This handout summarizes important rights and responsibilities you have as an F-1 student in relation to United States government immigration regulations, and identifies situations for which you should seek assistance from the ISSO. It will not detail all of the actual procedures required for you to take advantage of immigration benefits, but gives an important overview of what you need to know. The ISSO will provide additional information, counseling and assistance to help you maintain your lawful immigration status and achieve your educational goals while at Boston University. As regulations and procedures do change from time to time, the ISSO will inform you of substantial changes via BU email or on the ISSO website at http://www.bu.edu/isso.

1. THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS & SCHOLARS OFFICE

The International Students & Scholars Office (ISSO) provides professional expertise on immigration and employment, and helps ensure student, scholar, and institutional compliance with federal regulations. ISSO staff members are available to guide students and scholars through the often complicated requirements for foreign nationals studying and working in the United States. We strongly advise you to contact us any time you have a question pertaining to your F-1 immigration status, your BU program or if you intend to travel and reenter the U.S.

Advisors at the ISSO are approved by U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) as F-1 program Designated School Officials (DSOs). Although we have extensive expertise in F-1 student regulations and cases, we do not serve as immigration attorneys. If you are facing a complex F-1 student matter, or a situation involving legal advising outside of F-1 student status, ISSO staff may refer you to well-respected immigration attorneys or criminal attorneys who may be able to provide more comprehensive legal advising and represent you in legal filings and case processing.

The ISSO reports directly to the Vice President and Associate Provost for Global Programs. BU Global Programs provides strategic support and operational oversight to the ISSO, as well as to BU Study Abroad, the Center for English Language and Orientation Programs (CELOP), and to other university initiatives abroad. See: http://www.bu.edu/globalprograms/

2. IMMIGRATION ACRONYMS YOU SHOULD KNOW

ISSO Boston University International Students & Scholars Office

SEVIS Student and Exchange Visitor Information System — a DHS database used by schools to issue immigration documents and monitor F-1 and J-1 students, exchange visitors and their F-2 and J-2 dependents in the US

DHS U.S. Department of Homeland Security — an agency of the U.S. government that houses, among other entities, the three immigration-related departments:
- USCIS U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services — Approves immigration benefits, including employment authorization
- ICE Immigration and Customs Enforcement — Oversees SEVIS and is charged with enforcement of immigration-related infractions
- CBP Customs and Border Protection — Operates U.S. ports of entry and departure

DOS U.S. Department of State — an agency of the U.S. government that oversees U.S. embassies and consulates abroad and adjudicates applications for visas to the U.S.

3. IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS

The following documents are very important and must be valid at all times in order for you to maintain lawful F-1 status:

- **Passport** — Should be valid for a minimum of 6 months into the future
- **Form I-20** — A Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student (F-1) Status. Must be valid for the actual length of your program of study and may be extended, shortened or terminated to reflect academic program participation
- **U.S. Entry Stamp** or **Form I-94** Arrival/Departure Record (either document can serve as proof of U.S. admission in F-1 immigration status for “D/S” or “duration of status”). Download an electronic record of your Form I-94 from: www.cbp.gov/I94

Download
In addition, the following document is required each time you wish to enter or re-enter the United States after travel abroad:

- **F-1 visa** - Must be valid for any entry or re-entry to U.S. but can expire while you remain in the U.S. Certain students are exempt from the requirement to obtain a visa.
- **Proof of I-901 SEVIS Fee payment** – This can be printed from [fmjfee.com](http://fmjfee.com).
- **I-20 Travel Signature** – Once you have arrived in the U.S. to begin your program, you will then need an I-20 “travel signature” on page 2 of your I-20 each time you depart the U.S. and return in F-1 status.

Please keep your original documents in a safe place. We strongly recommend that you make photocopies or a digital copy of these documents and store them in a location separate from the actual documents. If any of these documents is damaged, lost or stolen, you must have it replaced as quickly as possible. You should contact the ISSO if you have any questions about the documents or if you need to have them replaced. Please bring all of these documents with you each time you visit the ISSO.

