

SOUTHWESTERN

LAW SCHOOL Los Angeles, CA

International Students Policy

Administrative policy.

Revision History: Formerly a part of the annually revised Student Handbook; established as a standalone policy in August 2022; technical revisions in October 2023; revised in May 2024 to address the Online J.D. Program.

Related policies: Academic Policies and Procedures

Scheduled Review Date: June 2025 (SEVIS Principal Designated School Official; Registrar's Office)

A. Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS)

International students enrolled in a residential J.D. or LL.M. program at Southwestern must adhere to the requirements set forth by the Student Exchange Visitor Information Program (SEVP). SEVIS is an internet-based system Southwestern uses to maintain accurate and current information on international students and scholars with F1 visas and their dependents. SEVIS allows schools and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to exchange data on the visa status of international students and scholars.

This policy does not apply to international students enrolled in the Online J.D. Program who plan to reside outside the United States for the program's duration. Any international student who matriculates into the Online J.D. Program but wishes to switch to a residential program must receive permission from the Associate Dean of Student Services.

B. Student Responsibilities

1. Change of address

An international student enrolled in a residential program must notify the Registrar's Office of any address change within ten calendar days of moving. Students must provide a physical address; P.O. boxes or office addresses are not allowed. If it is not possible to receive mail at the residence, the student must also provide a mailing address. Students may not use the Southwestern Law School address as their mailing address.

2. Enrollment status

An international student enrolled in a residential program must always remain in full-time status unless the Registrar's Office has approved an underload before the

start of the semester. A J.D. student is required to enroll in at least 10 units per semester and no more than 16 units per semester. An LL.M. student is required to enroll in at least 8 units per semester and no more than 16 units per semester. Please note that dropping courses can impact a student's visa status if they drop below the units listed in this paragraph.

3. On-campus check-in

F1 students must check in with the Principal Designated School Official (PDSO) listed in Section E below within seven business days from the first class day of each semester; summer sessions are excluded. Failure to check-in in a timely manner may result in termination of the international student's I-20.

4. Off-campus employment

A J.D. student must complete one academic year to qualify for off-campus employment. International J.D. students must consult with the PDSO and complete the necessary forms before obtaining and starting off-campus employment. Approval from the USCIS is required. Application approval may take up to 90 days.

F1 students participating in externships must contact the PDSO for curricular practical training (CPT) authorization on their I-20. Students must secure the externship training opportunity before CPT can be authorized, and CPT must be authorized before the student can begin working at the externship.

5. Transfer to another institution

A student must notify the PDSO before transferring from Southwestern to another institution. A student must report the new institution's name and the date they will be transferring.

6. Failure to enroll

If, for any reason, a student does not register for the fall or spring semester, the law school will notify SEVIS that the student is out of status, which will make the student subject to deportation.

7. Return to home country

If a student plans to travel during current enrollment, a signature is required from the PDSO. A signature from the PDSO is valid for one year.

8. Passports and visas

The student must inform the PDSO of any change of visa status and/or type within ten calendar days. The I-20 form, visa, and passport must always be kept current.

9. Graduation date

The student must notify the Registrar's Office of graduation before the program end date indicated on the I-20 form. Each international student must maintain their legal immigration status at all times to remain legally in the United States.

C. Spouses and Dependents: Full-Time or Part-Time Study

A spouse or dependent of an F-1 student with an F-2 status is not allowed to study full- or part-time at the university level. A dependent with F-2 status may only take classes that are considered recreational. Spouses must matriculate and apply for a separate F-1 student visa. Children are allowed to attend primary and secondary school (K-12).

D. Optional Practical Training (OPT) for F-1 students

1. Application timing

A student may apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT) 90 calendar days before their graduation. Applications may be submitted up to 60 calendar days after the program completion date, but no more than 30 calendar days after the PDSO has recommended the student for OPT and signed the new I-20 form. Documents required include the following:

- a.** I-765 form and application fee
- b.** Clear copy of passport and a passport photo
- c.** Updated I-20 form with Designated School Official approval to participate in OPT
- d.** Clear copy of form I-94

2. Timely submission

Documents can be filed online by creating a [USCIS Online Account](#). A student has 30 days to submit all documentation after receiving the new I-20 with recommended OPT. Travel outside the United States after the student's completion date and before the approval of the student's OPT is not recommended.

3. Multiple Optional Practical Training sessions

USCIS regulations affirm that an international student is eligible for 12 months of practical training if they have completed a first or second degree at a higher academic level. A student is not eligible for an additional 12 months if they seek a second degree on the same academic level.

E. Principal Designated School Official (PDSO) and Designated School Official (DSO)

Sylvia Villalpando
Principle Designated School Official
Student Services Office, Room W102
(213) 738-6888
svillalpando@swlaw.edu

Jessica E. Johnson
Designated School Official
General Counsel Office, BW361
(213) 738-6733
jejohnson@swlaw.edu

Students can find additional information regarding the responsibilities of international students [here](#).

F. Policy Revisions

Southwestern expressly reserves the right to change or modify any aspect of this policy at any time, with or without prior notice.