

Student Visas

What type of visa do I need to become an academic student in the United States?

Most non-U.S. citizens who wish to study in the United States will seek an F-1 (non-immigrant) student visa, but there are other visa types that are sometimes authorized for those who study in the U.S. Here is a short description of the different visa types that involve study:

- F-1, or Student Visa: This visa is the most common for those who wish to engage in academic studies in the United States. It is for people who want to study at an accredited U.S. college or university or to study English at a university or intensive English language institute.
- J-1, or Exchange Visitor: This visa is for people who will be participating in an exchange visitor program in the U.S. The "J" visa is for educational and cultural exchange programs.
- M-1, or Student Visa: This visa is for those who will be engaged in non-academic or vocational study or training at an institution in the U.S.

What if I receive an I-20 from more than one school in the US?

Prospective nonimmigrant students who have been accepted by more than one school must use the Form I-20 from the school they intend to attend to pay the SEVIS I-901 fee and to apply for a visa.

How can I know about the visa procedure in my country and find the application forms?

A- Students should check the embassy or consulate Web sites at <http://usembassy.state.gov/>. Each has directions for non-immigrants applying for a student visa that includes how to make an appointment for a visa interview.

B- Visa application forms are also available at <http://evisaforms.state.gov>.

C- The **Worldwide Edu Consultants** for Education in USA web site lists advising centers that help non-immigrants prepare for visa interviews.

Should I proceed with my ticket reservations once I have submitted my application to the US embassy?

No one can promise a visa will be issued before the embassy has fully processed the visa application. Therefore, do not make final travel plans or purchase nonrefundable tickets until a visa has been issued.

When can I apply for a student visa?

In order to apply for a visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate, you must first have a SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System)-generated document (either an I-20 or DS-2019) issued by a U.S. college or university or Department of State-designated sponsor organization. You will be required to submit this form when you apply for a visa.

Where do I get the (I-20 or DS-2019 form) from?

The U.S. academic institution or program sponsor will provide you with the appropriate SEVIS-generated form only when you have been academically admitted to the institution or accepted as a participant in an exchange program. The institution or program sponsor will also send you additional information about applying for the appropriate visa, as well as other guidance about beginning your academic program in the United States.

When would be the best time to apply for my student visa?

Once you have all the required documentation, you may apply for the visa, even if you do not intend to begin your program of study for several months. It is best to apply early for the visa to make sure that there is sufficient time for visa processing.

How early should apply for my student visa?

You should bear in mind that the U.S. Embassy/Consulate cannot issue a visa more than 120 days before the actual start of the program in the United States. However, visa applicants are encouraged to apply for their visa as soon as they are prepared to do so. Thus, if the college or university to which you have been admitted states on the I-20 or DS-2019 that the program will start on September 1, a visa cannot be issued before May 1.

When can I enter the US with my student visa?

Even if you have been issued a visa to enter the United States and it is your first entry as a student to the United States you will not be allowed to enter the country more than 30 days before the start of your program. Returning students do not have this requirement. Using the earlier example, if the program of study starts on September 1, you will not be permitted to enter the United States until August 1 or later.

As a student what do I need to bring to a visa interview?

An interview at the U.S. consular section is required for almost all visa applicants.

All applicants for an F or M student visa must provide:

- Form I-20, Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1), Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (M-1) Student Status for Vocational Students, or DS-2019 if coming on an exchange program or U.S. government-sponsored program.
- A completed application, Nonimmigrant Visa Applicant, Form DS-156, together with a Form DS-158. Both forms must be completed and signed. Some applicants will also be required to complete and sign Form DS-157.
- A passport valid for at least six months after your proposed date of entry into the United States

- One (1) 2x2 photograph (see embassy website for specifications)
- A receipt to show payment of the visa application fee, a visa issuance fee if applicable
- SEVIS I-901 fee receipt.
- Also all applicant should be prepared to show if asked:
- Transcripts and diplomas from previous institutions attended.
- Scores from standardized tests required by the educational institution such as the TOEFL, SAT, GRE, GMAT, etc.
- Financial evidence that shows that the student or sponsoring parents have sufficient funds to cover tuition and living expenses during the period of intended study. If the student is receiving a scholarship for his studies a letter to that affect from the sponsoring agency would be required.
- If travelling with dependents (i.e. children, spouse) must also provide: Proof of the students relationship to his/her spouse and/or children (e.g., marriage and birth certificates.)

What happens at the interview?

Because each student's personal and academic situation is different, two students applying for the same visa may be asked different questions and be required to submit different documents. For that reason, the guidelines that follow are general and can be changed by consular officers overseas, depending on each student's situation.

Usually at the interview, a quick ink-free fingerprint scan will be taken. Some applicants will need additional screening, and will be notified when they apply

What is the waiting time for visa interviews?

Visa wait times for interview appointments and visa processing time information for each U.S. embassy or consulate worldwide is available on the DOS website at [Visa Wait Times](#), and on most embassy Web sites.

In some embassies or consulates students are not required to make an appointment for their interview check your embassy website for specific arrangements at each embassy

How long is the interview for the visa at the US Embassy?

