

HOW TO OBTAIN A CALIFORNIA DRIVER'S LICENSE

Disclaimer: PUC OISS has prepared this guide to provide you with general guidance. However, any advice provided to you by our office, as well as the information in this document, should not be construed as legal advice. PUC international staff will provide regulatory and practice information as it stands at the time of the consult. Due to the fluid nature of governmental interpretation, individuals must understand that the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) office may change its interpretation of established immigration laws/regulations and eligibility requirements for benefits at any time. For legal advice, you may consult with an immigration attorney.

As an F student, you may be eligible to drive a motor vehicle while residing in the United States. This involves successfully applying for a driver's license. Driving a car without a driver license is illegal. It is also illegal to drive a car without insurance, so be sure to purchase car insurance before purchasing a car. It is highly recommended that you research coverage and prices to ensure you have the best policy for your needs. To acquire a driver license, you must apply for one at your local Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), which can have a different name in some states.

Basic steps:

- Talk with your designated school official (DSO)* about driving rules and regulations in your state or territory. **International Student Advisor at PUC*
- Confirm with your international student advisor that your student record is Active in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS).
- Wait 10 days after arriving in the United States to apply for a driver's license to ensure that your Form I-94, Arrival/Departure Record" information can update in all the government systems.
- Obtain a Social Security Number (SSN), if required by your state or territory
- Visit and submit the proper documentation to the DMV. A new paper version of the driver's license application is available in field offices for those who choose not to complete the electronic version. The DMV is moving towards a paperless process and will begin to phase out the paper application. Currently, you can start your application for a driver's license online and finish the process at a DMV office. Most DMV business can be completed online, but you may need to visit an office in person. Prepare online ahead of time and finish your DVM office visit faster. There is an application fee for originals, renewals, and replacement driver's license.

More detailed steps:

- You must first obtain a Social Security number, if required by your state. The *California Vehicle Code* (CVC) requires the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to collect your social security number (SSN). If you are unable to obtain a social security number, you will need to obtain a "denial notice" (refusal letter, Form SSA-L676) from the Social Security Administration by contacting your local Social Security office.
- Schedule an Office Visit Appointment online with your local DMV at <https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/dmv/dmv/appointments>
- Take your I-20 original signed forms, passport, visa*, I-94, and Social Security Card or Denial Notice Letter with you to your appointment. For some states you may need to provide proof of residence; this might be in the form of a bill or letter addressed to you. If you are on optional practical training (OPT), bring your Form I-766, Employment Authorization Document (the DMV will use the A number on this card to verify your status). **You do not need a visa if you are from a visa-exempt country, such as Canada or Bermuda.*

A driver's license applicant may also need to pass both a driving and written test. Depending on your state, if you have a license from your home country or another state, the DMV may not require you to take the tests. However, not all states accept driver's licenses from other countries.

For California,

- To practice prior to the knowledge written test and for information on the driver license drive test, visit <https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/driver-licenses-identification-cards/preparing-for-knowledge-and-drive-tests>
- If required, you can schedule a Behind-the-Wheel Driving Test Appointment with your local DMV at <https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/dmv/dmv/appointments>

After a successful application process, a DMV official will explain the next steps for obtaining your driver's license. It is normal for some nonimmigrants to only get temporary licenses. In addition, you may receive the license immediately or you may have to wait several weeks, depending on the state. You may view the DMV website for more details.

The DMV may offer alternative methods for completing the driver's license written examination, such as multiple languages, sign language, or via audio. An individual with special needs may need to speak with a supervisor concerning the written or driving examinations. For any questions concerning this, view the DMV website or contact the California DMV by mail or phone at 1-800-777-0133

California DVM Homepage: <https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal>

Study in the States: <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/driving-in-the-united-states>

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Student & Spiritual Life / International Student Advising at isa@puc.edu or (707) 965-7362.