

Obtaining a Student Visa

Schedule a Visa Appointment

Upon receipt of your Certificate of Eligibility (Form I-20) you will need to pay the \$200 SEVIS fee and obtain a receipt. You will then need to make an appointment with the American Consulate or Embassy having jurisdiction over your place of permanent residence. Although you may apply at any U.S. Consular office abroad, it may be more difficult to qualify for the visa outside of the country of permanent residence.

Once you identify the U.S. Embassy or Consulate that is most convenient for you, visit that Embassy or Consulate's website and complete the following steps:

1. Pay your visa fee
2. Obtain acceptable photographs
3. Complete online DS-160 visa application
4. Get a list of all required documents you must bring
5. Schedule your visa interview appointment

Prepare for Your Visa Interview

1. Know what you bring and prepare necessary documentation:
 - Form I-20 issued by a DSO at the school where you wish to enroll
 - Printed Form DS-160, "Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application," confirmation page
 - Passport valid for at least six months after you plan to enter the United States
 - Two-inch by two-inch photo of yourself (learn more about [photo requirements](#))
 - Receipt for your \$160 visa application fee payment
 - Receipt for your I-901 SEVIS fee payment
2. Know the rules and processes for obtaining a U.S. visa.

Before you apply for the visa, you should understand the process and rules governing visas. Many visa applications fail. In some countries, most applications fail. Often it is because the student did not know the rules or was not prepared. We do not want this to happen to you. **Please read what follows carefully.**

The consular officer will take a very legalistic view. In the U.S., it is considered important to be impersonal when administering laws. This is considered rude or improper in many countries, but not in the U.S., where the ideal is to apply laws equally to all regardless of status or sex. Do not try to negotiate or discuss personal matters.

The most important rule may seem strange to you. The consular officer who makes the decision on your visa application is required to think of you as someone who plans to come to the U.S. permanently and you must prove that you intend to return to your country after completing your studies. U.S. law very clearly states that F visas may be given only to persons who intend to remain in the U.S. temporarily. **This rule is the number one reason for denials of student visa applications.**

The other important rules are:

1. You must have a definite academic or professional objective. You must know what you are going to study and where it will lead. Be ready to say what you want to study and what kind of career it will prepare you for in your home country. Be prepared to explain why it is better for you to study in the U.S. than at home.
2. You must be qualified for the program of study.
3. You must be definite about your choice of schools. If you do not seem certain that you want to attend our university, you will not get a visa.
4. You must be adequately financed and have documents to prove it. Except in the unusual case when employment is specifically authorized on the Form I-20 (i.e. graduate assistantship), you may not plan to use employment as a means of support while you are in the U.S.

U.S. Government officials are convinced more easily by documents than by spoke statements. When possible, have papers ready to show your connections to your home country. If your family owns property, take the deeds. If you have a sibling who studied in the U.S. and then returned home, take a copy of your sibling's diploma and a statement from an employer showing that they have returned home. If possible, show that an individual or company in your home country will give you a job when you return. If you cannot get a promise of a job, try to get a letter saying that you will be considered for a job, or that the company needs people with the kind of education you are coming to the U.S. to receive.

If your family owns a business, take letter form a bank describing the business to the visa interview with you. Do not emphasize any ties you may have to the United States or to family members in the United States. Your visa application is stronger and better if at least part of your financial support comes from your home country, even if most of it comes from the U.S.

Do not speak of working in the United States unless employment is authorized on your Form I-20. Though limited work permission is possible for students in F-1 status (but not for dependents in F-2 status), employment is not guaranteed and cannot be used as part of your financial support for visa purposes.

Read your Form I-20. Some of the rules you must obey are printed on page 3. Be aware of these rules—especially the requirements that you study full-time. Look at the date entered in item #5 for reporting to the school. You must apply for the visa in time to reach the school no later than that date.

There is no time limit on how soon you can apply for the student visa (although the visa cannot be granted more than 120 days prior to the start date on your I-20). The sooner you apply, the better. Consular offices get extremely busy during the late summer months (July, August, September). However, you will not be allowed to enter the United States more than 30 days prior to the start date on your I-20.

For additional resources on obtaining a U.S. visa, visit the following websites:

- <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/2014/08/four-steps-to-help-you-apply-for-a-visa>
- <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/2013/04/how-to-prepare-for-your-visa-appointment>