Change of Status (COS) Instructions

It is possible for a non-immigrant to change visa status while remaining in the U.S. First, you must obtain the Form I-20 or Form DS-2019 from the International Office. After receiving the I-20 or DS-2019 and paying the SEVIS fee, you must submit an application for the Change of Status (COS) to USCIS. This approval can take approximately three to four months to receive from USCIS so plan accordingly.

HOW LONG MUST I MAINTAIN MY CURRENT IMMIGRATION STATUS?
Individuals must maintain their current non-immigrant status until at least 30 days prior to the report date listed on the I-20 or DS-2019 AND until a Receipt Notice issued by USCIS has been received.

HOW LONG WILL MY COS APPLICATION TAKE?
Check the "Case Status Online and Processing Times" page of the USCIS website ("http://www.uscis.gov") to determine current processing times. Applications usually take three to four months to process from the date of the Receipt Notice.

CAN I LEAVE THE U.S. WITH A PENDING COS APPLICATION?
If an individual departs the U.S. while the COS application is pending, he or she is considered to have abandoned the COS application. Departure from the U.S. without the COS approval will result in a cancellation of the application. Exit and re-entry to the U.S. after obtaining a U.S. visa stamp at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate abroad will be necessary.

CAN I LEAVE THE U.S. AFTER RECEIVING THE APPROVAL NOTICE FOR THE COS?
Individuals may remain in the U.S. after the COS has been approved. If you leave the U.S., you must apply for and receive a visa stamp in your passport to be able to re-enter the U.S. in the new status.

WHAT IF I HAVEN'T RECEIVED THE COS APPROVAL BY THE START OF CLASSES?
Individuals currently in the U.S. in a status that permits full-time study (including, but not limited to H-1B, H-4 and J-2) may begin attending classes on the scheduled I-20/DS-2019 start date, even if the COS has not yet been granted, provided that the individual has received the COS Receipt Notice from USCIS. Individuals currently in the U.S. in a status that does not permit full-time study (including, but not limited to, B-1/B-2 and F-2) may not attend classes until the COS has been approved and the Approval Notice has been received.

Contact the International Office if you have not received your approval notice two weeks prior to the I-20/DS-2019 start date.

WHAT SHOULD I DO AFTER I RECEIVE THE COS APPROVAL NOTICE?
Once the COS application has been approved you must check-in at the International Office. Bring your passport, I-20/DS-2019, and COS Approval Notice to the International Office during business hours.

COS Application

To change your status to a student status (F-1 or J-1) you must provide the following documents to the appropriate USCIS office. Check the Form I-539 instructions to determine to which address you should mail your application. Retain a photocopy your entire COS application before sending to USCIS:

- Form I-539 - Form must be completed and signed by you. The I-539 is available under the "Immigration Forms" section on the USCIS web site: "http://www.uscis.gov".
- Processing Fee - Check or money order made out to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Check USCIS for correct fee amount.
- An original I-20 or DS-2019 issued by Northwestern University - Make sure that you provide all pages of the forms and check to see that the form is signed by both you and the appropriate school official in the appropriate places;
- Proof of SEVIS fee payment. You can pay the SEVIS fee on-line at "www.fmjfee.com". You must have the I-20/DS-2019 to pay the SEVIS fee;
- Proof of adequate Financial Support - Original bank documents, student loan information, scholarships, fellowships, teaching or research assistantships indicating that you or your sponsor has the financial ability to cover your educational and living expenses for one full academic year. The amount you must prove will be indicated on your I-20 or DS-2019;
- Photocopies of Passport - biographical and current visa pages;
- I-94 - The electronic I-94 verification can be found and printed here. Include this copy in your application. A few people may still have a paper I-94 that is a white card often stapled inside your passport. If so, the original document should be included in your application.
- Dependent(s) - If you have dependent(s) that are applying for a change of status to F-2 or J-2 with you, you will also need to include photocopies of their passport biographical page(s), current visa stamp(s) and I-94 information. You must also include their original I-20 or DS-2019 issued by Northwestern University. Additionally, you must provide financial support for your dependent(s). The amount is indicated on your I-20 or DS-2019;
- Additional Documents - Additional documents may be needed. Please see the Change of Status page of our website ("http://www.northwestern.edu/international/student/new/status.html") for information regarding your particular type of change of status.

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