



WESTCLIFF
UNIVERSITY
Educate. Inspire. Empower.

F-1 INTERNATIONAL STUDENT HANDBOOK

2025-2026



Welcome to Westcliff University!

Congratulations! You have been accepted to Westcliff University and have been granted an F-1 visa.

As you surveyed your options and have chosen Westcliff University, we believe you should become aware of the environment in which our University is located, as we are very proud of our surrounding community.

Westcliff University is headquartered in Irvine, California. Irvine is a part of the Los Angeles metropolitan area. Irvine is about 1 hour south of Hollywood, 15 minutes east of the Pacific Ocean, 90 minutes southwest of the Big Bear Ski Resort (elevation – 8,805 feet), and 90 minutes north of San Diego and Mexico. It is also about 4 hours west of Las Vegas. We also have campuses in other parts of California, including Corona, Santa Monica, and San Francisco. In Florida, our campuses are in Miami and Orlando, and our newest location is in Dallas, Texas.

Irvine was chosen in 2008 by CNNMoney.com as the fourth best place to live in the United States. In 2012, it was ranked sixth nationally. In September 2011, BusinessWeek magazine listed Irvine as the fifth best city in the United States. Irvine consistently ranks as the safest city in America with a population over 100,000. In 2014, Irvine was named the best-run city in the U.S. by 24/7 Wall Street. Irvine is home to many corporations, particularly in the technology and semiconductor sectors.

What distinguishes the educational experience at Westcliff University in the marketplace is its relevant practicality. Our professors are very active in the industries about which they teach and are exceptionally well respected by both their professional and academic peers. We are a diverse university with over 100 countries represented by our student population. We are committed to creating an inclusive and supportive environment for all of our students during their program.

We look forward to seeing and talking with you on our campus in the months ahead. In the meanwhile, should you have any questions or comments regarding international student affairs, we invite you to refer to the [IA Calendar & FAQ](#) and/or the [Student Self-Service & Inquiry Form](#).

Warm regards,
International Affairs Department

Table of Contents

Welcome to Westcliff University!	1	Authorization to Work	15
Table of Contents	1	Volunteering	15
Coming to Westcliff University	1	Program Withdrawal	16
Preparing For U.S. Arrival	1	Transferring Out	16
Required Documents to Carry on the Plane	1	Authorized Early Withdrawal	17
Immigration Process at the U.S. Port of Entry	1	SEVIS Termination Process	18
Upon Arrival	3	Before Your Departure from the U.S.	19
What is a DSO?	3	Returning Back to the U.S. & SEVIS I-20 Reactivation Within 5 Months	19
Maintaining Valid F-1 Status After the Student Arrives in the U.S.	3	Returning Back to the U.S. & SEVIS I-20 Reactivation Past 5 Months	19
Attendance Policy	4	Reinstatement	20
During the Program	5	Visa Expiration/Cancellation/Renewal	20
Travel: Vacation and U.S. Entry	5	Life at Westcliff University & Acclimating Tips	20
Traveling While School is in Session	6	Managing Money	20
Short International Travel Requests	6	Schooling	21
Long International Travel Requests	6	Sales Tax	22
Important Travel Documents	6	Income Tax	22
International Travel Request Approval Process	6	Life Around Westcliff	23
Vacation	7	Student Activities	23
Vacation Eligibility	7	Emergencies	23
Work Authorization and Volunteering	8	American Culture	23
Practical Training	10	Practicing Personal Religion	23
Curricular Practical Training (CPT)	10	Alcohol	24
CPT Eligibility Requirements	12	Smoking	24
Duration of CPT and Course Requirements	12	American Holidays	24
CPT Application Process and Required Documentations	12	International Student Loans	24
Guidelines for Employment Offer Letter	13	Departure Back to Home Country	25
Optional Practical Training (OPT)	13	Regulatory Resources	25
Pre-Completion OPT	14	Westcliff University Contacts & Resources	25
Post-Completion OPT	14	Terminology- Common Abbreviations	25
STEM OPT Extension	15		
Applying for OPT	15		

Coming to Westcliff University

As students become familiar with American culture and surroundings, they will notice both commonalities and differences between their culture and the United States. Students are highly encouraged to be aware of the cultural customs and nuances while maintaining their own standards and values that reflect who they are as their own unique individual.

Westcliff University's International Affairs Department is here to help international students acclimate with orientations, workshops, and events that can help with understanding life and culture at Westcliff University.

[Student Self-Service & Inquiry Form](#)

Preparing For U.S. Arrival

Students who have been approved for a student visa should make their travel arrangements in advance as regulations require students to check in at Westcliff University within 30 days of the start date. Students are advised to email their itinerary to the admissions advisor and international student advisor. When preparing travel arrangements, it is important to be aware of the following required and recommended items:

Required Documents to Carry on the Plane

Students are highly recommended to carry their immigration documents on the plane with them. Please note students should not put any immigration documents in their checked luggage because they will be presenting these documents to a Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer when they enter into the U.S.

- Form I-20
- Valid Passport
- Valid F-1 student visa
- University Admissions acceptance letter
- Receipt of SEVIS I-901 fee
- Financial documents
- Other documents such as:
 - Health and immunization records
 - Transcripts
 - Degrees, diplomas, certificates
 - Immigration Process at the U.S. Port of Entry

Immigration Process at the U.S. Port of Entry

As mentioned above, students must be prepared to show the following documents to CBP upon arrival to the U.S. port of entry: I-20, passport, F-1 student visa, financial documents, admissions acceptance letter, and I-901 receipt of SEVIS fee.

Students who travel without all of the required immigration documents *may be denied entry into the U.S.* It will be up to the discretion of the immigration officer at the port of entry to allow students entrance into the U.S.

Students who enter the U.S. by air or sea will have their arrival recorded electronically, and their I-94 can be printed from <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov>.

