



COVENANT
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

International Student Handbook

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Academic Year

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THE SEMINARY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

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1. Introduction

We are so glad that you are considering studying or are already studying at Covenant Seminary. This handbook will walk you through the legal steps needed to come to the United States to study at Covenant Seminary and the legal requirements you must meet during your stay in the United States. We have tried to outline these steps to the best of our ability, but there may be changes during your time as a student.

Most importantly, keep in touch with your Designated School Official(s) (DSOs) to be sure you are maintaining legal status as you study in the United States. Your DSOs work closely with the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) to stay current on information about legal requirements. Tiffany Najbart and Betsy Gasoske are the current DSOs at Covenant Seminary. Please reach out to us if you have any questions by contacting international@covenantseminary.edu or by phone at the numbers below.

Tiffany Najbart
314-434-4044 x4130

Betsy Gasoske
314-434-4044 x4025

Below are other resources for you as you study in the United States.

- Study in the States: <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/>
- SEVP: 703-603-3400 or 1-800-892-4829; sevp@ice.dhs.gov

2. Health Requirements

According to Missouri law (RS 199.290), international students and their dependents from countries where tuberculosis is endemic must be tested for tuberculosis preliminarily as an admission requirement. **A tuberculosis (PPD) skin test is required again upon arrival in St. Louis before classes begin.** Students and their dependents must also yearly attest that they are free of tuberculosis symptoms. (Students from countries in which tuberculosis is not endemic are exempt from these requirements.)

Although no immunizations are required for admission to Covenant Seminary, we highly recommend that you and your family members are vaccinated for:

- Polio (OPV or IPV)
- Measles/Rubella (MMR, MR, or MRV)
- Diphtheria/Tetanus (DTaP, DT, Td, or Tdap) – within the last ten years

Check current information regarding US entry requirements concerning COVID-19 vaccination, testing, etc. before traveling.

Covenant students must have medical insurance for themselves and all family members. Travel insurance is highly recommended.

3. Declaration and Certification of Finances

For Covenant Seminary's DSOs to issue you an I-20 (see Section 4, "Issuance of Form I-20"), you must complete the Declaration and Certification of Finances form. This is a document that details who will be coming to the United States on an F-1 or F-2 visa, as well as the funding that you have available to pay for your expenses during your first year at Covenant Seminary. The International Student Advisor will send you this document along with a chart of Estimated Annual Expenses.

Fill out the form with all the required information. Item 13 will ask for the Total Required Annual Income. You will take this number from the chart of Estimated Annual Expenses based on how many of your family members are planning to come to the United States with you. If you have any questions about which number to use, please ask the International Student Advisor.

Item 14 asks for a list of assured financial support that will cover your total expenses. Your total for Item 14 must be equal to or higher than the number in Item 13 (your Total Required Annual Income).

For each source listed in Item 14, supporting documentation verifying the availability of those funds is required. The form details what kind of supporting documentation meets our needs. If you have any questions about this, check with the International Student Advisor.

Your completed Declaration and Certification of Finances along with all official supporting documentation should be submitted to the International Student Advisor.

4. Issuance of Form I-20

What is Form I-20?

Form I-20, “Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status,” is the form needed to apply for a student visa to the United States, enter the United States, and apply for benefits while in the United States. Once you have been fully admitted to Covenant Seminary, a Designated School Official (DSO) will issue you your Form I-20. Print and keep this document safe, as you will need it during your time studying in the United States. Note that any dependents who will be entering the United States with you under an F-2 dependent visa will also need a Form I-20. (Dependents include your spouse and any unmarried children under the age of 21.)

Your issued Form I-20 will be signed by the DSO. You need to then sign the Form I-20. Read the instructions on page three of Form I-20 carefully and make sure you understand them before signing the student attestation on page 1.

Items Needed for Issuance of Form I-20

The items needed to issue a student a Form I-20 are as follows.

- Copy of Passport Information Page
- Student’s Contact Information
- Declaration and Certification of Finances

An I-20 is also issued for any dependents who will join you in coming to the United States on an F-2 dependent visa. **In order to issue any dependents (spouse/children) an I-20, the DSO will need a copy of each dependent’s passport information page.**

Uses for the Form I-20

You will need the Form I-20 for many things during your time as an international student in the States, including the following:

- Paying the I-901 SEVIS Fee (See Section 5, “I-901 SEVIS Fee”)
- Applying for a nonimmigrant visa (See Section 6, “Visas”)
- Entering the United States (See Section 7, “Arrival in the United States”)

- Applying for Benefits (social security number, driver’s license, etc.) (See Section 9, “Work and Practical Training,” and Section 14, “Other Information”)

Reissuance of Form I-20

You may receive a new and updated Form I-20 at different points during your time as a student, including the following:

- When you begin taking classes at Covenant Seminary.
- If there are changes to your personal information or program of study.
- If you receive employment authorization for Curricular Practical Training, Optional Practical Training, or off-campus employment. (Note that while on-campus employment is not noted on your Form I-20, you still must talk with the DSO to be approved for on-campus employment. See “On Campus Employment” in Section 8.)
- For travel endorsement – Form I-20 needs to be endorsed for re-entry to the United States yearly. (This may be simply an added signature instead of a new I-20.)
- If your previous Form I-20 is lost or destroyed. (Please contact your DSO immediately if you need a new Form I-20 issued.)
- If you need to delay your entrance term to Covenant.
- If you need to extend your program end date as listed on your Form I-20.
- If you are a DMin, modular ThM, or hybrid student, you will likely need a new Form I-20 every time you travel to the United States.

It is **very important** that you keep all copies of your I-20, both present and previous, for your records. You may need these for future status changes in the United States.

