



OHIO CHRISTIAN
UNIVERSITY™

International Student HANDBOOK



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome to OCU!	2
Maintaining Status: The Basics	3
Extension of Stay	5
Employment	6
Transferring Your SEVIS Record	7
Travel	7
Completing Your Program	9
Taxes	10
Health Insurance	12
Health & Immunization Record	12
Important Documents	13
More Information	13

WELCOME TO OCU!

We are excited you have chosen Ohio Christian University! We desire to see you succeed and accomplish your goals. Please contact us if you have questions or need assistance. Communication is very important as you begin this new and exciting journey. Welcome to the OCU Family and we look forward to seeing you around campus!

We are here to help!

International Advisors

Abbie White

Principal Designated School Official (PDSO)
Admissions Event and
Student Worker Coordinator
awhite3@ohiochristian.edu

David Holt

Designated School Official (DSO)
Transfer and International Student
Recruitment Coordinator
dholt@ohiochristian.edu



MAINTAINING STATUS: THE BASICS

Maintain a Valid I-20

Your I-20 is a snapshot of your current status. It should always contain the most up-to-date personal, academic, and financial information.

- ▶ Request a new I-20 if you change your program length, degree level, major, source of funding, or number of dependents.
- ▶ Always have a valid travel signature on the last page of your I-20 prior to traveling outside the U.S.
- ▶ It is your responsibility to keep all of your I-20s from each of the schools you attend in the U.S. You should not throw any of these away.
- ▶ If you decide to transfer to another school in the U.S., request a transfer of your SEVIS record before beginning studies at your new school.

Maintain Full-Time Enrollment

In order to maintain status, F-1 students must be enrolled full-time for each fall and spring semester. Enrollment in summer sessions is not required unless a student begins their program in the summer.

- ▶ For undergraduate students, this means enrolling in at least 12 credit hours each semester. Only a maximum of 3 credit hours of online courses can be counted toward the full-time enrollment requirement.
- ▶ For graduate students, this means enrolling in at least 9 credit hours each semester. Only a maximum of 3 credit hours of online courses can be counted toward the full-time enrollment requirement.

Hybrid Courses

A hybrid course is one that is mostly online with some in-person sessions. Hybrid courses may be eligible to count toward the full course of study requirement like any other class. If you are a graduate student, you will be taking hybrid courses. They are not offered for undergraduates.

Exceptions To Full-Time Enrollment

A student may be allowed to drop below a full course of study as provided below. A student who wishes to drop below full time must obtain the approval from a Designated School Official (DSO) in advance, regardless of what the reason might be. A student who drops below a full course of study without prior approval will be considered out of status. Becoming out of status could result in deportation. A reduced course load (RCL) is authorization to drop below full-time. The following are the only grounds for which a student can request an RCL:

Academic Difficulties

A student must apply for an RCL if, due to academic difficulties, he/she is unable to enroll full time.

- ▷ Academic difficulties are exclusively limited to initial difficulties with the English language or with reading requirements, unfamiliarity with American teaching methods, or improper course level placement. Please note that “initial” should only be used in the student’s first academic term.
- ▷ A student may be authorized for an RCL on the “academic difficulties” basis only for a single term during any one course of study at a particular program level and must resume a full course of study at the next available term (excluding summer).
- ▷ An RCL for academic difficulties must consist of at least 6 credit hours for undergraduate students and at least half the full-time minimum for graduate students.

Medical Conditions

A student must apply for an RCL if, due to a temporary illness or medical condition, he/she is unable to be enrolled full time (or, if necessary, unable to enroll in any courses).

- ▷ The student must provide medical documentation from a licensed medical doctor, doctor of osteopath, or licensed clinical psychologist to the DSO to substantiate the illness or medical condition.
- ▷ The letter from the medical provider must recommend either that the student be part time or not enrolled due to medical circumstances.
- ▷ An RCL for a medical condition can be granted for a period of time not to exceed an aggregate of 12 months while the student is pursuing a course of study at a particular program level.
- ▷ The student must provide current medical documentation and the DSO must authorize the drop below full time for each new term.

Completion of Course of Study

A student must apply for an RCL in his/her final term if fewer courses (less than full time) are needed to complete the course of study. Graduate students who have completed formal coursework are also considered to be pursuing a full course of study.

Dropping below full-time without authorization is a violation of your F-1 status.

If you are thinking about dropping below full-time, set up an appointment with an International Advisor to discuss your options before you drop.

Adhere to Grace Periods

F-1 students have a 60-day grace period following the completion of their degree program and following the completion of Optional Practical Training (if applicable). See the section titled “Completing Your Program” to review your options during these grace periods.

- ▶ If you receive authorization from an OCU International Advisor to withdraw from all classes, you have a 15-day grace period during which you must depart from the U.S.
- ▶ If you withdraw from all classes without first receiving authorization from an OCU International Advisor, you have no grace period and must depart the U.S. immediately.
- ▶ If you are dismissed from the university, you must meet with an OCU International Advisor as soon as possible to discuss your options.

Work Only with Authorization

F-1 students are automatically authorized to work on campus for a maximum of 20 hours per week while school is in session. During vacation periods (spring, summer, and winter breaks), you may work more than 20 hours per week on campus. To work off-campus, you must apply for and receive authorization from USCIS before beginning to work. Working off campus without authorization is a severe violation of F-1 regulations.

Keep Your Address Updated

We are required to have your correct local address on file at all times. You must update your address within 10 days of any move, even if the move is only temporary.

Maintain a Valid Passport

Keep your passport valid at all times. If your passport will expire soon, you need to contact your embassy to inquire about renewal. Once updated, you must provide the OCU International Student Advisors a copy of your new passport.

EXTENSION OF STAY

Students who are unable to complete their academic programs within the period specified on their current I-20 may file for an extension of stay. The request to extend must be filed at least 45 days prior to the program end date listed on the I-20.

Extending is your responsibility. If you forget the deadline and apply late, you risk denial. If you are employed and overlook the date, you will be working illegally. Your permission to stay in the U.S. ends on the expiration date of your I-94 Departure Record card, unless the card is marked "D/S" which means "Duration of Status". In that case, if you are an F-1 student, your permission to stay will expire 60 days after the program end date shown in item #5 of your I-20, or when you completed your program, whichever comes first.

F-1 students are eligible to apply for an extension of stay under the following conditions:

- ▶ Maintaining lawful F-1 student status
- ▶ Making normal progress toward meeting your degree requirements
- ▶ Need for extension is caused by "compelling academic or medical reasons"
- ▶ Demonstrate adequate funding for the period of the proposed extension

If you need an extension of stay and you meet the eligibility requirements above, please contact an OCU International Student Advisor.



EMPLOYMENT

On-Campus Employment

Students in F-1 status are permitted to be employed on campus for up to 20 hours per week as long as they are in legal status and are continuing to make progress toward their degree requirements. During scheduled school breaks (spring, summer, and winter breaks), USCIS places no restrictions on the number of hours you may work. Regardless of how many hours you work, you are allowed to work on campus only. Do not work off campus under any circumstance without prior authorization from an OCU International Student Advisor.

Circumstances Under Which Work Is Not Permitted

- ▷ After completion of a program. A student may not engage in on campus employment during the grace period following the completion of a course of study.
- ▷ After transferring to another school. A student may not engage in on campus employment on or after the transfer release date. At that point, the new school takes ownership of your SEVIS record. Contact your new school for further instructions.
- ▷ After violating your F-1 status. Employment is contingent on maintaining status. Once your status is violated, your employment eligibility ends. Refer to the section titled “Maintaining Status” for more information.

Off-Campus Employment

International students in F-1 student status are only permitted to work off campus under limited circumstances and only after receiving prior authorization from the DSO and/or USCIS. OCU International Student Advisors are the only ones able to authorize off-campus employment. The following are the ONLY off-campus employment options available to F-1 students:

- ▶ Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a form of work authorization that allows F-1 students to engage in temporary employment for practical training in an area which is directly related to the student’s program of study.
 - ▷ Pre-completion OPT occurs while a student is taking classes and must be part-time while class is in session.
 - ▷ Post-completion OPT occurs after completion of a program and is full-time.
 - ▷ Students are authorized for one year of OPT per degree level. Most students choose post-completion OPT which allows them to work full-time for a year after completing their studies.
- ▶ Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is a form of work authorization that allows students to engage in employment that is a required part of their degree program such as an internship or co-op.
- ▶ Severe Economic Hardship is a form of work authorization that allows students to engage in employment due to a severe unforeseen economic hardship.

