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F Visa Overview

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Student Applicants (F-1/F-2 visas) - Overview

The Immigration and Nationality Act provides certain nonimmigrant visa categories for persons wishing to study in the United States. The "F" visa is reserved for nonimmigrants wishing to pursue academic studies and/or language training programs. To the extent possible, students should bring the documents suggested below when applying for their student visa, as well as any other documents that might help establish their ties to the local community. Foreign students seeking to study in the U.S. may apply for the F-1 category provided they meet the following general criteria:

- The student must be enrolled in an "academic" educational program, a language-training program, or a vocational program;
- The school must be approved by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS);
- The student must be enrolled as a full-time student at the institution; The student must be proficient in English or be enrolled in courses leading to English proficiency;
- The student must have sufficient funds available for self-support during the entire proposed course of study; and
- The student must maintain a residence abroad which he/she has no intention of giving up.

Basic Information

Students should note that Embassies and Consulates are able to issue your student visa 120 days or less, in advance of the course of study registration date. If you apply for your visa more than 120 days prior to your start date or registration date as provided on the Form I-20, the Embassy or Consulate will hold your application until it is able to issue the visa. Consular officials will use that extra time to accomplish any of the necessary alial clearances or other processes that may be required. Keep in mind the consular officer may need to get special clearances depending on the course of study and nationality of the student. This can take some additional time. For more information on applicants who may have additional

processing requirements see [Special Processing Requirements](#) [2].

Students are advised of the Department of Homeland Security regulation, which requires that all new students enter the U.S. 30 days or less in advance of the course of study start/report date as shown on the Form I-20. Please consider this date carefully when making travel plans to the U.S.

A beginning student who wants an earlier entry into the U.S., (more than 30 days prior to the course start date), must qualify for, and obtain a visitor visa. A prospective student notation will be shown on his/her visitor visa and the traveler will need to make the intent to study clear to the U.S. immigration inspector at port of entry. Before beginning any studies, he or she must obtain a change of classification, filing [Form I-539](#) [3], Application for Change of Nonimmigrant Status, and also submit the required Form I-20 to the Department of Homeland Security office where the application is made. Please be aware that there is an additional fee for this process, and that one may not begin studies until the change of classification is approved.

Continuing students may apply for a new visa at any time, as long as they have been maintaining student status and their SEVIS records are current. Continuing students may also enter the U.S. at any time before their classes start.

What is SEVIS and SEVP? What should you know about it?

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) is designed to help the Department of Homeland Security and Department of State monitor school and exchange programs and F, M and J category visitors. Exchange visitor and student information is maintained in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). SEVIS is an Internet-based system that maintains accurate and current information on non-immigrant students (F and M visa), exchange visitors (J visa), and their dependents (F-2, M-2, and J-2). SEVIS enables schools and program sponsors to transmit mandatory information and event notifications via the Internet, to the Department of Homeland Security and Department of State (DOS) throughout a student or exchange visitor's stay in the United States. Select [SEVIS](#) [4] to go to the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Internet site and learn more.

All student applicants must have a SEVIS generated I-20 issued by an educational institution approved by DHS, which they submit when they are applying for their student visa. The consular officer will need to verify your I-20 record electronically through the SEVIS system in order to process your student visa application. Unless otherwise exempt, participants whose SEVIS I-20 was issued on or after September 1, 2004 must pay a SEVIS I-901 Fee to the Department of Homeland Security for each individual program. The fee may be paid either through a special website, via Western Union, or by mail. See [SEVIS-901 Fee](#) [5] for further information on how to pay the fee.

Applying for a Student Visa

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 embassy or consulate. The waiting time for an interview appointment for applicants can vary, so early visa application is strongly encouraged. It is important to remember that applying early and providing the requested documents does not guarantee that the student will receive a visa. Visa wait times for interview appointments and visa processing time information for each U.S. Embassy or Consulate worldwide is available at [Visa Wait Times](#) [6], and on most embassy websites. During the visa application process, usually at the interview, an ink-free, digital fingerprint scan will be quickly taken. Some visa applications require further [administrative processing](#) [7], which takes additional time after the visa applicant's interview by a Consular Officer.

