



Applying for a Change of Visa Status from H-4 to F-1

H-4 visa holders are allowed to study in an academic program with no restrictions as far as online or face to face course enrollment. However, H-4 visa holders are not eligible for any type of employment whether on-campus or off-campus. Below is the general guidance for H-4 visa holders who are considering changing their visa status to F-1:

- The change of status application has to be **received** by USCIS while the H-4 is still in a valid status. Remember that the H-4 is in a valid status as long as the H1-B remains in a valid status. As long as the change of status application is received by USCIS while the H-4 is in status then USCIS will generally adjudicate the application even if the H-4 status expires. Please note this is at the discretion of USCIS.
- While USCIS general processing times are 2-3 months, most change of statuses will take much longer. Many change of status applications have taken up to nine (9) months for USCIS to process and some schools have reported a processing time of over twelve (12) months. **Students should plan for a minimum USCIS processing time of between four (4) and nine (9) months.**
- Applicants may contact USCIS after 90 days from their application receipt notice date to inquire about their application. There are very limited options to request an expedite for an application and to learn more about USCIS's expedite policy go to [USCIS Expedite](#). The ISSS cannot intervene with USCIS to request an expedite.
- Students filing for a change of status will not be eligible for any benefits related to the F-1 visa status (i.e. employment) until their change of status is approved
- Once the application is filed you cannot travel outside the U.S. or your change of visa status will be considered abandoned
- Once your change of visa status is approved, the next time you travel outside the U.S. you will be required to apply for an F-1 visa before you will be permitted to re-enter the U.S.
- You will be required to attend the next available International Student Orientation
- You will be required to enroll in the System Student Health Insurance Plan (SSHIP) unless you meet one of the allowed waivers

Below are some additional questions that H-4 visa holders often have related to the change of status to F-1:

- 1) **How does a change of status application affect the student's tuition rate?** H-4 visa holders may be eligible for the in-state tuition rate during their studies as an H-4 once they have met the residency requirements as an H-4.
 - Filing for the change of status to F-1 will not immediately affect a student's residency for the university. Once the change of status is approved, the student's residency with the university will change to F-1 out of state/country in the NEXT semester.
 - F-1 international students automatically pay the out of state/country rate unless they have a full-time graduate assistantship or a \$1000 competitive scholarship.

For example, a student files an application in June and is enrolled in classes for the fall semester which began on August 31. The student's change of status is approved on September 28. This student's residency rate will not change from in state to out of state/country until the next semester (winter mini or spring).

- 2) **What are the requirements for eligibility for practical training (CPT or OPT)?** In order to be eligible for practical training a student must be enrolled for an academic year (fall/spring or spring/fall).
 - Students who apply for a change of status within the U.S. may count time spent under a different visa category toward this requirement as long as their previous enrollment meets the full course of study requirement as stated below.
 - Students who are in their final semester and enrolled in less than a full course of study may still count this enrollment toward this requirement.

- 3) **If I travel outside the U.S. to change my visa status will this impact by practical training eligibility?** Yes. Students who chose to depart the U.S. and re-enter the U.S. as an F-1 student will not be eligible until they are enrolled for one academic year of study (fall/spring or spring/fall). Once a student travels outside the U.S. and re-enters to change their visa status then the “eligibility clock” is reset.
- 4) **What if my application is delayed and I need to apply for CPT?** Generally, there are very limited options to request an expedite for an application and to learn more about USCIS’s expedite policy you may Google search *USCIS, help center, expedite*.
- It is very important that students file their change of status application to avoid these types of delays.
 - As mentioned, change of status applications have taken as long as nine (9) months for USCIS to process with some Texas schools reporting a processing time of over twelve (12) months.
 - Students should expect their application to take a minimum of between four (4) and nine (9) months.
- 5) **I am in my final semester, I am enrolled in less than a full course of study, and my application has not been approved yet. Can I “delay” my graduation so I can be eligible for OPT?** No. The ISSS will not grant a student permission to “delay” or “postpone” their graduation so they may retain their OPT eligibility. Generally, there are very limited options to request an expedite for an application and to learn more about USCIS’s expedite policy you may Google search *USCIS, help center, expedite*.
- It is very important that students file their change of status application to avoid these types of delays.
 - As mentioned, change of status applications have taken as long as nine (9) months for USCIS to process with some Texas schools reporting a processing time of over twelve (12) months.
 - Students should expect their application to take a minimum of between four (4) and nine (9) months.
- 6) **What is a full course of study?** Once the application is filed with USCIS the student will need to enroll in a full course of study as prescribed below.
- A full course of study is a minimum of 12 credit hours for undergraduates with 9 hours face to face and 9 credit hours for graduate students with 6 hours face to face. Only one online “W” course counts toward the full course of study requirement.
 - A full course of study is a minimum of 9 credit hours for undergraduates with 6 hours face to face and 3 credit hours for graduate students with 6 hours face to face. Only one online “W” course counts toward the full course of study requirement.