### 4. SEVIS – ELECTRONIC REPORTING SYSTEM

DHS and DOS utilize an electronic database and reporting system called the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) to track international students and exchange visitors. All U.S. schools are required to use this system to report information on F-1 students and their F-2 dependents through secure, encrypted internet transmissions.

Boston University reports to the government only the information required by federal law. This includes all the information on your Form I-20 and information on “reportable events” that affect your immigration status. These events include, but are not limited to: (1) enrollment each school term; (2) leaves of absence, suspensions and withdrawals from school; (3) authorized and unauthorized drops below a “full course of study” as defined by federal regulations; (4) resumption of a “full course of study” after an authorized drop; (5) employment off-campus; (6) F-2 dependent information; (7) U.S. residential address changes; (8) current telephone number and email address, (9) completion or termination of studies, (10) changes in major, program of study, degree, completion date, etc. (11) school transfer. As an F-1 program sponsor, we are also required to report through SEVIS (12) any violations of status which may occur, including: any unauthorized drop below full-time status, failure to extend your I-20 prior to its expiration date, unauthorized employment, etc.

Since SEVIS is an electronic reporting system, it is very important that your information on record at the ISSO, and in the University Information System (UIS), be completely up-to-date at all times as we will report information about your status directly from the University’s records to DHS through SEVIS.

Your name in your academic record at Boston University must match your name as it appears on your passport and must adhere to SEVIS name standards as outlined on [https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov](https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov).

Failure to maintain accurate records with the University may result in technical violations of your status.

### 5. WHEN TO CONTACT THE ISSO

To ensure that you maintain lawful immigration status, you must contact the ISSO if any of the following events occurs:

- If there is a change to your legal name, U.S. address, phone number, email, country of citizenship, immigration status, major, program of study, level of education, expected date of completion, your source of funding.
- If there is a change to the biographical, immigration status, or contact information for your F-2 dependents.
- If you intend to travel outside the U.S. and need a travel signature from an ISSO staff member on your Form I-20 or if you will apply for a new visa before re-entering the U.S.
- Any time you or your F-2 dependents re-enter the U.S. if have questions about your U.S. entry stamp or the Form I-94 you were given. (Students and dependents should both be granted F-1 or F-2 status for “D/S” or “duration of status.”)
- If you receive a Form I-515A temporary admission to the U.S. (usually for 30 days) due to incomplete documentation.
- If you lose any of your immigration documents, or if they are stolen.
- If you intend to change your immigration status.
- If you intend to study abroad, take a leave of absence, or transfer to another school.
- If you need to additional time to complete your program, submit a complete I-20 extension request the ISSO before the Form I-20 expires.
- If you are seeking ISSO authorization prior to dropping below full-time study or withdraw from Boston University (due to suspension or personal reasons).
- If you want to obtain on-campus work authorization or apply for off-campus work authorization.
- If you want to have your dependent spouse and/or children join you in F-2 status.
- If you are facing charges for any felony or misdemeanor criminal act.
- If you need to apply for a U.S. Social Security Number.
6. REGISTRATION, ATTENDANCE AND COURSE OF STUDY REQUIREMENTS

Registration and Attendance - You must register for and complete a “full course of study”, defined as 12 credit hours, each fall and spring semester at Boston University, and during summer if it is your first, final or only semester.

- **AUDIT COURSES:** Audit courses (“AU” grade) do not count toward your required 12 credit hours.

- **WITHDRAWAL or MISSING GRADE:** If you withdraw from a course (“W” grade) or are given a missing grade (“MG”), you are not considered to have completed the course for the semester in question and this course will not be counted toward your required 12 credit registration.

- **INCOMPLETE GRADE:** If you receive an incomplete grade (“I” grade), you are considered to have been successfully enrolled for that course for that semester and the incomplete grade will be counted towards your required registration. However, you must then complete all remaining requirements for the incomplete course in addition to enrolling full-time in a following semester.

- **ON-LINE COURSES:** Although F-1 students have the right to enroll in on-line or distance education courses, only one such course (or 3 credits) per semester may count toward the 12 credits required to maintain full-time status. A student completing final program requirements, is not permitted to finish their studies with only an online course.

