Introduction

The USCIS Electronic Immigration System (USCIS ELIS) allows individuals to e-file applications for immigration benefits. It provides more accurate, convenient, and secure customer service and allows U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to process cases with greater efficiency and consistency.

Background

USCIS ELIS allows eligible foreign exchange students to e-file a Form I-539 application to extend, change or reinstate their nonimmigrant status. These answers should give Designated School Officials (DSO) and foreign exchange students a better understanding of USCIS ELIS and how USCIS handles the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) Form I-20, the Arrival-Departure Record Form I-94, and other documents.

Questions & Answers

Q1. What is the SEVIS Form I-20?
A1. Foreign exchange students will receive a Form I-20 from the DSO of the educational institution that accepted the student to study in the United States. That student must have a Form I-20 to apply for a visa, to enter the United States, and to apply for benefits.

Q2. Is a Form I-20 valid without a stamp?
A2. Yes. A stamp is not required on the Form I-20. Some state and federal agencies require foreign students to present a Form I-20 to identify the end date for the student’s program. However, a stamp is not required for this purpose.

Q3. How will an unstamped Form I-20 affect work authorization?
A3. A student should have no negative impact on off-campus employment if s/he has the USCIS-issued Employment Authorization Document and a Form I-20.

Q4. How will an unstamped Form I-20 affect applying for state or federal benefits?
A4. An unstamped Form I-20 should have no negative impact on applications for state or federal benefits, including driver’s licenses and state-issued identification cards. USCIS is actively communicating with Departments of Motor Vehicles (DMVs) to ensure their understanding that a Form I-20 does not require a stamp to be valid. International students and scholars who encounter issues with their state or federal benefit applications should contact the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) at (703) 603-3400 or SEVP@dhs.gov.

Q5. What is an endorsed Form I-20?
A5. The Form I-20 is endorsed when it is signed by a DSO, which allows the student to travel internationally or apply for employment authorization.

Q6. How does USCIS ELIS handle the Forms I-20 and DS-2019?
A6. USCIS will accept a photocopy or scanned electronic version of a valid Form I-20 or DS-2019. If USCIS needs to review the original document, USCIS will ask you to provide the original document. USCIS will adjudicate the request electronically. Although the student will receive the approval notice (Form I-797) through the mail, the scanned copy of the Form I-20 will not be stamped and returned. As of Aug. 10, 2012, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) no longer provides admission stamps on Forms I-20 and DS-2019 for prospective and returning international students and scholars (traveling with F, M, and J visas) seeking admission to the United States. This change makes CBP processes consistent with USCIS’s recent change to stop stamping the Form I-20.

Q7. Can a student upload documents after finishing submitting payment?
A7. You should upload all required documents in USCIS ELIS before making payment and submitting the case for decision. However, if needed you may also submit additional documentation at any time before a decision is made on your case by logging into your USCIS ELIS account and selecting “Upload Additional Documents.” If you have more than one application pending please be sure to upload the documents in the case for which they apply.

Q8. What do students enter into the (MM/DD/YYY) field if their Form I-94 only notes “D/S” and does not have a specific expiration date?
A8. If your Form I-94, I-94W, I-95, or entry stamp placed on your passport notes only “D/S” instead of a specific expiration date, leave the (MM/DD/YYY) field blank. In a future release of USCIS ELIS, this field will change to allow students to enter “D/S”.

Q9. When will USCIS fix the function that says Optional Practical Training (OPT) is Unauthorized Work?
A9. As a result of feedback from DSO’s, USCIS ELIS now correctly identifies OPT work as authorized.

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