For more information, see the following webpage:

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/prepare/students-and-the-form-i-20>

5. I-901 SEVIS Fee

Once you receive your Form I-20, the next step to prepare for coming to the United States is to pay the I-901 SEVIS Fee (currently \$350). This fee must be paid before applying for a visa. All potential F-1 visa international students must pay the SEVIS fee. Only the F-1 student must pay the I-901 fee; F-2 dependents do not need to pay this fee. **Note that if you have already paid the I-901 SEVIS Fee in the recent past, you may not be required to pay it again.** See <https://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/faq> for more details.

Information You Will Need to Provide to Pay the I-901 SEVIS Fee

You will need the following information at hand to pay the I-901 SEVIS Fee:

- Name, address, date of birth, and email address
- Country of birth and country of citizenship
- School Code (found on Form I-20)
- SEVIS Identification Number (found on Form I-20)

You need to have your Form I-20 before you can pay the I-901 SEVIS Fee.

To fill out the I-901 and pay the I-901 SEVIS Fee by credit card online, go to <https://www.fmjfee.com/>. Students whose country of citizenship or country of birth is Cameroon, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, or Nigeria cannot pay by credit card and must pay by money order, Western Union Quick Pay, or a certified check drawn from a U.S. bank. For more information on filling out the I-901 form and paying the fee, see <https://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/faq>.

Once you have paid the I-901 SEVIS Fee, print a copy of your receipt from <https://www.fmjfee.com/>. This receipt is required for your visa and/or admission to the United States and may be needed to apply for other documents and benefits, including visa extension, if needed.

Note: If you already have a valid student visa, you cannot be changed to Active status until your I-901 SEVIS Fee has been paid.

For more information, see the following webpages:

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/prepare/paying-the-i-901-sevis-fee>

<https://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/faq>

<https://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/i901.pdf>

6. Visas

Once you have your Form I-20 and have paid your I-901 SEVIS fee, you need to obtain a visa to enter the United States. A visa is a travel document from a U.S. Consulate or Embassy that you need before entering the United States. A visa gives you permission to apply for entry to the United States; it does not guarantee admittance to the United States. Note that the visa is different from your Form I-20 “Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status,” which is issued by your school and proves your eligibility as an F-1 student. International students studying at Covenant Seminary need an F-1 visa and any dependents need F-2 visas to enter the United States. (Note: Citizens of Canada and Bermuda do not need visas to enter the U.S. as students.)

To apply for your visa, you need your Form I-20 and your I-901 SEVIS fee receipt. Check with the U.S. Embassy in your country for any particular information needed to apply for a visa (<http://www.usembassy.gov/>). Generally, you will need to do the following:

1. Complete the online visa application, Form DS-160, found here:

<https://ceac.state.gov/genniv/>.

Have the following available:

- a. Your passport
- b. Travel itinerary, if you’ve made travel arrangements
- c. Dates of your last five visits/trips to the U.S., if applicable
- d. Resume or Curriculum Vitae
- e. Your Form I-20
- f. A photo of yourself (see information here:

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/photos.html>)

If your photo upload fails, you will need to bring a printed photo to your visa interview. The upload failed if you see an X instead of your picture on your confirmation page.

2. Once you have completed the visa application, print and keep the Form DS-160 barcode page.
3. Pay the visa application processing fee. (Check with your U.S. Embassy or Consulate for specific instructions.)
4. Schedule a visa interview appointment with your U.S. Embassy or Consulate. Wait times for interview appointments can vary, so check the wait time for the location you are applying at and apply early. (<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/wait-times.html>)
5. Gather the following documentation before your interview:

- a. Your passport, valid for at least six months beyond your planned length of stay in the U.S.
 - b. I-901 SEVIS Fee payment receipt.
 - c. Form DS-160 confirmation/barcode page.
 - d. Application fee payment receipt, if required to pay before interview.
 - e. A photo of yourself, meeting requirements, if your upload to the Form DS-160 failed.
 - f. Your Form I-20.
 - g. Your Covenant Seminary acceptance letter.
 - h. Transcripts, diplomas, degrees, or certificates from schools you have attended showing your academic preparation and standardized test scores, if applicable.
 - i. Ability to show ties to your home country (evidence of plan to depart the U.S. after completing study)
 - j. Proof of funding (evidence of ability to pay for educational, living, and travel costs) (<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/financial-ability>)
 - k. After your visa is approved, you may need to pay a visa issuance fee.
6. Once you receive your F-1 visa, look over it to make sure all the information on it is correct and matches the information on your passport. Check that you have been issued the right classification of visa (F-1).

Note that new student visas (F-1) can only be issued up to one year in advance of the start date of your course of study. If you are a continuing F-1 student who is already in the U.S., enrolled at an SEVP-approved school, and in SEVIS, then your F-1 visa may be issued at any time. We recommend that students apply for their visa as soon as possible. Your visa must be valid when you enter the United States.

NOTE: If you leave the United States during your time as a student, you will require a valid visa to re-enter the United States.

For more information, see the following webpages:

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study/student-visa.html>

<https://ceac.state.gov/genniv/>

7. Arrival in the United States

You may arrive in the United States up to 30 days before the start date of your program of study listed on your Form I-20. We advise that you arrive at least two to three weeks before the start of your term. You must report to Covenant Seminary by your program start date. **If you cannot enter the United States for the term listed on your form, will be late by a few days, or need to postpone your entrance term, contact your DSO immediately.**

Arriving at a Port of Entry

When you arrive in the United States, you will need to have the following documents and information printed and available to enter the country. **Carry these documents with you or in your carry-on; do not pack them in your checked baggage.**

1. Passport, valid at least six months beyond your period of stay in the U.S.
2. F-1 Student Visa.
3. Form I-20.
4. Covenant Seminary admissions acceptance letter.
5. I-901 SEVIS Fee payment receipt.
6. The name, contact information, and emergency phone number of your school's DSO:
Tiffany Najbart
international@covenantseminary.edu
314-392-4130
Afterhours: 314-312-2389
7. Transcripts, diplomas, degrees, or certificates from schools you have attended and standardized test scores to demonstrate your academic preparation (if applicable).
8. Items showing ties to your home country/evidence of plan to depart the U.S. after completing study.
9. Proof of funding (evidence of ability to pay for educational, living, and travel costs) (See <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/financial-ability>).
10. Address of where you will stay in the U.S.

If you are re-entering the United States and have any of the following documents, you will also want to have those available as well.

1. US Driver's License
2. Social Security Number
3. Employment Authorization Document

Upon arriving in the United States, you will meet with a Customs & Border Protection officer. You will need to present the officer with your passport, visa, and Form I-20. The officer may ask questions about the purpose of your visit, how long you are planning to visit, where you will stay, and if you have the means to support yourself financially, etc. and/or examine your luggage. The officer determines whether to admit you into the United States.

If you are admitted to the country, the officer will put an admission stamp in your passport with your admission date, class of admission, and the date you are admitted until. (Verify that this is “D/S,” Duration of Status). The officer will also electronically issue you a Form I-94 “Arrival and Departure Record.” Form I-94 gathers information about how you arrived in the country from your electronic travel records. (Travelers entering by land will receive a paper Form I-94.) Form I-94 is evidence of legal entry into the United States.

If you do not have all the proper documentation to be admitted to the country, you may be denied admission or issued a Form I-515A, “Notice to Student or Exchange Visitor.” Form I-515A allows you temporary admission to the United States for 30 days. If you receive Form I-515A, contact your DSO immediately for assistance on responding properly to this notice. (See Appendix 5-A, “Responding to a Form I-515A.”)

After Arrival in the United States

1. **Check in with your DSO in person as soon as possible to let them know you have arrived in the United States and to schedule an international student orientation.** If you don’t come to Covenant Seminary right after your arrival in the United States, check in with your DSO in person when you arrive at Covenant Seminary.
2. **Print your Form I-94, “Arrival/Departure Record”** from this website: <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home>.
Check the form for accuracy. Verify that the “Admit Until” date is “D/S” (Duration of Status). If any information is inaccurate, contact your DSO immediately.
3. Complete any necessary tuberculosis test requirements.
4. **Update your contact information:** notify your DSO of your local address and telephone number upon arrival.
5. **Maintain status while you are in the United States** (see section 8, “Maintaining Status”).
Once your first term starts, you’ll receive an updated I-20 from your DSO with Active status.

For more information, see the following webpages:

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/guide/f-1/f-1-postsecondary>

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/tools-menu/frequently-asked-questions>

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/getting-to-the-united-states>

<https://www.cbp.gov/travel/international-visitors>

<https://www.cbp.gov/travel/international-visitors/i-94>

<https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home>

<https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/faq>

Appendix 7-A: Responding to a Form I-515A

When entering the United States, if you receive a Form I-515-A, “Notice to Student or Exchange Visitor,” contact your DSO as soon as possible. Your DSO will help make sure you respond to the form properly. Form I-515A allows you admission into the United States for 30 days.

The Form I-515A details any required documents that need to be sent to the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP). Documentation **must** be sent to SEVP within 30 days or else your status may be terminated, and you must leave the United States immediately. Once you have correctly submitted all required documentation, SEVP will process it and send you a letter of approval and your Form I-94 “Arrival/Departure Record.”

For more information, see the following webpage:

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/form-i-515a-overview>

8. Maintaining Status

While in the United States, it is essential to be sure you are maintaining status, which means that you are fulfilling the purpose for why you were admitted to the United States (studying as an F-1 student) and following all the rules and regulations for F-1/F-2 visa holders. Your visa is the travel document you receive before entering the United States. Your status is what you must maintain once you have entered the United States to remain in the country legally. This section will go over the rules you need to follow to maintain your F-1 student status. **If you have any questions about the legal requirements of maintaining your status, please check with your DSO.**

Enrolling in a Full Course of Study

You must be enrolled in a full-time load of classes during each Fall and Spring term, other than your last term.

- At Covenant, for master's level degrees, you must be registered for **at least 10 credit hours** in each Fall and Spring term.
- For ThM students, full time is 8 credit hours.
- For MAC students in their internship year, you must be enrolled in six hours for your fall term.

All but one of your classes must be residential courses for you to maintain status. **Only one online class per term can count toward a full-time course load.** You may take one online class each term, but we strongly recommend taking in-person classes, if possible. In your final term before graduation, you may take less than a full load of classes.

You must attend and pass all of your classes. Most degrees require a C+ (2.25) grade point average to stay in good academic standing. The MAC, ThM, and DMin degrees require a B (3.0) grade point average to stay in good academic standing. Each term's grade point average must remain above a C- (1.7) grade point average. If you do not meet these conditions, you will be put on academic probation. This is a warning that the quality of your work is not adequate for your degree. Once on academic probation, you will stay on academic probation until you return to good standing or are dismissed. Note that failure to pass classes does **not** allow your program end date to be extended.

You must keep your account with Covenant Seminary in good standing, making payments for tuition and/or rent when they are due. Tuition payments for Fall, Spring, and Summer terms can be paid in full or split into 3 (Summer) or 4 (Fall and Spring) payment installments. January term payments must be paid in full. Tuition payments are due on the 1st of each month. Pay attention to

tuition payment dates. Late fees may be added. **If you owe more than \$2100 for a previous term, you will not be able to register for classes, which will impact your ability to stay in the United States.** A billing FAQ can be found here:

<https://covenantseminary.sllite.com/app/docs/g7BnCtMATUr5L7>.

