Acquiring F-1 or J-1 Status while in the United States

Individuals currently in the United States may apply for a change of status from certain nonimmigrant classifications to F-1 or J-1 student status. This process does not require a departure from the United States. USCIS reviews applications for change of status based on an applicant's ability to document and justify a change of intent after arrival to the United States. Applications are approved at the discretion of the USCIS adjudicator.

Please note the applicant's current non-immigrant status must be valid at the time the application is received at USCIS and that the current status will continue to be valid up until the date that the new status is requested to begin. If USCIS determines that the change would be approved more than 30 days in advance of the program start date, there is a chance the application could be denied.

To apply for a change of status to F-1 or J-1 within the United States, applicants must submit the documents listed below to USCIS. An applicant may need to include additional documents depending on the immigration status he or she currently holds. Please refer to the appropriate instructions in the section immediately below.

- **A cover letter** from the applicant requesting the change of status and explaining the circumstances, including information about purpose of entry to the United States in the current immigration status, why and how the applicant's goals/intentions changed after arriving in the United States, and any other relevant information. Because F and J are non-immigrant visa status categories, applicants should demonstrate strong ties to their home countries or otherwise show that they do not intend to immigrate to the United States.

- **Form I-539**, available from the Immigration Forms page of the USCIS web site. Dependent family members changing their dependent status (to F-2 or J-2) should be listed on Supplement 1 on Form I-539.

- **Processing fee**, check or money order payable to the US Department of Homeland Security (see above link for fee amount). A single fee covers the primary applicant and any F-2 or J-2 dependents listed on Supplement 1 of Form I-539.

- **Original SEVIS Form I-20 (for F-1) or Form DS-2019 (for J-1)** issued by the University of Pennsylvania. The F-1 or J-1 applicant must sign the Form I-20 or Form DS-2019 and the SEVIS forms for their dependents.

- **Receipt confirming payment of the SEVIS fee (Form I-901)**. For payment instructions, please refer to SEVIS fee payment website. Online payment of the SEVIS fee will allow a confirmation receipt to be printed immediately.

- **Copies of passport identification page and visa stamp** Copies should include the page showing the passport expiration dates if separate from the identity page. Canadian citizens are not required to have a visa stamp.

- **Copies of front and back of Form I-94**

- **Copies of the financial documentation** used to obtain the Form I-20 or Form DS-2019 from the University

Individuals currently holding dependent status should also include copies of the primary's passport, front and back of Form I-94, and proof of status.
We advise that applicants photocopy their complete applications for their personal records. It is also recommended that completed applications be sent by Certified Mail, Return Receipt Requested or by courier service. For the mailing address and instructions, refer to Form I-539 on the Immigration Forms page of the USCIS web site.

You can also apply through the USCIS website (http://www.uscis.gov) and File your I-539 online!

*** If you do not get approval for your change of status 14 days after your program start date (5/14/2012) please fill out the deferment form for the next semester. If you do not defer your I-20 it will be CANCELED due to non-activity.