Applying for a Change of Status to F-1/J-1

Most individuals have a choice to change status either by applying to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for a change of status or by leaving the U.S., obtaining a new visa abroad, and re-entering the U.S. in the new status.

Option 1: Depart the U.S. and re-enter
In many cases, traveling internationally is the quicker option. However, keep in mind that you may not re-enter the U.S. in the new status until you have obtained a visa (with the exception of Canadians, who do not require a visa to re-enter the U.S.). Wait times for a visa interview vary from one U.S. embassy or consulate to another. You should assess the likely wait time before choosing this option.

- NOTE: J-1 visa holders who are subject to the two-year home residency requirement - 212(e) - must exit and re-enter the U.S. to change status – these individuals are not eligible to apply to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services for any change of status.

Option 2: Submit Change of Status application to USCIS
Individuals who wish to submit a change of status application to USCIS must consult with an immigration attorney, as OIS staff cannot assist with this type of personal application. In general, it is best to submit a change of status application (Form I-539) to USCIS before the current immigration status expires. And it can often take at least one year for Forms I-539 to be adjudicated by USCIS. Be sure to check with OIS or your immigration attorney about USCIS processing times before choosing this option.

Process to Obtain I-20
Individuals who will travel and re-enter should work with OIS as all other incoming students do to obtain the I-20, via their Pre-Arrival Checklist in My OIS. Questions about this process can be sent to OISnew@pitt.edu.

Individuals who will submit a change of status application to USCIS should log into My OIS and submit a ‘Request to Change Status’ e-form, located in the Biographical Information section. The following documents will be needed when submitting this request:

- Copy of passport
- Copy of visa stamp
- Copy of I-94 record
- Admission letter or letter confirming enrollment
- Financial documentation – more information available about this in My OIS

OIS will issue an initial Form I-20 for the reason of ‘change of status’, which should be included in the application to USCIS.
Documents
Be sure to check with your immigration attorney for a full list of documents that should be included with your application.

- **Form I-539 Application To Extend/Change Nonimmigrant Status.** You can find this form on the USCIS web site (www.uscis.gov). For dependents, please be aware that one I-539 is required per family, not one per person. A separate Form I-539A needs to be completed for each dependent (spouse and/or children) to become your F-2 Dependents.
- **Check or money order** made out to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security for Processing Fee. See www.uscis.gov/i-539 for current fee. Fee is paid per form, not per person.
- **A brief letter explaining the reason for the change of status.** In your letter, indicate your request to change your immigration status and explain the circumstances:
  - explain why you entered the US in your current immigration status
  - explain 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.

- **I-901 SEVIS fee receipt.** For detailed information or to pay the fee, visit http://www.fmjfee.com. You must have your Form I-20 or Form DS-2019 to pay the fee.
- **Copy of signed I-20 or DS-2019**
- **Copy of passport biographical page**
- **Copy of visa stamp**
- **Copy of your I-94 record** (www.cbp.gov/i94)
- **Copy of financial documentation.** This should be the same documentation used to demonstrate eligibility for the I-20 or DS-2019.
- **Additional proof of eligibility for intended status.** Please see I-539 Instructions (www.uscis.gov/i-539) for individual categories.

Important Reminders

- Make a copy of your application before filing it with USCIS.
- Forward copies of any correspondence from USCIS about your case (receipt notice, approval notice, request for evidence) to OIS, so that we can keep a copy in your file. This is especially important for approvals.
- If your application is not approved by the start date on your Form I-20, OIS will defer the start date to the next available normal academic term (fall/spring).
- 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.)
- USCIS will likely consider any international travel while your application is pending to be an abandonment of your case, which can result in a denial. Consult with your immigration attorney before traveling outside the US.