

F-1: PREPARING FOR OCS OR FLAG

10/14/24

This handout was created to help advise F-1 students who plan to participate in Off Campus Study (OCS) and/or Faculty Lead Programs Across the Globe (FLAG).

1. Use your resources:

- The **Office of International Student Affairs [OISA]** can advise F-1 students on U.S. re-entry, visa and passport renewal, and implications if you will be outside of the U.S. for more than 5 months.
- The **Institute for Global Engagement [IGE]** supports Course Embedded Travel, the Global Learning Program, and Off-Campus Study for semester and year-long opportunities. Your **OCS program provider** is also a valuable resource!
- **Careers Life & Service [CLS]** supports career exploration in the U.S. & abroad -- including internships, externships, and post-graduate employment or graduate or professional studies.
- **Student Financial Services** can help you consider how any need-based aid from Grinnell might apply to an off-campus study opportunity.

2. Will you be outside of the U.S. for more than 5 months?

Unfortunately, a new Fall 2024 USCIS policy requires termination for F-1 students whose U.S. absence exceeds 5 months. Termination would necessitate an “initial status” re-entry following your 5+ month absence: *a new I-20 & SEVIS fee; limiting re-entry to within the 30 days prior to a new semester; and requiring 2 full semesters in the U.S. to re-gain practical training eligibility.* As you replan, please review your program dates and consider any potential strategy (like staying in the U.S. for breaks, or the potential for a brief re-entry of the U.S. during your program) to help you avoid a program termination if possible. **Feel free to consult the OISA. We are paying close attention to this issue, and we are also supporting advocacy efforts to challenge this new rule.*

3. Do you have a [Non-driver State ID or a Driver's Permit/License](#)?

It is wise to have an alternate form of identification in the U.S. - especially if you will need to send your Passport for visa processing. Some destination countries actually *require* that you have a REAL ID before you apply for a visa as a third country national from inside the U.S.

4. Will your Passport expire within the coming year?

F-1 students are required to maintain your passport validity for a *minimum* of 6 months into the future. Double check to make sure your passport won't expire within the coming year – and contact your home consulate to confirm the renewal process and timeline. You can typically do this from within the U.S. but it might require an in-person visit to Chicago or New York.

5. Do you need an *entry* visa for your destination?

This varies depending on your nationality and the purpose & length of your trip - research the process via the [consulate of the country\(s\)](#) you plan to visit. Most study abroad program providers also offer assistance. Process, requirements, and timelines can vary greatly. You can always [request a letter](#) of support from the OISA!

[TRAVISA](#) can help determine if you need a visa.

Visit your [home country consulate](#) re. passport renewal.

Visit a [U.S. Consulate](#) re. F-1 visa renewal.

Register for '[STEP](#)' to get global travel alerts.

6. Will you travel *through* or *to* any other countries? Consider in advance if you will need a transit visa for an in-route flight to your OCS destination. In addition, some programs offer fantastic study tours or optional side-trips that may necessitate additional visa acquisition.

7. Have you been arrested in the U.S.? This can impact re-entry or visa renewal. Please consult the OISA.

OISA Handouts are general in nature. Individual advising appointments are strongly recommended.
If students need legal advice, we can often assist with referrals.

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641-269-3703 • Fax 641-269-9776 • [International Student Affairs](#)

8. Will you need to renew your U.S. F-1 visa before you return to Grinnell?

If yes, you must renew your F-1 visa from a [U.S. Consulate](#) outside of the U.S. (either from your home country, or as a third country national from another location). It is wise to research this in advance, since not all consulates support third country national applications.

9. Don't forget to secure a travel endorsement on your I-20. Travel signatures for current students are valid for 12 months and must be signed by one of Grinnell's DSO staff: Karen Edwards, Brenda Strong, or Emily Perry. *Never forge a DSO signature — this would constitute a serious status violation.

10. Are you hoping to secure an internship in the U.S. following a study abroad program? If yes, read #2 above because you must avoid program termination due to a 5+ month absence. In addition, you should schedule an advising appointment with both the OISA and the CLS to ensure your understanding of INT registration and CPT authorization process. Please review: [F-1 CPT for Internships](#).

11. If your program will be inside the U.S...

- You still need to carry date-valid immigration documents (Passport, I-20) and we recommend securing an Iowa ID.
- On-campus employment benefits do not extend beyond Grinnell.
- You must [report your U.S. residential address](#) to the OISA (for SEVIS) within 10 days of any move.
- If the program includes an internship, you must secure Practical Training authorization first!

OTHER topics to consider...

- If you carry the Grinnell Student Health Insurance plan, consider in advance how to access benefits when you travel. [Visit SHAW](#) or consult with [Gallagher United Health Care](#) to learn more.
- When you enter the U.S., Port of Entry officials have discretionary power to inspect electronic devices and/or social media activity via your phone, laptop, tablet, etc.
- If you are outside the U.S. during tax season, the OISA still offers complimentary access to SPRINTAX Returns. The IRS deadline for people who file from outside of the U.S. is later: June 15.
- Be ready (and excited!) to experience culture shock all over again. Take time to read about the place you are traveling to. Remember, experiencing 'culture shock' can be a GOOD thing -- it means you are paying attention, challenging yourself, and learning!
- Send us photos and/or stories for MOSAIC 😊