

International Student Handbook

Trevecca Nazarene University

FROM CALLING TO BECOMING

Discern your calling and discover your purpose. Become Christlike leaders, step into who God is inviting you to become and bring healing to a broken world.

International Student Handbook

TREVECCA INTERNATIONAL EXECUTIVE
STUDIES GRADUATE PROGRAMS

Obtaining a visa & immigration status

This section covers the information, process and forms needed to obtain the F-1 immigration status; also frequently referred to as F-1 status (F status).

The F-1 visa allows you to legally enter the U.S. as a student. The F immigration status on the other hand allows you to legally stay in the U.S. for the duration of your studies.

Most international students come to the U.S. as F-1 students. They either financially support themselves, and/or are financially sponsored by family or friends. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security regulates the issuance of all non-immigrant visas, including the F-1.

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) is the agency under the **U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS)** that regulates all immigration laws, standards, practices and procedures, including F-1 immigration status.

Prior to applying for an F-1 visa, students must first apply for an academic program. The application at Trevecca can be found at trevecca.edu/applynow. An enrollment counselor will assist you through the application steps. If you are accepted into the academic program applied for, you will need to provide the following additional materials before you can apply for an F-1 visa.

Requirements for international students after academic acceptance

- 1. Proof of Financial Support.** Trevecca will provide a certification form for you to complete and sign, and you must also submit a bank statement showing sufficient funds for 1 year of living and studying in the United States of America. The bank statement may be a screenshot of an online account, but must show the name of the bank account owner, a sufficient amount of funds to cover tuition and living expenses as defined by your program, and a date within the last 6 months.
- 2. Immunization records:** Students must show proof of immunization against Mumps, Measles, Rubella (MMR - 2 doses required), Meningitis and chicken Pox (Varicella). Students may also show proof of the disease in lieu of a Chicken Pox vaccination.
- 3. Copy of ID page of Passport** (including photo)

These items can be emailed to your enrollment counselor.

When completing the finance forms, remember to remind your bank to convert all figures into U.S. dollars, and attach all necessary documents (e.g. bank letter/statement, sponsor's proof of income, proof of an approved loan or evidence of a scholarship) before returning them to your DSO or international student advisor. Please attach documents that are original and translated into English.

Please submit these documents, either by regular mail or as attachments to an email, to your international student admissions counselor.

I-20

After you have received acceptance into your academic program and the university has verified the additional required documents for international students, Trevecca will issue you an I-20 form.

The I-20 form is a very important document. It is required in order to apply for and obtain your F-1 student visa, and it must be maintained and regularly updated throughout your stay in the US.

The Designated School Official (DSO) is responsible for entering the information listed on the I-20 form into the database for the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS), known as **SEVIS: Student & Exchange Visitor Information System**. The information is viewed by Department of State officials at the U.S. Consulate when you go to apply for an F-1 visa.

The I-20 form will also be reviewed and verified by a U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Officer when you enter the U.S.

SEVIS Fee & Payment Receipt

As a new applicant, you must pay a one-time I-901 SEVIS fee for the F-1 visa to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security before you can apply for a visa. **You will need the SEVIS fee payment receipt in order to apply for your visa** at the U.S. Consulate in your home country. This fee is not required for F-2 dependents.

You must pay the SEVIS fee in **U.S. dollars**, either online (using a credit card) or through the mail (by U.S. check, money order, or bank draft). Once payment is received, it takes three business days to be processed. This means that your payment must be received at least three days before you apply for a visa at the U.S. Consulate in your country (or at least three days before your entry into the U.S. if you are a Canadian citizen).

You must have your I-20 form before you can pay the SEVIS fee. After receiving a Form I-20, you will need to know your SEVIS identification number. The SEVIS identification number is printed in the upper right section of the I-20. The TNU school code can be found on your I-20. Detailed information and instructions paying the fee can be accessed at www.fmjfee.com/i901fee/.

Consulate Appointment

Once you have received your I-20 and your SEVIS fee payment receipt, make an appointment at the U.S. Consulate or embassy in your home country to apply for the visa: usembassy.state.gov.

