

Policy Source: Gwinnett Tech	Owner: International Student Services	Effective: April 2026
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### 6.2.7 International Student Services (ISS) Practices

Gwinnett Technical College is certified by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) and follows the guidelines for F Visa students as set by SEVP. <https://www.ice.gov/sevis>.

#### International F-1 Students Policies & Requirements:

**I-20 - Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status Issuance & Visa Application:** Students must meet all admission requirements, provide the biographical information required and a Financial Affidavit along with supporting documentation (financial statements must be less than 3 months old, in English and in U.S. dollars) to ISS before an I-20 will be issued. Once the I-20 is received, students will need to pay an I-901 SEVIS fee prior to their F-1 Visa appointment at the closest U.S. consulate or embassy to them. F-1 Students will be permitted to enter the U.S. up to 30 days prior to the Program Start Date on their I-20 and not past the first day of classes. Students may start their enrollment with GTC beginning with the Fall or Spring semesters. F-1 students may not begin enrollment during a mini-semester or Term C. Summer term starts are permitted on a very limited basis. F-1 Students who have completed their Admissions requirements past the date of the mandatory New Student Orientation for F-1 students will have their admission term rolled over to the next available term for acceptance.

**Immigration Check-in:** New students must check-in with the International Student Office within 30 days of their program start date to avoid SEVIS termination or cancelation. New F-1 students are also required to attend a mandatory New Student Orientation at the Lawrenceville campus the week before classes start.

**Advisement & DSO – Designated School Official Approvals:** F-1 students should seek advisement from the office of International Student Services (ISS) for matters related to admission, tuition and fees, a student's records, registration, changes of major, taking a break from school, transferring to another school, traveling outside the U.S., updating contact information, and all questions pertaining their F status. Additionally, the ISS team will assist with all matters requiring approval from a Designated School Official (DSO)

**Enrollment Requirement:** Gwinnett Technical College holds a certification through SEVP to enroll students under an F status. Thus, M status holders should not enroll at GTC. F-1 Students must be accepted to approved Associate Degree level programs, and they are required to meet with an ISS Enrollment Support Advisor prior to registering for classes every semester. Students must enroll in 12 credit hours with at least 9 of these credits requiring on-campus presence. Unauthorized withdrawal from courses is discouraged as this will cause an I-20 to be terminated.

**Annual Vacation:** F-1 Students must have completed at least 30 weeks of instructional time and 24 credit hours before becoming eligible to take a term off or an Annual Vacation. Additionally, students must intend to register for classes in the academic term following their annual vacation. Thus, F-1

students who start classes in the Spring or Summer semesters will need to be enrolled full-time for 3 semesters before they would become eligible for an annual vacation.

**Reduced Course Load (RCL):** ISS may authorize students to drop below full-time enrollment without losing their student status. This is possible under specific conditions such as academic difficulties in the first semester, medical issues, or during a student's final term.

**Transfer/Change of Status:** Students already in the U.S. can request to transfer their SEVIS record to GTC after they have been accepted to the college and only if their I-20 is not in a Completed or Terminated status. F-1 students cannot have a gap in enrollment of over 152 days. Thus, the time between the last date of enrollment at a previous school and the first day of classes at GTC should not exceed this amount of time. For assistance with the process to apply for a change of status to F-1 with USCIS (U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services), students should meet with ISS. As per USCIS, people in the U.S. under a C, D, K, S, or Visa Waiver are not eligible to request a change of status to F-1.

Current Gwinnett Technical College students seeking to change their status to F-1 must meet the additional admission requirements required for an F-1 student and be in good academic standing before an I-20 is issued for them.

**Employment:** An F student may only work when authorized by a Designated School Official (DSO) in some cases, and USCIS in others. On-campus employment is allowed for part-time (19 hours or less) positions that directly support the student body. This type of employment does not require previous authorization but students should let ISS know if they are hired by GTC for further guidance. Off-campus employment and practical trainings will require the involvement of the ISS team and previous authorization from USCIS in most cases. Practical Training may be Curricular (CPT) or Optional (OPT). Students are responsible for acquiring all required authorizations for employment prior to their first day of work. Failure to do this will cause their I-20 to be terminated.

**Curricular Practical Training (CPT):** These are mandatory hands-on training experiences included in some programs of study as part of their curriculum which require prior authorization. Before a student can participate in CPT, student must contact ISS and receive an updated I-20 including the CPT information/authorization. Starting CPT prior to being authorized for it will result in the termination of the student's I-20. One year of full-time CPT eliminates a student's eligibility for OPT.

**Optional Practical Training (OPT):** This type of work is available to eligible F-1 students to allow them to acquire real-world work experience within their field of study. It differs from CPT in that is not mandatory or built within the curriculum for a program of study. Students must have been enrolled in their program of study for at least one year and receive authorization from ISS and USCIS prior to starting OPT. F-1 students are eligible for *up to* 12 months of OPT per educational level before or after the completion of their program. Performing any type of work resulting in the acquisition of experience within the student's field of study without previous authorization will result in the termination the student's I-20 regardless of whether the work is being performed in exchange for payment or on a volunteer basis.

**Contact Information:** Changes of address, email, or phone number must be reported to the ISS office within 10 days of the change.

**Travel Outside the U.S.:** Students will need a valid passport that is not expiring within six months, a valid F-1 Visa, and a Travel Endorsement on their I-20 form (signed by a GTC's PDSO/DSO) before attempting to re-enter the United States. Students planning to submit school work while outside the U.S. are required to meet with the Student IT Help Desk for guidance on

accessibility of the student's dashboard from outside the U.S.

**Program Extension:** Students who will not complete their studies by the Program End Date on their I-20 must submit a program extension request to ISS at least one month in advance.

**Program Completion & Grace Period:** Once F Students have completed their program of study and any authorized period of practical training, they have 60 days (post-completion grace period) to depart the United States. The program end date on the students' I-20s will be shorten during the student's final semester at GTC, if necessary, to reflect the appropriate last date of their final semester at Gwinnett Technical College. F-1 Students should meet with ISS the semester before their last to discuss post-completion plans.

**I-20 Termination:** Gwinnett Technical College may terminate a student's I-20 (otherwise known as Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status) when students fail to maintain their F status by violating the terms associated with their I-20 or fail to comply with SEVP processes and/or regulations. Termination of an I-20 is not always negative and, depending on the circumstances, may not always require the immediate departure of the student from the U.S. The cause for termination will determine a student's recommended course of action.

**Effects of an I-20 Termination:** When an F-1 record is terminated in SEVIS, the following happens:

- Student loses all on-and/or off-campus employment authorization.
- Student cannot re-enter the United States on the terminated SEVIS record.
- Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) agents may investigate to confirm the departure of the student.
- Any associated F-2 dependent records are terminated.

**I-20 Reinstatement Requests:** ISS will only provide a recommendation for reinstatement of an I-20 in the case where an error has been made on the part of Gwinnett Technical College or is needed to comply with specific SEVP regulatory processes. Gwinnett Technical College will not provide a recommendation for reinstatement on terminations caused by violation of status.