

Student Visa

Overview

Generally, foreign nationals who wish to travel to the United States must first obtain a visa, either a nonimmigrant visa for a temporary stay, or an immigrant visa for permanent residence. You must have a student visa to travel to the United States to study. Your course of study and the type of school you plan to attend determine whether you need an F visa or an M visa.

To enter the United States to attend:	You need the following visa category:
University or college	
High School	
Private elementary school	
Seminary	F
Conservatory	
Another academic institution, including a language training program	
Vocational or other recognized nonacademic institution, other than a language training program	M

Students cannot travel on the Visa Waiver Program or with Visitor Visas

You must have a student visa (F or M visa) to travel to the United States to study. You may not study after entering on a visitor (B) visa, unless you are eligible for and have obtained a change of status from USCIS, or through the Visa Waiver Program (VWP), except to undertake recreational (non-credit) study as part of a tourist visit. For more information on the VWP, see [Visa Waiver Program](#).

For short periods of recreational study, a Visitor (B) visa may be appropriate

A visitor (B) visa permits enrollment in a short recreational course of study, which is not for credit toward a degree or academic certificate. Learn more about [Visitor Visas](#).

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Study leading to a U.S. conferred degree or certificate is not permitted on a visitor (B) visa, even if it is for a short duration. For example, a student in a distance learning program that requires a period of time on the institution's U.S. campus must obtain a student (F or M) visa prior to entering the United States.

Student Acceptance at a SEVP Approved School

The first step to studying in the United States is apply to a SEVP-approved school in the United States. If the SEVP-approved school accepts your enrollment, you will be registered for the [Student and Exchange Visitor Information System \(SEVIS\)](#)[↗] and must pay the SEVIS I-901 fee. The SEVP-approved school will issue you a Form I-20. After you receive the Form I-20 and register in SEVIS, you may apply at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate for a student (F or M) visa. You must present the Form I-20 to the consular officer when you attend your visa interview.

If your spouse and/or children will live with you in the United States while you study, they must also enroll in SEVIS, obtain individual Form I-20s from the SEVP-approved school, and apply for a visa (but they do not pay the SEVIS fee).

Visit the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) [Student and Exchange Visitor Program \(SEVP\)](#)[↗] website to learn more about SEVIS and the SEVIS I-901 Fee.

Visit the Department of State [EducationUSA](#) website to learn about educational opportunities for undergraduate and graduate study, and an overview of the application process. You can also visit the DHS [Study in the States](#)[↗] school search page to search for SEVP-certified schools.

How To Apply

There are several steps to apply for a visa. The order of these steps and how you complete them may vary by U.S. Embassy or Consulate. Please consult the instructions on the [embassy or consulate website](#).

Complete the Online Visa Application

- [**Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-**](#)

160 – Learn more about completing the DS-160. You must: 1) complete the online visa application, and 2) print the application form confirmation page to bring to your interview.

- **Photo** – You will upload your photo while completing the online Form DS-160. Your photo must meet the Photograph Requirements.

Schedule an Interview

Interviews are generally required for visa applicants with certain limited exceptions. Consular officers may require an interview of any visa applicant.

You should schedule an appointment for your visa interview at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in the country where you live. You may schedule your interview at another U.S. Embassy or Consulate, but be aware that it may be more difficult to demonstrate that you qualify for a visa outside of the country where you live.

Wait times for interview appointments vary by location, season, and visa category, so you should apply for your visa early. Review the interview wait time for the location where you will apply:

New Students – Student (F and M) visas for new students can be issued up to 365 days before the start date of a course of study. However, you will not be allowed to enter the United States on your student visa more than 30 days before the start date.

Continuing Students - Student (F and M) visas for continuing students may be issued at any time, as long as the student is currently enrolled at a SEVP-approved school or institution and in SEVIS. Continuing students may enter the United States at any time before classes start.