Talk with your DSO & Academic Advisor before making any changes to your schedule. **Do not drop a class without first speaking to your DSO.** If you cannot study full time, contact your DSO immediately. **If you drop below a full course of study without your DSO's authorization, you are in violation of your status and may be required to leave the country immediately.** You may be eligible for a reduced course load if approved by your DSO due to a temporary illness or medical condition, difficulties due to language limitations (in first term only), or if you are in your last term before graduation. **You must talk to your DSO if you need a reduced course load.** Medical reduced course loads require a note from a physician and can only be approved for two semesters.

If you are unable to complete your degree program by the program end date listed on your Form I-20, talk to your DSO about program extension. Contact your DSO at least 15 days before your program end date to request an extension.

For more information, see the following webpage:

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/study/full-course-of-study>

Keep Your DSO Notified of Any Changes

It is important to keep your DSO notified of any changes. Talk with your DSO if you are planning to do any of the following:

- Change your degree program or add a degree program.
- Change your planned schedule, especially if you are planning to drop courses.
- Request a program extension.
- Move to a new address or have any change of contact information for you or your dependents. (You also will need to update this with the Seminary on MyCTS **in addition to updating a DSO.** Be sure to notify your DSO within 10 days of your move.)
- Obtain a job, switch employers, or change your hours. (See Section 9, "Work and Practical Training")
- Take a break from school.
- Travel outside the United States.

- You will need an I-20 endorsed for travel within the last year and a valid visa to re-enter the United States. We also recommend having a travel letter from your DSO. You may only be absent from the country for five months before you forfeit your status. **Be sure your I-20 has been signed under the Travel Endorsement section on page two within the last year before you travel.** Upon returning to the United States, print your newest I-94.
- Transfer to a new school.
- Apply for a change of immigration status.

It is important that you keep your information up to date with your DSO. If you get a new passport during your time at Covenant, please provide your DSO with a copy of your new passport immediately. (Your passport must be valid for at least six months after you plan to depart the United States.) **Inform your DSO of all changes ASAP and within 10 days of any change.**

Dependents

Any dependents you bring with you to the United States (your spouse or any unmarried minor children under the age of 21) are in legal immigration status as long as you, the F-1 student, are maintaining status throughout your course of study and during any OPT. The following stipulations apply to any dependents on an F-2 visa.

- F-2 visa holders **may NOT work** in the United States and are **not** eligible for Social Security numbers.
- F-2 visa holders may leave and re-enter the US with proper documentation.
- F-2 visa holders need an updated I-20 if any information about you, the student, changes.
- F-2 visa holders may study at an SEVP-certified school as long as they are taking only a part-time load of classes. (F-2 dependents may **not** study at an undergraduate or graduate institution full-time.)
- Minor children on an F-2 visa may attend K-12 school at the appropriate grade level. They do not need any extra documentation or permission to do so. **Missouri requires children between ages 7 and 17 to be enrolled in school.** Elementary and secondary schools do not need to be SEVP-certified for minor F-2 dependents to attend.
- F-2 visa holders may file for a change of status if they would like to continue their education by studying at an SEVP-certified school.

For more information, see the following webpages:

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/maintaining-status>

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/bringing-dependents-to-the-united-states>
<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/traveling-as-an-international-student>

9. Work and Practical Training

As an F-1 student, you may only work when authorized by either your DSO or U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS). If you would like to work, the first step is to talk with your DSO. **If you work illegally (without authorization OR more hours than allowed), you will violate your status and be forced to leave the United States.** You may not be allowed to return to the United States. DSOs are obligated to report any instances of F-1 students working without permission.

On-Campus Employment

As an F-1 student, you may work on campus for **up to 20 hours per week** while school is in session. (If you have multiple on-campus jobs, you may not exceed 20 hours per week between all jobs.) Exceeding 20 hours per week will jeopardize your status and will result in termination of your I-20 and being forced to leave the country. While school is not in session, or if you are on your annual vacation (Summer and January terms), you may work full-time (up to 40 hours per week) on campus. **To work on campus, talk with a DSO.** Once you have received a job offer, work with your department supervisor and DSO to get a letter so that you can apply for a Social Security Number. (Your DSO will need a form completed from your department supervisor detailing your job, employment start date, number of hours you'll work and the name of and telephone number for your supervisor.) **You must have a Social Security Number to work in the United States and you may not start work until you have applied for a Social Security Number.** (See Appendix 9A) **You must let your DSO know if you plan to change departments or change your hours worked.** Please note that you may not work past your program end date on your I-20.

On-campus job opportunities can be found here: <https://mycts.covenantseminary.edu/jobs>. Filter by "Industry" and pick "Campus Employment." Your DSOs may also know of other opportunities available on campus.

Off-Campus Employment

Generally, off-campus employment is **not** permitted for F-1 students.

However, if you are experiencing economic hardship from circumstances beyond your control, you may be eligible for off-campus work, if:

- You have been in F-1 status for at least one academic year,
- You are in good academic standing,

- You are enrolled in a full course of study,
- You are unable to obtain on-campus employment or meet your financial needs through on-campus employment, and
- Employment will not interfere with your studies.

Circumstances beyond your control that have caused severe economic hardship may include:

- Loss of financial aid or on-campus employment (if you are not at fault),
- Large increases in tuition or living costs,
- Decrease in the value of currency you depend upon to pay expenses,
- Unexpected changes in your source(s) of financial support,
- Unexpected large medical bills that are not covered by insurance, or
- Other substantial, unexpected expenses.

