



INTERNATIONAL STUDENT HANDBOOK

2022-2023



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List of Acronyms

DSO	Designated School Official
EAD	Employment Authorization Document
USCIS	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
LPR	Legal Permanent Resident
OPT	Optional Practical Training
PDSO	Primary Designated School Official
SBC	Southern Baptist Convention
SEBTS	Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
SEVIS	Student and Exchange Visitor Information System
SEVP	Student and Exchange Visitor Program

WELCOME to Southeastern!

Welcome to Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina! We look forward to getting to know you and we hope that you will come to love this wonderful institution and community of people.

International Student Services is located in Stealey Hall (Rm. 202) and is part of the Enrollment Office. We are happy to assist you in any way we are able. We offer many services through our office and for the services we do not provide, we can direct you to resources that will answer any questions you may have and help to resolve your issue. We understand that being in a new culture and environment is difficult, so we are here to help you!

For general International Student-related questions, for anything related to your student visa status, or related to relational, spiritual, and daily living matters, please contact our office. Please contact Samantha Couick via email to set up an appointment for any assistance you may need.

Admissions Office

admissions@sebts.edu

919-761-2324



Camille Doane (PDSO)

International Admissions Coordinator

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F-1 VISA Regulations

As an international student or scholar in the United States, you must be aware of and abide by the U.S. immigration regulations that govern your stay in the U.S.

Obtaining a Visa

Every student must have a SEVIS visa eligibility form I-20 (F-1). You must apply for international student admission in order to obtain an I-20. For general information on applying through the Admissions Office, visit <https://www.sebts.edu/admissions-and-aid/application-process/default.aspx>. Additional requirements are necessary for international students, which you can learn more about here: <https://www.sebts.edu/admissionsand-aid/international-students.aspx>

Most applicants for non-immigrant visas are now required to have a personal interview, and as a result it can take longer to get a visa. As of August 1, 2003, all persons in F and J status are included in the U.S. government's Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) and all visa documents are issued through SEVIS.

After completing all the necessary paperwork through the Admissions Office, you will receive your I-20 form from Southeastern. Once you receive this form, try to get your visa as soon as possible.

Questions About Renewing Your Visa

1. Can I stay in the U.S. if my visa has expired?

Yes, as long as you are maintaining your status, you may legally remain in the United States with an expired F-1 visa.

2. Can I renew my visa while in the U.S.?

No. For more information about visa applications, visit the Department of State (DoS) website.

3. Can I renew my visa outside the U.S. in a country that is not my home country?

Yes, but the Department of State recommends that you apply for a visa in your home country. For more information about visa applications, visit the DoS website.

Before you travel to a country other than yours to renew your visa, contact the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in that country.

If you exit the United States and apply for a visa, you cannot return to the United States until DoS issues you a new visa. This could require a lengthy stay. If DoS denies your visa application, you will not be able to return to the United States as a student.

For information regarding F-1 visa regulations that govern your stay in the United States, please visit the websites listed on the "Quick References" page of the handbook.

ACADEMIC Regulations

*Below is a list highlighting several academic requirements of the F-1 student visa. The list below is **not** an exhaustive list of visa requirements.*

- Students are REQUIRED to maintain full time academic status.*
- Students may only take ONE online course per full-time course load to count toward full time status.
- Students must be enrolled in a degree-seeking program and be making progress toward their degree.
- Students must attend and pass all classes.
- Students may not drop a class without first speaking with a DSO.
- Please note that during an annual vacation, students can take as many, as few, or no courses as they want. SEVP considers all study during an annual vacation incident to status. (Therefore any classes taken during summer or J-term do not count toward your full-time status.)
- Students must speak with a DSO about program extensions and degree changes.
- An F-2 spouse and/or dependents may not engage in full-time study, however, part-time study is permitted.
- All F-status students at Southeastern are required to have health insurance.

*For SEVIS purposes, full-time status is outlined below:

Undergraduate: 12 credit hours

Graduate: 9 credit hours

Doctoral: 3 credit hours



EMPLOYMENT Regulations

The most important issue regarding employment is understanding the difference between authorized and unauthorized employment. You must always make sure that any employment you plan to engage in is authorized employment. Any unauthorized (i.e. illegal) employment — even for one day and even if you did not know it was illegal — poses a serious threat to your ability to remain in or return to the United States. Make sure that you have the necessary employment authorization before you begin work, since starting work without prior authorization—even if you receive authorization later— constitutes illegal employment.

