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

Changing status in the U.S. versus travelling internationally

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. In many cases, travelling 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, and some individuals are likely to be flagged for security checks that may delay the process. You should assess the risk and likely wait time before choosing this option.

Please note that individuals 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.

Change of Status Process: Applying to USCIS

Step 1: Obtain a Certificate of Eligibility (form I-20 or DS-2019)

In order for OIS to issue the I-20 or DS-2019, you will need to send the following documents to OIS.

- Passport
- I-94 record
- Visa stamp
- Financial documentation

For currently enrolled Pitt students, you will upload these into the Change of Status e-form found in My OIS.
For new Pitt students, you will upload these into the Pre-Arrival Checklist found in My OIS.
Questions about both e-forms can be directed to OIS@pitt.edu

Step 2: Gather documents

You must gather the following documentation to submit to USCIS:

- **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. Only individuals applying to change visa status should be named on the I-539. For example, if you are in F-1 Student status and you wish for your spouse and three children to become your F-2 Dependents, your spouse would complete and sign the I-539 and list the three children in Supplement 1 on page 5 of the form.

- **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 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.

- SEVIS fee confirmation. For detailed information or to pay the fee, visit http://www.fmjfee.com. You must have your Form I-20 or Form DS-2019 in order to pay the fee.

- Copy of I-20 or DS-2019. You will receive this after completing Step 1 (above).

- 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.

Step 3: Send the application packet to USCIS
Before you file your application, you should make a copy for your records. Please visit https://www.uscis.gov/i-539-addresses for an updated list of filing addresses. Please visit www.uscis.gov/tools for current processing timelines.

- NOTE: Currently I-539 applications cannot be submitted electronically.

- NOTE: USCIS will mail you a receipt notice within 2 – 3 weeks of receipt at their processing facility. You can use this receipt number to track your case online (https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do)

- NOTE: 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 OIS Immigration Specialist to discuss how this affects your SEVIS record and next steps if you must travel.

Important Reminders

- 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 OIS.

- OIS 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 OIS 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 OIS.

- Upon receipt of Form I-797 Notice of Approval to F-1 or J-1 status, immediately check-in with OIS.

- Students applying for a COS to F-1 or J-1 may not begin an assistantship, or engage in on-campus employment of any kind until the change of status has been approved.

- 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 OIS 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, OIS strongly recommends you update OIS 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.