

Documents to Bring When Entering the U.S. and Traveling Outside the U.S. on F-1 Status

When preparing for your arrival to the U.S. for the first time as an international student, you should plan your travel according to the information provided by your college. According to immigration regulations, F-1 student visa holders can enter the U.S. up to 30 days prior to the program report date on the I-20.

- Valid passport with an official F-1 visa stamp
- F-1 visa
- Program acceptance letter
- Your original I-20 issued by Sofia University (with SEVIS fee paid prior to your travel date)
- A copy of your acceptance letter from Sofia University
- I-901 SEVIS fee receipt
- Financial documents provided when applying for Sofia program of study

At the U.S. port of entry, you will be required to present your passport and I-20 to the immigration officer who will stamp your passport. In most cases, the officer notes "D/S" (Duration of Status) on your passport pages. This means you are allowed to stay in the U.S. for the length of time indicated on your I-20, provided that you maintain full-time enrollment and a valid F-1 visa status.

Do not enter the U.S. in visitor status (B-1/B-2, WT, or WB). This status does not permit full-time study in the U.S. After your arrival, print your Admission (I-94) number at cbp.gov/I94 and keep a copy of all travel documents (I-94 information, F-1 visa, and I-20) for your personal records. Ensure your I-94 print out contains the correct information, including F-1 visa status and "Duration of Status."

If you have any additional questions about the visa process, do not hesitate to reach out to dso@sofia.edu for additional follow-up.

Traveling outside the U.S. after initial entry

Students on a F-1 visa are permitted to travel outside the U.S. Students may wish to travel abroad during their vacation term or when school is not in session. If a student needs to travel when the quarter has commenced and classes are on-going, they should be mindful of attendance requirements and obtain permission from their academic advisor. Traveling always carries inherent risks and students should be prepared to answer any questions raised by U.S. Customs and Border Patrol on why they are traveling. You should not travel outside of the United States for a period of more than five consecutive months.

Prior to traveling, students should inform the DSO and obtain an I-20 endorsed for travel and signed by their DSO.

When returning to the U.S., it is important to carry the following documentation:

- A Form I-20, recently endorsed for travel and signed by your DSO (contact DSO@sofia.edu to receive a travel endorsed I-20);
- A current passport valid for at least six months after the date of your reentry.
- A valid, current visa;
- Financial information showing proof of necessary funds to cover tuition and living expenses (optional).

You can stay in the United States on an expired F-1 visa, until the program end date or OPT end date listed on your I-20 (including any associated grace periods), if you maintain your student status. However, you must have a valid visa to return to the United States. If your visa has expired at the time you travel, you will need to reapply for a new F-1 visa in order to be permitted to return.