Students who enter the U.S. by land will receive a paper form of the I-94. The I-94 card records the students' arrival and departure from the U.S. Please note that land arrivals and departures will not be available through the online I-94 retrieval website, so it is imperative that students traveling by land keep the I-94 card in a safe location.

Canadian Citizens

Although Canadian citizens do not need visas to study or participate in an exchange program in the U.S, Canadian students do need to obtain an I-20 from the university, school or exchange program they plan to attend. Students who are Canadian must have the following documents to enter into the U.S: Canadian passport, original I-20, I-901 SEVIS fee payment, financial documents, and proof of ties to Canada.

I-515A form

If a student arrives at the port of entry and is granted entry to the U.S. with insufficient documentation, the student will receive an I-515A Form that grants 30 days of legal presence so the student can submit the missing/invalid documentation. Students who receive an I-515A form must report to the International Affairs Department to meet with an international student advisor.

Biometric Procedure

Students should expect to experience the biometric procedure at the port of entry, which includes digital fingerprint scanning and a photograph.

Upon Arrival

Students should schedule their arrival in the U.S. no more than 30 days prior to the first day of classes as identified on the student's I-20 form. Upon arrival, students are required to report to the Designated School Official (DSO). At Westcliff University, this is done through attendance at

New Student Orientation (NSO) where international students are given a thorough review of campus policies and how to maintain their status while in the U.S. An extension of NSO will also be available for students on the learning portal and must be completed by the end of the first session.

NSO is also the opportunity to report for international students that are transferring their record from another U.S.-based institution. Please note that your SEVIS record will also need to be transferred from your previous school to Westcliff before you are able to begin classes.

What is a DSO?

According to Study in the States, all SEVP-certified schools are required to have Designated School Officials (DSOs) to communicate with SEVP, update F-1 student records, and help students maintain status by providing guidance or helping you fill out important forms. DSOs can also help students by processing or providing supporting documentation for certain benefits that F-1 students are eligible for, such as:

- Working in the United States
- Applying for a driver's license
- Applying for a Social Security number
- Changing your major, program, or degree level
- Changing your education level
- Transferring to a new school
- Taking a vacation
- Traveling outside the United States
- Moving to a new address
- Changing your name
- Requesting a program extension

You will be contacted by your very own International Student Advisor during the first 1-2 weeks of your program and this person will serve as a resource for all these matters. When in doubt, you can also refer to the [IA Calendar & FAQ](#) and/or the [Student Self-Service & Inquiry Form](#).

Maintaining Valid F-1 Status After the Student Arrives in the U.S.

At Westcliff University, a student must take a minimum of 6 credits for graduate programs and 12 credits for undergraduate per semester to be considered a full-time student. F-1 students are required to maintain a full-time schedule to be considered “in status” for immigration purposes. If a student drops below the full-time requirement without prior approval, h/she is considered to be “out of status.” Students with extenuating circumstances that may impact their ability to study full-time must schedule an appointment with a DSO as soon as possible to discuss potential options.

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend all class meetings as these meetings are considered essential to their educational experience. In the event of an absence from a class meeting, the student has the responsibility to reach out to the faculty member to provide notification of the reason for the absence. Absences lead to lost credit for any activity conducted during class time, and multiple absences may result in reduction of the student’s final grade. If a student misses a class due to a schedule adjustment during the first week of instruction, this constitutes an absence.

Students who are eligible for financial aid who fail to attend the first two weeks of a course(s) have their course(s) cancelled, which in turn may affect enrollment at the university.

Tardiness: Tardiness and/or early departure is a disruption to the learning environment and experience and is discouraged. A student is considered to be tardy to class if he or she arrives more than 10 minutes after a class meeting starts, and an early departure is any instance in which a student leaves the class before it is dismissed. Being tardy and/or departing class early can potentially have a negative consequence on a student’s final course grade, as outline in the course syllabus.

During the Program

A student may remain in the U.S. beyond the student’s F-1 visa expiration date as long as that student maintains a valid F-1 status and continuous full-time enrollment. The student must remain enrolled full time, attend class, and maintain passing grades. Students that will be unable to complete his/her program by the date listed on the Form I-20 should contact their DSO in advance of the scheduled end date to request a program extension.

The student’s passport should be valid for at least 6 months in the future. The consulate or embassy of the student’s home country can help extend his/her passport if needed. The student

should carry a color copy of his/her passport with them along with his/her I-94 card for identification purposes.

Students should always notify their DSO or the International Affairs Department if they make any changes to their address, study plans, or visa status.

Each student receiving an I-20 will receive an 11-digit SEVIS Identification number that is maintained as part of his/her record. Updates are made to the student's record on a regular basis. Within 30 days of registering for classes, schools are required to report the following about each F-1 student: a) Whether the student has enrolled at the school, dropped below a full course of study without prior authorization, or failed to enroll; b) Current address; c) Start date of student's next session, term, semester, trimester, or quarter.

The following is to be reported within 10 days of its occurrence:

- Any student who has failed to maintain status or complete his or her program;
- A change in the student or dependent's legal name;
- A [change in the student or dependent's U.S. address](#);
- Any disciplinary action taken by the school against him or her as a result of being convicted of a crime;
- Any other notification request made by SEVIS with respect to the current status of the student.

It is very important for the student to notify the International Affairs Department of any changes that may affect the student's record and, by extension, his/her immigrant status.

Travel: Vacation and U.S. Entry

All F-1 students who travel internationally must request for a travel endorsement signature on the I-20 by the DSO. Without the travel endorsement signature, F-1 students may run into difficulties with an immigration officer at the airport when returning back into the U.S. Students will need to complete and submit a [digital International Travel Request Form](#). Upon confirmation of travel approval, students will be sent an I-20 with travel endorsement to their Westcliff University email address..

Prior to traveling internationally, F-1 students must consider the attendance policy and whether international travel puts their F-1 status in risk. Westcliff University has assigned breaks and holidays that will allow students to travel internationally without missing class, which is generally considered safer in regards to F-1 status. Additionally, F-1 students can also request to take a longer break if certain conditions are met. The following section will include further detail on international traveling and vacation.