TRANSFERRING YOUR SEVIS RECORD

If you want to transfer to another institution in the midst of your studies or start a new program at another institution after OCU, an immigration transfer must be completed. In an immigration transfer, you are requesting Ohio Christian University to transfer your SEVIS record to another institution to continue your studies.

In order to transfer your SEVIS record, you must follow the new school's transfer-in procedures and OCU's transfer-out procedures. To learn more about transferring your SEVIS record, contact an OCU International Student Advisor.

TRAVEL

Travel within the United States

Travel within the 48 contiguous states does not require any special permit or documentation. You should, however, take your original travel documents (passport, visa, I-94 and I-20) and a separate photocopy (in case the originals are lost).

If you travel to Hawaii, Alaska, or any of the U.S. territories, and pass through any other countries on your route, you will need to comply with the requirements for travel abroad (see below). Direct flights to and from these states and territories should not require anything other than your regular travel documents.

In order to re-enter the United States after a temporary absence of less than five months, an F-1 student must have the following documents:

- ▶ Form I-20 endorsed for travel by a DSO within the past 12 months*
- ▶ Passport valid for a least six months after reentry
- ▶ Valid F-1 visa stamp
- ▶ Financial information showing proof of necessary funds to cover tuition & living expenses, if requested

***Always keep all Form I-20s you have ever been issued.**

Visa Stamp Renewals

If you leave the U.S. and then try to re-enter, you must have a valid, current visa stamp on your passport. If your visa expires while you are in the U.S., you can legally remain in the U.S. as long as you have a valid I-20. You cannot renew your visa stamp in the U.S. If your visa has expired and you plan to travel outside the U.S. and then return, you must apply for a new visa in your home country. If you are traveling to Canada, Mexico, or other contiguous U.S. territories for less than 30 days, you do not need to get a new visa stamp. To apply for a new visa, you must have the following documents:

- ▶ Current Form I-20 endorsed for travel (carry all I-20s you have ever been issued)
- ▶ Valid passport
- ▶ Proof of financial support as listed on the form I-20
- ▶ Evidence of intent to return home following completion of study (such as employment letters, property ownership, immediate family, etc.)
- ▶ Copy of your OCU transcript

Visa processing times and procedures do vary by country. Use this website to reapply for your visa: travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study/student-visa.html

Travel through Canada or Other Countries

If you travel through Canada (even if you won't be leaving the airport), you will need to apply for an Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) or a visitor's visa. Visit www.cic.gc.ca/english/visit/visas.asp to put in your country to see which one you will need and how to apply. Check travel requirements for any countries you will be traveling through.

Temporary Absence of Longer than Five Months

If you wish to return Ohio Christian University to resume your studies following an absence of more than five months, you will need a new initial-status I-20, even if you still have a valid visa.

COMPLETING YOUR PROGRAM

For most students, your completion date will be the last day of the term in which you complete your degree requirements (regardless of the date you actually graduate).

If you plan to work in the U.S. after graduation, you must apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT). Applications for OPT should be submitted before your completion date and received by USCIS no later than 60 days after the completion of the academic program requirements. This means that your application must be received no later than 60 days after your completion date, and you will need to allow two weeks for processing and mailing. Keep in mind that applications for OPT usually take 3-4 months to be processed, and you may not begin working until you have received the authorization.

If you do not wish to apply for OPT, federal regulations provide you with a 60-day grace period, which starts the day you complete your program of study. During this grace period, you have several options:

- ▶ You can apply for a change of status if applicable. USCIS must receive the application before the end of the grace period.
- ▶ You can start a new program of study at OCU. You must be fully admitted, apply for, and receive a new I-20 before the end of the grace period. Updated financial documentation will be required.
- ▶ You can transfer to a new school. You must request a “transfer out” of your SEVIS record.
- ▶ You can leave the U.S. before the end of the grace period.

If you plan to travel outside of the U.S. during your grace period, a DSO will not be able to sign your I-20 for travel. If you travel outside of the U.S., you will NOT be able to re-enter the U.S. as an F-1 student at OCU.



TAXES

All international students (and their dependents) are required to complete an income tax return annually. OCU provides an international tax service to help students with this process around January of each year.