- **CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT:** Students who are approved to take a course at another school, must request advanced authorization from the academic department and the ISSO. Coursework taken concurrently at another school may count toward the full-time registration requirement as long as the student maintains active registration at Boston University.

- **PART-TIME REGISTRATION:** Registering for a part-time course load or dropping below full-time each semester without prior authorization from the ISSO will immediately jeopardize your immigration status. Prior ISSO authorization is required for a Reduced Course Load due to academic difficulties, medical reasons or in the final semester. (See “Registration Exceptions” below.)

Summer Registration – Summer registration is not required if it is a “vacation” term, meaning that you are enrolled in the spring before and the fall term after. However, summer registration is required if you will start or finish your program over the summer, or if summer is your only semester.

If you begin your program of study with Summer Session I, you must take a combined total of 12 credit hours in Summer I and Summer II. If you begin your program in Summer Session II, you must take at least 8 credit hours during Summer II.

If you complete your program during the summer (see section entitled “Completion of Studies”), you must be registered for a cumulative total of 12 credits for Summer Session I and Summer Session II combined. If you need less than a full-time course load to complete your program requirements, you must request authorization from your ISSO advisor for a reduced course load for your final semester.

Undergraduate Students – While you are eligible to register for as many classes as University policy allows, as a student in F-1 status you must register for at least 12 credit hours each fall and spring semester. Immigration regulations require prior ISSO authorization for all legitimate drops below full-time (see the “Registration Exceptions” listed at the end of this section).

Graduate Students Enrolled in Coursework – While you are eligible to register for as many classes as University policy allows, as a student in F-1 status you must register for at least 12 credit hours (or the number of credits your school/college determines to be full-time status) each fall and spring semester. Exceptions are made for graduate students receiving a graduate assistantship or fellowship requiring 20 hours of work per week. In this case, your academic department may officially certify you “full-time.”

Graduate Students Who Have Completed All Required Course Work - If a thesis or dissertation is required of your program of study and you have completed all other required course work, you need to register only for the number of hours of thesis or dissertation research as required by your department to maintain continued enrollment. In addition, you must be certified “full-time” by your department each academic semester. If you are completing your thesis during the summer and will not be enrolled the following fall semester, you must be registered during that final summer session.

Registration Exceptions - In certain circumstances you may be able to request an authorized reduced course load in a specific semester: (1) if you are experiencing initial academic difficulties due to English-language, improper course level placement or unfamiliarity with American teaching methods, (2) if you have an illness or medical condition that prevents you from full-time study, or (3) if you need fewer than 12 credits in your final semester in order to graduate. If you are authorized for a reduced course load for academic reasons, you must generally maintain a minimum of six credits in that semester. If you are considering reducing your course load you must make an appointment with your ISSO advisor to discuss your situation prior to dropping below full-time. You must resume full-time study the following semester unless you obtain a new authorization from the ISSO.
7. **LENGTH OF TIME YOU MAY REMAIN IN THE UNITED STATES ON YOUR BOSTON UNIVERSITY FORM I-20**

Your Form I-20 is issued for the expected duration of your program of study. When you enter the U.S. you should receive a “F-1 D/S” notation on the U.S. entry stamp in your passport or on your I-94 electronic arrival record indicating that you have permission to remain in the U.S. for “duration of status.” The duration of your F-1 status ends as soon as your Form I-20 expires or as soon as you complete your program of study, whichever is sooner, plus up to 60-days of a “grace period” for you to prepare to depart the U.S. or take legal action that will allow you to remain in the U.S.

If you need more time to complete your studies than allowed by your Form I-20, you must submit an extension request form to the ISSO before the expiration date on your Form I-20, allowing sufficient time for ISSO to review and approve your extension request. For more information on legal options at the end of your program, see the section below on “Completion of Studies”.

8. **SEMESTER VERIFICATION**

You are required to complete Semester Verification within the first two weeks of each semester for the duration of your program. To meet this requirement, you must present yourself in person — and show your BU ID card — to a designated “Semester Verifier” in your department, or at one of the other designated locations on campus (see our web site for locations).

