

Transfer Information for Current and Prospective GCTS F-1 Students

Understanding the F-1 Student Transfer Process

F-1 students already in the U.S. are permitted to transfer to another SEVP approved institution. Transfer students must complete the necessary I-20/visa certificate application process at the transfer-in school and notify their current institution (or transfer-out school) of their intent to transfer. After the transfer-out date, the student's record will be transferred electronically through the federal database called the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (or SEVIS). Remember, however, that your SEVIS record can only be transferred to one school, so you must plan carefully and decide which school you will attend before requesting a transfer.

The following definitions may be helpful for you as you consider the transfer process:

- Transfer: The electronic transfer of your SEVIS record from one certified school to another.
- Transfer-out school: The school you currently attend, but are leaving.
- Transfer-in school: The school you are planning to transfer to.
- Transfer release date: The date on which your SEVIS record is made available to the transfer-in school for update and can no longer be amended by the transfer-out school. This date is set in SEVIS by the transfer-out school.
- Program start date: The date your program of study at the transfer-in school begins.
- Initial admission: The first admission to the United States by an F-1 student using a given SEVIS ID number.
- Designated School Official: Also called your DSO. This is typically your international student advisor, or whoever manages and updates your SEVIS record and I-20.

For the most up to date transfer information, visit the website for the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement:

http://www.ice.gov/sevis/f_1_transfers.htm.

How long do I have to transfer?

When you transfer to another institution, there is a 5-month limit to the transfer eligibility requirement. This means you must begin classes at the transfer school within 5 months of transferring out of your previous school or within 5 months of the program completion date on your I-20 from your previous school, whichever is earlier. You may lawfully remain in the U.S. during this time.

If you are currently pursuing Optional Practical Training (i.e. OPT), a transfer can be done only if you can begin studying at the new school within 5 months of transferring out of the school that recommended OPT or the date OPT authorization ends, whichever is earlier. Students who are ineligible for transfer within the U.S. because of the 5-month rule should travel abroad and re-enter the U.S. with a new F-1 entry and I-20 from the new school.

How do I start the transfer process?

When you decide to transfer schools, first see your international student advisor, or DSO, at the school you are currently attending (transfer-out school). You will also be asked by the school you wish to attend (transfer-in school) to complete a transfer request form which you will submit to your advisor. This form must be completed and sent to the transfer-in school. This form will notify your current school of where to release your SEVIS record/I-20 and will establish a line of communication between the two schools. Once the transfer-out school releases your SEVIS record on a date determined by you and/or your DSO, the transfer-in school will receive your record and begin processing your request for a new I-20 and student record.

After you request to transfer-out, your current school will update your record in SEVIS as a "transfer out" request and indicate the school to which you intend to transfer along with a release date. Your transfer-out school will retain control over your record until you complete the current term and/or reach the release date, unless directed otherwise by you or your school.

What if I decide not to transfer, or to transfer to another school?

At your request, your transfer-out school may cancel your request prior to the release date. After the release date specified by on your transfer request form, however, the transfer-in school will be granted full access to your SEVIS record and then becomes responsible for maintaining your record. This means if you decide not to transfer to that school, you will need to contact the DSO at that school to request transfer to another school. Your initial transfer-out school will no longer have any access to your SEVIS record and has no responsibility to maintain your record. At this point, it is your responsibility to maintain your status through your transfer-in school, or whichever school currently has your record.

When do I need to report to the transfer-in school?

Report to your transfer-in school within 15 days of the program start date listed on your new I-20 issued from that school.

Can I travel internationally between transfers?

If you are thinking about traveling internationally between transferring to a new school, be advised that travel is subject to some restriction. For instance, if you intend to travel anytime during the 5 month period between schools, you must consult DSOs at both schools to ensure you have everything you need to re-enter the U.S.

Generally, you are required by U.S. immigration law to have an endorsed I-20 from the school that holds your active or initial record at the time you attempt to enter the U.S. This means, for instance, if you leave the U.S. after the transfer release date on your Gordon-Conwell I-20, you cannot return to the U.S. until the transfer school sends you an updated I-20 for reentry into the United States.

Students who want to travel outside the U.S. before or after the transfer release date, and whose current SEVIS record is in *Terminated* status, should obtain a new I-20 from the transfer-in school and return to attend that school within 15 days of the program start date on the new I-20.

Do I need to receive a new F-1 visa, stamped in my passport?

As long as you have followed the proper transfer procedures, you will be able to use your current, unexpired visa to re-enter the U.S., even though it has your previous school's name printed on it. This means the visa stamp from your previous school is still valid at your transfer school, as long as your visa has not expired and you have lawfully maintained F-1 status.

What if I have already graduated and/or reached the completion date on my I-20?

F-1 Students have a 60-day grace period after their program completion date (indicated on line 5 of their most recent I-20). During this grace period, students may request to transfer to another school. This means you can decide to transfer to another school anytime during your 60 day grace period, assuming you have lawfully maintained status and completed the requirements for enrolling at the transfer-in school in time to complete the necessary procedures for transferring your SEVIS record. If you are authorized for OPT, you can request transfer during your OPT period and within the 60-day grace period following your OPT expiration date.