F-1 visa holders are allowed to be employed by the seminary, although the number of positions available on campus is extremely limited.

Below is a list highlighting several employment regulations of the F-1 student visa. The list below is not an exhaustive list of visa requirements.

- F-status students may only work when authorized by a DSO in some cases, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in others. If you choose to work without authorization, you will be forced to leave the United States immediately, and you may not be able to re-enter the United States at a later date.
- Spouses and dependent children of F-1 students hold F-2 status and may not work in the U.S. under any circumstances.
- Work is permitted only on campus, except in cases of unforeseen economic hardship resulting after one full academic year in the U.S. or if the student participates in Optional Practical Training (OPT) after one full academic year in F-1 status. (OPT is a form of temporary employment that directly relates to your program of study. See page 9 for more information.)
- Once you complete your program of study and any authorized period of practical training, F-1 students have 60 days after completion of your program (the program end date on your Form I-20) to leave the United States. If you wish to extend your stay in the United States, talk with your DSO to learn more about doing one of the following:
 - Transfer to another school
 - Change your education level (e.g. bachelor's to master's)
 - Apply to change status to another visa status



EMPLOYMENT Options

On-Campus Employment

F-1 students are permitted to participate in on-campus employment. However, the number of positions available on campus is limited. We cannot “reserve” any positions specifically for international students because of discrimination laws.

- May work at any qualifying on-campus job that does not displace a U.S. citizen or LPR
 - May work up to 20 hours per week while school is in session (full time during those periods when school is not in session or during the annual vacation)
 - Should report work to DSO and receive a letter to obtain a Social Security number
-

When does an F-1 student become eligible to start on-campus employment?

An F-1 student may begin working as much as 30 days before the start of a program of study. They should inform a DSO before they begin work.

Can an F-1 student work on campus after enrolling in a new program?

If an F-1 student finishes a program (such as a bachelor’s degree) and starts another program of study at the same campus, the student may continue on-campus employment as long as the student plans to enroll in the new program of study for the next term. If otherwise eligible, an F-1 student may continue to work on-campus with a pending application for reinstatement or change of status. An F-1 student may only work on campus after the program end date if continuing the education at the next program level at the same school.

Can I work at more than one on-campus job?

Yes. However, the F-1 student’s total work hours for all jobs cannot exceed 20 hours during the school term. The F-1 student may work full-time during those periods when school is not in session or during the student’s annual break.

Can an F-1 student work during the grace period following program completion?

No. The 60-day “grace” period after graduation or post-completion OPT is for an F-1 student to prepare to leave the United States, unless the student is beginning a new program of study. An F-1 student may consider applying for post-completion OPT to continue working after graduation.

EMPLOYMENT Options

F-1 Employment Authorization Based on Severe Economic Hardship

U.S. Immigration regulation stipulates: “If other employment opportunities are not available or are otherwise insufficient, an eligible F-1 student may request off-campus employment work authorization based upon severe economic hardship caused by unforeseen circumstances beyond the student’s control.” [8 CFR 214.2 (f)(9)(ii)(C)]

To be eligible to apply for off-campus employment authorization based upon severe economic hardship, F-1 students must meet the following conditions:

1. F-1 student must show severe economic hardship resulting from one of the following:
 - Loss of financial aid or on-campus employment without fault on the part of the student
 - Substantial fluctuations in the value of currency or exchange rate
 - Unusual increases in tuition and/or living costs
 - Changes in the financial condition of the student’s source of support
 - Medical bills
 - Other unexpected expenses
2. Student must have attended at least one academic year and be in good academic standing.



EMPLOYMENT Options

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is temporary employment authorization that gives F-1 students an opportunity to apply knowledge gained in the classroom to a practical work experience off campus. You may use some or all of the available 12 months of practical training during your course of study or save the full twelve months to use after you complete your studies. Authorization for optional practical training is granted by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) and can take at least 90 days and frequently up to 120 days to obtain.

To be eligible for OPT you must:

- Complete the OPT request form
- Complete the I-765 form
- Provide a copy of your I-94 form (both sides) and a copy of the visa and identification pages from your passport
- Provide copies, front and back, of all previous I-20s
- Provide two recent photographs with your name and SEVIS number in pencil on the back
- Provide a check for the amount currently set by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- Make an appointment with the Director of Student Resources Office to bring the above documentation for review and to receive a new I-20. Once all your documentation is in order, you will be asked to make copies for your personal records.

