



## Understanding Your I-20

The I-20 is a multi-purpose document issued by a U.S. government-approved educational institution certifying that a student has been admitted to a full-time study program and has demonstrated sufficient financial resources to stay in the United States. The I-20 is officially titled the "Certificate of Eligibility" because it allows an individual to apply for an F-1 student visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate abroad.

**ALL STUDENTS MUST READ AND CONFIRM ALL 3 PAGES BEFORE SIGNING THE FORM I-20**

**PAGE 3 OF THE I-20 HAS VALUABLE INFORMATION INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO: EMPLOYMENT, AUTHORIZATION TO RELEASE INFORMATION BY SCHOOL, I-20 EXTENSION, ETC.**

### New Form I-20

Effective June 26, 2015, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security introduced an updated version of the Form I-20. If you still have old versions of the I-20, be sure to keep them for your records, but use the newest version for travel or other purposes.

### Do all students need I-20s?

No. If a student is maintaining a status in the United States other than F-1, an I-20 is not needed. Dependent children in E, H, I, J, L, M, N, O, P, R, or S status must change status after their 21st birthday. Students who are at Sierra States University in a dependent child status and approaching their 21st birthday should see an International Student Adviser at International Department for information about changing their nonimmigrant status to F-1.

### How is an I-20 is created?

After a school completes the admissions process, it collects necessary financial support and identification documentation for admitted international students requesting F-1 status. Those student names and biographic information are entered into a U.S. government database called SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System). SEVIS processes the information and produces an I-20. The school official (called the Designated School Official or DSO) prints and signs the I-20 and then delivers it to the student. If a student needs to update or change information on their I-20, the DSO makes these requests through SEVIS to produce a new document.

### How is the I-20 is used?

**Outside the U.S.:** After receiving an I-20 from a school, an international student must make an appointment to apply for an F-1 visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate (the visa is needed to be allowed entry into the United States in F-1 status). Students must present both the F-1 visa and the I-20 to a U.S. Customs and Border Protection officer upon arrival at the U.S. port-of-entry.

**Inside the U.S.:** Once a student has arrived in the United States and passes through the border inspections process (either at an airport, seaport, or land border), the I-20 is used as identification and proof of legal and academic status. Typically, students must show their I-20 at the Social Security Office and the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). The I-20 is also shown to employers in the hiring process for employment. Off-campus employment information and/or authorization will be printed on page 2 of the I-20.

## Do I need the I-20 for travel?

When traveling abroad, students must take their I-20 with them. The I-20 is required to reapply for a visa (if needed) and for re-entering the United States. Before departure from the United States, students should verify that they have a **valid travel endorsement on page 2** of their I-20 from an authorized person in the International Department. This signature is valid for one year for multiple visits outside the United States. However, upon all departures within the valid period time, students must report, provide, and sign all travel documents for submission to the International Department. In most cases, a travel endorsement can be done quickly and easily in the International Department, however students should plan ahead and get their travel endorsement several weeks before departing the United States to avoid the holiday rush, our institution requires a minimum of 7 business days before departure.

## Why do I have multiple I-20s?

New I-20s are issued to continuing students whenever there is a significant update to a student's record. This includes changes in biographical data, program dates, change of major, the addition of a work authorization, etc. These types of changes are typically prompted by student request, but International Department will automatically produce a new I-20 when a student declares or changes their major. It is not necessary for students to request this new I-20. We will email the student to come pick up their new Change of Major I-20 when it is ready.

## What is the I-20 completion date?

The "completion date" is entered in box #3 of the I-20 based on a student's particular major and degree level. This is an estimate of time the University feels it may take to fulfill all degree requirements. However, if a student is not able to finish the program on that date, an extension must be requested from International Department at least one month before the completion date expires.

According to U.S. immigration regulations, the "completion date" is defined as the day final degree requirements are completed. The actual completion date may not necessarily be the day of the graduation ceremony or the date on the I-20. (In fact, many students actually finish degree requirements before the completion date on the I-20).

### ***Undergraduate Students:***

The completion date is considered to be the last day of final exams of the quarter degree requirements are fulfilled.

### ***Graduate Students:***

The completion date is the day on which all degree requirements are fulfilled, such as filing the thesis or dissertation in the Graduate Division. If there is no research component to the degree program, the completion date would be the last day of final exams of the quarter degree requirements are fulfilled.

## The 60-day Grace Period

When students **COMPLETE** a study program, they are allowed a 60-day grace period to either 1) depart the United States, 2) request a school transfer, or 3) change visa status.

Note: Students who are interested in working in the United States following their program completion must apply for Optional Practical Training work authorization before the expiration of the 60-day grace period.

## **What happens if I lose my I-20?**

If you are a Sierra States University F-1 student, you will need to submit a document request form for a replacement I-20. All fees must be paid prior to completion of the request. Please note that if you are outside the United States, you must obtain the replacement I-20 before entering the U.S. to resume your studies. Allow sufficient time for processing and mail delivery.

**\*\*\*Students must have their I-20 information available to them at all times. We highly recommend that you keep a scanned version accessible for personal use. However, please note that scanned versions are ONLY for PERSONAL use and cannot be used for travel or official business.**

## **Should I keep all copies of my I-20s?**

Yes. You may obtain several different versions of your I-20s while you are in the United States if there are changes to your program or other information. Keep all copies for future reference. Always use the most recently issued I-20 for travel, work, or other purposes.

## **Do my family members need I-20s?**

If you will be accompanied by your spouse and children, they will each need their own I-20 to obtain the F-2 dependent visas and to remain in the United States during your program and for travel purposes.