

International Students in CCA's low residency program in MFA Comics

International students who are accepted to the MFA in Comics program at California College of the Arts and choose the low residency model must obtain an F-1 student visa to enter the United States to participate in the intensive on-site summer sessions.

The low residency model of the MFA in Comics program is nontraditional, which means important visa and immigration implications exist for F-1 international students who enroll in the program.

Please carefully read the following information.

Obtaining the F-1 Visa for the low residency program:

1. CCA is only able to issue an I-20 that is valid for the dates between which a student is required to be in the United States to attend MFA in Comics classes on a full time basis. Because there are three on-campus sessions and each session is one year apart, students will be issued three separate I-20s, and will need to pay three separate SEVIS I-901 fees.

Example: A F-1 international student starting the MFA in Comics in Summer 2024 would be issued an I-20 for only the dates that reflect the July 2024 session, pay the SEVIS fee, and use that I-20 to obtain a F-1 visa.

In late spring 2025, the student would be issued a new initial I-20 for only the dates that reflect the Summer 2025 session, would pay another SEVIS fee, and use the new I-20 to obtain another F-1 visa if the previous one has expired. In the third year, the process would repeat again. If the F-1 visa is still valid, a student can use it to re-enter the program with the new I-20 form.

Length of Stay in the United States

1. U.S. immigration regulations allow F-1 visa holders to enter the United States no more than 30 days before the program start date listed on the I-20.
2. F-1 students are also allowed a 60-day grace period to remain in the United States after the program end date listed on their I-20. During this time, a student may remain in the United States to travel around (within the United States) and to make preparations to depart. During the grace period students may not work or engage in full-time study.

At the conclusion of the 60-day grace period, a student must depart the United States. If a student departs the United States during the grace period, their F-1 status ends.

3. While in the United States, F-1 students are required to abide by all relevant immigration regulations. One of the main components of maintaining F-1 status is that students must be registered for a full-time course of study each term.

For graduate students at CCA, that means being registered in at least 9 units per academic semester (Fall/Spring) Because the low-residency format of the program only requires students to complete 6 units per academic semester in the fall and spring, students cannot maintain valid F-1 status during this time since their program requirements do not allow them to meet the minimum units for full time enrollment. Due to these restrictions, students may not remain in the United States between the intensive on-site summer sessions.

4. It is very important to pay attention to the regulations pertaining to length of stay in the United States. Staying in the United States for longer than you are allowed to is a violation of your F-1 status and could jeopardize future visa applications.

Employment Authorization

Because a student's physical presence in the United States in F-1 status is only required for three one-month periods of time, students do not accrue enough time consecutively in F-1 status to be eligible for either Curricular Practical Training (CPT) or Optional Practical Training (OPT).

Please feel free to contact the International Student Services (ISS) office with any questions at iss@cca.edu