The International Student Services Office will review your application and submit a recommendation for OPT by updating your record in SEVIS. The SEVIS system will produce a new I-20, a copy of which you will submit with your application for OPT.

The name and address of your OPT employer must be reported to the International Student Services Office within 60 days of beginning OPT.

If interested, please contact the International Student Services Coordinator for more information about OPT.

TRAVEL Regulations

Students should consult their Designated School Official (DSO) prior to travelling. Your DSO generally works in the International Student Office. You must have a current SEVIS Form I-20 endorsed for travel and your DSO needs to be able to verify that your SEVIS record is accurate and up-to-date.

Below is a list of documents you should have with you when travelling outside of the U.S. to ensure your re-entry into the country:

- A valid Passport
- A valid U.S. Visa (the visa stamp in your passport should be valid beyond the date of your return to the U.S. and should have multiple entries)
- A valid Form I-20 (check the expiration date item 5 on your I-20 and check the back of your I-20 for our signature)
- Financial Documents showing the necessary funding for your degree program
- Letter of Good Standing/Student Verification from International Student Services Office (optional)

What if I have an expired passport or one that will expire in less than 6 months?

You must renew your passport before re-entering the United States. In most cases, to enter the United States, you must have a passport that is valid for at least six months after the date you enter or re-enter.

Can I re-enter the U.S. if my OPT request is pending?

Yes, but traveling during this time should be undertaken with caution. USCIS may send you a request for evidence while you are away. Therefore, you want to make sure you have provided a correct U.S. address both to your DSO and on the application and would be able to send in requested documents. Also, if USCIS approves your OPT application, you will be expected to have your EAD in hand to re-enter the United States. Like a request for further information, USCIS can only send the EAD to your U.S. address.

Can I re-enter the U.S. if I left during OPT?

If USCIS has approved your OPT you will be expected to have your EAD in hand to re-enter the United States, in addition to your Form I-20, valid passport and visa, and a letter of employment if you have one. If you exceed the limits on unemployment while outside the United States, you will not be eligible to re-enter the United States in F-1 status.

Are there any other requirements for travel outside of the U.S.?

The questions above outline the general requirements for reentry for F-1 students. However, because individual circumstances vary, consult your DSO, embassy, or legal advisor before traveling. Planning for your trip early ensures that you have enough time to get all of your travel documents in order. If you are not returning to your home country, you should check the requirements of the country you are visiting. Some countries require a visa. You may also need a transit visa for countries where you are making a connecting flight. Be sure to check *before* you travel. Most countries have immigration websites that provide visa information. If you have additional questions, please contact SEVP at SEVP@ice.dhs.gov or call at 703-603-3400.

TRAVEL Regulations

Students should consult their Designated School Official (DSO) prior to travelling. Your DSO generally works in the International Student Office. You must have a current SEVIS Form I-20 endorsed for travel, and your DSO needs to be able to verify that your SEVIS record is accurate and up-to-date.

Five-Month Rule

What is the five-month rule?

The five-month rule refers to the termination of a student's record in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) based on the student being away from classes or not in status for five months. This rule applies to the following students:

- Students who have had their student record terminated (i.e., been out of status) for more than five months; and
- Students who have spent more than five months outside of the United States during an absence from school, excluding those participating in authorized study abroad programs

If your student record is terminated, you fall under the five-month rule and if you wish to return to the United States as a student, you will need to obtain a new/initial Form I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status," with a new SEVIS ID and pay the I-901 SEVIS fee again. Only if your current student visa is no longer valid do you possibly also need to apply for and receive a new student visa.

For more information on student visas, visit the U.S. Department of State's website. To determine whether the five-month rule applies to you, contact your designated school official or the U.S. Embassy or Consulate where you would renew your visa.

Please visit <https://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel> for more travel information for F-1 visa holders.

FINANCE Information

Financial Aid

Be sure to apply for the school's financial aid during the application period listed on the calendar for the following academic year. The amount of each award is discretionary and does not exceed the cost of tuition fees. It is given for tuition only; if part of the scholarship is not needed for tuition, it will not be given to the student for other expenses but returned to the scholarship fund. You must **REAPPLY EACH YEAR** for financial aid if you wish to receive it.