If you believe you are eligible for off-campus employment, speak with your DSO, who will need to recommend off-campus employment and endorse a new I-20 recommending employment. Let the DSO know about the circumstances that have led to your request. USCIS must approve any off-campus employment. Once you have obtained a new I-20, you will need to fill out Form I-765, “Application for Employment Authorization” within 30 days of receipt of the I-20. (See Section 10, “Off-Campus Employment Checklist.”)

If approved by USCIS, you will receive a Form I-766, “Employment Authorization Document” (EAD). You may **not** begin working until you receive this card. Your DSO will also need a copy of your EAD.

You may only work up to 20 hours per week if you are approved for off-campus employment. You may work full time when school is not in session or if you qualify for emergent circumstances as published by notice in the Federal Register.

Authorization lasts for one year and must be applied for again to continue off-campus employment. Students should submit a new Form I-765 90 days to six months before the expiration of the Employment Authorization Document.

For more information, see the following webpages:

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/work/working-in-the-united-states>

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/special-student-relief>

Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

CPT is a full-time or part-time employment/training opportunity (paid or volunteer) that is part of your degree's curriculum and that directly relates to your program of study. **CPT must be authorized by your DSO and recorded on your Form I-20 before starting your training. CPT cannot be backdated.** At Covenant, the following degrees require CPT:

- MDiv: Requires 400 hours of field education.
- MABTS (Church Planting Track only): Requires 300 hours of field education.
- MAM: Requires 200 hours of field education.
- MAC: Requires Practicum and Internship during final year of study.

See Section 11, "Curricular Practical Training (CPT)," for more information on how to qualify and be authorized for CPT.

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

OPT is available during or following your program of study. It must directly relate to your area of study and be recommended by your DSO.

For OPT during your course of study, **you may only participate in up to 20 hours per week while school is in session.** (Any pre-completion OPT is subtracted from the year of time of post-completion OPT available to you after completion of your degree.)

See Section 12, "Optional Practical Training (OPT)," for more information on how to qualify and be authorized for OPT.

For more information about employment, see the following webpages:

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/work/working-in-the-united-states>

<https://www.ice.gov/sevis/employment>

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/training-opportunities-in-the-united-states>

Appendix 9A: Applying for a Social Security Number

If you are planning to work in the United States, you will need a Social Security number (SSN). When you talk with your DSO about your work plans, your DSO will go over your employment requirements for your F-1 visa. If you are applying for OPT or off-campus employment through USCIS, you can request your SSN through Form I-765. If you are planning to work on-campus or do CPT, follow the instructions below.

To apply for an SSN, you will need the following documents:

- Documentation showing your immigration status:
 - I-94 Arrival/Departure Record and/or admission stamp in your unexpired foreign passport
 - I-766 Employment Authorization Document, if applicable
 - Form I-551 Lawful Permanent Resident Card (Green Card), if applicable
- Most recent Form I-20
 - For CPT or OPT, Form I-20 must have the employment page completed and signed by your DSO.
- A letter from your employer describing your job, employment start date, the number of hours you will be working, and your supervisor's name and telephone number.
- Documentation showing your age:
 - Current passport.
 - Foreign birth certificate, if possible.
 - Other document(s) issued by Department of Homeland Security, if applicable.

Fill out the application for a Social Security card here: <https://www.ssa.gov/forms/ss-5.pdf>.

Take your application to the closest Social Security office. The closest office to Covenant Seminary is below:

1215 Fern Ridge Pkwy Ste 100
 Creve Coeur, MO 63141
 Office: 1-855-820-0096
 TTY: 1-800-325-0778
 Fax: 1-833-923-0556

For more information, see the following webpages:

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/obtaining-a-social-security-number>

<https://www.ssa.gov/ssnumber/>

<https://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10181.pdf>

10. Off-Campus Employment Checklist

General Information

Form I-765, “Application for Employment Authorization,” is used to file for off-campus employment. You must file your Form I-765 within 30 days of the date that your DSO enters the recommendation for off-campus employment into your SEVIS record and issues you an updated I-20.

To start the process, inform your DSO that you would like to work off campus and explain the circumstances that have led you to wish to work off-campus. Generally, F-1 students are unable to work off campus, but off-campus work may be possible if you are experiencing severe economic hardship. To qualify, you must be unable to obtain on-campus employment, be in good academic standing, be enrolled in a full course of study, and have maintained F-1 status. You also, generally, must have completed at least one academic year. If your circumstances are eligible, your DSO will produce an I-20 for you with authorization for off-campus employment.

Note that you cannot work until you receive your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card.

You must keep the name of your employer and your employer’s address information current. **Inform your DSO within 10 days of any change of information or employment.** Please give your DSO a copy of your EAD.

Form I-765 is available to file online here: <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>.

USCIS Off-Campus Work Authorization Application Checklist

- 1. \$410¹ USCIS filing fee. Check or money order from a U.S. bank account made payable to “U.S. Department of Homeland Security.”
- 2. Form I-765 Application for Employment Authorization.²
 - a. Question 14: If you do not have a Social Security Number yet, be sure to request one. This will save you a trip to the Social Security Office.
 - b. Question 27: Off-campus employment due to severe economic hardship is (c)(3)(iii).
 - c. Part 6: Additional Information
 - i. Indicate here any previous SEVIS numbers you have had. (Reference Page 3, Part 2, Item 26.)
- 3. Copy of your most recent I-94.³
- 4. Copy of your Passport Identification page.
- 5. Copy of F-1 entry visa (Canadians are exempt) or Change of Status approval notice.
- 6. Copy of your most recent Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card (front and back), if applicable.
- 7. Two identical, recent U.S. passport-style color photographs (2 x 2 inches, full face, white background) with name and Alien Registration number (or SEVIS number, if you do not have an Alien Registration number) written in pencil on back.
- 8. Copy of I-20 endorsed by Designated School Officer (DSO) within the last 30 days including off-campus employment authorization on page 2.
- 9. Evidence you’ve been in valid F-1 status for one full academic year, are in good standing academically, and are enrolled in a full-course of study.
- 10. Evidence that employment will not interfere with your studies.
- 11. Evidence the employment is necessary to avoid severe economic hardship.
- 12. Evidence that on-campus employment is not available or sufficient to meet your needs.

