



International Student Handbook

Last Updated: 202101



International Student Orientation Handbook

(For New International Students)

Welcome to the United States of America!

This handbook has information regarding staying in compliance with immigration laws while attending Gulf Coast State College. All new students must become familiar with this information.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact one of the International Student Representatives. The DSO, Margaret Long, can be reached by email at m.long@gulfcoast.edu or by phone at (850) 769-1551 ext. 4866 or the PDSO, Kristin Cottrell, can be reached by email at kcottrell@gulfcoast.edu or by phone at (850) 769-1551 ext. 4862.

Welcome to Gulf Coast State College!

Who is considered an International Student at Gulf Coast State College?

Except for those on the B-1, B-2 or an F-2 immigration status, an International Student is any person who has some type of legal U.S. State Department Visa.

What is a VISA?

A VISA is a document approved by a U.S. embassy and displayed in one's passport to be used to come to our Port of Entry (POE). The time period from the visa issuance date to visa expiration date as shown on the visa, is called visa validity. The visa expiration date has nothing to do with the authorized length of stay in the United States. A current visa is not needed to remain in the United States but is needed to reenter the United States after traveling abroad.

What is immigration status?

At the POE, the person's status is approved or denied by the U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP). Upon approval, the person/student is issued the I-94 Card. The I-94 Card states a person's status and their expiration date. The student should verify that the "Admit Until" date on the I-94 and the admissions stamp on your passport lists "D/S" (that means, Duration of Status) and not a specific date. It is proof that the student entered the United States legally and determines the length of stay in the United States. Gulf Coast State College will need to keep a copy of the student's most recent I-94 on file for record keeping purposes. For more information, see the following link:

<https://www.cbp.gov/travel/international-visitors/i-94>. We will have the student sign a permission slip to access their most recent I-94.

HEALTH/Accident Insurance: VERY IMPORTANT!

All international students on the F-1 student visa must have proof of health/accident insurance. If proof of insurance is not provided, a hold will be added to the students' information. The coverage must be for a full year and must be renewed each year.

See <https://www.isoa.org/> for more information.

SEVIS & the F-1 International Student's I-20

SEVIS (Student & Exchange Visitor Information System) is the web-based system to provide real-time, up to date information of nonimmigrants. The reporting and monitoring of students while in the United States is mandated by U.S. law. At the beginning of each semester, students must report to the International Student Representative and complete the "Semester Update Form".

Students need to do the following to stay in compliance with U.S. laws:

- Enroll in a full time course of study at the beginning of each semester. A full course of study is 12 credit hours. Only one of these classes may be an online class. Summer semester is considered a vacation semester, except for students who will begin the academic program of studies in the spring or summer semester. A student must have attended 2 consecutive semesters before they are eligible to take the summer semester off. If the summer semester is not a required semester for a student, they are still eligible to take classes but do NOT have to enroll in 12 hours. They are also eligible to take all online classes. Learn more about this requirement by visiting this page: <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/full-course-of-study>
- Attend and pass your classes. Consult with the DSO (International Student Representative) before dropping below a full time course of study for any reason.
- Report address changes to the DSO within 10 days of the change.
- Report any change in sources of financial support to the DSO.
- Seek the approval of the DSO/USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services) before engaging in employment or practical training.
- Report any changes in program of study to the DSO.
- Report any change in status to the DSO.
- Notify the DSO prior to traveling outside the United States. You will need to get an updated I-20 signed for travel.
- Notify the DSO upon applying for change of nonimmigrant status.
- Notify the DSO upon approval of an adjustment of status to an immigrant.
- Consult with the DSO to extend the program.
- Notify the DSO if intending to transfer to another SEVIS school.
- Notify the DSO about changes in dependent status.
- Maintain a valid passport with at least 6 months remaining before expiration.

Student Benefits

While studying in the United States, students can apply for certain benefits. These student benefits are not granted by SEVP and require students to apply to other U.S. government agencies to receive them.

- Apply for a Driver's License – You must apply for one at your local Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). For more information go here: <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/driving-in-the-united-states>
- Work in the United States – You may apply for on-campus employment up to 30 days before the start of classes. You will need to talk with the DSO about this. You may be approved to work up to 20 hours per week when school is in session. If you have additional questions, please visit the link here: <https://www.ice.gov/sevis/employment#tab0>

- Participate in a Training Opportunity – As an F-1 student, you may be eligible to participate in paid training opportunities that relate to your program of study. Restrictions do apply. See the following link for more information: <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/training-opportunities-in-the-united-states>
- Apply for a Social Security Number – All students who receive wages from an employer must apply for a Social Security Number (SSN). Please visit the following page for more information: <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/obtaining-a-social-security-number>

TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language

Minimum total scores of 79 on the Internet-based, 213 on the Computer-based and 550 on the paper-based test or 6 hours of college English is required if the native language is not English.

