

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

For 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. For a brief overview, visit the America.gov article [Basics on U.S. Visas](#).

The first step for a prospective nonimmigrant student is being accepted for enrollment in an established school which is [SEVP certified](#). In general, for academic students, including those in language training, F visas are the appropriate category, and for nonacademic vocational students an M visa is the appropriate category.

If you are going to the U.S. primarily for tourism, but want to take a short course of study which is recreational or avocational, and of less than 18 hours per week, you may be able to do so on a visitor visa. If your course of study is 18 hours or more a week, you will need a student visa.

### 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.**
- **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 for application processing.
- **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 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 approval for a change to Exchange Visitor status, filing [Form I-539](#), Application for Change of Nonimmigrant Status and pay the fee. Also you must submit the required Form I-20 to the Department of Homeland Security office where the application is made. Please be aware that one can 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 are 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 (DHS) 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 DHS and Department of State (DOS) throughout a student or exchange visitor's stay in the United States. Select [SEVIS](#) to go to the DHS, 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. Your school is responsible for entering your information for the I-20 student visa form into SEVIS. 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, all F-1 or M-1 principal applicants must pay a SEVIS I-901 fee to the DHS for each individual program. See the [SEVP Fact Sheet](#) for a fee list. See [SEVIS-901 Fee](#) for further information on how to pay the fee.**

### **Qualifying for a Student Visa**

The Immigration and National Act is very specific with regard to the requirements which must be met by applicants to qualify for the student visa. The consular officer will determine whether you qualify for the visa. Additionally, applicants must demonstrate that they properly meet student visa requirements including:

- Have a residence abroad, with no immediate intention of abandoning that residence;
- Intend to depart from the United States upon completion of the course of study; and
- Possess sufficient funds to pursue the proposed course of study.

### **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, with few exceptions. 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. 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. Learn how to schedule an appointment for an interview, pay the application processing fee, review embassy specific instructions, and much more by visiting the [Embassy or Consulate website](#) where you will apply.

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](#), which takes additional time after the visa applicant's interview by a Consular Officer. 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 additional documents.

### **Required Documentation**

Each applicant for a student visa **must** submit these forms and documentation 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. See the previous section for SEVIS information.

- **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 separate form is needed for children, even if they are included in a parent's passport. **The DS-156 must be the March 2006 date, electronic "e-form application."** Select [Nonimmigrant Visa Application Form DS-156](#) to access the electronic version of the form DS-156. **Important Notice:** At certain U.S. Embassies and Consulates abroad, nonimmigrant visa applicants are now required to apply for their visa using the new DS-160 Online Nonimmigrant Visa Electronic Application, instead of the nonimmigrant application forms DS-156, 157, 158, and other related forms. [Learn more](#) and find out which Embassies have converted to the DS-160 Online process.
- **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](#) 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](#);
- A MRV fee receipt to show payment of the visa application fee.
- The SEVIS I-901 fee receipt.

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.

### What are the Required Visa Fees?

- **Nonimmigrant visa application processing fee** - For current fees for Department of State government services select [Fees](#). You will need to provide a receipt showing the visa application processing fee has been paid, when you come for your visa interview.
- **Visa issuance fee** – Additionally, if the visa is issued, there will be an additional visa issuance reciprocity fee, if applicable. Please consult the [Visa Reciprocity Tables](#) to find out if you must pay a visa issuance reciprocity fee and what the fee amount is. If there is a fee for issuance for the visa, it is equal as nearly as possible to the fee charged to United States citizens by the applicant's country of nationality.

### Spouses and Children

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 non refundable 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.

### **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](#) requirements, as well as information related to restrictions about [bringing food, agricultural products](#) or other [restricted/prohibited goods](#) 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](#) 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. 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.

### **Staying Beyond Your Authorized Stay in the U.S. and Being Out of Status**

- It is important that you depart the U.S. on or before the last day you are authorized to be in the U.S. on any given trip, based on the specified end date on your Arrival-Departure Record, Form I-94. Information on successfully [maintaining your immigration status](#) while a student or exchange visitor can be found on the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) website.
- Staying beyond the period of time authorized by the DHS causes you to be out-of-status in the United States, which is a violation of U.S. immigration laws. This may cause you to be ineligible for a visa in the future for return travel to the U.S. Select [Classes of Aliens Ineligible to Receive Visas](#) to learn more.
- Staying unlawfully in the United States beyond the date Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials have authorized, even by one day, results in your visa being automatically voided, in accordance with immigration law, INA 222(g). In this situation, you are required to reapply for a new nonimmigrant visa, generally in your country of nationality.