

Guide: I-539 Change of Status Online Application (COS)

Once admitted to Cerritos College you may consider a change of status (COS) to F-1 student status. We recommend you meet an F-1 adviser to discuss your situation and review your options. Reasons to consider changing to F-1 student status:

1. Some visa statuses will NOT permit you to enroll in school or may only permit part time enrollment. F-1 student status will allow you to enroll as a full-time student.
2. Your current visa status will be expiring, or you will be aging out (ex: F-2 and H-4 expire at age 21).
3. Once in F-1 student status, you will be eligible for on-campus part-time employment immediately.
4. After 1 year in F-1 student status, you may be eligible for other F-1 benefits, including Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and/or Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Option 1 – Application Procedure for Travel & Reenter (obtain F-1 visa at U.S. embassy abroad)

If you have plans to travel outside of the U.S. before the start of the next session or semester, you may request an *initial* I-20 to obtain your visa abroad and reenter the U.S. in F-1 status:

1. **Submit a complete international student application:** review the complete application process: <https://www.cerritos.edu/international/application-process.htm>
2. **Receive an initial attendance I-20** form from your International Student Adviser (obtaining an I-20 does not guarantee that you will receive F-1 status).
3. **Pay the SEVIS I-901 fee:** www.fmjfee.com
4. **Apply for an F-1 visa at a U.S. Embassy abroad** (Canadian Citizens are exempt): review detailed instructions on our website: <https://www.cerritos.edu/international/arrival-for-new-students.htm>
5. **Re-enter the U.S. in F-1 status** no more than 30 days before your program start date (refer to your I-20)
6. **Print your new I-94** as soon as you arrive in the U.S. to verify your new status, provide copy to your International Student Adviser: www.i94.cbp.dhs.gov

Option 2 – Application Procedure to Apply for a COS within the U.S.

If you wish to remain in the U.S., you can file a COS application with U.S. Customs and Immigration Services (USCIS). This option may take between 3-6 months, and you MUST NOT travel outside of the U.S. while your request is pending.

1. **Submit a complete international student application:** review the complete application process: <https://www.cerritos.edu/international/application-process.htm>
 - a. **If you are a current Cerritos College student in H-4 status, do not** submit an online application, **contact the OISS first to discuss your case.**
2. **Submit the following documents to your International Student Adviser:**
 - a. Complete I-539 form draft online (review with an adviser BEFORE submitting to USCIS): www.uscis.gov
 - b. Personal Statement – explain your request and the reason for it, include a detailed timeline and any evidence
 - c. Copies of all previously issued I-20s, if applicable. If changing from F-2 to F-1, please also provide a copy of spouse/parent's F-1 I-20.
 - d. Signed Statement of Understanding: *Page 4 of this document.*
3. **Receive a 'Change of Status I-20'** from your international student adviser.
4. **Pay the SEVIS I-901 fee for your new I-20:** www.fmjfee.com
5. **Pay \$455 COS fee** (including \$370 I-539 filing fee and \$85 biometrics fee) by credit card on your www.uscis.gov account
6. **Submit a complete application to USCIS online** – refer to the *Application checklist* below.



COS Application Complete Checklist

Collect all documents before submitting your I-539 online:

- Complete I-539 Form Online (www.uscis.gov) – BEFORE SUBMITTING, print the draft PDF and send to F-1 adviser for review
 - If you have dependents, you may NOT apply online. File I-539A for each dependent by mail.
 - Personal Statement – explain your request and the reason for it, include a detailed timeline and any evidence
 - \$455 (including \$370 I-539 filing fee and \$85 biometrics fee) paid online with credit card
 - Copy of your newly issued and signed COS I-20
 - Proof of I-901 SEVIS fee payment: www.fmjfee.com
 - Copy of your most recent I-94: www.i94.cbp.dhs.gov
 - Copy of your Passport bio page (must be valid for at least 6 months into the future) and current visa
 - Copies of all previously issued I-20s. If changing from F-2 to F-1, please also provide a copy of spouse/parent's F-1 I-20.
 - Copy of recent financial documents (minimum USD \$24,500) and signed [statement of financial support](#), if applicable.
 - Copy of Cerritos College admission letter
 - Official transcripts from all previously attended U.S. schools
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Preparing your Personal Statement/Explanation

The most effective way to write your statement is to be honest and very detailed:

The statement should explain your situation clearly. Include the following:

- A detailed timeline:
 - When did you arrive in the U.S. and under what visa status?
 - What is your current visa status and when will it expire?
 - When did you contact Cerritos College and apply for admission?
- Why are you interested in changing to F-1 status?
- What will you do after you complete your program? An F-1 visa is a non-immigrant visa and you should establish that you intend to return to your home country after you complete your studies.

Your statement could begin like this:

I am requesting a change of status from [your current visa status] to F-1 student because...

[Add further explanation – answer the bullets above]

Submit your I-539 Application Online

Complete it, but do NOT submit until an adviser/DSO reviews your responses and provides I-20:

***IMPORTANT NOTE:** Make sure you have received your Change of Status I-20 from the F-1 adviser, printed it, and signed it with a pen under *Student Attestation*. Then, scan and upload the I20 to your online I-539 application. If you submit your application **before** you have uploaded your new I-20, or if you do not sign with ink (electronic signature not accepted), your application will be **denied**.

Once you have carefully reviewed your I-539 and all supporting documents including your new signed COS I-20, then you pay the I-539 processing fee with a credit card and submit the application. Immediately after submitting online, you will receive a USCIS case number, save this submission page as a PDF and provide a copy to your F-1 adviser.