Most students will complete the Form 1040NR (Nonresident Alien Income Tax Return) and a Form 8843. You are required to file an income tax return even if you have no income from U.S. sources, or if the income is exempt from U.S. taxes due to treaties between the U.S. and your home country.

The U.S. tax system encompasses many different types of taxes (e.g., income tax, Social Security tax, sales tax, personal property tax) and three layers of taxation (local, state, and federal). International students have obligations at several levels.

Sources of U.S. income may include on-campus employment, scholarships, fellowships, graduate assistantships, practical or academic training, and any compensation received for labor. International students do not have to pay taxes on interest paid to them by U.S. banks.

Note that “income” is not limited to wages paid in cash, but also includes that portion of scholarships, fellowships, or assistantships that is applied to housing and meal expenses. The portion applied to tuition fees, books, and supplies is not counted as income. Be sure to inquire about the applicability of any tax treaty that might exist between your home country and the United States. IRS publication 901 lists all tax treaties.

Important Dates, Documents & Forms

April 15: This is the deadline for filing a U.S. federal income tax return if you have earned wages from U.S. sources. This is also potentially the last day to file state and local taxes. This varies by state.

June 15: This is the deadline for filing a U.S. income tax return if you have NOT earned wages from U.S. sources.

Form 519: “U.S. Tax Guide for Aliens,” this is an IRS publication. Form 519 is essential information for individuals from nations that have tax treaties with the United States.

Form 8843: “Statement for Exempt Individuals and Individuals with a Medical Condition.” This form is to be completed and returned with the 1040NR. It verifies nonresident alien tax status.

Form 1040NR: “U.S. Nonresident Alien Income Tax Return.” This form is distinct from the 1040 and the 1040A filed by residents for tax purposes. It is not interchangeable with those forms. The IRS publishes an instruction booklet to accompany the form.

W-2: “Wage and Tax Statement.” A form issued at the beginning of every year by employers. This form shows the income amounts you have earned. You must file copies of the W-2 with federal, state, and local tax returns.

W-4: "Employee's Withholding Allowance Certificate." This form is completed by you when you are first hired for a job. This form is used to indicate how much tax you want to be withheld from your paycheck.

1042S: "Foreign Persons U.S. Source Income Subject to Withholding." This is a form issued to you by the school that shows the total scholarship/fellowship payments income tax withheld and any other information regarding grant payments. It also could show the treaty benefits that could be claimed and honored on payment made by an employer.

Resources

The IRS provides information through free publications online. All forms listed above can be found online at www.irs.gov/forms-instructions.

Sprintax is the tax program that OCU has purchased to help you file your taxes. Contact your DSO during tax time (January-March) for more information.

Not only are federal taxes required, but there are also requirements for state and city taxes. Here is a link for information on filing taxes for the state of Ohio: tax.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/tax/individual/resources/who-must-file



HEALTH INSURANCE

In the U.S., the individual is responsible for paying any medical bills not covered by health insurance. For this reason, it is recommended for all international students and their accompanying dependents to have health insurance while attending Ohio Christian University. It is recommended that your coverage include “medical evacuation” and “repatriation of remains”. You may have health insurance coverage from your home country that will cover you in the U.S. but be sure to verify this.

Purchasing Health Insurance

The following health insurance providers provide options for international students:

VISIT International Health Insurance
www.visitinsurance.com

Compass Student Insurance
www.studenthealthusa.com

BETINS International Health and Travel Insurance
www.betins.com/Products/Educational/Individual.aspx

HTH Worldwide Insurance Services
www.hthtravelinsurance.com/students_plans.cfm

HEALTH & IMMUNIZATION RECORD

Traditional students must complete and submit a Health & Immunization Record to the Admissions Office before beginning classes. The Health & Immunization Record can be found at: www.ohiochristian.edu/campus-degrees/admissions/forms

IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS

Please make sure to read the following documents for additional important information pertaining to your time at Ohio Christian University.

Student Handbook (Traditional Students Only)

Available at:

ohiochristian.edu/file/doc/student-handbook

or at

ohiochristian.edu/myocu/student-development

Academic Catalog

Available at ohiochristian.edu/catalog

MORE INFORMATION

All of this information along with the forms and instructions will soon be available online at:
ohiochristian.edu/myocu/international-student-care







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www.ohiochristian.edu/myocu/international-student-care

