F-1 Status vs. J-1 Status: What’s the Difference?

International students who are admitted to a degree-seeking program at Vanderbilt University and who need to apply for a student visa could consider two visa types: F-1 student or J-1 exchange visitor. All degree-seeking students are generally eligible for an F-1 visa, but not all are eligible for a J-1 visa. Below is some general information to help you determine which visa category (or categories) you are eligible for, and which one would be more suitable for you.

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| I-20        | Be accepted into a degree-seeking program | At a minimum, must show enough funding for one academic year of study. Funding can be primarily or entirely from personal or family sources. | On-campus: no prior authorization needed. Off-campus:  
- Employment must be directly related to your major.  
- Curricular practical training (CPT) for experiences that satisfy an academic component of your program  
- Optional practical training (OPT) for up to 12 months per degree level. STEM-designated majors may be eligible for a 24-month extension. | F-2 dependents may study part-time, but not full-time. F-2 dependents are not permitted to work. | F-2 dependents may study part-time, but not full-time. F-2 dependents are not permitted to work. | No home residency requirement or waiting period before transitioning to another visa category. Pre- or post-completion OPT can allow self-employment if the opportunity is directly related to your major. No job offer is needed to apply for pre- or post-completion OPT, but it is required to apply for STEM OPT. There are limits on the |
| J-1 Exchange Visitor | DS-2019 | Be accepted into a degree-seeking or non-degree seeking program. Substantial portion of funding must be from non-personal or family funds. | At a minimum, must show enough funding for the full duration of your program. Funding cannot be primarily or entirely from personal/family sources; a substantial portion must be from non-personal/family sources – such as a university or government sponsor. | On-campus: must have prior authorization to begin working. Off-campus: Eligible for academic training (AT) for experiences directly related to your major.  - Bachelor’s/Masters: eligible for up to 18 months (additional time may be available for STEM majors)  - PhD: eligible for up to 36 months  - Must have a job offer to apply for academic training. Cannot apply for academic training after the program end date on your DS-2019 has passed. | J-2 dependents may study (full- or part-time). J-2 dependents are eligible to apply for work authorization. J-2 dependents must have health insurance that complies with Department of State requirements. Some exchange visitors may be subject to a 2-year home residency requirement before they can transition to certain immigrant visa statuses (H-1B, permanent resident, etc.). | number of days you can be unemployed. Changing educational levels upwards or downwards is allowed. 12-month waiting period before starting a program in the J-1 research scholar/professor category if the J student program was longer than 6 months). |
Health insurance is required for full duration of the program; insurance must comply with Department of State requirements.

Self-employment is not suitable for academic training.

"Reverse matriculation" (i.e., going from a higher degree to a lower degree) is not allowed.