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# Legal Rights and Responsibilities in School and Work

## **International Students Ought to Know:**

1. that **it is important to maintain contact with the International Students' Office** on your campus. This office may be called by different names, such as ISSO (International Student and Scholar Office), SISS (Services for International Students and Scholars), ISO (International Student Office) or other title. Smaller campuses, or campuses with few international students, may merge this advisory office function with the Registrar or other school office.

No matter its title, the role of these advisers is essential to the successful completion of your academic goals in the United States.

For purposes of this book, the abbreviation ISSO office has been used to apply to International Student Services.

## International Students Ought to Know:

2 that all **laws, rules, and regulations pertaining to immigration and the maintenance of legal status change very frequently**. It is important that you be aware of this so that you can maintain legal status. The best sources of current information are the International Student Advisers at your school.

## International Students Ought to Know:

3. that it is your personal responsibility to **keep your immigration documents valid** at all times.

## International Students Ought to Know:

4. that the **laws, rules, and regulations may vary by status, country of origin, academic program requirements, expected time frame to complete studies, and/or other variables**. Each person's situation is unique, and it is important that you not assume that what will work for your friend, who is also an international student, will necessarily work for you!

## International Students Ought to Know:

5. that **the visa application process may be difficult and time consuming**, and you may experience a delay in both the application process and in making changes or personal arrangements. Plan extra time for this!!

## International Students Ought to Know:

6. that, although you will often hear the term “INS”, which refers to the former Immigration and Naturalization Service, **the functions previously carried by the INS are currently the responsibility of the Department of Homeland Security, referred to as DHS.** A part of DHS is the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service, USCIS, which processes immigration requests and issues the necessary documents.



## International Students Ought to Know:

7. that in addition to experiencing delays, **you may be individually monitored**; you may experience difficulty in renewing or extending your visa; and, if you are from certain countries or areas of the world, you may be interviewed or questioned regarding potential terrorist activities.

While this may be upsetting and offensive, it is important to remember that you are not *personally* being investigated or supervised. These are general policies designed to ensure the overall safety and security of everyone in the United States, whether citizen, resident, or temporary visitor.

## International Students Ought to Know:

8. that it is essential that you **make copies of all of your documents and keep them in a safe place**. If the originals are lost or stolen, copies will facilitate their replacement.

## International Students Ought to Know:

9. that **you need to be aware of your expiration date**, that is, the date by which you are expected to have completed your program. If you think you will need more time to complete your course of studies, you can apply for an extension. You must apply *before* the expiration date. You should contact your ISSO office for assistance with this process.

## International Students Ought to Know:

10. that **you may be able to extend your stay in the United States** after the completion of your studies for a period of time under certain special conditions. For information, contact your ISSO office.

## International Students Ought to Know:

11. that **you will be registered with SEVIS, the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System.** The SEVIS system centralizes and coordinates information, so that it is more accessible to government agencies. All educational institutions must report and keep current the status of all international students attending their institutions. For further information about SEVIS, go to: [Factsheet.htm](#)

## International Students Ought to Know:

12. that **your school will use the Internet to provide and update information with SEVIS.** Most schools also maintain a local database with information about the international students enrolled in their programs.

## International Students Ought to Know:

13. that **it is important that your SEVIS record be current** and reflect any changes in your status or plans while you are in the United States. Your ISSO office is responsible for this - but they can only keep it current if **you** inform them of any changes.

## **International Students Ought to Know:**

**14. that if you want to transfer, and are accepted at another school, both schools' International Student Services will need to be involved in your transfer process.**

Each school and program has its own requirements for course work, grades, and content. You can apply to transfer credits from one institution to another, but shouldn't expect that all your credits will transfer. Generally, there is a minimum number of credits which must be taken at the degree-granting institution.. Grades which are below a certain level will not transfer.



## International Students Ought to Know:

15. that **you have to have good academic standing in order to keep your legal status**. You should not be expelled, and should have a passing grade point average (GPA). What constitutes “passing” varies from school to school, but if your GPA falls below your school’s level, you will be put on probation for one or more semesters.

During this probationary period, you will be expected to demonstrate that you are able to do the work required by your program with good grades. If you continue to receive failing grades, you will be expelled from school, and your legal status will be affected..

## International Students Ought to Know:

16. that **if you are at risk of probation or of being expelled, it is important that you contact your academic adviser** to get help. Special workshops, programs, tutoring, and other resources can help you get back “on track”. You should also let your ISSO office know of any academic difficulties so that they can assist you to find the help you need.

## International Students Ought to Know:

17. that **you have to let the ISSO know of any changes in your program or your major**, so that these changes can be entered on your records. Changing your program or your major may also affect the expected date of completion of your studies.

## International Students Ought to Know:

18. that **you are required to engage in “full-time study.”** For undergraduates, “full-time” means at least 12 semester hours. For graduate students, “full-time” is defined by the school. “Audits” (classes you attend but for which you do not receive a grade) don’t count toward this requirement.