While Consulate procedures for the F-1 visa may differ from country to country, the application process usually includes a short interview in English, several forms that you need to complete, and a processing fee. When you go to the U.S. Consulate, **you must bring originals of all required documents** for your F-1 visa application. Your passport must be valid for **at least six months** from the date of your appointment at the Consulate.

When your application is approved, an F-1 visa stamp will be added to your passport.

U.S. Entry

After receiving your F-1 visa, you will be ready to enter the U.S. within 30 days of school start date listed on your Form I-20 and receive your corresponding F-1 immigration status upon arrival in the U.S.

Please note, that when you enter the U.S., you may be subject to various security checks, including, being photographed and electronically fingerprinted. This is a routine procedure for anyone entering the U.S. with a visa and is part of the safety measures taken by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

DHS regulations require that you enter the U.S. based on the Form I-20 from Trevecca Nazarene University or any other U.S. college that you plan to attend. **If you do not do so, it is a violation of F-1 immigration laws and can result in loss of your student immigration status.** Your passport must be valid for **at least 6 months** past your entry date to the U.S. Be sure that you do not use a tourist visa or any other visa type to enter into the United States when your purpose is for study.

Report to your college

It is extremely important that you safeguard your I-20 form, and do not lose it. Your Form I-20, passport with valid F-1 visa stamp, and Form I-94 are critical to maintaining your status. The I-94 Form is a confirmation of your lawful entry into the U.S. You will be able to download and print a copy of this form by following the instructions at i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94.

Upon arriving in the U.S., you must report to **Trevecca Nazarene University** at the required time based on your program. Trevecca's address is **333 Murfreesboro Pike, Nashville, Tennessee, 37210**.

A P/DSO at your campus will validate your F status in SEVIS. To do so, you must provide him/her with the following original documents: passport, Form I-20, printout of your I-94, and proof of your US address. The P/DSO will make copies of these documents and maintain them for mandatory record-keeping purposes. You are required to begin classes on your official start date on I-20.

Failure to report to the college that issued the I-20 upon your U.S. arrival is a USCIS violation and can also result in loss of your student immigration status.

International Student Orientation/ Information Session: All new international students are required to attend the International Student Information Session. You will learn about important SEVIS regulations, F-1 visa laws, and school resources that directly impact your life as an international student in the U.S.

Maintaining your immigration status

One of the most important responsibilities you will have during your studies at TNU is to maintain your immigration status. This section will assist you in doing that.

Remember, immigration status is often referred to as just **"status."** Maintaining your status is often referred to as **"being in status,"** which means that you have fulfilled all U.S. F-1 requirements and regulations and followed all procedures.

If you fail to adhere to any F regulations, you could lose your status, be required to leave the U.S., and be denied re-entry. Therefore, it's very important that you meet with your DSO at least once a semester or whenever there's a qualifying event such as a change of address, international travel, medical emergency, or anything that will cause you to attend classes on less than a full-time basis.

Also, keep in mind that immigration laws often change. Your DSO will keep you informed. In addition, you should also check The Department of Homeland Security website www.ice.gov/sevis/index.htm from time to time for any updates.

RULES FOR MAINTAINING YOUR STATUS:

Personal Information

Anytime there is a change to your physical address, email address, or phone number, you must notify your DSO at Trevecca immediately so that we can update this information in SEVIS.

Your I-20 Form

Students should always have an I-20 form that accurately reflects their current information. Any changes to a students' program of study or expected graduation date should be reported to a DSO immediately so that the updated information can be reviewed, approved, and placed onto a new I-20 form for the student. Within 20 days of each new semester, students should check in with a DSO at Trevecca to verify their presence and attendance in classes.

Trevecca encourages students to keep all copies of I-20s. Particularly when working with CPT or OPT employment, it is possible the IRS may ask for documentation of work authorization during a former semester or academic year. For this reason, and others, it is best practice for students to keep every I-20 they are issues throughout their time on F-1 status.

Program Dates

If the program end date on your I-20 does not accurately reflect your anticipated graduation date, it is the student's responsibility to notify a DSO at Trevecca and formally request an extension of the program. This request must be made before the current program end date. Please note that it is not sufficient to simply notify an academic advisor. We do not have the ability to extend a program after your program end date has passed, so it is very important to notify us with sufficient time to make the change.