Traveling While School is in Session

F-1 students are highly recommended to travel during university-designated holidays and/or university- approved annual vacations. The university can endorse international travel during school breaks and/or holiday periods as long as students return before the next semester/session begins. Please note that there is a risk to traveling while school is in session as students may be questioned in detail by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) at the port of entry.

Short International Travel Requests

Students that must travel internationally during the school year are strongly recommended to not be out of the country for more than 2 weeks. Westcliff University understands that emergencies happen and will do our best to accommodate as we are able, but for situations that are not emergencies we request students provide a 2-week notice ahead of their departure. All students that travel internationally must complete the [digital International Travel Request Form](#) in order to get the travel endorsement that will be required for re-entry into the United States.

Long International Travel Requests

Students that will be outside of the United States for longer than two weeks may need to request for an 'Authorized Early Withdrawal' termination. Students will then have 15 days to leave the country and will have the option to request the DSO to reactivate the SEVIS record. It is advised that students request for reactivation at least 30 days prior to the intended arrival date. Please note that the reactivation of I-20 is up to the discretion of SEVP.

Important Travel Documents

When traveling outside the U.S., international students must carry the travel documents required for re-entry into the United States: (1) Valid Form I-20 with travel signature, (2) Valid passport (within 6 months), and (3) Valid visa.

International Travel Request Approval Process

F-1 students must have their request approved by the Student Service Department and the International Affairs Department in order to travel internationally. Upon approval of the travel request dates, the student will receive an international travel approval email through their Westcliff email address and the DSO will give a travel signature on the second page of their Form I-20.

Vacation

According to [Study in the States](#), “F-1 students must complete at least one full academic year at an SEVP-certified school to be eligible for annual vacation.” During a university-approved annual vacation, F-1 students’ SEVIS I-20 records will remain in ‘active’ F-1 status. They may study part-time, travel internationally, travel within the U.S., and/or do Curricular Practical Training (CPT) provided that they enroll in the internship course.

Students requesting vacation must review the policy below, as well as complete and submit the [digital Vacation Request Form](#). Please be aware that students are only able to apply for vacation at certain times, as described below, and the link will not be available when vacation application periods are closed. If you have any questions after reviewing the information below you may contact your International Student Advisor or refer to the [IA Calendar & FAQ](#) and/or the [Student Self-Service & Inquiry Form](#).

Please be sure that any outstanding balance is cleared with the Student Accounts before submitting a request.

All vacation requests must be submitted by the Add/Drop Deadline. That being said, we strongly recommend that students submit their request a minimum of **3 weeks prior** to the start date of the semester being requested for vacation to allow for processing time.

Any submissions after the Add/Drop Deadline will not be accepted. Vacation requests will **not** be approved if a student is entering or on their **last** semester.

Vacation Eligibility

F-1 students must meet the following requirements of their respective program level in order to request for vacation time. All credits must be accumulated at Westcliff University (transfer credits and internship courses do not count) in the *current program of study*.

Undergraduate Level:

- **Summer:** Undergraduate students must attend at least 2 consecutive sessions (1 complete semester) at Westcliff University before requesting a summer vacation.
- **Non-Summer:** Undergraduate students must have been enrolled in a full course of study for at least one academic year (24 credits) at Westcliff University before requesting for a non-summer vacation.

Graduate Level:

- **Summer & Non-Summer:** Graduate students must have been enrolled in a full course of study for at least one academic year (18 credits) at Westcliff University before requesting for a vacation.

Students that apply on-time and are confirmed to be eligible may be approved for vacation for *only one full semester* and can *only* be granted vacation from the start of a given semester:

- Fall Semester [Session 1](#)
- Spring Semester [Session 3](#)
- Summer Semester [Session 5](#)

Any required program courses or concentration courses that are ***not offered*** upon returning from vacation will require students to ***enroll in other courses*** to maintain a full course load of study.

Work Authorization and Volunteering

Any F-1 students working on-campus or off-campus must receive proper approval prior to beginning employment.

- **On-campus employment:** If positions are available, students are eligible to work on-campus part time, which will be limited to 20 hours per week during the academic year.
- **Off-campus employment:** Work authorization must be approved through the International Affairs Department and USCIS. It is imperative that F-1 students be aware of employment authorization application procedures, eligibility requirements, deadlines and rules for maintaining status in the event that the F-1 student decides to pursue employment.

Any employment without proper approval would be considered a violation of the student's F-1 status. Potential consequences of working without approval include loss of legal immigration status in the U.S., possible deportation, and an impact on future visa applications.

Therefore, in order to maintain active F-1 status, a student must receive work authorization in order to work in the United States. For example, USCIS may approve a qualifying student for employment due to severe economic hardship or the student may apply for Curricular Practical Training (CPT) with authorization by the DSO.

Unauthorized work is a serious violation of the student's visa status and could negatively impact his/her ability to stay in the United States. Simply put, it is illegal for F-1 students to work without authorization. Family members with the F-2 visa may not accept any employment under any circumstances. Permission to be employed ceases at the conclusion of a program of study or at

the expiration of the period of lawful stay, whichever is earlier, or at the expiration of employment authorization as noted by USCIS.

F-1 students with permission to work are not required to pay Social Security taxes, but are subject to income tax withholding and must file an income tax return before April 15th of each year.

Practical Learning Experience Requirement

Some programs at Westcliff University require all students to successfully complete practical learning experiences as part of the completion of their degree. Practical learning at Westcliff is a key component of the university's approach to teaching, learning, and student success as these experiences reinforce what students are learning in the classroom and promote the relevant application of this content in a real-world context. This practice reflects Westcliff's commitment to a practical and relevant education and the value of applied, experiential learning. Students who have this experience demonstrate a more successful transition into a new career or career advancement.

