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Welcome to F-1 Immigration Basics. This presentation was developed to assist new international students attending Illinois State University on F-1 student visas. It has been designed to help you better understand how the United States immigration regulations affect your student life.

International Student and Scholar Services (or I Triple S) is the campus office dedicated to assisting ISU international students. We are here to help advise you if you have questions regarding your F-1 status, but it is important to remember that you are ultimately responsible for knowing the immigration regulations and taking appropriate action to maintain your legal status.

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Immigration Basic #1 – Keep your immigration documents updated and safe

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As an F-1 student, one of your most important immigration documents is your I-20. This document is unique to F-1 student status and contains information regarding who you are, what you are studying, and how you will pay for your education. It is important that the information on your I-20 is correct. If any of the information on the I-20 you received in your Admissions Packet is incorrect, please contact Admissions@ilstu.edu.

It is important to note the dates on your I-20 document. Your program start date should correspond with the start of the semester for which you were admitted. You cannot enter the US more than 30 days prior to this date and you must check-in with International Student and Scholar Services by this date.

Your program end date is based on the average time it takes for a student to complete. You are expected to finish your program on or before this date, therefore, it is important to make sure your Academic Advisor is aware of this date, so they can help you plan accordingly. The program end date on your I-20 (not your visa expiration date) is what determines how long you can stay legally in the US in F-1 status.

It is also important that you sign your I-20 document as an indication that you have read and agree to the information contained in it. Your I-20 is not valid unless you have signed it.

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There are several other important immigration-related documents besides your I-20. The first is your passport. Your passport serves as proof of your identity and citizenship. You must have a valid passport while in F-1 status, so make sure that you know your passport expiration date and renew at least 6 months prior. Most students can renew their passports from within the United States. You should check the website of your country's consulate or embassy here in the US for details.

Your visa is another important immigration document. The F-1 visa stamp in your passport is similar to a "ticket" into the United States. Once you are here, it can expire and that has no effect on your F-1 status. If, however, you choose to travel outside of the country, you will need a valid F-1 visa in order to re-enter. So make sure that you know your F-1 visa expiration date if you have plans to travel outside of

the US. You cannot renew your visa from within the US. I Triple S recommends you renew in your home country. You should check the website of the US Consulate in your home country for details.

Just because you were issued an F-1 visa at a US consulate does not guarantee you will be allowed into the country. The CBP officer at the border has the jurisdiction to deny you entry. Your I-94 along with the US entry stamp in your passport serve as proof that the officer admitted you into the US, what visa status you were admitted as, and how long you are allowed to stay. Every time you enter the US, you are issued a new I-94. You must go online to the CBP website in order to retrieve your I-94. I Triple S recommends that you save a copy of your I-94 for your records and also provide our office with a digital copy to add to your student file.

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Immigration Basic #2 – Check-in with I Triple S and attend Orientation

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What is I Triple S? International Student and Scholar Services is the campus unit dedicated to assisting ISU international students. We are also the unit in charge of reporting to the Department of Homeland Security about the F-1 students at our institution through updates made via the SEVIS system. The SEVIS system is a large government database used to track international students attending US institutions.

I Triple S has two International Student Advisors who are both also Designated School Officials or DSOs. DSO is the term given to someone who has gone through specialized training in order to have access to update the SEVIS system and sign I-20 documents. Throughout the presentation, the terms “International Student Advisor” and “DSO” will be used interchangeably.

You will be assigned to one of the two advisors based upon your Academic College. Your I Triple S advisor is here to help you. Feel free to ask for help with any issue you are facing. We want you to be successful and are happy to assist.

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In order to maintain your F-1 status, you are required to “check-in” with I Triple S and attend Orientation.

Check-in is held during the first two days of Orientation and is just one part of the larger event. The check-in process involves completing a checklist of important tasks. One of these tasks is to show I Triple S your important immigration documents, so please bring them with you when you come to check-in. Once you have completed the check-in process, your DSO will be able to update your SEVIS record to show that you have arrived at ISU and are enrolled full-time.

Orientation is a larger 3-day event meant to help international students transition to life on campus. It includes an Open House featuring campus and community organizations, including banks and cell phone companies. There will also be free food, fun, and prizes along with the opportunity to get to know your fellow international students. We also offer campus tours, computer help, and important informational sessions to help you be successful at ISU. Please remember, check-in and Orientation are mandatory for all F-1 international students.

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Immigration Basic #3 – Report Changes to I Triple S

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As was mentioned earlier in this presentation, SEVIS is a large government database used to track international students attending US institutions. It is an acronym which stands for “Student and Exchange Visitor Information System.” Your SEVIS record can be thought of as the real-time digital version of your I-20 document. It contains all the information listed on your I-20 and more, including passport, visa, and I-94 data, current address, and work authorization information. The information contained in your SEVIS record is important and can be used by various US government agencies to help verify your F-1 status.

It is important to remember that I Triple S is the campus unit in charge of updating your SEVIS record, but you are responsible for reporting any changes in your information to your International Student Advisor. Just like with your F-1 immigration status, you are ultimately responsible for making sure your SEVIS record stays up-to-date.

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This graphic shows the flow of information to the SEVIS system. In most cases, the student communicates with their DSO either directly (via email, phone, or in-person) or indirectly through updates made to the student’s GollinoisState account. This information is received by the DSO. If any follow-up action is required, the DSO will usually email the student about the additional steps that must be taken before the change can be made. Once all the information and any required paperwork is received by the DSO, the DSO will update the student’s SEVIS record with the new information.

