



**University at Buffalo**  
*The State University of New York*

**Office of International Education**  
International Student and Scholar Services

## **CHANGE OF STATUS: H-4 DEPENDENT TO F-1 STUDENT**

### **What is a Change of Status?**

A change of status is a change in one's primary purpose for being in the U.S. There are two ways to change one's immigration status. One way is to travel back home or outside the U.S., apply for an F-1 visa at a U.S. Consulate and re-enter the U.S. in the new status. The other way is to submit a change of status application to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services ("USCIS") while remaining in the U.S. The USCIS reviews applications for changes of status based on the applicant's ability to document and justify a change of primary purpose for being in the U.S. since having arrived in the U.S.

### **Am I eligible to apply for a change of status from H-4 to F-1?**

To be eligible for a change of status to F-1, you must have maintained and currently be in lawful status as an H-4, be admitted to a degree program at UB and have received a new I-20.

Note: Your application for a change of status must be received by the USCIS during the 30-day period before the program start date on your I-20. If there is a gap of more than 30 days between the end of your current immigration status and the program start date on your I-20, your change of status application will likely be denied.

### **How do I obtain an I-20?**

If you are applying for admission to UB and requesting a change of status at the same time, the Office of International Admissions will issue your I-20. The documents required will be explained as part of the admissions process.

If you are already admitted to UB and are currently enrolled as a student, the International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS) office will issue your I-20 after you submit the following documents:

- Copies of your current valid immigration documents, including the biographic page of your passport
- Financial documents indicating you have sufficient funds for your studies. For more information on acceptable financial documents, visit [www.buffalo.edu/intlservices/documents/FinancialDocumentation-LH.pdf](http://www.buffalo.edu/intlservices/documents/FinancialDocumentation-LH.pdf)
- Name and contact information for your academic advisor

- Address in your home country. Note: F-1 is a non-immigrant visa category which means that you must intend to return to your home country after your studies.

### **How do I change my status by traveling?**

1. Obtain an “initial” I-20. During your application to UB or while working with an International Student Advisor in ISSS, please indicate that you plan to change your status by traveling. You will then be issued an “initial” I-20.
2. Pay the SEVIS Fee. For more information on how to pay the SEVIS Fee, visit [www.buffalo.edu/intlservices/f1.html#sevis](http://www.buffalo.edu/intlservices/f1.html#sevis). Note: You must bring the SEVIS fee payment receipt with you to the U.S. Consulate or Embassy where you will apply for the visa.
3. Prepare additional supporting documentation to be used during the visa interview. For more information on these requirements visit [www.buffalo.edu/intlservices/visa2.html](http://www.buffalo.edu/intlservices/visa2.html).
4. After receiving your F-1 visa stamp, re-enter the U.S. using the I-20 and F-1 visa stamp. Submit copies of these documents to ISSS upon your arrival.

### **How do I apply for a change of status inside the U.S. from H-4 to F-1?**

1. Obtain a “change of status” I-20.
2. Pay the SEVIS Fee. Please read “The SEVIS Fee Requirement” handout at [www.buffalo.edu/intlservices/f1.html#sevis](http://www.buffalo.edu/intlservices/f1.html#sevis) for more information on how to pay the fee.
3. Submit the following to the USCIS:
  - **Application fee of \$290.** This should be a check payable to the “USCIS”. Write your 11-digit “admission number” from your I-94 card on the front of the check or money order.
  - **Cover letter** from you addressed to the USCIS, requesting a change of status from H-4 dependent to F-1 and explaining your circumstances. Include the reasons why you entered the U.S. as an H-4 dependent, why and how your intentions changed after your arrival in the U.S., and any other information relevant to your decision to study in the U.S. Explain as well how this education will help you when you return to your home country.
  - **Form I-539** “Application to Extend/Change Nonimmigrant Status” (*Please use the fillable form available at [www.buffalo.edu/intlservices/documents/i-539\\_expires2012.0229\\_001.pdf](http://www.buffalo.edu/intlservices/documents/i-539_expires2012.0229_001.pdf)*)
  - Copy of your **SEVIS fee receipt** verifying that you paid the SEVIS fee
  - **Your original** “change of status” I-20. Please sign your I-20 at the bottom of Page 1.
  - Photocopies of the **financial documentation** you submitted when you requested an I-20.
  - Photocopy of the **front and back of your Form I-94** (small, white card) with a legible date stamp
  - Photocopy of your **passport** biographic and picture pages
  - Photocopy of your **U.S. visa stamp**
  - Photocopies of your **spouse’s/parent’s H-1B documents** (biographic / picture page of passport, visa stamp, I-94 card, Form I-797, pay stubs showing current employment)

**We recommend that you schedule an appointment with an International Student Advisor to review your completed application before submitting it to the USCIS.**

**Where do I send my application?**

Mail your completed application to the Dallas Lockbox. We recommend using a reliable, express mail/courier service.

For express courier deliveries (e.g. UPS, Fed Ex) use the following address:

USCIS  
ATTN: I-539  
2501 S. State Highway 121 Business  
Suite 400  
Lewisville, TX 75067

For regular U.S. Mail use the following address:

USCIS  
P.O. Box 660166  
Dallas, TX 75266

*Please make a photocopy of your entire application and supporting documents for your files before sending them to the USCIS.*

**How long will processing at the USCIS take?**

Estimated processing time is 3-6 months. After the USCIS receives your application, it will mail you a Form I-797 Notice of Receipt with your assigned case number. You can check the status of your application online by following the directions on the form. When you receive a response from the USCIS, you must report the outcome to International Student and Scholar Services. **If the application is approved, send or bring a photocopy of your I-20, I-797 “Approval Notice” and new I-94 card to ISSS, 210 Talbert Hall.**

**Can I begin attending classes after I’ve submitted my application to the USCIS and while I’m awaiting a response?**

**You may attend classes while your change of status application is pending.** However, you may not begin an assistantship, or engage in employment of any kind until your change of status to F-1 student has been approved.

**Please note that F-1 students are not eligible for in-state tuition.**