Practical learning experiences are satisfied by the completion of the designated number of credits of internship course as a requirement for the program. This can be found in the student catalog under the respective programs. During each internship course, students engage in direct work experience relevant to their studies in addition to participating in the assigned classroom activities. Internship opportunities exist on-and off-campus. Off-campus internships require prior university approval, and F-1 students must have Curricular Practical Training (CPT) authorization to participate in off-campus internships.

Students are responsible for developing and demonstrating the skills necessary to be successful in an internship. In addition to industry knowledge, students should be prepared to demonstrate professionalism, effective communication (written, oral, and digital), and integrity while engaged in an internship. The faculty facilitating the internship courses assess these qualities and provide valuable feedback to students throughout the course.

Practical Training

As part of the practical learning experience requirement, F-1 students have the option to acquire an internship opportunity either on-campus or off-campus. On-campus part-time internships (20 hours or less) are on an availability basis and do not require Curricular Practical Training (CPT). Off-campus internships of any kind, or on-campus internships that are full-time, will require CPT authorization for F-1 students. CPT can be paid, or unpaid, and can either be full-time or part-time. We can offer assistance in applying for opportunities through our Career Services Department

and we can also guide you through the CPT process. Engaging in an internship provides students with networking, educational, and career advancement opportunities.

Practical training may be authorized to F-1 students who have been lawfully enrolled in a full course load for one full academic year. An employment authorization for practical training can be requested if the position is directly related to the student's program of study. The two types of practical training available are Curricular Practical Training (CPT) and Optional Practical Training (OPT).

Curricular Practical Training (CPT): CPT is authorized by the DSO, who updates the student's SEVIS record with the relevant information such as employer names, authorization dates, etc.

Optional Practical Training (OPT): OPT is authorized by USCIS, not the university. There are the types of OPT:

- Pre-completion OPT
- Standard Post-completion OPT
- STEM extension OPT

Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

CPT is an on- or off-campus employment option for F-1 students when the practical training is an integral part of the established curriculum or academic program. CPT employment is defined as "alternative work/study, internship, cooperative education, or any other type of required internship or practicum that is offered by sponsoring employers through cooperative agreements with the school." To qualify, the work experience must be directly related to the student's degree and he/she must enroll in an internship course (one credit). CPT can be paid or unpaid and part-time or full-time as determined by the employer. SEVP does not list any requirements for pay and/or compensation for CPT opportunities, but federal and state labor and wage/hour laws do still apply. Students are required to receive authorization for CPT from the DSO *before they are legally allowed to begin* engaging in CPT.

According to NAFSA Adviser's Manual 360, there is no regulatory limit on either the number of times or the length of time a student may engage in either part-time or full-time CPT. In addition, regulations do not prohibit multiple or concurrent CPT employers. However, F-1 students engaging in an aggregate of 12 months or more of full-time CPT (over 20 hours of work per week) *will not be eligible for OPT*. Engaging in part-time CPT (less than 20 hours of work per week) does not affect eligibility for post-completion OPT. The use of 12 months of full-time CPT only affects eligibility for optional practical training (OPT) at the same educational level.

Quick Facts of CPT at Westcliff University:

- **Preconditions:** Undergraduate students must have been lawfully enrolled as a full-time student for one full academic year before being eligible for CPT. Graduate students can start CPT immediately if required by the program.
- **Location:** Students may engage in CPT at the employment location specified in the Employee Offer Letter provided to the DSO during the CPT approval process.
- **Duration:** The DSO grants CPT for the duration of up to 12 months or the end of the student's program of study, whichever comes first. Students may also request a shorter approval period, if desired.
- **Hours per week:** Part-time CPT is considered 20 hours or less of work per week, while full-time CPT is considered anything over 20 hours of work per week. It is between the employer and the student to determine whether the employment is part-time or full-time.
- **Field/level of work:** The internship must be an integral part of the student's established curriculum and be related to the student's major field of study.
- **Offer letter from employer:** The student must have an offer letter of employment signed by the employer describing the details of the student's job and responsibilities.
- **Effect on other work:** Use of full-time CPT for one year or more will affect the student's eligibility for OPT. Use of part-time CPT does not affect eligibility for OPT.
- **Approval process:** The student must submit the required documents (see below) to the DSO for approval. Upon approval, the DSO will update the student's I-20 with CPT authorization. The student cannot begin CPT until the CPT employment start date is recorded in SEVIS. The DSO will also print out the updated Form I-20 reflecting the CPT authorization, which the student will need when completing the Form I-9 for the employer. Please note that USCIS approval is not required for CPT and as such no EAD is issued. Instead, the I-20 is the evidence of work authorization.
- **Attendance requirement:** Students must continue to maintain attendance and a full course of study in F-1 status during the period of employment. Students must also be enrolled in an internship course for the respective degree program throughout the period of employment.

CPT Eligibility Requirements

Requirements for Undergraduate Degree Level Students:

Undergraduate students must have been enrolled in school full-time for at least one academic year (24 credits) and must have maintained attendance with a valid F-1 status. Student eligibility to participate in CPT while attending Westcliff University is subject to the following GPA requirements:

- Students earning a GPA of 2.50 or above are eligible for Full Time or Part Time CPT
- Students earning a GPA of 1.50 – 2.49 are eligible for Part Time CPT only

- Students earning a GPA of 1.49 and below are not eligible for CPT

Requirements Graduate Degree Level Students:

Graduate students may begin CPT immediately during their first semester, if CPT is required by their program. Student eligibility to participate in CPT while attending Westcliff University is subject to the following GPA requirements:

- Students earning a GPA of 3.00 or above are eligible for Full Time or Part Time CPT
- Students earning a GPA of 2.50 – 2.99 are eligible for Part Time CPT only
- Students earning a GPA of 2.49 and below are not eligible for CPT

Duration of CPT and Course Requirements

CPT authorization will be given for up to 12 months or the end of the student's program of study, whichever comes first. Students may also request a shorter approval period, if desired. CPT can be renewed by submitting a CPT Renewal form.