Semester Verification is necessary because the ISSO is required to report to the Department of Homeland Security each semester that you are present on campus and enrolled. When you complete Semester Verification, notice is automatically sent to the ISSO which we forward to the DHS through SEVIS. Please refer to the ISSO web site at [www.bu.edu/isso](http://www.bu.edu/isso) for more detailed information.

9. **EMPLOYMENT**

**On-Campus Employment** – As a degree-seeking student in F-1 status, you may be employed at most on-campus jobs with authorization from the ISSO. Non-degree students are not permitted to work on campus, due to BU policy. While on-campus employment may not exceed 20 hours per week during fall and spring semesters, full-time employment on campus (more than 20 hours per week) is allowed when classes are not in session (during winter intersession, summer vacation and spring break).

If you are a new student, your authorization for on-campus employment may begin no more than 30 days before the start of your program, as listed on your I-20. Students in continuing F-1 status (transferring from another school or changing degree levels) may be eligible to begin working more than 30 days before their program start date if they complete ISSO check-in and I-9 Employment Verification. On-campus employment during summer vacation and academic breaks is permissible only if you are currently registered (in the summer term) or registered to continue at Boston University following the break. If summer is your first or final semester, only part-time employment (20 hours or less) is permitted as summer term is considered a required academic semester for you and not a vacation period.

On-campus employment usually means that you will receive a Boston University paycheck. If you will work for an on-campus vendor or conduct BU research at an off-campus site, your employment must be reviewed and approved by an ISSO advisor before you begin. For clarification see: [http://www.bu.edu/isso/employment-internships/on-campus-student-employment/](http://www.bu.edu/isso/employment-internships/on-campus-student-employment/)

**Off-Campus Employment** – As a student in F-1 status, you are eligible for limited employment off-campus, but you must apply for and obtain appropriate authorization from the ISSO or U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services before beginning any off-campus employment. Off-campus employment authorization may be granted for:

- Curricular Practical Training (CPT),
- Optional Practical Training (OPT),
- Optional Practical Training extension for qualifying majors in Science, Technology, Engineering or Math (STEM OPT)
- Employment Authorization based on Severe Economic Hardship,
- Employment Authorization for an International Organization, or
- Temporary special relief provisions that may be announced by DHS.

Each off-campus authorization type has eligibility criteria and specific application steps. For more information on off-campus employment eligibility and application procedures, refer to the “Employment and Internships” section of the ISSO website at [http://www.bu.edu/isso/employment-internships/](http://www.bu.edu/isso/employment-internships/).

It is critical that you work with the ISSO to obtain appropriate U.S. employment authorization before you begin any on-campus or off-campus employment. Working without U.S. authorization can jeopardize your lawful U.S. status, lead to termination of your SEVIS record, and to loss of current and future employment benefits.
10. CHANGE OF U.S. ADDRESS (Student Link: “Immigration-U.S. Address”)

If you move within the United States, DHS must be informed of your change of address within 10 days of your move. To ensure timely notification, please access your personal information through the Boston University Student Link (http://www.bu.edu/studentlink) and update your current address information using the Immigration-U.S. Address option. The change of address will then be forwarded automatically to the ISSO and on to DHS through your record in SEVIS.

Since a change of address notification is required for all non-immigrants and since SEVIS only permits one U.S. address, F-2 dependents who maintain a U.S. address different than that of the F-1 student must notify the ISSO and DHS of their address by filing Form AR-11. Form AR-11 can be completed electronically at: www.uscis.gov/AR-11. If you choose to mail the AR-11, we recommend using Certified Mail, Return Receipt Requested as proof that you have submitted the form. More information on reporting changes of address can be found at http://www.bu.edu/issso/immigration-status/maintaining-status/address/.

11. DEPENDENTS AND OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS

If you are married and/or have children, you may be eligible to have your legal spouse (husband or wife) and/or children (under the age of 21), visit you temporarily or join you for the duration of your studies. Under federal immigration regulations, dependent spouses and children who accompany or follow-to-join you must each be issued their own dependent Form I-20 in order to apply for an F-2 dependent visa, and enter the U.S. in F-2 status.