In most cases, the flow of information is one-way (student to DSO to SEVIS), but sometimes the SEVIS system interface will make a change to a student’s record or an automatic alert will be generated for a student based on information in their SEVIS record. In this way, sometimes your DSO will be alerted to changes made to your SEVIS record or an impending change that *will occur*, if no action is taken. If that happens, your DSO will contact you via your Illinois State email account for any follow-up that may be required. So please, READ ALL EMAILS FROM I TRIPLE S. They may contain information vital to maintaining your F-1 status.

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Since your DSO is the individual with the ability to update your SEVIS record, it is important to let your DSO know about any changes to your information. Two of the most common changes are address changes and academic changes.

F-1 students are required by the immigration regulations to report any change in address within 10 days of moving. You can report this type of change by updating the “mailing address” in your GollinoisState account. I Triple S will be automatically alerted to the change in the system and update your SEVIS record with your new address information.

Academic changes must also be reported to your DSO. In most cases, I Triple S will receive an automatic alert any time your Program Plan changes, but often times these changes require some follow-up on your part. Let your DSO know about any changes to your academic program and confirm whether any additional steps must be taken in order for your SEVIS record to be properly updated.

In general, if any of the information on your I-20 changes after you arrive on campus, you should report the change to your DSO.

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Immigration Basic #4 – Enroll Full-Time

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Immigration regulations require that all F-1 students be enrolled full-time. At Illinois State University, full-time for an Undergraduate or Bachelors student is 12 credits. If you are a Graduate student pursuing a Master's or Phd, then you must be enrolled in a minimum of 9 credits. Graduate students will also be considered full-time if they are enrolled in at least 1 credit of thesis work.

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Your course registration requirements in the summer depend on whether summer is considered a vacation period for you or not.

If you were enrolled in the Spring and will continue your program in the Fall, then summer is a vacation period and you do not need to be enrolled in order to maintain your F-1 status. You can take classes if you wish, and they can be online or in person.

If summer is your first semester or your last semester, then it is no longer considered a vacation period and you must be enrolled full-time. Six credits is considered full-time for the summer semester for both undergraduates and graduates. If summer is not a vacation period, then you cannot be enrolled in only online courses. At least one of your courses must be non-internet based.

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As was stated earlier, F-1 students must be enrolled full-time in order to maintain F-1 status. There are very few exceptions to this rule. Immigration law only allows F-1 students to be less than full-time for three main reasons.

Academic difficulty is one of the few reasons, but this reason is usually reserved for new students having difficulty with English, reading, or being improperly placed in a course.

Students who have a severe medical condition and a doctor's note requesting that the number of course credits be limited to a specific amount, can also request to drop below full-time.

The third and most common option is for students in their final semester who are taking the last remaining courses to complete their degree.

Remember: ISSS must approve your request to go below full-time before you drop any courses. If you think you may have to drop below the minimum full-time requirement (of 12 credits for undergrads and 9 credits for grads), contact your DSO beforehand.

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F-1 students also have special limits on the number of online classes they can take. Only 3 credits of online coursework can count towards meeting the full-time enrollment requirement. For example, a

graduate student can take 6 credits in-class and 6 credits online because only 3 of the online credits are required to meet the 9 credit minimum. There is no limit to the number of extra online courses you can take, as long as only 3 count towards meeting the full-time minimum.

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Immigration Basic #5 – Work Legally

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F-1 students can work on campus without any special permission or authorization. It is simply a benefit of being an F-1 student. An on campus job is any job where your paycheck comes from Illinois State University.

While school is in session, you are allowed to work a maximum of 20 hours per week on campus. During the Spring, Summer, and Winter breaks (while school is not in session), you are allowed to work *more* than 20 hours per week. There is no specific maximum number of hours that can be worked during the breaks.

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Working off campus is NOT a benefit of F-1 status and must be specifically authorized even if the work is unpaid. All off-campus work must also be in your field of study and can only be authorized after you have completed two full-time semesters in your program. An F-1 student cannot work as a barista at Starbucks or a cashier at McDonalds. That type of work would be considered illegal.

Off-campus work that occurs before you graduate (an internship or practicum, for example) must be considered part of your degree program by your Academic Advisor and must be authorized by your DSO before you begin the job.

Off-campus work that occurs after you graduate involves an application that must be mailed to USCIS for authorization and can take 2-3 months to process. You cannot start working until you have received your Employment Authorization card from USCIS.

REMEMBER: any off-campus work requires prior work authorization even if the job is unpaid.

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Immigration Basic #6 – Ask Your International Student Advisor First

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Listed on this slide are some common situations in which an international student should contact his/her International Student Advisor.

It is important to note that you must contact your International Advisor if you will not complete your degree by the program end date listed on your I-20. This must happen BEFORE the end date is reached, otherwise you will be out-of-status and face severe consequences. As was stated earlier in this presentation, make sure you know the program end date on your I-20. It is what determines how long you can stay in the US.

It is also important to note that you should contact your International Student Advisor prior to traveling outside of the US. F-1 students who travel outside of the country must have a valid “travel signature” from their DSO on page 3 of their I-20. Your International Advisor can help to make sure you have all the important immigration documents for your travel, and provide a travel signature, if necessary.

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You should always feel free to contact I Triple S with any questions you might have. Our website is also a great source of information. The web address, main email and main phone line are listed below.

Your International Student Advisor will hold regular walk-in hours, during which most of your issues can be addressed. Only in special complex circumstances will it be necessary to make an appointment with your DSO. You can visit the I Triple S website for more information regarding available dates and times for each.

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Thank you for listening to this presentation of F-1 Immigration Basics. Please make sure to take the F-1 Immigration Basics quiz to test your knowledge. The International Student and Scholar Services office hopes that by presenting this information to you ahead of time, you will feel more confident and prepared when you arrive on campus.

We look forward to meeting you and welcoming you as a new member of the Global Redbirds at Illinois State University!