CPT Internship Course & Requirements

- All coursework is done online
- CPT courses are Pass/No Pass
 - Students must receive a 73% or above to pass the class
- One credit per semester
- Students are required to answer weekly online discussion questions as a part of attendance on GAP

Please note that students are required to participate each week by answering and responding to weekly discussion questions provided by the professor.

Note: If a student earns an overall failing grade in their internship course(s) in a given semester, then they will be ineligible for CPT in the following semester. Ineligible students may re-apply for CPT after one full semester.

CPT Application Process and Required Documentations

How to Apply for CPT:

In order to apply, the student will need to submit the following:

- Completed [digital New CPT Application Form](#)
- Completed 'Cooperative Educational Internship Agreement' form
- Employee Offer Letter (including the correct start date, work location, job title/description)

- Online Receipt of Tuition Payment including CPT course
<https://www.westcliff.edu/payment-form/>

Please allow approximately 7-10 working days to process the application. After the student's CPT is processed onto his/her I-20, the International Student Advisor will notify the student via email.

Guidelines for Employment Offer Letter

In order for the DSO to approve CPT authorization, the Employment Offer Letter must be on the original company letterhead that is signed by the student's supervisor. It must include the following:

- Name and address of employer
- Job Title and a detailed job description
- Specific employment start date and end date (end date, if applicable)
- Full-time or Part-time and the number of hours per week
- Supervisor's name, title, and contact information

Note: Please specify the branch/physical location of employment if it is different from the official employment headquarters.

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

International students in the U.S. in valid F-1 immigration status are permitted by USCIS to work off-campus in Optional Practical Training (OPT) status both during and after completion of their degree. Eligible students can apply to receive up to 12 months of OPT employment authorization. Rules established by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) govern the implementation of OPT, and all OPT employment requires prior authorization from USCIS and a recommendation from the International Affairs Department.

According to USCIS, a student can be granted to engage in temporary employment for three types of OPT:

- **Pre-Completion OPT:** Employment authorization that is given before graduation
- **Post-Completion OPT:** Employment authorization that is given after graduation (excluding thesis or equivalent)
- **STEM Extension OPT:** A 24-month OPT extension given to students who have STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) degrees/ major concentrations after post-completion OPT

Pre-Completion OPT

According to USCIS, students may apply for Pre-Completion OPT after they have been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis for one full academic year at a SEVP-certified college, university, conservatory, or seminary. If a student has been authorized to participate in Pre-Completion OPT, the student may work part-time (20 hours or less per week) while school is in session. If there is a school break or a student is approved for an annual vacation the student may work full-time (more than 20 hours per week). Please note that every month a student participates in Pre-Completion OPT the student forfeits one month of Post-Completion OPT eligibility. For example, a student that participates in 3 months of Pre-Completion OPT would then only be eligible for 9 months of Post-Completion OPT.

OPT Eligibility Requirement

- Employment must be directly related to the student's major
- Student must maintain lawful F-1 status
- Students who have engaged in 12 months or more of full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) are not eligible for OPT
- OPT is permitted for up to 12 months full-time in total (Pre-Completion + Post-Completion)

Post-Completion OPT

F-1 students may apply to participate in Post-Completion OPT after completion of their program of study. To be eligible for Post-Completion OPT, the student must be in lawful full-time F-1 status for one full academic year, must be conditionally approved to graduate on a set program end date, has not accrued 12 months or more of full-time CPT, and must not have previously had OPT for the same degree level. It is the student's responsibility to keep track of their Full-Time CPT participation in order to retain OPT eligibility, if desired. If the student participated in Pre-Completion OPT for the current degree level, USCIS will deduct that amount of time from the authorization period for Post-Completion OPT.

STEM OPT Extension

Certain F-1 students who majored in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) may apply for a 24-month extension of their Post-Completion OPT. To find out more information in applying for STEM OPT Extension, please see USCIS webpage for [Optional Practical Training Extension for STEM Students \(STEM OPT\)](#).

Applying for OPT

To apply for OPT, students should visit the [USCIS OPT Website](#) to review the requirements. Then students have the option to contact the international student advisors in the OPT division to inquire about eligibility. If eligible, the DSO will issue and endorse a new I-20 with OPT recommendation. Along with the OPT recommendation I-20, students will need to gather documents required for the specific type of OPT they are applying for. Students also do not need to have a job offer to apply for OPT. International Student Advisors can assist in reviewing OPT applications before they are mailed to USCIS by request. OPT application processing time may take up to 2-4 months, so students are recommended to plan ahead and apply early. For more information, please contact your International Student Advisor.

Authorization to Work

Students must not begin employment until they receive an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from USCIS. If they do not have employment upon receiving an EAD card under Post-Completion OPT, they are subject to the 90-day unemployment provisions. Moreover, students should make sure to work closely with their school's International Affairs Department. As with everything students will do while in the U.S., permission is based on maintaining lawful F-1 status and the International Affairs Department is there to help them maintain that status throughout their stay.

Volunteering

Students who wish to engage in any 'volunteer' work must be sure it would not impact their immigration status. This is a very complex area in which immigration regulations and labor laws intersect. A common misconception between employment and volunteering is that employment is paid and volunteering is unpaid. However, based on U.S. labor laws, there is more to distinguish between employment and volunteering. Unpaid work may still be considered employment that necessitates F-1 off-campus work authorization.

To be considered a volunteer, the work performed by the student must meet the following criteria:

- No expectation of compensation
- The services provided by the volunteer should not be the same services for which he or she was previously paid and/or expects to be hired and paid for in the future and the volunteer cannot displace a genuine employee
- Services are performed for a non-profit organization for public service, religious or humanitarian objective

- Work for a for-profit entity is considered employment and must be paid. The only exception is made for training programs where the trainee functions are supervised and provides no significant measurable work for the employer. The trainee must not take the place of a paid employee. There is also a difference between volunteer work and unpaid internship

For further information about what is considered volunteering please contact a DSO.