Send your application to USCIS.

¹ Be sure to check the current filing fee which can be found in the I-765 Instructions (<https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/forms/i-765instr.pdf>)

² <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/forms/i-765.pdf>

³ <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/recent-search>

U.S. Postal Service (USPS):

USCIS

PO Box 805373

Chicago, IL 60680

FedEx, UPS, and DHL deliveries:

USCIS

Attn: I-765 C03

131 South Dearborn - 3rd Floor

Chicago, IL 60603-5517

11. Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

CPT is a full-time or part-time employment/training (volunteer) opportunity that is part of your degree's curriculum and that directly relates to your program of study. **CPT must be authorized by your DSO and recorded on your Form I-20 BEFORE starting your training opportunity. Beginning work without authorization will lead to termination and having to immediately leave the country.** At Covenant Seminary, the following degrees require CPT:

- MDiv: Requires 400 hours of field education.
- MABTS (Church Planting Track only): Requires 300 hours of field education.
- MAM: Requires 200 hours of field education.
- MAC: Requires Practicum and Internship during final year of study.

To qualify for CPT, you usually need to have completed one year of academic study, unless your degree program requires you to start CPT earlier (MAM only). Complete initial advising with your Field Education representative. You also need to have secured your training opportunity before CPT can be authorized. **Once you have secured your training opportunity, you must fill out the CPT Request Form and turn this into your DSO in One-Stop. This must be done two weeks before your training starts. If you have multiple training opportunities, each one must be authorized. You must receive authorization (through a signed I-20) BEFORE starting your employment.** You will receive an updated I-20 endorsed by your DSO after submitting your CPT Request Form. Once your CPT is approved, Field Education can approve your Ministry Agreement.

CPT must be authorized each year; it is your responsibility to make sure you have an up-to-date CPT authorization from your DSO on your I-20.

You must maintain a full course of study, even while doing CPT.

Note that students who complete one year or more of full-time CPT (more than 20 hours a week) are not eligible to complete OPT. Students are allowed one year of full-time practical training. Any full-time CPT counts towards this allotment and will reduce the amount of available post-completion OPT time.

See the following webpages for more information:

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/training-opportunities-in-the-united-states>

<https://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/CurricularPracticalTraining.pdf>



Appendix 11-A International Student Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

CPT is a full-time or part-time employment/training (volunteer) opportunity that is part of your degree's curriculum and directly relates to your program of study.

CPT MUST be authorized by your DSO and recorded on your Form I-20 BEFORE you begin your training.

For MDiv, MAM, and MABTS-Church Planting students, your Field Education hours are considered your CPT. You must speak with the Field Ed department to be sure your hours will count.

For MAC students, your Practicum and Internship are considered your CPT.

To Be Filled out by Student:

Student Name: _____

Degree: _____

Student Signature: _____

To Be Filled out by Supervisor:

Training Site Name: _____

Training Site Address: _____

Supervisor Name and Title: _____

Start Date (CANNOT BE BACKDATED): _____ End Date: _____

Planned Hours to Work Each Week: _____

(Note that full-time CPT (more than 20 hrs) will subtract from post-completion Optional Practical Training time.)

Brief Description of Duties:

Supervisor Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please return this form to your Designated School Official (Tiffany Najbart) in One-Stop at least two weeks before your start date.

12. Optional Practical Training (OPT)

General Information

OPT is available during or following your program of study if you have not completed OPT at your education level in the past. **It must directly relate to your area of study and be recommended by a DSO.** Typically, Covenant Seminary students do post-completion OPT. You may have more than one training opportunity, as long as all of them directly relate to your field of study.

You do not have to have secured your training opportunity before recommendation. For OPT, you will need to file Form I-765, “Application for Employment Authorization,” and send it to USCIS. (See checklist below.) Once you receive your Employment Authorization Document, you can work for any employer, as long as the training relates to your program of study.

Form I-765, “Application for Employment Authorization,” which is used to file for OPT, may be filed up to 90 days before, but no later than 60 days after, your program end date. **We recommend filing as soon as possible once you reach 90 days before your program end date, as there could be delays in processing.**

To start the process, inform your DSO that you would like to apply for OPT and provide a statement of how you are hoping to apply what you have learned as a student through OPT in a particular type of job setting. Indicate the date when you’d like your OPT to start (it can start directly after your program end date or start as late as 60 days after your program end date). Let your DSO know when you are ready to file your Form I-765 and your DSO will produce an I-20 for you with authorization for OPT. You must file your Form I-765 within 30 days of the date that your DSO enters the recommendation for OPT into your SEVIS record.

Note that you cannot work until you receive your Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card and may not begin OPT until the date indicated on your EAD. Post-completion OPT must be full-time (over 20 hours). There is a 12-month maximum of full-time practical training that can be completed per degree level (ex. masters). This includes full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT), pre-completion OPT, and post-completion OPT. OPT must be completed by 14 months after graduation. You may only be unemployed a maximum of 90 days while on OPT.

