



December 2024 NEWS

Can you believe it is already December and almost time for the end of Fall semester? As you finish your classes, know that it has been our privilege to serve you in 2024. We hope that you take time to relax and have fun during the Winter Break! If you are looking for stuff to do or how to connect with others, head over to the [International Student Success Team's webpage](#) for links to social media, student chat group, events, and their student newsletter.

Winter Break

The university will be closed for Winter Break, Monday, December 23, 2024, through Friday, January 3, 2025. *iStart eforms will not be processed during Winter Break. Students should finalize all eforms by Monday, December 9, 2024, at 11:59pm, if they need to be processed in 2024. Normal business operations will resume on Monday, January 6, 2025.*

Travel Signatures

Check Page 2 of your I-20 for a valid travel signature if you plan to travel outside the U.S. for the Winter Break. If the travel signature is dated before December 2023 and you plan to travel, it is time for a fresh signature. Log into iStart to access the Travel Signature eform. **Be sure to give our staff at least 5 business days to process.** For information on traveling as an F-1 student, watch this helpful video https://youtu.be/Vhal_O7WBM4 and explore our travel webpage <https://www.usf.edu/world/international-services/immigration/travel.aspx>

Get Ready for Tax Season

All F and J visa holders who were physically present in the U.S., in 2024, are required to file a tax form in 2025. This is regardless of whether you worked or received income or not in 2024. Relax! Tax forms are filed between February 15 and April 15. There is time to review the resources in the [tax section](#) of our website. We will send you an email with a link and a code to use, *Sprintax Forms*, in mid-February. The code applies the USF discount and covers the cost of the basic 1040-NR and 8843 forms.

Holiday Scams

Scams increase during the holidays. Be wary of suspicious phone calls or email. To protect yourself:

- Do not give out your birth date, SSN, or any other identifying information to someone over the phone or email.
- If you don't know the number, don't answer.
- If you do answer, and the individual is asking for personal information or payment, it's okay to hang up!
- **Government officials will NEVER ask for payment over the phone or email.** They will not use fear tactics or try to intimidate you. If a phone call or email threatens to arrest or deport you if you don't pay a fee, hang up!
- Report a scam to the [Federal Trade Commission](#) and the organization/institution the scammer claims to be representing. Most government agencies have a section on their website about reporting fraudulent activity.

- **Contact the International Student Support Team or OIS about suspicious phone calls, emails, or if you've fallen victim to a scam.** We can help you, and reporting scams helps us protect other international students from dangerous or expensive scams, too.

USF Academic Reminders

Fall Semester Grades

Fall grades will be visible in Student Self-Service on December 20. If you had a reduced course load (RCL) for your final semester or you thought you would graduate and applied for post-completion OPT but can no longer graduate, contact our office during Virtual Drop-in hours, Walk-in hours, or email F1status@usf.edu. We need to take immediate action if your I-20 ends in December 2024 and you will not graduate. Also contact OIS if you are put on final probation or academic dismissal and will not be able to register for Spring 2025.

Fee Payments

Check out the official [USF tuition payment deadline](#) website for a full list of payment deadlines. Failure to pay tuition in full by the deadline, can result in cancellation of registration. If you are an F-1 or J-1 student, you must remain enrolled for full-time courses as part of your immigration status. OIS will reach out to you if your registration is cancelled.

Fall 2024 Graduating Students

F-1 students who graduate in Fall 2024 enter a 60 day status grace period from December 31, 2024 to March 1, 2025. OIS shortens I-20's once graduation is officially certified. During the status grace period, you can do the following:

- Apply for OPT and submit application to USCIS. See our website for [information on OPT filing](#).
- Obtain admission and a new I-20 for another level of study at USF for a program that begins Spring 2025.
- Obtain admission and transfer your SEVIS record to another school for a program that begins in Spring 2025. Complete the F-1 Transfer OUT – SEVIS Release Form in iStart with your official admission letter.
- Apply for a change of status to a different visa classification.

Spring 2025 Course Registration

F-1 and J-1 students should select mostly in-person courses at their home campus. Undergraduate students should enroll in 12 credits hours and graduate students should enroll in 9 credit hours. F-1 and J-1 students are restricted to counting one 3 credit hour online course towards their full-time enrollment. Students who are completing their academic program and graduating in Spring 2025 can complete the Reduced Course Load eform in iStart if they need less than full-time courses to complete the program.

USF Home Campus

F-1 students are required to take 50% or more of their courses at their USF Home Campus. We recommend that students check carefully to determine the campus connected to online courses. Taking courses at multiple campuses does not allow a student to take additional online courses.

Excess Credit Hours

Students should not postpone graduation or add additional excess credit hours for the purposes of engaging in internships or post-graduation work.

Winter Session

The [Winter Session](#) occurs during Winter Break and consists of online courses. While F-1 students can take courses during winter session, they need to be aware that these courses count towards the Spring semester and appear on their transcript as Spring semester courses. This means that students who take a winter session online course will need to take all face-to-face courses for Spring semester.

Student Self-Service - Phone Number and Personal Email

F-1 and J-1 students must maintain a valid U.S. phone number. Go to Student Self-Service>View & Update My Information>Personal Information>Phone Number to update. Enter the 3-digit area code first and then the 7-digit phone number. All students should also update their PERSONAL non-USF email to an email that is in use. This will allow you to use iStart after you graduate.

Workshops and Presentations

F1/J1 Status Maintenance Q&A – December 12 at 10am

Join our Current Student Team for an informative session via Microsoft Teams about the standard requirements for Program Extension, Reduce Course Load, Transferring Out, and Authorized Early Withdrawal. This session welcomes all currently enrolled students holding F-1 or J-1 visas. <https://cglink.me/2k5/r1958933>

F1/J1 Status Maintenance Q&A – December 16 at 10am

Join our Current Student Team for an informative session via Microsoft Teams about the standard requirements for Program Extension, Reduce Course Load, Transferring Out, and Authorized Early Withdrawal. This session welcomes all currently enrolled students holding F-1 or J-1 visas. <https://cglink.me/2k5/r1958934>

Spring 2025 Semester Important Dates

- January 10 – Last day to register for Spring without a late registration fee
- January 13 – Classes officially begin
- January 17 – End of drop/add week; last day to add a major for Spring; and tuition payment deadline (GAs and financial aid deferments pay tuition by February 28)
- January 20 – USF Closed

Join our BullsConnect Group - https://bullsconnect.usf.edu/INTLSVCS/club_signup



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<https://www.usf.edu/world/international-services/>

Virtual Drop-In via Teams ([E-Form](#) in iStart) - Mon, Tues, Wed, Fri 11am-1pm & Thurs 1pm-2pm
Walk-in Hours Tampa Campus ([BEH Map](#)) - Mon, Tues, Wed, Fri 1pm-2pm & Thurs 2pm-4pm
Visit Schedule to USF St Pete & Sarasota - <https://www.usf.edu/world/international-services/about-us/contact-us.aspx>