Your F-2 dependents are allowed to remain in the U.S. as long as you remain in the U.S. in legal F-1 status. Your dependents may not engage in any form of employment. F-2 spouses have limited permission to study in the U.S. They may engage in full or part-time nondegree or avocational study, but they are only permitted to enroll on a part-time basis if they are studying towards a college or graduate degree. If your spouse is interested in full-time degree study, he/she should contact the ISSO for information on changing to F-1 status before beginning full-time study.

An F-2 dependent child may only study full-time in elementary or secondary school (kindergarten through 12th grade). Your F-2 dependents must be approved by the USCIS for change to F-1 status before commencing full-time study at the college level.

12. TRAVEL

We encourage you to contact the ISSO anytime you plan to travel outside of the U.S. This is particularly important as regulations and practices concerning re-entry into the United States continue to change. Many students experience significant difficulties and delays in applying for visas at U.S. embassies or consulates. When you return to the U.S. after travel abroad, you should bring any new passport, new visa, new U.S. entry stamp or new Form I-94 to the ISSO so that we may update your file. Immigration regulations require that we maintain current copies of your passport and immigration documents.

Travel within the U.S. – You may travel within the U.S. provided you maintain your lawful F-1 status and have a valid passport, Form I-20, and U.S. entry stamp or Form I-94 in your possession.

Travel Outside the U.S. before Completion of Studies – You may leave the U.S. at any time. You are permitted to return in F-1 status if you have a valid passport, valid F-1 visa stamp and a current Form I-20 that has been signed for travel on page 2 by an authorized staff member at the ISSO. Only a Designated School Official (DSO) at the ISSO is authorized to sign a Form I-20. A “travel signature” is generally valid for one year. You may request a more updated travel signature (six months prior to your expected date of return) if you intend to renew your F-1 visa during your trip abroad.

If you are nearing the end of your program of study at BU, you should consult ISSO staff about whether departure from the U.S. is advisable, particularly if you are traveling after the end of classes but before graduation. If you intend to apply for post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT), move to a new degree level at BU, or transfer to another school, there may be steps you need to take before your departure as your Form I-20 must represent your future activity (continued study, OPT employment, etc.) on the date of your reentry to the U.S.

Travel Outside the U.S. after Completion of Studies - The date you officially complete your studies (see “Completion of Studies” section) is very important to your ability to travel and re-enter the U.S. If you attempt to return to the U.S. in F-1 status after your completion date, you may be denied re-entry to the U.S. unless you have been authorized to engage in Optional Practical Training (OPT) and have secured a job offer in your field of study. If you depart the U.S. and wish to return after the date of your completion of studies, you must present the following documents to the CBP inspector upon arrival back in the U.S.:

2. Your Form I-20 which has been endorsed for travel within the last six months by the ISSO
3. Your valid passport
4. Your valid F-1 visa
You may also be asked to present:

5. Proof of employment in your field of study
6. I-901 SEVIS Fee Payment receipt

Application for New F-1 Visa during Travel – The F-1 visa stamp in your passport grants you permission to travel to the U.S. and request entry in F-1 status. While your visa must be valid on the date you enter the U.S., you are permitted to legally remain in the U.S. after the expiration date of your F-1 visa, provided you are maintaining F-1 status, and hold a valid passport, and an unexpired and valid Form I-20. If your F-1 visa expires while you are in the U.S., it will be necessary to apply for a new visa during your next trip abroad, as this will be required in order to re-enter the U.S.

If you need to apply for a new visa during a trip abroad, you should inform the ISSO before travel. In certain cases, security checks and supplemental visa application forms may significantly delay your visa application process in many countries. If you are planning to apply for a visa in Canada or in a country other than your home country, you must first consult an ISSO advisor.

- Please refer to the ISSO website at http://www.bu.edu/isso/travel-visas/ or the most current ISSO Travel Tips for information on recent travel and visa application changes.
- If you travel to Canada, Mexico or certain islands near the U.S., you may be eligible to return to the U.S. even if your F-1 visa in your passport has expired, provided your visit does not exceed 30 days and you meet other eligibility for “automatic visa validation.” You should consult with ISSO about this provision prior to travel.