Required Documentation

Each applicant for a student visa **must** submit these forms and documentation, and submit fees as explained below:

Form I-20A-B, Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Student Status-For Academic and Language Students or Form I-20M-N, Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (M-1) Student Status for Vocational Students. You will need to submit a SEVIS generated Form, I-20, which was provided to you by your school. You and your school official must sign the I-20 form. All students, as well as their spouses and dependents must be registered in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), an Internet-based system that maintains accurate and current information on non-immigrant students and exchange visitors and their dependents (F/M-2 visa holders). Your school is responsible for entering your information for the I-20 student visa form into SEVIS. Students will also have to pay an SEVIS I-901 fee for each program of study. Questions regarding your exchange program should be directly to your program sponsor;

A completed application, Nonimmigrant Visa Applicant, Form DS-156, together with a [Form DS-158](#) [8]. Both forms must be completed and signed. Some applicants will also be required to complete and sign [Form DS-157](#) [9]. A separate form is needed for children, even if they are included in a parent's passport. Select [Nonimmigrant Visa Application Form DS-156](#) [10] to access the electronic version of the form DS-156.

An interview at the embassy consular section is required for almost all visa applicants. The [waiting time](#) [6] for an interview appointment for applicants can vary, so early visa application is strongly encouraged. During the visa interview, an ink-free, digital fingerprint scan will be quickly taken, as well as a digital photo. Some applicants will need additional screening, and will be notified when they apply.

A passport valid for travel to the United States and with a validity date at least six months beyond the applicant's intended period of stay in the United States (unless [country-specific agreements](#) [11] provide exemptions). If more than one person is included in the passport, each person desiring a visa must complete an application.

One (1) 2x2 photograph. [See the required photo format explained in nonimmigrant photograph requirements](#) [12];

A MRV fee receipt to show payment of the visa application fee, a visa issuance fee if applicable (Please consult the [Visa Reciprocity Table](#) [13]) and a separate SEVIS I-901 fee receipt. While all F-visa applicants must pay the MRV fee, including dependents, only the F-1

principal applicants must pay the SEVIS fee.

Students who are authorized for Optional Practical Training (OPT) must have an I-20 endorsed for OPT, and provide a USCIS-issued Employment Authorization Document (EAD).

All applicants **should be prepared** to provide:

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 you or your parents who are sponsoring you have sufficient funds to cover your tuition and living expenses during the period of your intended study. For example, if you or your sponsor is a salaried employee, please bring income tax documents and original bank books and/or statements. If you or your sponsor own a business, please bring business registration, licenses, etc., and tax documents, as well as original bank books and/or statements.

Applicants with dependents **must** also provide:

Proof of the student's relationship to his/her spouse and/or children (e.g., marriage and birth certificates.);

it is preferred that families apply for F-1 and F-2 visas at the same time, but if the spouse and children must apply separately at a later time, they should bring a copy of the student visa holder's passport and visa, along with all other required documents.

Entering the U.S. - Port of Entry

A visa allows a foreign citizen coming from abroad, to travel to the United States port-of entry and request permission to enter the U.S. Applicants should be aware that a visa does not guarantee entry into the United States. The Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials have authority to permit or deny admission to the United States. Student visitors must have their Form I-20 in their possession each time they enter the United States. In advance of travel, students should review important information about [Admissions/Entry](#) ^[14] requirements, as well as information related to restrictions explained on the Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection website. Upon arrival (at an international airport, seaport or land border crossing), you will be enrolled in the [US-VISIT](#) ^[15] entry-exit program. In addition, some travelers will also need to register their entry into and their departure from the U.S. with the [Special Registration](#) ^[16] program. If you are allowed to enter the U.S., the CBP official will determine the length of your visit on the Arrival-Departure Record (Form I-94). Since Form I-94 documents your authorized stay in the U.S., it's very important to keep it in your passport.

What Items Do Returning Students Need?

All applicants applying for renewals must submit:

A passport valid for at least six months;

an application 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. Blank forms are available without charge at all U.S. consular offices and on the Visa Services website under Visa Applications Forms;

a receipt for visa processing fee. A receipt showing payment of the visa application fee for each applicant, including each child listed in a parent's passport who is also applying for a U.S. visa, is needed;

a new I-20 or an I-20 that has been endorsed on the back by a school official within the past 12 months.

All applicants applying for renewals **should be prepared** to submit:

A certified copy of your grades from the school in which you are enrolled;

financial documents from you or your sponsor, showing your ability to cover the cost of your schooling.