Prepare for Your Interview

- **Fees** - Pay the non-refundable visa application fee, if you are required to pay it before your interview. If your visa is approved, you may also pay a visa issuance fee, if applicable to your nationality. Fee information is provided below:

Application Fee

Select your nationality to see
\$185
Issuance Fee

Select a country/authority or area 

All Fees

- Review the instructions available on the website of the [U.S. Embassy or Consulate](#) where you will apply to learn more about fee payment.

Gather Required Documentation

Gather and prepare the following required documents before your visa interview:

- **Passport** valid for travel to the United States – Your passport must be valid for at least six months beyond your period of stay in the United States (unless exempt by [country-specific agreements](#)). Each individual who needs a visa must submit a separate application, including any family members listed in your passport.
- **Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-160 confirmation page.**
- **Application fee payment receipt**, if you are required to pay before your interview.
- **Photo** – You will upload your photo while completing the online Form DS-160. If the [photo upload fails](#), you must bring one printed photo in the format explained in the [Photograph Requirements](#).
- **Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Student Status-For Academic and Language Students, Form I-20 or Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (M-1) Student Status for Vocational Students, Form I-20** – Your school will send you a Form I-20 once they have entered your information in the SEVIS database. You and your school official must sign the Form I-20. All students must be registered in the Student and Exchange Visitor System (SEVIS). Your spouse and/or minor children, if they intend live in the United States with you, will each receive an individual Form I-20.

Additional Documentation May Be Required

A consular officer will interview you to determine your qualifications for a student visa, and may request additional documents, such as evidence of:

- Your academic preparation, such as:
 - Transcripts, diplomas, degrees, or certificates from schools you attended; and
 - Standardized test scores required by your U.S. school;
- Your intent to depart the United States upon completion of the course of study; and
- How you will pay all educational, living and travel costs.

Review the instructions for how to apply for a visa on the website of the [U.S. Embassy or Consulate](#) where you will apply.

Attend Your Visa Interview

A consular officer will interview you to determine whether you are qualified to receive a student visa. You must establish that you meet the requirements under U.S. law to receive a visa.

Ink-free, digital fingerprint scans are taken as part of the application process. They are usually taken during your interview, but this varies based on location.

After your visa interview, the consular officer may determine that your application requires further [administrative processing](#). The consular officer will inform you if this is required.

After the visa is approved, you may need to pay a visa issuance fee (if applicable to your nationality), and make arrangements for the return of the passport and visa to you. Review the [visa processing times](#) to learn more.

Entering the United States

A visa does not guarantee entry into the United States. A visa only allows a foreign citizen to travel to a U.S. port-of-entry (generally an airport) and request permission to enter

the United States. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials at the port-of-entry have authority to permit or deny admission to the United States.

After you present your passport, visa, and Form I-20 at the port-of-entry, a CBP official will make this decision. Upon admission, the CBP official will provide an admission stamp or paper Form I-94, Arrival/Departure Record.

Learn about procedures for students (with F or M visas) entering the United States on the CBP website under [Arrival Procedures for Students or Exchange Visitors](#). Learn about admissions and entry requirements, restrictions about bringing food, agricultural products, and other restricted/prohibited goods, and more by reviewing the [CBP website](#).

Extending Your Stay

Foreign students in the United States with F visas must depart the United States within 60 days after the program end date listed on Form I-20, including any authorized practical training.

Foreign students may request an extension through U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) website (see the [USCIS Extend Your Stay](#) page). Additional information to maintain student status is on the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement SEVP website under [Maintaining Your Immigration Status While a Student or Exchange Visitor](#).

Failure to depart the United States on time will result in being [out of status](#). Under U.S. law, visas of individuals who are out of status are automatically voided ([Section 222\(g\) of the Immigration and Nationality Act](#)). Any multiple entry visa that was voided due to being out of status will not be valid for future entries into the United States.

Failure to depart the United States on time may also result in you being ineligible for visas in the future in certain cases. Review [Visa Denials and Ineligibilities and Waivers: Laws](#) to learn more.

