

30 DAY GRACE PERIOD TO ENTER THE UNITED STATES

“As of January 1, 2003, International Students can enter the United States no more than 30 days before the program start date listed on their I-20” (8 CFR 214.2 (j) (1) (ii))

- You may be denied entry into the United States at the port of entry if you arrive early even though you have a valid I-20
- You might be admitted, but in a different visa/immigration status (as a tourist for example) other than the F-1 status. This can pose a lot of challenges and you will be unable to engage in the activities otherwise available to you as a F-1 International Student

CUSTOMS INSPECTION AT U.S PORT OF ENTRY

What a Typical customs Inspector will do

- When you arrive at a U.S. airport, you will go first to immigration inspection. Make sure you remember to present your I-20 along with your passport and visa to the border official so that you will enter the U.S. as an International Student (F-1 status). Pack these documents in your carry-on bags because you do not pick up your luggage until afterwards.
- The immigration officer will also give you a white little card Arrival/Departure card (the I-94) which should be stapled into your passport. Keep track of this very important little white card. You will need it to leave the country!
- Additionally, as there are new border procedures, which require digital imaging of fingerprints and a photograph, and verification of your record in the SEVIS system (the U.S. government student database), this process may take a little longer than in the past.
- If the immigration inspector cannot immediately find your record, he or she may ask you to go to a “second station” where the officer has a little more time to find your record. Do not panic – this does *not* mean there is a problem.
- If there is a problem, during office hours, call the Office of International Student & Scholar Services at (973-353-1427).

What you need to do

- Collect your documents from the immigration officer
- Carefully secure your I-94 card (little white card). It should be stapled inside your passport opposite the visa page. If you lose it you will have to apply to U.S immigration for replacement at a fee of \$300!