

**Change of Status (COS) Guide**

**Northwestern University  
International Office**

Previous Status	New Status	How early should I submit my application for the COS to USCIS?	Can I study before my new status has been approved?	Can I work before my new status has been approved?	Can I receive an assistantship or other NU funding (not including NU loans) <u>before</u> my new status has been approved?	When can I begin to work on Optional Practical Training (OPT) or Curricular Practical Training (CPT)?	What should I do if I have not received my approval by the start date listed on my NU I-20?	What should I do once I receive the I-797 COS Approval Notice from USCIS?
B-1/B-2	F-1	See Application Timeline below.	No	No, not even on campus.	No	<b>OPT:</b> After one academic year of full-time enrollment in F-1 status. <b>CPT:</b> In most cases, after one academic year of full-time enrollment in F-1 status.	Contact the International Office.	Check-in with the International Office upon receipt of the Approval Notice. Bring your passport and I-20.
F-2	F-1	See Application Timeline below.	No. Please contact an advisor if you have any questions.	No, not even on campus.	No	<b>OPT:</b> After one academic year of full-time enrollment in F-1 status. <b>CPT:</b> In most cases, after one academic year of full-time enrollment in F-1 status.	Contact the International Office.	Check-in with the International Office upon receipt of the Approval Notice. Bring your passport and I-20.
H-1B	F-1	See Application Timeline below.	Yes	No, not even on campus.  H-1B employment must end at the expiration of the H-1B status or upon approval of the F-1 status, whichever is earlier.	No	<b>OPT:</b> After one academic year of full-time enrollment in a status that permits full-time study. Time accrued studying in H-1B status can be credited toward the one academic year requirement. <b>CPT:</b> In most cases, after one academic year of full-time enrollment in a status that permits full-time study. Time accrued studying in H-1B status can be credited toward the one academic year requirement.	H-1B status-holders may begin attending classes full-time as long as the H-1B status was maintained until at least 30 days prior to the I-20 start date AND the I-797 COS Receipt Notice has been received. If the Approval Notice has not yet been received by the I-20 start date, the I-20 must be deferred. Contact the International Office to request the deferral. Remember: as long as the H-1B status was maintained until at least 30 days prior to the I-20 start date AND the I-797 Receipt Notice has been received, the H-1B may attend classes full-time while the application is pending.	Check-in with the International Office upon receipt of the Approval Notice. Bring your passport and I-20.

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H-4	F-1	See Application Timeline below.	Yes	No, not even on campus.	No	<p><b>OPT:</b> After one academic year of full-time enrollment in a status that permits full-time study. Time accrued studying in H-4 status can be credited toward the one academic year requirement.</p> <p><b>CPT:</b> In most cases, after one academic year of full-time enrollment in a status that permits full-time study. Time accrued studying in H-4 status can be credited toward the one academic year requirement.</p>	Contact the International Office.	Check-in with the International Office upon receipt of the Approval Notice. Bring your passport and I-20.
J-1* (see note below)	F-1	See Application Timeline below.	Yes	Yes	Yes	<p><b>OPT:</b> After one academic year of full-time enrollment in a status that permits full-time study. Time accrued studying in J-1 status can be credited toward the one academic year requirement.</p> <p><b>CPT:</b> In most cases, after one academic year of full-time enrollment in a status that permits full-time study. Time accrued studying in J-1 status can be credited toward the one academic year requirement.</p>	Contact the International Office.	Check-in with the International Office upon receipt of the Approval Notice. Bring your passport and I-20.
F-1	J-1* (see note below)	See Application Timeline below.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not applicable. Contact the International Office to discuss J-1 employment options.	Contact the International Office.	Check-in with the International Office upon receipt of the Approval Notice. Bring your passport and I-20.
F-1 or H-4	F-2	Submit COS application with the F-1 application.	F-2 dependents are not eligible to study full-time in the U.S. Please contact an advisor if you have any questions.	F-2 dependents are not eligible for employment authorization.	Not applicable.	F-2 dependents are not eligible for employment authorization.	Not applicable.	Check-in with the International Office upon receipt of the Approval Notice. Bring your passport and I-20.

**Application Timeline:**

It is recommended individuals maintain their current non-immigrant status until at least 30 days prior to the report date listed on the I-20/DS-2019 AND until a Receipt Notice issued by USCIS has been received.

**Individuals not permitted to receive NU funding until the new status is approved:**

If your current status does not permit you to receive an assistantship or other NU funding (not including NU loans) until the new status has been approved, it is possible to expedite your application based on receipt of the award. Include with your COS application an official award letter from your department and a letter from yourself explaining the hardship of not receiving the award if the COS is not approved prior to the start of classes.

**Individuals changing from B-1/B-2 to F-1 status:**

Individuals in B-1/B-2 status may change status to F-1 only if, at the time of entry to the U.S., an indication was made to immigration officials of the intent to study in the U.S. In most cases, an immigration officer will stamp the I-94 card with a "Prospective Student" notation. Part of the application process will include a questionnaire which asks why you did not apply for a student visa to come to the U.S. The questionnaire verifies that you did not have fraudulent intent upon application for the visitor visa or upon entry to the U.S.

**Individuals changing to a dependent status (F-2 or J-2):**

Please provide proof of your relationship to the F-1 or J-1, such as a marriage or birth certificate. Furthermore, copies of the F-1 or J-1 Form I-20 or DS-2019, passport ID page, current visa stamp if applicable, and current I-94 card should be submitted with the application. Financial evidence documenting support for both the F-1/J-1 and F-2/J-2 must accompany the application.

**\*Changing to and from the J-1 status:**

A change of status from F-1 to J-1 may not always be possible. Unless you are participating in an established exchange program, a significant portion of your financial support (non-loan based) must come from your home government, a U.S. government agency, an international organization, or scholarships, fellowships and assistantships from Northwestern University (NU loans of any kind do not constitute institutional support). Check the J-1 status requirements on your [I-20/DS-2019 Request Form](#) for more details concerning the difference between the F and J statuses. Change to the J-1 status should not be for the sole purpose of obtaining employment eligibility for yourself and/or your dependents.

As a J-1, you may be, or may become, subject to the 2-year home country physical presence requirement after the completion of your degree program, which could affect your future U.S. immigration options. Please link to the [Department of State](#) website for more information about the 2-year home residency requirement. If you are changing status from J to another status and are subject to the 2-year home residency requirement, you must first obtain a waiver of the requirement OR leave the U.S. and apply for the visa stamp abroad.