Information on Change of Status Applications vs. Consular Applications

U.S. regulations generally require a student who will be studying full-time in the U.S. to hold a visa that allows study. Some visa types allow study, even though the purpose of the visa is not specifically for study. These include dependent visas, such as J-2, TD, O-3, and H-4. A dependent visa is valid only until the dependent turns 21 years of age; then he or she must have their own independent visa.

If a student wishes to have an immigration status that is specifically for full-time study, then the F-1 student visa, or the J-1 exchange student visa is appropriate. These visa types require the payment of a SEVIS/I-901 fee to the government ($350 for F-1 students and $220.00 for J-1 students).

These student visa types will allow the student to receive additional employment and study benefits, including work authorization on-campus, extension of stay to complete a program, transfer of program to a new U.S. school, etc.

There are two ways to obtain the appropriate student visa status for persons currently in the US in another nonimmigrant status:

1. **Visa Application Abroad**: Obtain an F-1 or J-1 status by departing the U.S. with the I-20 form (F-1 students) or DS-2019 form (J-1 students) issued by the IS office, and applying for the F-1 or J-1 student visa at a U.S. Embassy. If the visa is approved, you then use the Form and visa to re-enter the U.S. in the new student status. This is usually faster than applying for a change of status from within the U.S. There is no guarantee, however, that the visa will be approved quickly, though most are approved within a month. This requires that the student pay both the SEVIS fee and the visa application fee.

2. **Change of Status Application within the U.S.**: Obtain F-1 or J-1 “status” without departing the US. This does not give you a new “visa” from an embassy – only the status of “student” within the U.S. This requires you to apply to the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for a change of immigration status (COS). This application can take 8-9 months to approve. This requires that the student pay both the SEVIS/I-901 fee and the change of status USCIS application fee.
   a. **Eligibility**:
      i. Applicants must be eligible to apply for a change of status (CoS). There are reasons why some people are ineligible for a CoS. For example, if you have held J-1 status and you are subject to the 212(e) home residency requirement, you are not eligible to file for a change of status in the US until you receive a waiver of the 212(e) requirement, or the 2 year home-residency is met. It is very important to know if you are eligible to apply for your CoS in the US. Consult with an immigration attorney to determine eligibility for a COS application.

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i. Applicants must be able to maintain your current immigration status to within 30 days of the academic program start date, as it is listed on your I-20 form or DS-2019 form. If the current status expires more than 30 days in advance of the academic program start date listed on your I-20 form or DS-2019 form, then the Change of Status application will be denied.

Procedures
Please follow the instructions below for the option you have chosen.

**Travel & Visa Application:** Obtain the I-20 or DS-2019 and gain the new visa and status
1. Request I-20 or DS-2019 via compass.uga.edu. You will need to update the following documents:
   a. Your financial documents. This can be a UGA Assistantship Letter, personal bank statement, or, if sponsored by an outside organization or person, the bank statement and / or an original notarized letter of support. All financial evidence must be less than 3 months old.
   b. Passport copy, including any extension pages.
   c. Most recent I-94 document - [https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94](https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94)
2. Once the initial I-20 or DS-2019 has been issued, payment of the SEVIS fee at [https://www.fmjfee.com/i901fee/index.html](https://www.fmjfee.com/i901fee/index.html) is required. Paying the SEVIS fee online provides a printable receipt immediately. The receipt should be retained and will be necessary for the visa appointment abroad.
3. Use the SEVIS number, found on the initial I-20 or DS-2019, to schedule the visa appointment.
4. See the list of U.S. embassies here: [http://www.usembassy.gov/](http://www.usembassy.gov/)

**Change of Status application with USCIS online - OR - by mail:**

1. Request I-20 or DS-2019 via compass.uga.edu. Please provide the following documents:
   a. Indicate that a Change of Status application is planned in the I-20 request e-form
   b. Financial Documentation. This can be a UGA Assistantship Letter, personal bank statement, or, if sponsored by an outside organization or person, the bank statement and / or an original notarized letter of support. All financial evidence must be less than 3 months old.
   c. Passport copy, including any extension pages.
   d. Most recent I-94 document - [https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94](https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94)

**Applying Online**
1. Use a desktop, laptop, phone, or tablet to complete the application at [http://www.uscis.gov/i-539](http://www.uscis.gov/i-539)
   - Log in or create a new USCIS account at: [https://myaccount.uscis.gov/](https://myaccount.uscis.gov/)
   - Prepare your documents:

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i. Review the list of required documented from the mailing instructions below.

