

Immigration Documents for the Low-Residency MFA program

The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) can only issue an I-20 that is valid for the dates a student is required to be in the United States to attend Low-Residency Master of Fine Arts (Low-Res MFA) classes on a full-time basis. Because there are three on-campus sessions, each one year apart, students will be issued three separate I-20s, pay three separate SEVIS I-901 fees, and obtain three separate F-1 visas.

Example: An F-1 international student starting the Low-Res MFA in June 2014 would be issued an I-20 for only the dates that reflect the June 2014 session, pay the SEVIS fee, and use that I-20 to obtain a F-1 visa.

In spring 2015, the student would be issued a new initial I-20 for only the dates that reflect the June 2015 session, would pay another SEVIS fee, and use the new I-20 to obtain another F-1 visa. In the third year, the process would repeat again.

It is important to note that each time when applying for a visa, US consular officers must determine that the person is eligible for that specific visa at that time in order to approve the application. Prior successful F-1 visa applications are not a guarantee of future approvals. Each application is taken on its own merits, and it is possible for a student who has been issued an F-1 visa in the past to have a subsequent one denied.

Length of Stay in the United States

US immigration regulations allow F-1 visa holders to enter the United States no more than 30 days before the program start date listed on their I-20.

F-1 students are extended a 60-day grace period to remain in the United States after the program end date listed on their I-20. During this time, a student may remain in the United States to travel (within the country) and to make preparations to depart. Students may not work or study during their grace period. At the conclusion of the 60-day grace period, a student must depart the United States. Departing during the grace period ends their F-1 status.

It is important to follow regulations stipulating length of stay in the United States, and as reflected on the I-20. Staying past the end date and associated grace period on the I-20 is a direct violation of F-1 status and could jeopardize future visa applications.

While in the United States, F-1 students are required to abide by all relevant immigration regulations, including being registered for a full-time course of study each term.

Employment Authorization

Because a student's physical presence in the United States in F-1 status is only required for three six-week periods of time, students do not accrue enough time consecutively in F-1 status to be eligible for either Curricular Practical Training (CPT) or Optional Practical Training (OPT).

For immigration-related questions related to enrollment in the Low-Res MFA program, please contact an advisor in International Affairs at intaff@saic.edu.