Program Withdrawal

In the event that a student needs to withdraw from the program because he/she wishes to be transferred to another institution or have to return to his/her home country, the student must follow the withdrawal process for his/her specific request. The following section includes the process to withdraw from the program to transfer out or return home.

Transferring Out

F-1 students are required to maintain legal status while studying in the U.S. This is also applicable while requesting to transfer out to another SEVP-approved institution. It is important to understand the university transfer policy and SEVP's regulations as it may affect your status during the transfer process. Students can be transferred out in active, terminated, or completed status. F-1 students must first notify the DSO of his or her intent to transfer and indicate the school in which he/she intends to transfer (transfer-in school). The student should also notify the transfer-in school of his or her intent to enroll.

Students must complete the Program Withdrawal Form and indicate in the appropriate section that they intend to transfer out. Student may also be required to submit any other related documents to their Student Services Advisor and/or International Student Advisor.

All F-1 students must continue to maintain status by staying enrolled and attending a full course load of study, or be engaged in OPT, through the transfer process until the transfer release date. If classes are in session, the student must attend classes and otherwise maintain status until the transfer release date. Immediately ceasing to attend class may result in a "W" transcript and possible termination of the I-20 for "Unauthorized Drop Below Full Course of Study". Furthermore, students are expected to make normal progress toward completing the program of study and be in good academic standing to avoid any academic dismissals, which may also affect their I-20 status.

If for any reason an I-20 record is terminated, the record can still be transferred to the Transfer-In School and the student will need to file an application for reinstatement of status with the new

school. It is the student's responsibility to confirm with the Transfer-In School that they will accept students in terminated status.

Advising Sessions: As part of the transfer-out process, the F-1 student will be asked to meet with an advisor from Student Services and/or International Affairs Department to discuss the transfer out request. The advisor will discuss any concerns leading to the transfer out decision, will recommend any potential options available to support the F-1 student, and will ask for feedback on the student's experience at Westcliff University.

Regarding any refund inquiries, please refer to the catalog for the Refund Policy and contact studentaccounts@westcliff.edu if you have any questions.

Transfer-Out Student Checklist:

- Continue to maintain status until transfer release date
- Contact Registrar's Office to ensure your financial account is cleared
- Meet with an advisor from Student Services
- Provide acceptance letter from the Transfer-In School
- Provide transfer form from the Transfer-In School
- Complete the Program Withdrawal Form and select the 'Transfer Out' option
- Contact an advisor from the International Affairs Department

Authorized Early Withdrawal

F-1 status nonimmigrant students can request for a temporary absence or withdrawal from school due extenuating circumstances such as a family emergency, personal matter or another circumstance that calls for the student to leave the United States prior to their program's completion. Upon approval for a temporary absence or withdrawal from school, the DSO will grant an F-1 student an Authorized Early Withdrawal or a permitted temporary absence from their course of study. The DSO will change the student's I-20 status in SEVIS to 'Terminated' for 'Authorized Early Withdrawal' and the student will be permitted a 15-day grace period to depart the United States.

Please be advised that F-1 status is based on an international student's full-time enrollment. If any of the following reasons apply, then you will need to submit a request for an Authorized Early Withdrawal:

Program Withdrawal, Temporary Absence, and/or Long International Travel

If you are planning to withdraw from the program or will be traveling internationally for an extended period of time due to an emergency (more than the allowed period for international travel) then your I-20 record will need to be terminated under 'Authorized Early Withdrawal.' In

addition, if you are only leaving temporarily, you will need to take a 'Leave of Absence' from your program at Westcliff University.

Switching to Online Campus

If you plan to continue to study online abroad and/or have other means of legally staying in the U.S., you have the option to switch to online courses and take an Authorized Early Withdrawal. Please be sure to complete the Change in Program Location Request Form and Change of Status Form (if applicable).

Joining the Military

If you will be joining the U.S. military or Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest (MAVNI) program, please be sure to communicate with the International Affairs Department in order to coordinate when you will be leaving for basic training.

Implications of Authorized Early Withdrawal Termination

Upon termination of your SEVIS I-20 record, please note that all F-1 benefits including internship/employment (such as CPT, on-campus employment) will NOT be in effect. Additionally, when approved for an Authorized Early Withdrawal, the SEVIS records of your F-2 dependents will also be terminated which means that your F-2 dependents will not be able to remain in the U.S. as long as your I-20 record is in 'terminated' status.

SEVIS Termination Process

The International Affairs Department will process the Authorized Early Withdrawal request and Student Services will process any changes to your student record . Please allow 7-10 business days to process your documents. You will receive a confirmation email through your Westcliff email address confirming that your SEVIS I-20 record has been terminated under Authorized Early Withdrawal. Please note that you will have 15 days to leave the United States from your termination date.

Your Authorized Early Withdrawal request **will not be effective** until the university reviews and approves your request. Please make sure you are fully aware of the steps that you need to take in order to prevent any negative impact on your SEVIS I-20 record.

Before Your Departure from the U.S.

(Applicable Only to Temporary Absence, and/or Long International Travel Requests)

We recommend that you receive a travel signature on your most updated I-20. You will need that I-20 with a travel signature in order to come back to the US. Please submit the following documents:

- Copy of your valid passport
- Copy of your valid visa
- Copy of your flight schedule
- Your most recent I-20

Please note that, effective October 2021, USCIS has updated its policy to permanently allow for the digital signing and transmissions of I-20s. F-1 students are to print their electronic I-20s as needed to present at necessary times, such as a visa interview or port of entry. For more information, please refer to the [SEVP Policy Guidance](#).

Returning Back to the U.S. & SEVIS I-20 Reactivation Within 5 Months

One month before your intended return back to the US, you must complete the SEVIS I-20 Reactivation Form and submit the form along with other supporting documents (including your return flight itinerary) through the [University Forms website](#). The approval of the I-20 reactivation will be at SEVP's discretion. Please note that SEVIS I-20 reactivation will only be possible if you are returning to the US within 5 months from your termination date.

