

Change of Status Policies and Procedures

If you are in the US in a nonimmigrant status (B-1/B-2, F-1, F-2, H-1B or H-4) and would like to change to an F-1 status without travelling to a US embassy/consulate, you will need to apply for a change of visa status with USCIS.

To be eligible to apply for a COS, you must be in the US with a valid visa status and USCIS must receive your COS application before your current visa status expires. Nonimmigrant visa holders in the following categories are not permitted to change to F-1 status from within the US and must change status through Consular Processing:

- M-1 students
- C, D, and K nonimmigrants
- WT and WB visitors admitted under the Visa Waiver Program through ESTA
- J-1 physicians admitted to receive graduate medical education or training
- J nonimmigrants subject to the 212(e) 2-year foreign residence requirement

NOTE: If your COS is approved by USCIS, you will be in your new status, but you will not have a visa reflecting the new status. The next time you travel outside of the US, you will need to apply for a new F-1 visa at a US consulate/embassy to reenter the US in your new status. For best guidance, always communicate with your DSO before travelling outside the US.

At the time of applying to Sofia, it is important you communicate to the International Office you are applying for a change of status so your DSO can prepare the appropriate F-1 I-20. After you are admitted to Sofia University, you will be issued your F-1 I-20 by a DSO.

You can begin your COS application by going to the USCIS [I-539, Application to Extend/Change Nonimmigrant Status](#). There, you will find a “file online” button that takes you to the USCIS application page. You will need to create an account if you do not already have one. For the COS application, you will be filling out the I-539 online form. Instructions on how to fill out the I-539 form can be found [here](#). You must be prepared to provide the following supporting documents for your online application:

- Copy of the biographical page of your current passport.
- Copy of your current visa.
- [Copy of your most recent I-94](#).
- I-901 SEVIS Fee Receipt. Make sure you make payment by going to <https://www.fmjfee.com/i901fee/index.html> and include your receipt in your online application.
- A copy of your F-1 I-20 signed by you and your DSO.
- A bank statement from you or your authorized sponsor(s). For this application, a bank letter will not suffice. Please read the “Proof of Financial Support” section of this catalog for further information on acceptable financial documentation.
- A filing and biometrics service fee will apply.
- Personal statement, addressed to USCIS, from you, describing why you would like to change your status

After submitting the online application, you will receive an email from USCIS containing your I-797, Notice of Action. Save this document for your records.

Please note that representatives at Sofia University cannot prepare or file a COS application on behalf of a student, but we can help answer questions about the process.

If the application for COS to F-1 is received by USCIS before the current visa status expiration date, the applicant may remain in the US while the F-1 status is pending. However, it should be noted that the COS process can be lengthy. To learn about the most recent USCIS processing times, please visit <https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/>.

Whether an international student can begin studying while their COS to F-1 is pending will depend on a case-by-case scenario. [Students may be advised to study at the next available intake or to defer their program start date until the F-1 status is approved.](#) Students can email DSO@sofia.edu for further guidance.

Effective June 2023, USICS has opened a premium processing path for COS applicants by filling the [I-907, Request for Premium Processing Service](#). An additional fee does apply. USCIS will provide a response to an applicant who selects the premium processing application within 30 calendar days from when all prerequisites, including receipt of biometrics, have been completed. This does not guarantee approval for all cases. Filing the I-907 confirms that USCIS will send you one of the following notices within 30 calendar days; an approval, a denial, a notice of intent to deny or a Request for Further Evidence (RFE). If you receive an RFE, the 30 days will "reset" when USCIS has received the response to the RFE.

Continue to monitor the status of your online application through your USCIS account and email as USCIS may send you an RFE. It is important to respond to any RFE from USCIS in a timely manner. You may email DSO@sofia.edu for assistance in responding to an RFE.

[If the F-1 status is approved, contact your DSO immediately for the next steps.](#)

If the F-1 status is denied, and you do not have another active visa status to fall back on, you will unfortunately have to leave the US immediately to avoid [accruing unlawful presence](#). [You may contact your DSO for guidance on alternative options.](#)