Responsibilities of F-1 Students under SEVIS

What is SEVIS?
SEVIS is the national database maintained by the United States government to keep track of students attending U.S. schools. Durham Technical Community College is required by law to update a student’s record regularly in SEVIS.

Maintaining your legal status

1. Keep your passport and I-20 document current. If you need to leave the country, you will need a Designated School Official (DSO) signature on your I-20, and possibly a new I-20. Please make an appointment for this purpose. If you have not maintained your status, we cannot sign the I-20. If you plan to transfer to another school upon your return, you must let us know so that you can be officially “released” in SEVIS and can then obtain a new I-20 from the new school.

2. Take a full course load of at least 12 credit hours both Fall and Spring semesters unless PRIOR approval has been received from a DSO. Summer semester is required only for those beginning their studies at that time, and those students should register for at least 8 credit hours.

3. Only 3 credit hours of on-line courses are permitted in any semester, as part of the 12 credit hour requirement. Any leaves of absence and reduced course loads for medical reasons or other reasons must be approved in advance by the Director of International Student Services or another DSO. There are certain regulations we must follow. (Important: Approval cannot be granted by an academic advisor.)

4. If you change your program of study, you must obtain a new I-20. If you need to extend your studies beyond the original date authorized on your I-20, you must request an extension of stay and show new financial support documents before the completion date. An extension cannot be granted after your completion date. A letter from your academic advisor explaining the reasons may also be required.

5. Report any changes of legal name, address, and telephone numbers to the Director of International Student Services, as we must update your information in SEVIS. Do not rely on a new registration form each semester for this purpose.

6. Notify the Director of International Student Services or another DSO when you are planning to leave Durham Tech for any reason. We must notify the USCIS through the SEVIS system.

7. Keep your health insurance and driver’s license (if you have one) valid throughout your stay in the United States. Observe all federal, state and local laws. We must report criminal activity.

You have been admitted to the United States for “duration of status,” which means as long as you are pursuing a full course of study and making normal progress toward completion, plus any time working in authorized “Optional Practical Training” (if you qualify). If you fail to maintain your status, you will become “out-of-status.” Visit the USCIS web at www.uscis.gov for more information.

Employment

1. You are not permitted to work off-campus in your first year as an F-1 student. Although on-campus employment for less than 20 hours per week is permitted, Durham Tech rarely has an on-campus job available. Working illegally off-campus will put you “out-of-status.”

2. If you are experiencing economic hardship caused by unforeseen circumstances, you may apply for an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) authorizing off-campus work. You must have been in F-1 status for
one full academic year, be in good academic standing, demonstrate that employment will not interfere with your studies, and explain to the USCIS the reasons for your economic hardship. There is a substantial fee for this application and some students are not approved. You will also need a new I-20. Please schedule an appointment for this purpose, and allow several months for a response from USCIS.

3. You may apply for one semester of Curricular Practical Training (CPT) if you are going to enroll in a Work-Based Learning (WBL) course as a part of your program of study at Durham Tech. You must go through the approval process to take the WBL with your academic department and you must also apply for the CPT authorization with the Director of International Student Services or another DSO and have the CPT listed on your I-20 prior to you starting at your WBL placement. CPT can be paid or unpaid.

4. You may apply for 12 months of temporary employment called Optional Practical Training (OPT) in your field of study as you near completion (post-completion OPT) or for up to 24 months of part-time temporary employment after you have been in F-1 status for at least 9 months (pre-completion OPT).

A post-completion OPT application is made no earlier than 90 days before completion of studies and no later than 60 days after completion. To be eligible, you must have been in F-1 student status for at least 9 months, and the employment must be directly related to the major area of study indicated on your I-20. Non-degree students are not eligible. You must report your employer contact information, as well as any personal address or other changes, to Durham Tech during this period, as Durham Tech is required to continue maintaining your records. Schedule an appointment with the Director of International Student Services or another DSO to find out more about OPT options.

5. Any Employment Authorization Documents approved by USCIS for F-1 students are automatically terminated when you transfer to another school.

F-2 Dependents

1. F-2 dependents (spouse and children) of an F-1 student are not eligible for employment at any time. F-2 dependents can take courses for credit leading toward a degree as long as they are enrolled less than full-time.

Transferring to Another School

1. You are eligible to transfer to another school if you have reported to the school that issued your original I-20 and have not violated your F-1 status.

2. Please notify the Director of International Student Services or another DSO of your intention. We have to “release” your record in SEVIS before the new school can issue a new I-20. It is NOT advisable to have Durham Tech put you in “transfer status” in SEVIS until you have been officially accepted by the new school and are definite about your plans, as it is very difficult to reverse the process.

3. If you are transferring into Durham Tech from another school, we cannot issue an I-20 to you until the previous school releases your record in SEVIS. Durham Tech does not admit students who are “out-of-status” at another school.

4. Any Employment Authorization Documents approved by USCIS for F-1 students are automatically terminated when you transfer to another school.

If you have questions regarding your F-1 student visa status, please contact International Student Services in the Center for the Global Learner. White Building (Building #1), Room 58. Appointments can be scheduled by calling 919-536-7264 ext. 3228 or emailing the staff: Heidi White, (PDSO), Director of International Student Services, whiteh@durhamtech.edu; Gina Perryman, (DSO), International Student Services Advisor, perrymang@durhamtech.edu