Returning Back to the U.S. & SEVIS I-20 Reactivation Past 5 Months

If you are returning back to the U.S. past 5 months, the option to reactivate your SEVIS I-20 record will not be possible. In this case, you will need to apply for a new I-20 with a new SEVIS number.

The effective withdrawal date is determined when all F-1 transfer documents are submitted to the University. Before the full termination process completes, please speak with the Student Accounts (studentaccounts@westcliff.edu) to check if you have any pending balances or refunds that will need to be settled before your departure. Please note that transcripts will not be released until pending balances are completed. Please see the Westcliff University Tuition Refund policy for additional information related to the return of tuition paid.

Reinstatement

Students with a terminated Form I-20 SEVIS record will need to seek reinstatement in order to continue their education under an F-1 visa. It is important for all students with a terminated Form I-20 to contact a DSO for further assistance to prevent accruing unlawful presence. Withdrawn students with a terminated record must request a Reinstatement Form I-20 and file an I-539 with

USCIS upon enrolling/re-enrolling into the program of study. Re-entry/readmission is to become readmitted back to the university, whereas reinstatement is to have the Form I-20 record reinstated with USCIS.

Visa Expiration/Cancellation/Renewal

International students must depart or extend their visas according to the regulations governing their visa types. There are serious consequences for nonimmigrants, including students, who violate immigration rules even in minor ways, particularly for those who stay in the U.S. beyond the authorized period of stay.

Individuals that overstay are subject to the cancellation of their visa even if the visa is for multiple entry and is valid many years into the future. These individuals will be unable to obtain a new visa except by applying at a U.S. Consulate in their home country prior to returning to the U.S. F-1 students must extend their stay at least 30 days before the expiration of their I-20, or depart no later than 60 days after the completion of his or her education program or after their I-20 expires (see item 5 on the I-20), whichever comes first.

Life at Westcliff University & Acclimating Tips

Here at Westcliff University we strive to ensure students have the resources available to make their stay comfortable and to produce a pleasant experience for each student. To help with the adjustment process, please visit our [Student Resource Center](#) and our [Student Life's page](#) to find some resources that will assist you with your journey here at Westcliff University. On the [Student Resource Center](#), you will find the Student Resource Booklet that is available anytime for various student needs, including:

- Housing
- Transportation
- Health Insurance
- Banking
- Social Security Number
- Mobile Phones
- Driver's License
- Cultural Areas

Managing Money

Managing personal finances can be a challenging part of academic study in the United States. Dealing with a new currency and cost of living can be difficult initially. Pay attention to the exchange rate between the home country's currency and the U.S. dollar. Learn to think in dollars!

When handling American currency, it is important to look closely at the paper money, as much of it looks alike. Coins can present difficulties too. The five-cent piece (20 per dollar) is known as the nickel, ten-cent (10 per dollar) as the dime, and 25-cent (4 per dollar) as the quarter. The dime is smaller than the nickel, even though it is worth more.

The United States is becoming a “cashless” society, meaning that many people find it easier to pay by card or check than carry large amounts of cash on their person. It is advisable that students open a checking or savings account at a local bank and deposit any large sums of money he/she has in a bank. A visit with a banker at a local bank can clarify the variety of checking and savings accounts available and determine which type best suits the student’s needs.

Schooling

Basic Classroom Rules: Classroom behavior differs from culture to culture. Some classes are very formal, while others are more relaxed. If the student is to succeed academically, it is important that h/she knows how to fulfill the expectations of his/her instructors. Higher education institutions in the United States have expectations of their students that the student will want to become familiar with.

Arrive on time and be seated before the scheduled starting time of class. Listen attentively and take thorough notes.

Class attendance is key to maintaining the student’s visa as well as the success of his/her studies at Westcliff University. So, make sure to attend class from the first scheduled day. Never miss a class if at all possible!

Students that miss a class for illness are strongly recommended to contact their professor before the missed class. Professors are not required to accept late work, so contacting the professor in advance may increase the likelihood of a possible accommodation.

Students should ask questions and express their opinions. Instructors count on this! Do not be afraid to express a different viewpoint than the professor as long as it is done respectfully. Students can bring a unique perspective to the classroom and their input will enhance the material being taught.

Students that do not understand an assignment or material should communicate with their instructors first. Secondly, students can seek assistance from our [Academic Resource Center \(ARC\)](#). Make an appointment to see the professor during office hours or simply talk to them after class. It is important to take initiative in solving difficulties the student is experiencing in class. The student’s instructor will be able to explain the assignment or suggest ways to improve the situation.

Understand and be able to use the material from the classroom instead of merely memorizing it.

Become familiar with the online library (LIRN). Depending on the student's program of study, many of his/her assignments may involve writing and research. There is an online library tutorial the student can use to assist them in learning more about the library as well as helpful experts at the Academic Resource Center (ARC).

Careful records of source material are essential. Always give credit to the source from which the student borrows information to avoid plagiarism.

Sales Tax

Sales tax is added to the price of most goods sold in the U.S. The advertised price on the shelf is without tax. Sales tax is typically 8-10% in Southern California, but varies slightly by community.

Income Tax

Income Tax is a tax paid on income received from U.S. sources (i.e. wages, scholarship, internships or fellowship grants, etc.). There are two types of income tax: federal and state. If a student earns income from U.S. sources, he or she will need to complete federal and state income tax returns the following year. An income tax return shows the total amount of the student's income, any allowable deductions, exemptions or exclusions he or she may claim, and his or her ultimate tax liability. If the student worked, his or her employer should have withheld income taxes from each paycheck. If he or she received a scholarship, taxes should have been withheld from those payments as well. Scholarships or grants that exceed the costs of tuition are considered taxable income. If too much tax was withheld, his or her tax return will show a refund is due. If not enough was withheld, he or she will need to pay the difference. Students who are citizens from other countries may not be subject to federal taxes when they work while classes are in session, but these persons must file an income tax return in order to receive credit for any taxes deducted.