Form I-515A issued at the Port of Entry upon entry to the U.S. – If a Customs and Border Protection Officer determines your documentation is incomplete when entering the U.S., you may be issued a Form I-515A and an I-94 card with a date-specific status end date. These documents will grant you temporary admission to the U.S. (generally for 30 days). You must submit the required response and documents to the Form I-515A prior to the expiration date of your I-94 card to prove that you entered the U.S. lawfully. If you receive a Form I-515A, you must contact the ISSO immediately to ensure that proper procedures are followed in a timely manner. Failure to submit the proper original documentation prior to the expiration date of your I-94 card will result in termination of both your F-1 student status and your SEVIS record.

13. HOLIDAYS AND VACATIONS

You may remain in the United States and maintain F-1 status during holidays and vacation periods observed by Boston University, including summer vacation, provided you are eligible for and intend to register for the next academic semester and all of your immigration documents (including Form I-20, I-94, passport) and SEVIS record remain valid.

14. TUITION PAYMENT

To ensure that you will be able to register each semester, please settle your tuition bill in a timely manner. Not being able to register for classes because your account is not settled will impact your ability to maintain lawful status. If you have problems meeting your financial obligations please contact your ISSO advisor.

15. STUDY ABROAD OR PHYSICAL ABSENCE FROM THE U.S. FOR GRADUATE RESEARCH

If you are an F-1 student planning to study abroad or do research abroad, you should consult with your advisor at the ISSO before finalizing your travel plans or leaving the United States to see if your time abroad will impact your SEVIS record:

1. If you will be physically absent from the U.S. of five (5) months, please consult with your ISSO advisor to evaluate whether your absence will interrupt your F-1 SEVIS record, requiring a new “initial” I-20, payment of a new SEVIS fee, and/or a new F-1 visa prior to your reentry to the U.S.
2. If you plan to participate in a BU Study Abroad program or participate in full-time research abroad while remaining registered in BU coursework, you may be eligible to keep your SEVIS record “active” even if you are absent for more than five (5) months. However, please consult with an ISSO advisor before you depart so that we can evaluate your academic plan and advise you about any risks or considerations.
3. If you plan to study abroad through another college or organization, you will need to take an official leave of absence from BU and request a new Form I-20 before your return to the U.S. to resume studies following your time abroad.
4. Any physical absence from the United States for a period of five (5) months, or study abroad within your first year or last semester of study, may affect your eligibility for Optional Practical Training or other off-campus employment.

16. COURSE WORK AT OR TRANSFER TO A DIFFERENT SCHOOL

If you wish to take one or more courses at another university or college temporarily, ISSO authorization may be required. If you wish to cease your study at Boston University and transfer to a different school, you must inform your advisor at the ISSO and follow proper transfer procedures before you attend the new school. If you plan to travel outside the U.S. and return to attend a new school, you may need to begin the SEVIS transfer process before you depart the U.S.
17. LEAVE OF ABSENCE, SUSPENSION OR WITHDRAWAL

While in the United States in F-1 status, you must remain continuously enrolled for a full-course of study at Boston University until you have completed your academic program (see “Registration, Attendance and Course of Study Requirements” above). If you interrupt your studies, your SEVIS record and Form I-20 will become invalid and you will not be eligible to remain in the US in F-1 status. Important: if you are working on- or off-campus, you must cease employment immediately upon interrupting your full-time studies. You must contact the ISSO before you interrupt your studies for any one of the following reasons:

1. You are planning to request an official leave of absence from the University (to participate in an external study abroad program, or due to academic, medical, or personal reasons) during the fall or spring semester.

2. You are being suspended (or are under review for suspension)

3. You are planning to withdraw from classes or drop below full-time registration at any point during the fall or spring semester (or summer term if it is your first or final semester of study).

In the event that you are suffering from an illness or other medical condition that compels you to interrupt your studies at BU, you can request authorization for a medical leave of absence from your advisor at the ISSO, to enable you to maintain valid F-1 status during the time you are not enrolled.

If you request a leave of absence or withdraw from school (due to suspension or personal reasons), you may be granted a 15-day grace period to leave the country only if you are granted authorization prior to your withdrawal. Only your ISSO advisor may authorize this benefit. If you do not gain ISSO authorization before withdrawing, you will violate your status and will be required to leave the country immediately. If you are considering a withdrawal, please discuss options such as a change of status or school transfer with an ISSO advisor prior to finalizing your plans.

