

Preparing For Your F-1 Visa Application and Interview

This information is for people who plan to enter the United States for the first time to study. For information on bringing dependents to the U.S., returning to continue studies, or renewing your visa, or for more details on how to apply for a student visa, refer to the U.S. Department of State website, at:



STEPS

1. Contact your local U.S. Consulate or Embassy to ask about how to get an F-1 international student visa. A list of Consulates and Embassies can be found at <http://usembassy.state.gov/>.
2. Apply for your student visa as far in advance as possible. Many consulates recommend that appointments be made no more than 90 days from the intended date of entry to the U.S., but some can make earlier arrangements for interviews. Follow the U.S. Embassy/Consulate's instructions to schedule an interview for your F-1 student visa.
3. Complete the following forms:
 - (i) DS-156 Nonimmigrant Visa Application Form
 - (ii) DS-158 Contact Information and Work History for Nonimmigrant Visa Applicant
 - (iii) If a male between the ages of 16 and 45, DS-157 Supplemental Nonimmigrant Visa Application.
4. Fees:
 - (i) **Visa Application Fee:** Pay this fee by following instructions on your local U.S. embassy or consulate's web site
 - (ii) **SEVIS Fee** (see reverse side for fee paying options): If your I-20 was issued on or after September 1, 2004, and is marked for "Initial Attendance" (see #3 on your I-20 form), you will also need to pay the \$100 SEVIS fee. All students admitted to De Anza College for the first time will receive an "Initial Attendance" I-20. Current De Anza College student may also receive an "Initial Attendance" I-20 for certain immigration procedures
5. Remain calm and answer all the Consular Officer's questions to you openly and honestly. Be clear and specific on your educational goals and on the benefits of a U.S. education provided by De Anza College.

Prepare and bring to your visa interview the following:

- (a) A passport valid for at least six months
- (b) Form I-20 (sign the form under *Item 11*)
- (c) School admission letter
- (d) Completed visa applications (DS-156, DS-158, and, if applicable, DS-157)
- (e) Two 2"x 2" photographs in the required format (see the <http://travel.state.gov/> for detail)
- (f) A receipt for the visa application fee
- (g) A receipt for the SEVIS fee. If you have not received an official receipt in the mail showing payment and you paid the fee electronically online, the consulate will accept the temporary receipt you printed from your computer. If you do not have a receipt, the consulate may be able to see your payment electronically if your fee payment was processed at least 3 business days before your interview.
- (h) Financial evidence that shows you have sufficient funds to cover your tuition and living expenses during the period you intend to study.
- (i) Any information that proves that you will return to your home country after finishing your studies in the U.S. This may include proof of property, family, job or other ties to your community.

SEVIS Fee Paying Options

1. To Pay SEVIS Fee by Mail

- (a) Get a Form I-901 "Fee Remittance for Certain F, J, and M Nonimmigrants."
 - Download the form from <http://www.ice.gov/graphics/sevis/>
OR
 - Ask for the form by phone at 1-800-870-3676 (inside the US)
- (b) Complete the Form I-901. Be sure to write your name exactly how it appears on your I-20 form.
- (c) Prepare a check, international money order or foreign draft (drawn on US banks only¹) in the amount of \$100 USD, made payable to "The Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement."
- (d) Mail the completed I-901 and payment to the address listed on Form I-901.
- (e) A receipt will be sent by mail to the address that you indicate with your payment.
(Depending on your country's postal service, the total amount of time between mailing the check, processing of check and receiving the confirmation letter/receipt, the entire process could take a minimum of three weeks or longer.)

¹ Many foreign banks are able to issue checks or money orders drawn on a U.S. bank. You may therefore obtain a check from:
1) a bank chartered or operated in the United States; b) a foreign subsidiary of a U.S. bank, or c) a foreign bank that has an arrangement with a U.S. bank to issue a check, money order, or foreign draft that is drawn on a U.S. bank

2. To Pay SEVIS Fee Online

If you have a personal credit card or have access to one, payment online is the fastest method.

- (a) Find the online Form I-901 at www.fmjfee.com
- (b) Complete the form online and supply the necessary Visa, MasterCard or American Express information.
**Be sure to write your name exactly how it appears on your I-20 form.*
- (c) Print a copy of the online receipt.
- (d) Be sure to make copies of your receipt, and keep it with your other important immigration documents.
- (e) A receipt will be sent by mail to the address that you indicate with your payment.