For example...a graduate student was enrolled in 12 hours (6 hours face to face and 6 hours online “W”) as an H-4 in the fall semester. The student enrolled for 9 hours (6 hours face to face and 3 hours online “W”) for spring and applied for a change of status to F-1. As long as the change of status is approved prior to the summer semester this student would be eligible for practical training starting in the summer.

*For example...graduate student was enrolled for 12 credit hours (3 hours face to face and 9 hours online “W”) as an H-4 in the fall semester. The student enrolled for 9 hours (6 hours face to face and 3 hours online “W”) for spring and applied for the change of status to F-1. This student would not be eligible for practical training until **after** the fall semester because the student was not enrolled in a full course of study in the fall semester.*

Documents Required to Change Your Status from H-4 to F-1

Below is a checklist of all documents required for the change of status (COS). It is your responsibility to provide all documents as listed below. Incomplete applications will not be reviewed or processed. ***Before the ISSS can process a change of status to F-1 the individual must first be admitted to a degree program or the English Language Institute.*** Please email the following documents to Intl.Stu@tamuc.edu. DO NOT copy any alternate email or drop your documents off in person at the ISSS.

- Copy of approval notice (if applicable), current passport (***picture and data pages only***), visa, and I-94 for H-4 applying for the change of status and H1-B principal. ***DO NOT provide copies of every page of the passport.***
 - If paper copy I-94 provide a copy of the front and the back
 - If electronic record I-94 you may print a copy at [I-94 Arrival/Departure Record](#)
- Proof of funding for one year of study which equals an estimated \$20000 for ELI, \$26000 for graduate student, and \$28000 for undergraduate student plus \$3000 per dependent:
 - Proof of funding may be a bank statement (checking or savings account) or certificate of deposit and will to cover the ***previous 3 months***.
 - A letter from a bank, employment letter (for F-1), or Admission Purposes Only financial guarantee ***will not be accepted.***
 - Applicants must need include the ISSS sponsor statement (for sponsors ***outside*** the U.S.) or the [Form I-134](#) (for sponsors ***within*** the U.S.) at [Funding Requirements for I-20](#).
- Current letter of employment for H1-B principal confirming dates of employment.
- Letter stating reason for change of status.

DO NOT submit the following documents or any additional documents not listed above:

- i) W-2's or tax returns
- ii) Marriage license
- iii) SSN card
- iv) Driver's license
- v) I-539

Incomplete applications will not be reviewed or processed and it is your responsibility to provide all documents listed above via email to Intl.Stu@tamuc.edu.

The ISSS will review all documents and issue the F-1 I-20 for the COS if eligible within 10 business days. Once your COS has been processed you will be emailed the copy of the COS I-20 along with instructions to file online electronically or by mail. Students will only receive a copy of the COS I-20.

Please note that once the application is processed the person applying for COS will need to pay the \$200 SEVIS I-901 fee at <https://www.fmjfee.com/i901fee/index.jsp>. Be sure to keep a copy of your payment receipt for your records and to submit with your online application (I-539). This fee is non-refundable once payment is made.