



OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL SERVICES

University Center for International Studies
University of Pittsburgh

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

Most individuals have two options to change their current visa status:

- Depart the U.S., obtain a new visa while abroad, and re-enter the U.S; or
- Remain inside the U.S. and submit a Change of Status application to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)

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 USCIS 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. Without submitting a premium processing fee (see below), it can often take *at least* one year for Forms I-539 to be adjudicated by USCIS. Be sure to check with your immigration attorney about [USCIS processing times](#) before choosing this option.

- **NOTE:** USCIS offers a premium processing fee option for Change of Status applications. For an additional fee, USCIS will adjudicate the application within 30 days after the applicant completes the biometrical appointment at USCIS.
 - Review USCIS' [Form I-907](#) webpage for current fee information.
- Applying for premium processing is a *personal decision*. Some important factors to consider are employment eligibility, and travel implications (cost, ease, etc.).

Process to Obtain I-20 / DS-2019

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 must log into [My OIS](#) and submit a 'Request to Change Status' e-form, located in the *Biographical Information* section. You will need the following documents when submitting this request:

- Copy of passport
- Copy of visa stamp
- Copy of [I-94 record](#)
- Financial documentation to cover the estimated cost of attendance
 - [Undergraduate](#) Financial Information
 - [Graduate](#) Financial Information

After reviewing and approving the e-form, OIS will issue an initial Form I-20 or DS-2019, which must be included in the application to USCIS.



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Documents for Change of Status applications

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**
 - For dependents, please be aware that one I-539 is required per family, not one per person.
 - A separate [Form I-539A](#) must be completed for each dependent (spouse and/or children) to become your F-2 or J-2 dependents.
- ❑ **Application fee**
 - If submitting your application online, you can use a credit or debit card.
 - If submitting the paper-based version, you can use [Form G-1450](#), or use a check or money order made out to the "U.S. Department of Homeland Security".
 - See the [Form I-539](#) webpage 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 U.S. in your current immigration status
 - explain why your goals/intentions changed after arriving in the U.S.
 - 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**
 - Visit the [I-901 Fee](#) website to pay the fee.
 - 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**
- ❑ **Copy of financial documentation**
 - This should be the same documentation that you used to demonstrate your eligibility for the I-20 or DS-2019.
- ❑ **Additional proof of eligibility for intended status**
 - Please see "Instructions for Form I-539" on the [Form I-539](#) webpage.

Important Reminders

- **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.**
- Make a copy of your application before filing it with USCIS, and keep it with your personal records.
- Upload copies of USCIS correspondence (receipt notice, approval notice) via the "Request to Change Status" e-form group in [My OIS](#).
- 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 U.S. 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 U.S.