Important!!!

You must bring the receipt of fee payment with you to the interview. If you have lost the receipt, the Consular Officer should be able to view your payment history in his or her database.

If you are transferring schools, extending your program, applying for an F-2 dependent visa, or have paid this fee and been denied a visa within the last twelve months, you do not need to pay the \$100 SEVIS fee.

If you have any questions, please contact International Student Programs office at (408) 864-8826 or by email dainternational@fhda.edu

Student Visas

Students are Encouraged to Apply Early

Overview

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Public School

Student Applicants (for F-1 and M-1 visas) - Overview

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. Please read this information for general information on how to apply for an F1 or M1 student visa. For additional student related information, visit the [EducationUSA website](#) created by the Department of State, [Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs](#) to learn about educational opportunities for undergraduate and graduate study, opportunities for scholars, financial aid, testing, admissions, and much more.

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.

Keep in mind that June, July, and August are the busiest months in most consular sections, and interview appointments are the most difficult to get during that period. Students need to plan ahead to avoid having to make repeat visits to the Embassy. To the extent possible, students should bring the documents suggested below, as well as any other documents that might help establish their ties to the local community.

Changes introduced shortly after September 11, 2001 involve extensive and ongoing review of visa issuing practices as they relate to our national security. It is important to apply for your visa well in

advance of your travel departure date.

When Do I Need to Apply for My Student Visa?

- **Students are encouraged to apply for their visa early to provide ample time for visa processing. Students may apply for their visa as soon as they are prepared to do so.**
- 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](#).
- **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 special clearances or other processes that may be required.
- **Students are advised of the Department of Homeland Security regulation which requires that all initial or beginning 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 student who wants to an earlier entry in 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](#), 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 of \$140 for this process, and that one may not begin studies until the change of classification is approved.

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 better 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](#) 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 or SEVIS](#) for further information on how to pay the fee.

What is Needed to Apply 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 on our website at [Visa Wait Times](#), and on most embassy websites. During the visa application process, usually at the interview, a quick, two-digit, ink-free fingerprint scan will be taken. Some applicants will need additional screening, and will be notified when they apply. Also, because each student's personal and academic situation is different, two students applying for 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 abridged or expanded by consular officers overseas, depending on each student's situation.

All applicants for a student visa **must** provide:

- **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 directed to your program sponsor;
- A completed 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. A separate form is needed for children, even if they are included in a parent's passport. Select [Nonimmigrant Visa Application Form DS-156](#) to access both versions of the DS-156. You may also check with the Embassy Consular Section where you will apply to determine if the hard-copy blank DS-156 form is available, should you need it.
- An interview at the embassy consular section is required for almost all visa applicants. The [waiting time](#) for an interview appointment for applicants can vary, so early visa application is strongly encouraged. During the visa interview, a quick, two-digit, ink-free

fingerprint scan will be taken, as well as a digital photo. Some applicants will need additional screening, and will be notified when they apply.

- A passport valid for at least six months after your proposed date of entry into the United States.
- One (1) 2x2 photograph. [See the required photo format explained in nonimmigrant photograph requirements](#);
- A MRV fee receipt to show payment of the visa application fee, a visa issuance fee if applicable (Please consult the [Visa Reciprocity Table](#)) 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.

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.

Additional Information

- No assurances regarding the issuance of visas can be given in advance. Therefore final travel plans or the purchase of nonrefundable tickets should not be made until a visa has been issued.
- Unless previously canceled, a visa is valid until its expiration date. Therefore, if the traveler has a valid U.S. visa in an expired passport, do not remove the visa page from the expired passport. You may use it along with a new valid passport for travel and admission to the United States.

What Items Does a Returning Student 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.

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. 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 in your passport. Student visitors must have their Form I-20 in their possession each time they enter the United States. Upon arrival (at an international airport, seaport or land border crossing), you will be enrolled in the [US-VISIT](#) 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](#) program. The Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection internet site offers additional information on [Admissions/Entry](#) requirements.

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, 2001, 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, 2001 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 receipts confirming the payment as needed.

March 2006

Other Government Websites

- First Gov Service Locator 
- U.S. Department of Justice 
- The White House 
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Websites of U.S. Embassies, Consulates, and Diplomatic Missions

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