While on OPT, you must keep your address current and report your employer’s name and address, EIN, supervisor’s name and contact information, job title, start date, and planned hours worked to your DSO. You are responsible for reporting and explaining, in writing, how your job relates to your major area of study. You must keep your address and employer information current, even if you are unemployed. **Inform your DSO within 10 days of any change of information or employment.** You must inform your DSO if you have any periods of unemployment. Please get your DSO a copy of your EAD.

Studying While on OPT

While on pre-completion OPT, you must not work more than 20 hours a week.

While on post-completion OPT, study must be incidental. If you are dual enrolled in two master's programs, you may apply for and begin OPT at the completion of one degree and either pause studying during the OPT year or take classes incidental to primary authorization of OPT. Incidental study is defined as less than half time (up to 4 credit hours/semester for MA/MDiv or up to 3 credit hours/semester for ThM). If you apply and are accepted to a second degree program at the same level during your OPT year, you can begin this program incidentally, as described above, or enroll in the second program full time, terminating your OPT authorization. Transferring to another school or beginning study at a new education level automatically terminates OPT authorization.

After Completion of OPT

After completing OPT post-graduation, you have 60 days to depart the country or apply to another degree program. The new degree program must begin within five months of the end of OPT. If it begins later, you must leave and re-enter the country.

USCIS OPT Application Checklist

OPT can be filed for online or by mail. For online filing, see <https://www.uscis.gov/file-online/forms-available-to-file-online>.

- 1. \$410⁴ USCIS filing fee. Check or money order from a U.S. bank account made payable to "U.S. Department of Homeland Security."
- 2. Form I-765 Application for Employment Authorization.⁵
 - a. Question 27: Post-Completion OPT is (c)(3)(B).
 - b. Part 6: Additional Information
 - i. Indicate here any previous SEVIS numbers you have had. (Reference Page 3, Part 2, Item 26.)
 - ii. List all previously authorized OPT and Curricular Practical Training (CPT) dates, academic level, and whether the position was part- or full-time. (Reference Page 3, Part 2, Item 27.)
- 3. Copy of your most recent I-94.⁶
- 4. Copy of your Passport Identification page.

⁴ Be sure to check the current filing fee which can be found in the I-765 Instructions (<https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/forms/i-765instr.pdf>)

⁵ <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765> (online) or <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/forms/i-765.pdf> (paper)

⁶ <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/recent-search>

- 5. Copy of F-1 entry visa (Canadians are exempt) or Change of Status approval notice.
- 6. Copy of your most recent Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card (front and back), if applicable.
- 7. Two identical, recent U.S. passport-style color photographs (2 x 2 inches, full face, white background) with name and Alien Registration # written in pencil on back. (If you don't have an Alien Registration #, write your SEVIS number on the back.)
- 8. Copy of I-20 **endorsed by Designated School Officer (DSO) within the last 30 days including OPT authorization on page 2.**

Send your application to USCIS.

U.S. Postal Service (USPS):

USCIS
Attn: I-765 C03
PO Box 805373
Chicago, IL 60680-5374

FedEx, UPS, and DHL deliveries:

USCIS
Attn: I-765 C03 (Box 805373)
131 South Dearborn - 3rd Floor
Chicago, IL 60603-5517

13. Completion and Post-Attendance

Program Completion

After completing your degree or any OPT, you must continue to maintain legal status in the United States. After your study or OPT is complete, you have 60 days to leave the United States. If you would like to continue to stay in the United States, you can apply and be accepted to a different degree program at Covenant Seminary, transfer to another school, or apply to change your visa status. If you do not do any of these things, you must depart the United States within 60 days. Failure to depart the United States on time may jeopardize any applications for OPT, change of status, or permanent residency.

Transferring to Another School

If you decide to attend another SEVP-certified school, you will need to apply and be accepted to that school. We recommend starting this process well in advance of completion of your studies at Covenant Seminary. Once you have been accepted to another school, you will need to talk to your current DSO and bring them the following information:

- An acceptance letter or confirmation from the new school
- Contact information for the DSO at the new school.
- The SEVIS school code for the new school.

You will fill out a Transfer Out Form. Then, your SEVIS record will be transferred to the new school at a specified date that your DSO will work with you and your new school to determine. Your DSO will inform you when your record is being transferred. Once your record has been transferred, you will need to work with the DSO at your new school. You will want to get a Form I-20 from your new school as soon as your record is transferred officially and check in with your new DSO as soon as possible.

For more information, see the following webpages:

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/instructions-for-transferring-to-another-school-as-an-f-1-student>
<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/study/transferring-to-another-school>

Applying to Change Your Visa Status

Changing status is changing the purpose of your visit to the United States. You may apply to change your status if you have maintained status throughout your time in the US.

For more information, see the following webpages:

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/complete/change-of-status>

14. Other Information

Driver's License

We highly recommend having a car while you are at Covenant. In order to operate a car while in the United States and studying at Covenant, you will need to obtain a Missouri driver's license. **Even if you have a foreign driver's license, you will need a Missouri's driver's license as soon as possible.**

To start the process, talk with your DSO. If you do not yet have a Social Security Number, because you are not working in the United States, your DSO will need to write a letter to the Social Security Office requesting documentation that you do not have a Social Security Number. All international students applying for a driver's license will also need a letter from the DSO to the Missouri Department of Revenue indicating that you are in good standing and enrolled in classes.

First, you'll need to pass the driver's test at a Missouri State Highway Patrol Examination Station. (The closest one to Covenant is located at 703 Big Bend Rd, Ballwin, MO 63021.) To study for the driver examination, use the Missouri Driver's Guide found here: <https://dor.mo.gov/driver-license/guide/>. Be sure to bring your passport, I-20s, and I-94 with you.