Class Schedule

Students are required to be enrolled full-time for regular semesters while on an F-1 visa. For traditional undergraduate students, "regular semesters" are Fall and Spring.

Full-time student status at Trevecca is defined as a minimum of 12 credit hours during Fall/Spring Semester for Undergraduate Students, and a minimum of 6 credit hours per semester for graduate students.

Students must have permission from a DSO at Trevecca for a reduced course load, and must also have an updated I-20 issued to them with a reduced course load authorized and notated.

For graduate students, you must be enrolled each semester that is a standard part of your program. Please note that most graduate programs at Trevecca operate with a non-traditional cohort model, and thus do not have a typical “summer break.”

Students desiring to take any time off from normal full-time status need to seek permission and guidance from a DSO at Trevecca prior to doing so.

On-Campus Employment

Unless authorized by a DSO for CPT or OPT, employment for F-1 students is limited to jobs on campus. Companies that directly provide a service for students on the campus of Trevecca Nazarene University may be considered on-campus employment (such as the bookstore, cafeteria, etc.). If you have questions about whether a job will be considered “on-campus employment,” please verify with a DSO prior to working.

Employment on campus is limited to 20 hours per week while you are in an academic semester, per F-1 visa regulations. Please note that this is not an average. For each individual week, hours worked should not exceed 20. Working more than 20 hours per week during an academic term, unless authorized by CPT or OPT, is a violation of F-1 visa status and will lead to termination of status.

During official university breaks (Summer, Spring, Winter breaks), students may work full-time on campus.

Off-Campus Employment

As an F-1 student, all off-campus employment must be authorized by a Designated School Official (DSO). Please note that it is not sufficient to simply notify a DSO that you plan to work off campus. You must physically have an I-20 that shows work authorization before you can begin work in an off-campus job. The federal government views unauthorized employment as a very serious offense, and it will lead to termination of your F-1 status, most likely without the ability to apply for reinstatement. Please be sure that you work with your DSO to apply for CPT or OPT if you are interested in working off-campus. There are two types of off-campus employment allowed for F-1 students:

Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

- Students are eligible to apply for CPT after one year of F-1 status. In the event that an internship or off-campus work experience is required for the program, CPT may be authorized as early as Day 1 of the program. Students enrolled in an IES program at Trevecca will be immediately eligible for CPT, but must still apply and receive authorization from the DSO, as well as verify CPT authorization on their I-20 form prior to working.
- Students must be enrolled full-time while school is in session when working on CPT.
- CPT must be an integral part of your program of study. Most commonly, this means that students should receive class credit for CPT.

- In all cases, an academic advisor or program director must verify that the student's work opportunity is a valid training experience for their program of study.
- In all cases, students need to submit Trevecca's official CPT application to a DSO to request CPT authorization. A DSO will review the application to verify the student's eligibility.
- If eligible, the DSO will then update the student's I-20 with the CPT authorization. You must have a physical copy of the updated I-20 showing CPT authorization for your specific job before you can begin to work. CPT cannot be "backdated" to reflect a start date in the past. If you work off-campus for any time without CPT authorization on your I-20, then you have worked without authorization.
- Note that authorization for one CPT experience does not automatically qualify you to continue the same experience after the CPT end date, and it does not qualify you for other CPT experiences. Each individual work opportunity must receive a new authorization.
- CPT is typically approved one semester at a time, but may be granted for up to one year at a time. Students must pay attention to their CPT authorization dates. Working past the authorization dates or starting prior to the authorization date is unauthorized employment.
- CPT may be approved for full-time (more than 20 hours per week) or part-time (20 hours or less per week). Please note that working more than one year on full-time CPT will make you ineligible for post-completion OPT. There is not a limit on the amount of part-time CPT that you can work, as long as each opportunity is properly authorized.