Change of Status

If your plans change while in the United States (for example, you marry a U.S. citizen or receive an offer of employment), you may be able to request a change in your nonimmigrant status to another category through U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). See [Change My Nonimmigrant Status](#) on the USCIS website to learn more.

While you are in the United States, receiving a change of status from USCIS does not require you to apply for a new visa. However, once you depart the United States you must apply for a new visa at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate in the appropriate category for your travel.

Additional Information

- There is no guarantee you will be issued a visa. Do not make final travel plans or buy tickets until you have a visa.
- For information about working in the United States during your study, review [Students and Employment](#) and Form I-765 [Work Authorization Instructions](#) on the USCIS website.
- If you have a temporary break in your study, view the information on the SEVP website under [Do Students Returning from Temporary Absences Need New Visas?](#) If your student visa is still valid, but you are outside the United States, you should consult with your Designated School Officials.
- Spouse and children
 - Your spouse and unmarried, minor children who intend to reside with you during your study may apply for F-2 or M-2 visas. Although SEVIS fee payment is not required, your school must issue them an individual Form I-20, which is required to apply for their visas. You must provide a copy of your F-1 or M-1 visa and provide proof of relationship.
 - Your minor children are permitted to attend school in the United States while accompanying you.
 - U.S. Embassies and Consulates adjudicate visa applications for same-sex spouses in the same way that we adjudicate applications for opposite sex spouses.
- A valid U.S. visa in an expired passport is still valid.

Unless canceled or revoked, a visa is valid until its expiration date. If you have a valid visa in your expired passport, do not remove it from your expired passport. You may use your valid visa in your expired passport along with a new valid passport for travel and admission to the United States.

Can I enter the United States more than 30 days in advance?



Students on F or M visas are not permitted to enter the United States earlier than 30 days before the start date of their program. If you wish to enter earlier than 30 days before your start date, you must separately apply and qualify for a visitor (B) visa.

After you are admitted to the United States by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials in visitor (B) visa status, you must separately apply to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for a change of status to student (For M) status prior to the start of your program. You may not begin your course of study until the change of status is approved, and you may encounter lengthy processing times. You may also depart the United States and re-enter on your student (F or M) visa.

Optional Practical Training



Students who are authorized Optional Practical Training (OPT) must have a Form I-20 endorsed for OPT and must apply to USCIS for an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). OPT is temporary employment that is directly related to the eligible F-1 student's area of study. To learn more about OPT, please visit the USCIS Website and the ICE International Students webpage.

Attending Public Secondary School



There are restrictions on students in F-1 nonimmigrant status attending public school in the United States. See [Foreign Students in Public Schools](#) to learn more.

Visa Renewal



Whether you are applying for the first time or renewing your visa, you will use the same application process (please review [How to Apply](#), above).

Visa Denial and Ineligibility



Review [Visa Denials](#) for detailed information about visa ineligibilities, denials, and waivers.

I was refused a visa under section 214(b). May I reapply?



You may reapply if you believe you have additional evidence of your qualifications for a student (F or M) visa, or you believe your circumstances have changed. Review [Visa Denials](#) to learn more.

Misrepresentation or Fraud



Attempting to obtain a visa by the willful misrepresentation of a material fact, or fraud, may result in the permanent refusal of a visa or denial of entry into the United States.

Review [Ineligibilities and Waivers: Laws.](#)

Citizens of Canada and Bermuda



Citizens of Canada and Bermuda generally do not require visas to enter the United States as students, although they must present a valid Form I-20 at the time of admission. For more information see [information for Citizens of Canada and Bermuda.](#)

Additional resources for Canadian visitors to the United States can be found on the [U.S. Embassy and Consulate websites in Canada.](#)

Further Questions



- **Case-Specific Questions** - Contact the U.S. Embassy or Consulate handling your visa application for status information. Select [U.S. Embassy or Consulate](#) for contact information.
- **General Questions** - review [Contact Us.](#)