Students Away from Classes More Than Five Months

Students in or outside the U.S., who have been away from classes ^[17] for more than five months, will likely need a new visa to enter the U.S.

How long may I stay on my F-1 student visa?

When you enter the United States on a student visa, you will usually be admitted for the duration of your student status. That means you may stay as long as you are a full time student, even if the F-1 visa in your passport expires while you are in America. For a student who has completed the course of studies shown on the I-20, and any authorized practical training, the student is allowed the following additional time in the U.S. before departure:

F-1 student - An additional 60 days, to prepare for departure from the U.S. or to transfer to another school.

M-1 student - An additional 30 days to depart the U.S. (Fixed time period, in total not to exceed one year). The 30 days to prepare for departure is permitted as long as the student maintained a full course of study and maintained status. An M student may receive extensions up to three years for the total program.

As an example regarding duration of status, if you have a visa that is valid for five years that will expire on January 1, 2009, and you are admitted into the U.S. for the duration of your studies (often abbreviated in your passport or on your I-94 card as "D/S"), you may stay in the U.S. as long as you are a full time student. Even if January 1, 2009 passes and your visa expires while in America, you will still be in legal student status. However, if you depart the U.S. with an expired visa, you will need to obtain a new one before being able to return to America and resume your studies. A student visa cannot be renewed or re-issued in the

United States; it must be done at an Embassy or Consulate abroad.

Public School

There are certain restrictions on attending public school in the U.S. Persons who violate these restrictions may not receive another visa for a period of five years. The restrictions apply only to students holding F-1 visas. They do not apply to students attending public school on derivative visas, such as F-2, J-2 or H-4 visas. The restrictions also do not apply to students attending private schools on F-1 visas. The restrictions are:

Students who attend public high schools in the U.S. are limited to twelve months of study. Public school attendance in the U.S. prior to November 30, 1996 does not count toward this limit.

F-1 visas can no longer be issued to attend public elementary or middle schools (Kindergarten - 8th grade) or publicly-funded adult education programs.

Before an F-1 visa for a public school can be issued, the student must show that the public school in the U.S. has been reimbursed for the full, unsubsidized per capita cost of the education as calculated by the school. Reimbursement may be indicated on the I-20. Consular officers may request copies of canceled checks and/or

Notices:

- If you are going to the U.S. primarily for tourism, but want to take a short course of study of less than 18 hours per week, you may be able to do so on a visitor visa. You should inquire at the appropriate U.S. Embassy or Consulate. If your course of study is more than 18 hours a week, you will need a student visa. In most countries, first time student visa applicants are required to appear for an in-person interview. However, each embassy and consulate sets its own interview policies and procedures regarding student visas. Students should consult Embassy web sites or call for specific application instructions.
- On April 8, 2008, DHS announced an extension of Optional Practical Training for qualified students. For more information, visit the [USCIS website](#) [18] and the [ICE International Students webpage](#) [19].

Nonimmigrant Visas:

[F Visa](#) [20]

Profession/Occupation:

[Students](#) [21]

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Links:

[1] <https://immigration.com/visa/sevis/f-visa-overview>

[2] <http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/general/section-306.html>

[3]

<http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.5af9bb95919f35e66f614176543f6d1a/?vgnnextoid=94d12c1a6855d0>

[4] <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/>

- [5] <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/>
- [6] http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/wait/wait_4638.html
- [7] http://travel.state.gov/visa/a_zindex/a_zindex_4353.html
- [8] <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/79965.pdf>
- [9] <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/126741.pdf>
- [10] <https://evisaforms.state.gov/ds156.asp>
- [11] <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/104770.pdf>
- [12] http://travel.state.gov/visa/visaphotoreq/visaphotoreq_5334.html
- [13] http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/fees/fees_3272.html
- [14] http://cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/id_visa/study_exchange/
- [15] <http://www.dhs.gov/us-visit-office>
- [16] <http://www.ice.gov/doclib/nseers/SRProc.pdf>
- [17] <http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/study-exchange/student/student-visa-validity-following-a-break-in-studies.html>
- [18] <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.5af9bb95919f35e66f614176543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=9a3d3dd87aa191>
- [19] <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/index.htm>
- [20] <https://immigration.com/visa/nonimmigrant-visas/f-visa>
- [21] <https://immigration.com/profession/professionoccupation/students>