The visa interview usually lasts an average of 3 minutes. You must be prepared to be brief yet convincing. Be confident, do not lie or hide the truth.

What is the U.S. consular officer is looking for in the interview?

Firstly, that you are a bona fide student. He or she will look at your educational background and plans in order to assess how likely you are to enroll and remain in college until graduation. Be prepared to discuss the reasons you chose a particular college, your major and career plans.

Secondly, that you are capable of financing your education. Provide solid evidence of your sponsor's finances and if receiving a government scholarship a document to that affect will be necessary.

Thirdly, that your ties to your home country are so strong that you will not want to remain in the United States, that your reasons for returning home are stronger than those for remaining in the U.S.

Can I work in the U.S. while in college on a student visa?

According to the current immigration regulations, international students can only work part time - up to 20 hours per week - on campus while school is in session during the required academic year, and up to 40 hours per week during school vacation periods. Students working 10-15 hours a week can earn enough to pay for incidentals such as books, clothing and personal expenses, but cannot pay major expenses such as tuition or room and board.

Does the I-20 from a reputed university in the U.S. guarantee me a student visa?

No. the I-20 only allows you to begin the visa application. The consular officer after the interview decides whether to approve or deny a visa.

How long would my student visa be valid for?

It is valid for the duration of your course of study. Keep in mind that your visa stamp in your passport must only be valid when you are entering or re-entering the country.

What if my F-1 student visa has expired?

You can stay in the United States on an expired F-1 visa as long as you maintain your student status. However, if you are returning home or traveling to a country where [automatic revalidation](#) does not apply, you must have a valid visa to return to the United States.

Ensure that you have all the documentation you need for your visa application and allow sufficient time for processing a new visa. The documentation you may need for a new visa includes, but is not limited to the following:

- A SEVIS Form I-20, endorsed for travel and signed by your DSO and your original Form I-20 (see your DSO before you travel)
- Original evidence showing proof of necessary funds to cover tuition and living expenses
- Evidence showing your intention to return to your home country upon program completion, including evidence of compelling social and economic ties to your home country
- If you have applied for or had optional practical training (OPT) approved, bring a copy of your Form I-20 endorsed for OPT and your Employment Authorization Document (EAD), if one has been issued

The Department of State recommends that you apply for a visa in your home country. For more information about visa applications visit the Department of State website at www.UnitedStatesVisas.gov

I recently received my I-20 (or DS-2019) form do I need to make an appointment for the student visa?

You should check the website of the US embassy in your country for student visa application procedures.

How long does it take to receive a student visa?

This can be different in each country and each student's situation. Refer to the website of the US embassy in your country for more information

I have a valid 10 year B (visitor) visa to the US in my passport; do I need a new student visa for study in the US?

Yes, all students must begin their studies in the US on a student visa.

How long should the length of my study in the US be before I need to apply for a student visa? Can I take a 3-4 week language program in the US with my tourist visa?

No, you will need a student visa for all language programs in the US.

I am in the United States with an F-1 or M1 visa and I want to change schools. What do I have to do?

Make sure you inform the international student office on your campus to update your SEVIS information with the details of the new school. This way you can continue your studies in the new school. However if you are leaving the US to go home for a holiday make sure you take a new I-20 form from the new school with you to apply for a new student visa from the US embassy.

Can I use my F-1 visa to study at a public secondary school?

If the school is on the SEVIS list of approved schools and the student is paying the full tuition he/she can attend a public secondary school for one academic year.

How can I become an F or M nonimmigrant student?

- Apply and be accepted by, an SEVP-certified school. When a school accepts a nonimmigrant applicant, it issues a Form I-20 for initial attendance. Prospective nonimmigrant students may apply to more than one SEVP-certified school but must choose one and use the Form I-20 from that school when applying for a visa.
- Be able to pay for the cost of schooling and living expenses while in the United States and furnish proof of sufficient funding to the school.
- Attend a school full time
- Pay the SEVIS I-901 fee at www.fmjfee.com
- Apply for a visa from an embassy or consulate in your country
- After obtaining an F-1 or M-1 visa, the prospective student may enter into the United States no more than 30 days prior to the program start date on the student's Form I-20.

How do F or M nonimmigrants obtain a student visa?

After receiving a Form I-20 from a school, the prospective nonimmigrant must apply to the local consulate or embassy for a visa appointment and interview. The SEVIS I-901 fee must be paid prior to the interview.

As part of the visa application process, an interview at the embassy consular section is required for visa applicants from age 14 through 79. Persons age 13 and younger, and age 80 and older, generally do not require an interview, unless requested by the embassy or consulate.

Where can I find more information about student visas?

- Student visa information: http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1270.html
- U.S. Embassies & Consulates Worldwide:
http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/embassies/embassies_1214.html
- Overview visa information: <http://www.UnitedStatesVisas.gov>
- Visa wait times for interview appointments:
http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/wait/tempvisitors_wait.php
- Exchange visitor visa information/Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-156:
http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1267.html