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

- OPT is most commonly done after completing your program, but may also be applied for as a pre-completion training.
- Post-Completion OPT (most common) provides an opportunity for students to gain practical work experience related to their program of study for up to one year. An extension is available for students in STEM related fields to apply for.
- The application for OPT is extensive. The Office of Global Engagement will hold informational sessions each semester for students interested in applying for OPT.
- Students must consult with a DSO prior to applying for OPT. OPT must be recommended on a student's SEVIS record and the student must receive an updated I-20 reflecting this recommendation. SEVIS will approve or deny a student's application for OPT. If approved, the student will receive an Employer Authorization Document (EAD). More detailed information will be provided for any student that applies for OPT

****An important note regarding Employment without authorization:**

As is the case with any F-1 violation, Trevecca Nazarene University and the Office of Global Engagement are required by law to report proven cases of unauthorized employment of F-1 students. The US government views unauthorized employment for an F-1 student as a particularly serious offense, and it can have serious consequences. If you participate in unauthorized

employment, your F-1 status will be terminated, and it is likely you will be required to leave the US immediately. In cases of status violations, we encourage students to seek counsel from an experienced immigration attorney to discuss your specific situation and options.

Social Security Number

If you obtain a job while in the U.S., you will need to obtain a Social Security card from a U.S. Social Security Office. This card will contain your Social Security Number (**SSN**). You will need a SSN for tax and employment purposes. Your Social Security Number is permanent, so you only need to apply once.

To obtain a Social Security number, you will need verification of a job offer (or verification that your academic program will require you to work). You will then see a DSO in the Office of Global Engagement, and they will assist you with securing an appointment at the social security administration office to obtain your SSN.

Taxes

International students earning money while in the U.S. are subject to federal and state income taxes, and will need to complete a W-4 form prior to working.

International students must report their annual U.S. income by filing federal (Form 1040 or 1040 EZ) and state income tax returns each year, even if they do not work or receive some other form of U.S. income. Students who do not earn U.S. income in a given year are required to file U.S. Internal Revenue Form 8843, which can be downloaded at <http://www.irs.gov>. For more information and help in filing taxes, students should consult an accountant or other qualified tax professional.

The Office of Global Engagement at Trevecca will provide tax information resources for international students, typically during the spring semester each year. Please see a DSO in the office of Global Engagement for questions related to filing taxes.

Travel

Please notify the Office of Global Engagement each time you plan to travel outside of the US, and also obtain a travel authorization on your I-20. If you wish to travel for the purposes of renewing your visa, please notify a DSO in the Office of Global Engagement so that they can assist you with your plans and ensure you have the proper documentation.

Online Classes

Per F-1 visa regulations, students may only take 3 credit hours towards a full-time course load via online studies. For graduate students, this means that at least 3 hours per semester must be taken through courses with an on-campus requirement. For traditional undergraduate students, at least 9 credit hours per semester must be taken through courses with an on-campus requirement. For questions related to this policy, please see a DSO.

Grace Period

Following your program end date, you will have a 60-day grace period before you will be required to leave the country. During this time, you may not work (on or off campus) or study. Working or studying during the grace period is considered a violation of status. Options to extend your stay past the 60-day grace period include:

- Applying for Post-Completion OPT
- Transferring your SEVIS record to another institution for a new program of study, or being admitted for a new level of study at Trevecca

Transferring your SEVIS Record

If you wish to transfer your SEVIS record to another institution, all transfers must be completed prior to the end of your 60-day grace period. Please communicate ahead of time with your DSO at Trevecca, and also work with the DSO at your new university to determine their process. Many schools have a "Transfer In" form that they require, which should be given to your DSO at Trevecca. At the very least, you should have a formal acceptance letter from the new university before we will be able to transfer your record.

As soon as your SEVIS record is transferred, any OPT or CPT work authorization is canceled immediately. The student also cannot continue to work on-campus at the former institution. For these reasons, please work with the DSO at Trevecca to ensure that you plan carefully for the transfer date.

Transferring your SEVIS Record

All requests made to DSOs at Trevecca need to be made in writing via email for documentation purposes. While we are happy to respond as much as possible to calling or texting for general communication purposes, texting or calling a DSO to ask for items such as program extensions, CPT or OPT authorization, travel requests, etc. will not be sufficient. All formal requests must be made in writing via email.

A Final Note

While the Designated School Officials at Trevecca will do everything possible to provide support and guidance for students, ultimately, the responsibility to maintain visa status falls on the student. The information provided in this document is not meant to be a comprehensive list of all F-1 visa regulations. Instead, this document provides basic guidance for some of the most common issues facing international students.