18. COMPLETION OF STUDIES

Immigration regulations pay careful attention to the date on which you officially complete your program. After your official completion date, you have up to 60 days to remain in the U.S. and during this “grace period” must depart the U.S unless you have taken some action to remain lawfully in the U.S. (see options below). Different programs have different dates of completion. Please see below for specific information concerning official dates of program completion. Once you depart the U.S. after your completion date, your F-1 status and grace period end, and you can no longer enter the U.S. with the Form I-20 issued for the program you have just completed.

Note: While an estimated program end date is reflected on your Form I-20 when you are first admitted to BU, this end date may be extended at your request (see our website for detailed steps) or may be shortened automatically if you complete your program sooner than anticipated.

* Important: the 60-day pre-departure “grace period” is not available to students who do not complete their program of study (e.g. are suspended, withdrawn, or otherwise do not complete their program objective as stated on their Form I-20.)

Undergraduate Students and Graduate Students Who Are Not in Thesis or Dissertation Programs — Your date of completion will be the University’s official graduation date for the semester that you complete all program requirements, as follows:

- **Spring semester:** Date of program completion will be the date of the May graduation ceremony
- **Summer term:** Date of program completion will be September 25th
- **Fall Semester:** Date of program completion will be January 25th

* F-1 students who do not intend to enroll for the fall semester, but who will complete their program of study during the summer, must be registered during the summer term in order to maintain their lawful student status.

Graduate Students in Thesis or Dissertation Programs — Your official date of completion will be the day of the graduation ceremony of the semester in which you submit your thesis/dissertation. You must be enrolled in that semester, as well. Please note that all students who will complete and submit their thesis/dissertation during the summer must be registered as continuing students during the summer semester to maintain lawful F-1 status.

Non-Degree Students — Since non-degree students do not graduate from a program, the completion date specified on your I-20 is the last day of exams for the term in which you enroll in non-degree studies.

All Undergraduate Students and Graduate Students — At the completion of your program, you must do one of the following:

1. Apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT) employment. Once approved by USCIS, OPT employment may begin up to 60 days after degree completion. Although applications for OPT can be submitted during your 60 day grace period, it is strongly recommended that students apply prior to completion of studies.
2. Apply to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services for a change to a different immigration status.

3. Complete an SEVIS transfer to a new program of study at Boston University or another college or university. Transfer must be processed before the end of your 60-day grace period. You must begin study in your new program within five (5) months from the date your transfer your SEVIS record from BU or from the date of your program completion, whichever date is earlier.

4. Depart the country no more than 60 days after your program completion date. Please note that this grace period ends when you depart. You are not permitted to depart the U.S. and return in F-1 status during the 60-day period.

Please consult with staff at the ISSO regarding your options at least one semester before you complete your studies.

19. CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATING IMMIGRATION STATUS

Immigration laws in the United States impose severe penalties if you fail to comply with your immigration responsibilities, or fail to obtain a required registration or employment permission in advance. Maintenance of accurate records at the ISSO and in the University Information System (UIS) is especially important since details of your status are reported automatically to DHS through SEVIS.

Any violation of F-1 status, including termination of a SEVIS record, may result in accrual of unlawful presence time which may lead to removal from the U.S. (formerly “deportation”), to inadmissibility, or to a long-term bar from the U.S. of up to 10 years.

You should work closely with the ISSO staff to make certain that you comply with all F-1 regulations, and take immediate action to remedy any status violations as quickly as possible after they occur.

In the event of a status violation, your ISSO advisor will discuss your legal options – including applying to USCIS for reinstatement or making a new entry to the U.S. to reestablish lawful status. The ISSO may also refer you to an immigration attorney for legal advice.

As your F-1 program sponsor, Boston University ISSO is always pleased to provide you with additional information, advising and assistance regarding your immigration status so that you may achieve your academic goals at Boston University.

A list of International Student Advisors (all approved F-1 Designated School Officials) can be found at: http://www.bu.edu/isso/contact/student-advising/index.html

We look forward to working with you during your time on campus!