Life Around Westcliff

The campus of Westcliff University is conveniently situated in a central location close to restaurants, a movie theater, a health club, and many more options. For more information about these resources and activities, please check out the [Around WU](#) page!

Additionally, students may find it useful to research places before they go using the popular platforms below.

- **Yelp:** An easy way to connect people with great local businesses through reviews and recommendations that are published by the public. Yelp is available through the website and/or smartphone mobile applications at <http://www.yelp.com/>
- **Tripadvisor:** The world's largest traveling site that offers a wide variety of travel choices and assists in planning and booking the perfect trip around town. Tripadvisor is available through the website and/or smartphone mobile applications at <http://www.tripadvisor.com/>

Student Activities

A great way to learn more about what Westcliff University has to offer is to keep in the loop with upcoming student activities and events on our social media pages. For more information about student events and activities, please check out our [Student Life](#) page!

Facebook	@WestcliffUniversity
Instagram	@WestcliffUniversity
LinkedIn	@WestcliffUniversity
YouTube	@WestcliffUniversity
Twitter	@AskWestcliff

Emergencies

Students should call 911 in the event of an emergency requiring police officers, firefighters or an ambulance. When calling 911:

- Stay calm
- Provide your exact location
- Fully answer any questions the dispatcher asks to the best of your ability
- Stay on the line with the 911 dispatcher until specifically instructed to end the call

American Culture

Practicing Personal Religion

The United States is a multicultural society founded on tolerance and mutual respect. People are encouraged to seek out opportunities to practice their religious beliefs. There are usually a variety of denominations and religious groups in every community. Many Americans are uncomfortable discussing religion, although America has a high rate of religious attendance. If the student is in a religious situation or discussion in which he/she is uncomfortable, it is socially acceptable to excuse themselves, explain their perspective, or change the topic.

Alcohol

U.S. laws concerning the sale and consumption of alcohol may seem very liberal or very constraining depending on the person and their nationality. In the United States it is illegal to purchase and consume alcoholic drinks, including beer and wine, until one reaches the age of 21.

Smoking

Many parts of the United States have designated all public buildings as “smoke free,” meaning that smoking is prohibited in any part of the building. Other buildings have designated spaces for smokers. If one is a guest in someone’s home, room, or apartment, always ask permission before smoking. At Westcliff University, our campuses are all smoke free; however, smoking outside the buildings may be permitted unless otherwise prohibited.

American Holidays

There are eight major federal holidays in the United States:

- New Year’s Day (January 1st)
- Martin Luther King Jr. Day (January 17th)
- Memorial Day (4th Monday in May)
- Independence Day (July 4th)
- Labor Day (1st Monday in September)
- Thanksgiving (4th Thursday in November)
- Veteran Day (November 11th)
- Christmas (December 25th)

You will find that many businesses and government offices are not open on the federal holidays listed above, such as banks or the Department of Motor Vehicles. Like many schools, Westcliff University is also closed on these federal holidays, meaning staff are not on campus and no classes will be held. If you had a class scheduled for a day that a federal holiday lands on, your professor will discuss alternate arrangements with you.

International Student Loans

The [International Education Financial Aid](#) (IEFA) website is the premier internet resource listing financial aid information for students who wish to study in a foreign country. IEFA has partnered with a provider of international student loan programs to provide students around the world with financial aid options to fund their education abroad. Through this site, F-1 students will gain access to a loan comparison tool designed specifically for international students. There are up to

eight (8) lenders associated with this website which are currently providing financial aid to international students. F-1 students may also refer to the [Westcliff University Scholarship and Grants](#) website for information on how to apply.

Departure Back to Home Country

The student has 60 days upon completion of his/her program to leave the United States under his/her F1 visa. To remain in the U.S. beyond 60 days the student will need to re-enroll in a higher program, transfer to another school to receive a new I-20 form, or apply to change his/her visa status.

Regulatory Resources

- [U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement \(ICE\)](#)
- [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services \(USCIS\)](#)
- [Student Process Steps: How to Navigate the U.S. Immigration](#)
- [Student Visas: U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs](#)
- [Visa Appointment & Processing Wait Times](#)
- [U.S. Embassy & Consulates](#)
- [Nonimmigrant Visa Applications](#)
- [I-901 SEVIS Fee Payment Tutorial](#)

Westcliff University Contacts & Resources

- [Catalog/Student Handbook](#)
- [Credit Card Payment Link](#)
- [Student Self-Service & Inquiry Form](#)

Terminology- Common Abbreviations

CBP	Customs and Border Protection
CPT	Curricular Practical Training
DSO	Designated School Official
D/S	Duration of Student Status
DHS	Department of Homeland Security (Oversees CBP, ICE, and USCIS)
DS 160	The DS-160, Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application form, is for temporary travel to the United States, and for K (fiancé(e)) visas. Form DS-160 is submitted electronically to the Department of State website via the Internet. Consular Officers use the information entered on the DS-160 to process the visa application and, combined with a personal interview, determine an applicant's eligibility for a nonimmigrant visa
EAD	Employment Authorization Document
F-1	Category of Visa required of all non-immigrant students
I-20	Establishes the individual meets the basic criteria for nonimmigrant student status
I-539	Application to Extend/Change Nonimmigrant Status
I-901	Form to pay SEVIS fee of \$350
I-94	Arrival/departure card, received from the airline during the flight
ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement (Responsible for maintaining the student & Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) conducting immigration investigations, detentions, and removals –deportations)
OPT	Optional Practical Training
POE	Port of Entry
SEVIS	Student and Exchange Visitor Information System
USCIS	United States Citizenship and Immigration Services

THANK YOU!

The administration, staff and faculty thank you for considering Westcliff University. We look forward to helping you in achieving your dreams as a global citizen and becoming an integral part of Westcliff University!