-1

Before applying, note: The following is only general guidance on the I-539 process and is not nor should it replace legal advice. If your application is complex, ISSS recommends consulting an immigration attorney.

We recommend including the below documents in your application to USCIS. You may need to also include additional documents depending on the immigration status you currently hold.

- 1. Cover Letter:** In your letter: Request the change of status and explain the circumstances; explain why you entered the US in your current immigration status and why your goals/intentions changed after arriving in the US. Those requesting F or J non-immigrant status must show they do not intend to immigrate to the United States. Including evidence such as a demonstration of ties to your home country is recommended.
- 2. Form I-539:** Available from the USCIS web site (<http://www.uscis.gov/i-539>). Dependent family members changing their dependent status (to F-2 or J-2) should be listed on Supplement 1 on Form I-539.
- 3. Processing Fee:** check or money order payable to the US Department of Homeland Security (see above link for fee amount). A single fee covers the primary applicant and any F-2 or J-2 dependents listed on Supplement 1 of Form I-539.
 - This fee must be drawn at a financial institution that is physically located in the U.S.
- 4. SEVIS Fee Payment Confirmation:** Online payment of the SEVIS fee will allow a confirmation receipt to be printed immediately.

Copies of:

- 5. Form I-20 or DS-2019 issued by Penn:** Be sure form I-20(s) or DS-2019(s) are signed. Your I-20 will list the reason: Initial attendance-Change of Status requested.*
- 6. Passport Identification Page & US Entry Visa:** Copies should include the page showing the passport expiration date if separate from the identity page. Canadian and Bermudian citizens are not required to have a US Entry Visa.
- 7. I-94 printout** from <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94> and **entry/admission stamp** in passport. If issued paper I-94, include copy of the front and back of I-94 card.
- 8. Financial documentation** used to obtain the I-20/DS-2019 from Penn
- 9. Individuals currently holding dependent status:** should also include copies of the primary's passport, I-94, and proof of status.
- 10. Students who have been offered assistantships or fellowships:** should include a brightly-colored cover sheet stating "Please Expedite: assistantship pending." USCIS may, as a courtesy, expedite the application.

Mailing your Application:

- Make a copy of the application for your records.
- We advise that you send your completed application by Certified Mail, Return Receipt Requested or by express mail with tracking.
- For the mailing address and instructions, refer to USCIS website (<http://www.uscis.gov/i-539>).

PLEASE REVIEW THESE IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS WHEN APPLYING:

- *Contact ISSS at iss@pobox.upenn.edu if you decide to travel versus applying for a change of status from within the US. You will need an amended I-20 with the reason updated to "Initial Attendance" only.
- You should not leave the US while the change of status application is pending with USCIS. This will cause an abandonment of the application. Consult an ISSS advisor to discuss how this affects your SEVIS record and next steps if you must travel.
- If the request for change of status to F-1 or J-1 has not been approved by the program start date on the I-20/DS-2019, the individual should notify an advisor at ISSS.
 - ISSS may need to defer your program start date in SEVIS to avoid the termination of your SEVIS record. Until your application is approved, you must provide monthly updates to ISSS on your application status to avoid any issues with your immigration status.
 - Applicants for change of status must immediately report the outcome of their applications to ISSS.
- Upon receipt of Form I-797 Notice of Approval to F-1 or J-1 status, immediately check-in with ISSS. Please see <http://global.upenn.edu/iss/orientation> for more details.
- Students may not begin an assistantship, or engage in on-campus employment of any kind until the change of status has been approved.
- Processing times vary at each service center. Check the [USCIS website](#) for current processing times.
- Even with an approved change of status, most students will need to apply for a US entry visa for their new status during their next trip abroad. (Citizens of Canada & Bermuda are exempt.)
- Applicants who receive a Request for Evidence (RFE) from USCIS should immediately consult with ISSS and/or an immigration attorney before responding.
- If your application is denied or is not adjudicated before the expiration date on their current I-94, ISSS strongly recommends you update ISSS and consult with a qualified immigration attorney.
- IMPORTANT: On Form I-797 Notice of Approval, pay special attention to the "Valid from" date as the date indicates when your new status (F-1 or J-1) takes effect.
 - From this date on, you should stop your previous status related activities (e.g. H-1B employment).
- Form I-539 application cannot be e-filed in the USCIS ELIS system.