After you've passed your test, you can visit any license office to obtain a driver's license. Below are the closest license offices:

- Creve Coeur License Office - 12933 Olive Blvd. St. Louis, MO 63141- (314) 878-2110
- Chesterfield License Office - 100 Chesterfield Commons East Road, Chesterfield, MO 63005 – (636) 536-3095
- Overland License Office - 10292 Page Ave, St. Louis, MO 63132 – (314) 890-0860

You'll need to bring the following documents with you.

- Passport
- I-20s
- I-94
- Social Security card or documentation that you do not have a Social Security Number
- A letter from your DSO verifying your status
- Proof of Residence
- Driver Examination Record

Once you have a driver's license, note that you will need to get motor vehicle insurance. See this page for more information about Missouri's motor vehicle insurance requirements:

<https://dor.mo.gov/driver-license/insurance/>.

For more information, see the following webpage:

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/study/driving-in-the-united-states>

<https://dor.mo.gov/driver-license/issuance/required-documents-checklist.html#license/permit>

Taxes and Forms

If you earn income in the United States, have a taxable scholarship, or receive other types of income, you will need to file taxes in the US each year. Taxes for the previous calendar year must be filed each year on or before April 15th. To file taxes, you will need a Social Security Number. (If you are working in the US, you must have an SSN.) If you do not qualify for a Social Security Number but still need to file taxes due to receiving scholarships or other income, you will need to apply for an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN). (Talk to a DSO if you need information on this.)

In addition, **all international students**, whether you worked or not, **must** file Form 8843, “Statement for Exempt Individuals and Individuals With a Medical Condition.”

(<https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f8843.pdf>) This form indicates that you are not considered a US resident for tax purposes. You will need to fill out Part I (4b should match the number of days you were in the U.S. as an F-1 student) and Part III (10 should be Dr. Jay Sklar, Vice President of Academics). If you are filing a tax return, this form can be sent with it. Otherwise, this form may be sent separately by April 15.

For assistance with your taxes, the IRS offers a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program free of charge. Find more information about VITA here: <https://www.irs.gov/individuals/free-tax-return-preparation-for-qualifying-taxpayers>. You can also find information and locations where you can file your taxes for free at: <https://mctcfreetax.org/>.

You may also need to file taxes in your home country.

For more information, see the following webpages:

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/2014/02/tips-tax-season>

<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/2013/01/does-f-or-m-student-need-pay-income-taxes>

<https://www.irs.gov/individuals/international-taxpayers/foreign-students-scholars-teachers-researchers-and-exchange-visitors>

Textbooks

Textbook lists for classes are finalized six weeks prior to the beginning of a course. The list of textbooks for a course can be found on MyCTS. Click the course in question in **Course Offering** or

from your list of pre-registered courses. More information about the course will pop up. Scroll to the bottom of the pop-up for a list of textbooks for the course.

Contact List

Below is a list of contact information for various needs. If you do not know who to contact for a particular need, please contact your DSO.

- Academic Advising – One-Stop, advising@covenantseminary.edu
- Add/Drop a Class – Registrar, One-Stop; registrar@covenantseminary.edu; 314-434-4044 x 4036
- Billing Questions – Business Office, One-Stop; busdept@covenantseminary.edu; 314-434-4044 x 4930
- Business Office – One-Stop; busdept@covenantseminary.edu; 314-434-4044 x 4930
- Course Changes – Registrar, One-Stop; registrar@covenantseminary.edu; 314-434-4044 x 4036
- Curricular Practical Training – See DSOs
- Degree Changes – See DSOs
- Designated School Officials (DSOs): international@covenantseminary.edu; Tiffany Najbart – 314-434-4044 x 4130 and/or Betsy Gasoske – 314-434-4044 x 4025
- Driver’s License Letters – See DSOs
- Employment - See DSOs
- Field Education – One-Stop; fielded@covenantseminary.edu
- Financial Aid – One-Stop; financialaid@covenantseminary.edu
- Housing – One-Stop; housing@covenantseminary.edu
- I-20s – See DSOs
- International Concerns – See DSOs
- International Student Care – Terri Ryan (terri.ryan@covenantseminary.edu); 314-885-9373
- Library – library@covenantseminary.edu; 314-392-4100; <https://library.covenantseminary.edu>
- Optional Practical Training – See DSOs
- Transferring to Another School – See DSOs
- The Scribe Writing Center – Library; scribe@covenantseminary.edu; <https://library.covenantseminary.edu/scribe>
- Social Security Number – See DSOs
- Student Life – Edwards Hall; studentlife@covenantseminary.edu; 314-434-4044 x 4155
- Registrar – One-Stop; registrar@covenantseminary.edu; 314-434-4044 x 4036
- Registration – Registrar; One-Stop; registrar@covenantseminary.edu; 314-434-4044 x 4036
- Taxes – See DSOs
- Travel Letters – See DSOs
- Work Guidelines – See DSOs

My wife and I came all the way from Brazil
full of uncertainties, not knowing if we were going to make it
or if the Lord would open all those doors, but by his grace he did.
We came for theological education—and yes, we got that—but we also got
so much more. I have appreciated Covenant’s focus on pastoral care,
for doing relational ministry that transforms hearts.
That was a major part of our education. The community was wonderful!
The staff and faculty treated us as friends, and I met people at Covenant who
I’m sure are going to be some of my best friends throughout my whole life.
We felt like we were part of one big family.

PAULO CAPRONI (MDIV ’19)
PhD Student in New Testament, McMaster Divinity College
Ontario, Canada