- Instead of 2 checks that are normally required when mailing the application, be prepared to pay the USCIS application fees by credit card

**Applying by Mail**

1. Assemble the following items to mail to USCIS:
   a. Completed G-1145 Form: [https://www.uscis.gov/g-1145](https://www.uscis.gov/g-1145)
   b. The complete, dated, and signed USCIS I-539: [https://www.uscis.gov/i-539](https://www.uscis.gov/i-539)
   c. Two checks or money orders made out to the "U.S. Department of Homeland Security." The first check is for the amount of $370.00 and is the filing fee for the Form I-539. The second check is for the amount of $85.00 and is for the biometric services fee required for you and for each person included on the F
   d. A cover letter explaining your desire to change your status.
   e. Newly issued UGA I-20/DS-2019 requesting change of status signed by applicant and IS advisor
   f. I-901 fee receipt (this is paid after I-20 is issued here): [https://www.fmjfee.com/index.jhtml](https://www.fmjfee.com/index.jhtml)
   g. Proof of Admission to UGA. This can be the admission letter or a 'letter of enrollment' from the Registrar's Office.
   h. Original financial documents (no faxes, bank, or internet print-outs will be accepted). This can be a UGA Assistantship Letter, personal bank statement, or, if sponsored by someone, an organization, etc., the original statement and an original notarized letter of support. All financials must be less than 3 months old.
   i. Copy of your valid passport, including any extension pages.
   j. Copy of I-94 - [https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/consent.html](https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/consent.html)
   k. Copy of your current visa stamp in passport
   l. Copy of your current or previous immigration documentation.
   m. J-1 applicants only: Proof of 212(e) waiver approval or completion of two years in home country

2. Mail your application to the following address by a trackable mailing service to the USCIS Dallas Lockbox:

**For U.S. Postal Service (USPS):**

USCIS  
P.O. Box 660166  
Dallas, TX 75266

**For FedEx, UPS, and DHL deliveries:**

USCIS ATTN: I-539  
2501 S. State Highway 121 Business  
Suite 400  
Lewisville, TX 7506

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Premium Processing
CoS applicants have the option of filing for Premium Processing by submitting Form I-907 request to USCIS. The fee for Premium Processing will be an additional $1,750.

Important reminders:

- You must submit Form I-907 the same way you submit Form I-539.
  - If you mail a paper Form I-539 to USCIS, you must mail a paper Form I-907.
  - If you submit Form I-539 online to USCIS, you must submit Form I-907 online.
- Applicants must submit their biometrics before premium processing can begin. Even if USCIS accepts an applicant’s Form I-907 and accompanying fees, the time limit for premium processing will not start running until the applicant and all co-applicants included on the Form I-539 submit their biometrics. Please note, USCIS may reject an applicant’s Form I-907 and/or Form I-539 if submitted with another benefit request, including multiple Forms I-907 requests filed together.
- To file Form I-907 online, an applicant must first create a USCIS online account, which provides a convenient and secure method to submit forms, pay fees, and track the status of any pending USCIS immigration request throughout the adjudication process.
- An immigration attorney is strongly recommended to assist applicants with the change of status application.

Important Notes

- An immigration attorney is strongly recommended to assist applicants with the change of status application.
- Estimated processing time for USCIS is approximately 6-12 months. These times change regularly and without notice. Please check the USCIS web site for current processing times at the Vermont Service Center: egov.uscis.gov
- A week or two after filing the application, an I-797 Notice of Receipt will be provided from the government. Applicants are responsible for providing Immigration Services a copy of your receipt notice, any request for evidences you may receive, proof of your change of status approval and I-94.
- The check the status of your application on-line tool may be used with the receipt number found in the top left corner of the I-797 receipt notice. Visit egov.uscis.gov/casestatus to view case status.
- If a Request for Evidence (RFE) from the USCIS, consult with Immigration Services and/or your immigration attorney before responding.
- Applicants may attend school while your change of status application is pending at USCIS unless the current status is F-2 or B-2 tourist. Furthermore, an assistantship, or on-campus or off-campus employment of any kind may not begin until the change of status has been approved by the USCIS.
- After a change of status from within the US, a new visa stamp may be necessary for the
new status if travelling abroad. This will involve a visit to a US embassy or consulate during that trip. Consult with Immigration Services about this process well before the trip.

- Once the Change of Status is approved, you will need to contact our office immediately so we can issue a new immigration forms and advise on the immigration check in process.

- Immigration Services reminds students that a change of status application is the responsibility of the applicant. Immigration Services has provided the above information as a courtesy and recommends that persons with complex applications consult a competent immigration attorney before proceeding.