

Ten Immigration Issues to Consider When Advising International Students

- 1) **SEVIS:** The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System is the online database maintained by the Department of Homeland Security that contains information on all students in F-1 and J-1 status and their dependent family members. The ISSO is required to use this database to create and maintain immigration records and documents as well as to report updates to student's personal data, academic registration and immigration status. The system maintains data in "real time" which means violations to immigration status could result in immediate SEVIS record terminations and consequences.
- 2) **Full-time study:** International students are required to register for and receive credit for a minimum of 12 credits each fall and spring semester to maintain valid student immigration status. There are some exceptions made for students in their final semester of study and for graduate students who qualify for "full-time certification" in accordance with Office of the University Registrar policies available at: www.bu.edu/reg/internal/cert-codes.pdf.
- 3) **Continuous enrollment:** Any interruption of studies (withdrawal, leave of absence, suspension, expulsion, etc.) will have an immediate impact on an international student's immigration status and ability to remain in the U.S., so students should consult with an ISSO advisor before discontinuing studies.
- 4) **Limited work authorization:** Immigration regulations place severe restrictions to employment options, so international students should not accept any offers of employment, internships or any other forms of compensation (housing, food, gifts, cash, etc.) for services rendered without receiving authorization from their ISSO advisor.
- 5) **Immigration documents should not expire:** International students must be careful not to let their immigration documents expire. International student possess four to five different official documents that determine their valid immigration status and their ability to remain in the U.S. It is critical that they make certain not to let these documents expire and that they work with their ISSO advisor to extend their documents well in advance of expiration.
- 6) **Check-in each semester:** All international students must check in at the ISSO when they arrive at BU for the first time, and then most international students (all F-1 students) must verify their presence on-campus at the beginning of each new semester through the Semester Verification process.
- 7) **International travel can be risky:** Students need a valid visa, valid SEVIS record and a valid endorsement for travel on their I-20 or DS-2019 from their ISSO advisor in order to reenter the United States. The length of a U.S. visa varies, so students may need to apply for a new visa each time they depart the U.S. which could prove difficult and time consuming. Students should be encouraged to review all travel plans with their ISSO advisor.
- 8) **Study/Research Abroad:** Students who will engage in either study or research abroad should speak with their ISSO advisor prior to participation as extended absences from the U.S. can have an effect on their immigration status and their eligibility for benefits of status.
- 9) **Social Security:** International students in F-1 status are not eligible to apply for a social security number unless they are employed. If they are working on campus, the hiring department must fill out a certification of on-campus employment that must be signed by the ISSO before the student can apply for a SSN. Students may begin working without a SSN, but they must apply for one to avoid being taxed at a very high rate. All students who have been awarded a fellowship or assistantship that includes a living stipend should apply for a social security number.
- 10) **Immigration regulations are very complicated and constantly changing:** Faculty and administrators should always confer with an ISSO advisor when assisting international students to avoid errors and situations that could jeopardize a student's immigration status.