The number of credits each course carries varies by the number of hours it meets each week. If your school is on the semes-

ter system, two credit courses generally meet for two hours, three credit courses for three hours, and so forth. Science courses often carry four or five credits, especially when labs are required in addition to classes. In effect, if you are taking science courses you will be taking fewer courses, but the demands and credits of each course will be greater.

## International Students Ought to Know:

19. that **if you are a doctoral student, have completed all of your course work, and are working on your dissertation, you may be able to register for less than full-time** and still maintain your status. Policies will vary by school. If you can't complete your dissertation in the time originally planned, you can apply for a program extension through your ISSO.

## International Students Ought to Know:

20. that **if you enrolled in a program that begins with a summer semester or includes a summer semester requirement, you must register for summer** in order to keep your student status current. If you began your program of studies in the fall semester, summer study is not required.

## International Students Ought to Know:

21. that **the US government requires that you demonstrate financial assets to cover the expenses** of your program as well as living expenses before you begin your studies. Work opportunities are often limited for international students, and evidence that you can pay for your schooling and living expenses assure the government that you will not become dependent upon government resources and be able to complete your program.



## International Students Ought to Know:

22. that **if you have financial problems while you are here, you may apply for loans, or be employed under specific regulations and terms as a student.** It's best to avoid problems and plan carefully before you begin; but, if an emergency need occurs, go to your ISSO for advice and assistance. There are some exceptions to the employment restrictions which can assist you to earn a portion of your expenses.

## International Students Ought to Know:

23. that **if you and your family need additional resources in order for you to complete your program of studies, you should check on grants and funding for which you may be eligible through your own country.** Many countries will provide assistance to their citizens who are studying abroad but plan to return and use their knowledge in their country.

## International Students Ought to Know:

24. that **your status limits employment in the United States**. Check with your ISSO office for information about employment possibilities, if any, that are permissible in your situation.

## International Students Ought to Know:

25. that **if you are employed in the United States, you need a valid Social Security card.** While you must apply for a card through the Social Security Administration office, your ISSO office will assist you to prepare your application. Cards are generally issued within 14 days of application; however, delays occur.

To get information about social security cards in your native language, go to [www.ssa.gov/multilanguage/index.htm](http://www.ssa.gov/multilanguage/index.htm)

## International Students Ought to Know:

26. that **all residents in the US—permanent or temporary, citizen or non-citizen, employed or not employed—must file both Federal and State tax returns** on an annual basis, as well as city and county tax returns in some areas.

## International Students Ought to Know:

27. that **tax forms may be downloaded from the federal Internal Revenue site and from state and local government sites, and are also available in Post Offices and public government offices.** Your ISSO office may also have forms available for your convenience. Most tax returns are due by April 15th each year.

## International Students Ought to Know:

28. that **if you are married, you may be able to have your spouse and children accompany you** while you are studying in the US. Your ISSO office will be able to advise you of the procedures and arrangements necessary.

## **International Students Ought to Know:**

**29. that if your country and the US have strained relations, there can be a longer delay in the processing of your visa application and/or immigration application, and changes and updates, and that your records will be checked more thoroughly, your activities will be monitored more closely, and you may be requested to come for interviews or to provide additional information.**



The ACLU suggests that you carry with you the name and telephone number of a lawyer who specializes in working with foreign nationals in the United States. You have the right to call your lawyer if you are having problems with immigration processes.

## International Students Ought to Know:

30. that a **big legal issue in the US that may affect you is “profiling”**—using race, religion, country of origin, or other criteria to determine if a person or a group of people should be treated differently than others based on suspicions of possible terrorist or criminal activity. Until and unless this issue is resolved, you may encounter differential treatment if you are from certain areas of the world.

It is important to recognize that people’s reactions are not addressed toward you as an individual, and that the motivation is fear, rather than dislike.

## International Students Ought to Know:

31. that **if you lose, or fall out of, your student status, you may be asked to leave the country.** Immediately contact your school's ISSO office for assistance. If you want to appeal, ask a lawyer who specializes in immigration issues to review your individual circumstances and offer professional advice. The lawyer will charge a fee for this service.

## International Students Ought to Know:

32. that **your parents, brothers, and sisters can apply for a Tourist Visa to visit the US** through the embassy in your country if they want to come and visit you. The ISSO office at your school can assist in this process.

## International Students Ought to Know:

33. that **if you are traveling within the United States, you should carry your immigration documents with you** for identification and as evidence of your legal status in this country.

## International Students Ought to Know:

34. that **you have the right to consult an attorney specializing in immigration law** if you have any special concerns or problems. The cost of this consultation is your personal responsibility.

You can find a lawyer through their professional organization, American Immigration Lawyers Association, on line at [www.AILA.org](http://www.AILA.org)