



OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL SERVICES

University Center for International Studies
University of Pittsburgh

Leave of Absence for F-1 Students

F-1 students must be enrolled in a full course of study during the Fall and Spring semesters (12 credits for undergraduates and 9 credits for graduates). If you plan to withdraw from classes and/or take a leave of absence from your academic program, OIS will need to close out your SEVIS record, and you will need to depart the U.S. within 15 days after your record is closed. OIS can issue a new I-20 when you are ready to return to Pitt and resume your studies, as you will not be able to use a previously-issued I-20 for re-entry.

Things to Consider Before Taking a Leave of Absence

- Once your SEVIS record is terminated, you cannot remain in the U.S. during your leave. You must depart the U.S. within 15 days.
- You cannot engage in any employment or training in the United States while you are on a leave of absence. Any employment/training authorization will be terminated along with your SEVIS record.
- After a leave of absence, you will *not* be eligible for CPT or OPT until you have resumed your studies and have completed two full-time consecutive academic terms in the U.S.
- **NOTE:** If you have a documented medical reason for withdrawing from classes, you may qualify for a reduced course load authorization, based on medical conditions. In this scenario, your SEVIS record will remain active, and you can remain in the United States, if necessary.
 - Please read more about a [medical reduced course load](#) before submitting the *Departure Notification* e-form (as described below).

Absence from the US Longer than 5 Months

If your absence from the US is more than 5 months, OIS will need to create a new SEVIS record for you once you are ready to return. You will be given a new I-20 with a new SEVIS number that is different from the previous SEVIS number that you started with at Pitt. You would not be eligible for CPT or OPT until you have completed two consecutive full-time academic terms in the U.S. When you return to Pitt, if you do not have more than two semesters left to take, you will not be eligible for CPT or OPT benefits.

Absence from the US Less than 5 Months

If your absence from the United States will be less than 5 months, and you will have less than 1 full academic year remaining to complete your academic program once you resume your studies in the U.S., please contact your [Immigration Specialist](#) to discuss your situation.

Steps for Requesting a Leave of Absence from Pitt for Immigration Purposes

If you decide to take a leave of absence from the University after reviewing the above information, please take the following steps:

1. Discuss with your academic department, so that they are also aware of your plans. OIS will not inform your department that you are planning to leave, nor will your department inform OIS of your plans.
2. Contact your [Immigration Specialist](#) if you have questions about the timing of your departure, your return, etc.
3. After you have discussed your plans with your department, and your decision is final, please log into [My OIS](#) and submit a *Departure Notification* e-form. This will be your official notification to OIS of your decision. It is important to note that your SEVIS record will be terminated once your *Departure Notification* e-form has been processed.



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Steps for Returning to Pitt

Once you are ready to return to Pitt and resume your studies, please take the following steps about **2 - 3 months** before you plan on returning to Pitt:

- Contact your academic advisor, or academic department, about your plans to return.
 - Each school at Pitt has its own procedures about the academic steps that students need to take when they return from a leave of absence.
- Contact your OIS [Immigration Specialist](#) about your plans to return to Pitt. You will need a new I-20 for your return.
 - Students submit their request for a new I-20 via the 'Return to Pitt from Leave' e-form group in the *Admission to Orientation* section of [My OIS](#).
 - If your Pitt username and password are still active, you can sign into My OIS using the "Login" button.
 - If your Pitt username and password have been deactivated, you can still sign in to My OIS. Use the "Limited Services Login," located below the other "Login" button.
 - You will need to upload financial documentation to show that you can support yourself for one year of study.
 - Return from Leave of Absence Requests are typically processed within 5-7 business days if the request is complete and accurate.
 - Once your new I-20 has been created, you will need to pay the I-901 [SEVIS Fee](#) again. For immigration purposes, your F-1 status will start all over again and you will receive an "Initial Attendance" I-20.
- Travel back to the U.S. no earlier than 30 days before the Program Start Date listed on your new I-20.
- After returning to the U.S., complete ALL of the e-forms in the "Upon Arrival to the United States" section of the "Return to Pitt from Leave" e-form group.
 - This is REQUIRED to maintain your immigration status in the U.S.

Leave of Absence FAQs

- **Can I return from a Leave of Absence in the Summer?** OIS typically does not recommend that students return to school in the summer term. Students need to enroll for a full course of study in the term they plan to return to the US, this includes the summer term, and very few programs support full-time enrollment in the summer.
- **Do I need to apply for a new visa stamp to return to the US?** If your visa stamp is still valid, and the number of entries has not expired; you should be able to use it with your new I-20. Study in the States provides a more detailed explanation [here](#).
- **What if my visa stamp is expired?** You will need to apply for a new [F-1 visa stamp](#) before you can return to the US. Review the [US Embassy's website](#) for your home country to determine the specific application process.
- **Do I need to pay the I-901 SEVIS Fee again?** If you are issued a new, "Initial Attendance" I-20 for an absence from the U.S. of more than 5 months, you will need to pay the I-901 [SEVIS Fee](#) again.
- **Do I need to take a Leave of Absence to study abroad?** No. Please discuss your plans to study abroad with your [Immigration Specialist](#).