Southern Baptist Scholarship is a reduced tuition rate for students who are members of a Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) affiliated church. If you intend to maintain the Southern Baptist scholarship on your tuition, you must join an SBC church within the first semester of attendance and submit a completed Certification of Church Membership form to the Registrar's Office. If you do not, you will no longer receive the Southern Baptist Scholarship and will be expected to pay the non-Baptist affiliated tuition rate.

Change of Degree

If you are applying for a new degree program, you will be required to complete a Change of Degree form through the ISS Office in addition to the general admissions application, and you will be required to submit updated financial documents for your first year of study for the new degree program. This process is not for changing majors/minors, only for changing degree programs (such as B.A. to M.A., M.A. to Ed.D., etc.). Updated financial information is required by the government.



FINANCE Information

Tax Information

If you have been employed in the U.S., regardless of immigration status, you must submit to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) a complete and accurate income-tax statement each year. F-1 visa holders are required to file tax forms while they are in the U.S. Because of this requirement, they must file a 1040NR Federal income tax form. The student should keep careful record of all earnings and gifts given to him or her by churches and friends, since the total amount must be reported for income tax purposes on a yearly basis.

Income is assessed for income tax purposes in the U.S. on a calendar year basis. “Tax returns” (forms) must be filed with the IRS between January and April 15 of the following year. It is necessary to file federal, state, and sometimes local income tax returns. You can download forms from the IRS website www.irs.ustreas.gov/prod/forms_pubs/index.html.

You can call the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) toll-free telephone number:

- for tax forms and publications call 1-800-829-3676;
- for general tax information call 1-800-829-1040 (ask for Technical Division).

**These numbers are frequently busy so it may take some time to reach them.*

To determine which federal income tax form to complete, you will need to secure a copy of Publication 519: U.S. Tax Guide for Aliens available from the U.S. Tax Office. It is important to get current instructions each year. If filing a U.S. income tax return, you should be aware of the provisions of the U.S. Tax Treaty relating to your country (especially where you also file a return in your home country or where you receive income or scholarships from overseas), non-taxable components of income received from church internships, income of the working spouse and other deductions for which you may be eligible. All of these items can represent a substantial savings in U.S. income tax liability.

It is recommended that you hire an accountant who is familiar with filing taxes for international students.



ISS Policies *and* Procedures

Operation Hours

International Student Services operates Monday-Thursday from 8:00am-5:00pm and Fridays from 8:00am-12:00pm. Please request an appointment if you need to meet with the coordinator outside of open office hours.

Appointments

Appointments are to be scheduled via email at cdoane@sebts.edu. Students who come by without an appointment may be unable to be helped at that time. (Appointments are not required, but do ensure a meeting.)

Processing Times

Processing generally takes 2-3 business days once the ISS Coordinator receives an official request form, but processing can take longer depending on the workload of the office. There is no same-day/next-day processing.

Forms

There are now forms available for almost every service that our office provides. Completion of form(s) is now required so that an official request is on file.

SEVIS Registration

Registration for the upcoming semester will be done after the last day to drop classes to ensure that all students are maintaining a full-time course load.

QUICK References

Government Links

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Website

<https://www.uscis.gov/>

Department of Homeland Security Website

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students>

U.S. Department of State Website

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study/student-visa.html>

Institution Links

SEBTS Website

<https://www.sebts.edu/>

The College at Southeastern Website

<https://www.collegeatsoutheastern.com/>

Around Southeastern Website

<http://www.aroundsoutheastern.com/>

Government Contact Information

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Contact Center

800-375-5283

Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

703-603-3400

SEVP@ice.dhs.gov

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT Statement

Please review the statements below and sign the bottom of the page to confirm that you understand and agree to all of the statements listed below. Please return this signed form to the ISS Coordinator.

- I have received an International Student Handbook.
- I understand the regulations for maintaining my F-1 student visa status.
- If I have dependents, I understand the regulations for F-2 dependents to maintain my F-1 status.
- I will notify the International Student Services Office of any changes that need to be made to my SEVIS record within 10 days of any occurring changes.
- I understand the academic requirements of maintaining my F-1 status.
- I understand the employment regulations of maintaining my F-1 status.
- I understand that I must contact a Designated School Official (DSO/PDSO) for questions regarding my international student status.
- I understand the policies for Financial Aid regarding International Students.

By signing below you are confirming that you have received and understand all the statements above, all other requirements for maintaining your F-1 visa status, and all requirements for maintaining good standing with SEBTS. You also agree to uphold all conditions in relation to your visa status and being a student at SEBTS.

Signature

Date

NOTES



International Student Services

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