



University of
New Haven

UIS Hot Topic

University Immigration Services

November 4, 2022



Today's Hot Topic: Understanding your Documents

PASSPORT: Your passport was issued by your country of citizenship. Most students have a passport, but occasionally there are situations when students have a travel document of another kind (eg. refugees). When entering through a U.S. port of entry (eg. JFK airport), your passport must be valid for at least 6 months into the future. Your nearest consulate can help you renew your passport or replace it if lost or stolen. You may need a police report if your passport is lost or stolen.

Please note that the way your name appears on your passport determines how your name appears on your other documents. If you have only one name or all your names appear on one line in your passport, we legally must put all in the surname (last name) field on your I-20. SEVIS allows the first name field to be empty. For the Department of State that issues the visa, however, the first name field is required so they insert a placeholder, FNU (First Name Unknown). The FNU will follow you along forever in any database system that requires the first name field, including Banner, the University system of records. If you don't want the FNU on your documents, we recommend you contact your nearest consulate to get your name changed on your passport.

VISA: The visa stamp in your passport is required to enter the U.S. (exception for Canadian citizens). You are awarded a visa status by Immigration and Customs (CBP) at the port of entry, and your status appears on your I-94 (see below). The first time you enter the U.S., the school listed on your visa must match the I-20 you used to get the visa. For subsequent entries, it does not need to match. This can happen, for example, if you transfer your SEVIS record between schools while inside the U.S.

The expiration date on your student visa is based on reciprocal diplomatic agreements between the U.S. and your country. Diplomatic agreements may also determine if your visa is for single or multiple entries. It is OK if your visa expires while you are here. You may remain legally inside the U.S. as long as your SEVIS record remains active and your I-20 is valid. You can only renew the visa at the U.S. consulate in your home country (exceptions exist for countries with volatile political situations).

I-94: The I-94 is an arrival-departure record managed by CBP ports of entry. It is an electronic record, but you will need to retain a copy of it with your other documents. Every time you enter or re-enter the U.S. you will get a new I-94. Retrieve it online and save the newest pdf. You may be asked for the I-94 when applying for other benefits in the U.S., such as a driver's license. Check your I-94 each time to confirm you were awarded the F-1 (or J-1) student visa status with the expiration date of D/S which means duration of status.

I-20: The I-20 is a document identifying F-1 visa status, which is maintained in the U.S. government's SEVIS database by Designated School Officials at the University of New Haven. Often when a DSO updates information in SEVIS, a new I-20 is printed to reflect the new information. You will have multiple I-20s by the end of your time as an F-1 student. Please note that this also implies that even if one I-20 indicates a particular set of information points, it might not be up to date with your current situation if changes were made in SEVIS. You should communicate regularly with the UIS about your I-20.

I-20 Timeline

1. Your initial attendance I-20 is issued after you have been admitted to the University and have certified your finances. You use this I-20 to pay the I-901 fee and schedule your visa interview. (For students already inside the U.S. one school can transfer the SEVIS record to another school without the student having to reapply for the visa. Transfer regulations can be tricky, so consult with UIS.) You may have received I-20s from more than one school, but you should use the I-20 from the school you decide to attend because your visa will be issued with this school's name and you will enter the U.S. and report to the school on your visa and I-20.
2. Once you have checked in for your first semester your SEVIS record will be activated and you will receive your "continued attendance I-20", which will be uploaded to your accepted student portal. If you used an I-20 from another school to enter the U.S. or if you paid the I-901 fee on a different SEVIS ID (I-20 number), you must seek assistance from University Immigration Services (UIS) upon arrival.
3. If you travel, take your continued attendance I-20 to the UIS to get a travel signature at least one week ahead of your travel. You will need a recent travel signature on page two of your I-20 to re-enter the U.S. upon return.
4. UIS will issue you a new I-20 whenever there is a significant update to your SEVIS record. This includes changes in, program/graduation dates, change of major, the addition of a work authorization, etc.
These types of changes are typically prompted by your request, however there may be times when UIS receives information from another department that warrants a change. Be aware that some actions to your SEVIS record can change the end date on your I-20. Always know your current I-20 expiration date to avoid falling out of status by mistake.
UIS will contact you when there is a new I-20 issued and you need to pick this up. Remember you must keep all original I-20s safe as you will need them again when you apply for OPT. UIS recommends you save scans of all your I-20s on a device where you can access them in the future when needed.
5. Pay attention to the Program End date found in the Program of Study box on page one of your I-20. This date was originally applied to your I-20 based on the average length of undergraduate programs (4 years) or graduate programs (2 years). If you need more or less time, you must request this date be extended or shortened. It doesn't change automatically with your course registration nor with your financial guarantee documentation. Failure to extend a program prior to the I-20 end date could result in termination of your SEVIS record thus ending your F-1 visa status.
According to U.S. immigration regulations, the Program End date, also called the "completion date" is defined as when final degree requirements are completed. The actual completion date may not necessarily be the day of the graduation ceremony nor the last day of classes. If you apply for and are approved for OPT, then the completion date will extend to the OPT end date as indicated on your EAD (work permit card).
6. There is a 60-day grace period following the completion of coursework or following the OPT/STEM end date. A student can still transfer to another school or change education level at the same school within the 60-day grace period. Otherwise the student must depart the U.S. within the 60 days.

If you have questions about your I-20, please reach out to University Immigration Services at uis@newhaven.edu or use the inquiry form on UIS myCharger page.



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