International students should plan to take the [TOEFL](#) at least three (3) months prior to the intended term of enrollment in order to assure the official test score report is received at least thirty (30) days before the beginning of the term.

Financial Statement

Students must be able to bear the cost of study and living expenses. A Statement of Financial Responsibility must be completed and notarized each year. An official bank statement with funds available to you in excess of \$23,122 (US currency) must be attached to the statement of financial responsibility. Students should know that \$23,122 (US currency) is needed each year to cover living expenses, tuition, and fees. This amount is tentative.

[Statement of Financial Responsibility of financial resources](#)

Documentary evidence of means of financial support must be provided to the College for admission purposes and issuance of the Certificate of Eligibility (Form I-20).

The [Statement of Financial Responsibility](#) indicates that you have or your sponsor has an account of at least \$23,122 (US Currency) and that this money is to be used to support you while you study at Gulf Coast State College. The Statement of Financial Responsibility must be certified authentic (notarized) and an official bank statement must be attached. The statement must be dated no more than 6 months from the term deadline date.

Federal financial aid is not available to international students. Tuition and fees must be paid by the beginning of each term. Students may apply for GCSC scholarships. See the following link for more information: <https://www.gulfcoast.edu/foundation/>.

Foreign Transcripts

Transcripts from foreign institutions must be evaluated by any current NACES member (www.naces.org/members). It is the responsibility of the student to bear all associated costs and fees. Gulf Coast will determine transferable credits. If the academic institution you attended does not issue documents in English, you must submit precise word for word translations of all your credentials.

- High school graduates only, please submit your original high school transcript to a [NACES](#) approved company for a document-by-document evaluation.
- University students, please submit university original transcripts to a [NACES](#) approved company for a course-by-course evaluation, in addition to the high school transcripts. Additional high school documents may be required. Acceptance of transfer courses is subject to approval by Gulf Coast State College.

Travel outside the United States

Any student on F-1 status who needs to leave the United States must see the International Student Representative first and have their I-20 signed.

What to expect when entering/re-entering the country?

- To travel outside of the U. S., the student will need a Form I-20 with current information that is signed by the DSO on pages 1 and 3 allowing for travel outside of the U.S.
- The student's visa (if applicable) and passport must still be valid at the time the student reenters the United States (unless the student has taken a trip of less than 30 days to Canada, Mexico or contiguous islands).
- A student cannot reenter the country during the grace period granted after completing a program of study.

How to change program of study/degree?

If a student wants to change the program of study / degree, they must see the International Student Representative first to discuss the situation before an updated I-20 can be completed.

Passport Expiration Dates

All international students must keep their passports up to date with at least six months remaining before expiration. The location and contact information for embassies may be obtained by going to the U.S. State Department's website. www.state.gov

Full Course of Study

All F-1 students must maintain a full course of study, or 12 semester hours. Students may count no more than the equivalent of one class or three credits of online or distance-learning courses per semester toward the full course of study.

Reduced Course Load (RCL)

There are three circumstances when an F-1 student can take less than a full course of study:

- Academic difficulties
- Medical conditions
- Completion of a course of study

A doctor's letter is required for medical reasons and it must state the start and end date of the reduced course load.

Summer Enrollment

Summer attendance is optional after the student has completed 2 sequential semesters at GCSC.

Registration Monitoring

At the end of each drop/add period, all international students on F-1 status are monitored for attendance and registration is entered in the SEVP system. If you must withdraw from a class, see the International Student Representative first as you must maintain status.

Hurricanes & International Students

In the event of a hurricane, the International Student Representative needs to have the following information on file by completing the Emergency Contact Form.

- Where the student plans to go for safety (address).
- Name of the people with whom the student is staying.
- Email address and phone number of the student.
- The students' emergency contact information in case the college needs to reach them and assure them of your safety.

International Student Representative / PDSO and DSO
Primary Designated School Official and Designated School Official

Margaret Long / Enrollment Services

Phone: 850-769-1551 x 4866

mlong@gulfcoast.edu

Mailing Address

Gulf Coast State College

Attn: Margaret Long

5230 U.S. Hwy 98

Panama City, FL 32401

Office Hours:

Monday – Friday 8 am to 4 pm

Kristin Cottrell / Coordinator of Enrollment Services

Phone: 850-769-1551 x 4862

Kcottrell@gulfcoast.edu

Mailing Address

Gulf Coast State College

Attn: Kristin Cottrell

5230 U.S. Hwy 98

Panama City, FL 32401

Office Hours:

Monday – Friday 7:30 am to 3:30 pm