Check your USCIS account and your mail regularly for additional correspondence from USCIS.

Form I-797C, Notice of Action - ASC Appointment Notice

Receipt Notice & ASC (Biometric) Appointment Notice:

You should receive 2 Form I-797C notices, it is important to check your mail and online USCIS account regularly for these notices and other updates:

1. Receipt Notice – 2-3 weeks after submitting application online, you should receive a printed receipt by mail confirming submission and your case number. Use this case number to track status of your application online at <https://www.uscis.gov/tools/checking-your-case-status-online>.



2. Biometrics Appointment – this notice will include a very specific date, time, and Application Support Center location (photo and fingerprints will be taken). If you miss this appointment, your application will be DENIED.

What if I receive a 'Request for Evidence (RFE)'?

If USCIS requires additional information or documents, they will contact you by regular mail or via your USCIS online account; check both regularly. You must respond BEFORE the due date give on your RFE. Your application will be denied if you do not respond in time. Schedule an appointment with an International Student Adviser IMMEDIATELY if you receive an RFE.

Student Requirements & Responsibilities

Read carefully, ensure you are aware of your responsibilities to avoid potentially serious immigration problems:

1. I understand that Cerritos & the Office of International Student Services (OISS) at Cerritos are not responsible for filing my change of status (COS) petition or the final decision made by USCIS.
2. Neither receiving an I-20 nor sending an application for COS to USCIS guarantees that your request will be approved.
3. All F-1 students must pay the non-refundable I-901 SEVIS fee.
4. While COS application is pending, remain in the U.S. Do NOT travel outside of the U.S. until approved.
5. Once your F-1 status is approved, you must purchase the International Student Medical Insurance coverage through Cerritos College and enroll in a minimum of 12 units (9 units minimum of in person instruction) each Fall and Spring Semester.
6. Notify OISS within 10 days if you move or make any changes to your contact information (phone, number, email address, etc.).
7. Notify OISS if you choose to withdraw your application for COS, decide to file any other petitions with USCIS, or choose to travel outside of the US while your COS application is pending.
8. While your COS request is pending, you may or may not be permitted to enroll in classes, depending on your current visa status. Consult with an International Student Advisor to determine if you can enroll and if there is a limit.
9. If your COS application is denied, you may be required to depart the U.S. immediately if your current visa status has already expired. Furthermore, if you have registered for classes, you may need to withdraw from those classes in order to depart the U.S. If you drop classes due to a denial, you may not be able to receive any refund of fees paid.
10. All students requesting F-1 status must complete the New International Student Orientation on Canvas. Students who do not complete it will receive a hold on their account which will prevent adding/dropping classes and requesting transcripts.
11. Once your COS is approved, if you wish to travel outside of the U.S. you must obtain an F-1 student visa from a U.S. embassy abroad before returning to the U.S. Find a U.S. Embassy here: <http://usembassy.state.gov/>

Keep this document for your records.

Questions? Contact Cerritos College, Office of International Student Services

Your F-1 Advisors:

[Jeanora Price](#) • [Gladys Calderon](#)



Student Request for Change of Status (COS)

Please provide the following information:

Student Name: Cerritos ID:

Email: Phone:

What is your current visa status? When does your current visa expire?

If your current visa is H-4, please answer the following questions:

Permanent foreign address (your home country address):

City of Birth: Country of Birth:

Country of Nationality (country that issued your passport):

Submit the following for review to receive your COS I-20:

- Complete I-539 Form draft online (review with an adviser BEFORE submitting to USCIS): www.uscis.gov
- Cover Letter – explain your request and the reason for it, include a detailed timeline
- Copies of all previously issued I-20s if applicable. If changing from F-2 to F-1, please also provide a copy of spouse/parent's F-1 I-20.
- Signed Statement of Understanding

Change of Status (COS) Statement of Understanding

By reading and signing this form, you agree to the following:

- I understand that Cerritos & the Office of International Student Services (OISS) at Cerritos are not responsible for filing my change of status (COS) petition or the final decision made by USCIS.
- Neither receiving an I-20 nor sending an application for COS to USCIS guarantees that your request will be approved.
- All F-1 students must pay the non-refundable I-901 SEVIS fee.
- While COS application is pending, remain in the U.S. Do NOT travel outside of the U.S. until approved.
- Once your F-1 status is approved, you must purchase the International Student Medical Insurance coverage through Cerritos College and enroll in a minimum of 12 units (9 units minimum of in person instruction) each Fall and Spring Semester.
- Notify OISS within 10 days if you move or make any changes to your contact information (phone, email, address, etc.)
- Notify OISS if you choose to withdraw your application for COS, decide to file any other petitions with USCIS, or choose to travel outside of the US while your COS application is pending.
- While your COS request is pending, you may or may not be permitted to enroll in classes, depending on your current visa status. Consult with an International Student Advisor to determine if you can enroll and if there is a limit.
- If your COS application is denied, you may be required to depart the U.S. immediately if your current visa status has already expired. Furthermore, if you have registered for classes, you may need to withdraw from those classes in order to depart the U.S. If you drop classes due to a denial, you may not be able to receive any refund of fees paid.
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- Once your COS is approved, if you wish to travel outside of the U.S. you must obtain an F-1 student visa from a U.S. embassy abroad before returning to the U.S. Find a U.S. Embassy here: <http://usembassy.state.gov/>
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Student Signature:

Date: