Applying for Your F-1 Student Visa

How Do I Apply for My F-1 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 websites or call for specific application instructions.

Keep in mind that June, July, August, and September 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.

When Do I Need to Apply for My Student Visa?

- Students who receive a Form I-20 from the Intensive English Language Program/Portland State University will apply for an F-1 Student visa.
- Students are encouraged to apply for their visa as early as possible. You may apply for your visa as soon as you receive your Form I-20 and pay the US Government I-901 SEVIS fee (please see the US DHS website for more details: https://www.fmjfee.com)
- Students should note that U.S. embassies and consulates are able to issue your student visa 120 days or less before your program begins. 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.
- Students may enter the US no earlier than 30 days 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 United States.

What do I Need to Apply for my Student Visa?

Because each student’s personal and academic situation is different, two students applying for the 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 changed or expanded by consular officers overseas, depending on each student’s situation.

All applicants for an F-1 student visa must provide:

- Your Intensive English Language Program/Portland State University Form I-20. Sign the form before you go to your visa interview.
- Form DS-160 Online Non-Immigrant Visa Application. A separate form is needed for children, even if they are included in a parent’s passport. You may download the DS-160 and other forms online at: travel.state.gov/visa/forms/forms_1342.html.
- All visa forms MUST be completed and submitted in electronic format.
- 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 (go to: travel.state.gov/visa/visaphotoreq/visaphotoreq_5334.html).
- A receipt for visa processing fee and a receipt for SEVIS fee (I-901 Fee). These receipts show 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. For instructions on paying the I-901 SEVIS fee, please follow the instructions on the US Government website (www.fmjfee.com). See also the info sheet in this packet about paying the I-901 (SEVIS) fee.

All visa 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, GRE, GMAT, etc.;
- Financial evidence that shows you or your sponsor has 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 original bank books and/or statements. If you or your sponsor owns a business, please bring business registration, licenses, etc., and tax documents, as well as original bank books and/or statements.

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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.

What Items Does a Returning Student Need?

All applicants applying for a visa renewal must submit:

- An application Form DS-160 Online Non-Immigrant Visa Application. A separate form is needed for children, even if they are included in a parent's passport. You may download the DS-160 and other forms online at travel.state.gov/visa/forms/forms_1342.html.
- All visa forms MUST be completed and submitted in electronic format.
- 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 (go to: travel.state.gov/visa/visaphotoreq/visaphotoreq_5334.html). For instructions on paying the I-901 SEVIS fee, please follow the instructions on the US Government website (www.fmjfee.com). See also the info sheet in this packet about paying the I-901 (SEVIS) fee.
- A new I-20 or an I-20 that has been endorsed on page 3 by a Designated School Official (DSO) within the past 6 months;
- A receipt for visa processing fee and a receipt for SEVIS fee (I-901 Fee). These receipts show 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. For instructions on paying the I-901 SEVIS fee, please follow the instructions on the US Government website (www.fmjfee.com). See also the info sheet in this packet about paying the I-901 (SEVIS) fee.

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 education and living expenses.

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

When you enter the United States on an F1 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 the US. If your I-20 is going to expire you should speak with your International Student Advisor for information on how to extend your I-20. Your I-20 must remain valid while you are in the United States. 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 beyond the end date on your I-20 or the completion of your studies - whichever comes first, to prepare for departure from the U.S. or to transfer to another school.

Don’t Worry!

Simply be on time for your interview with the embassy or consulate and answer all of the visa officer’s questions openly and honestly.

US Embassy/Consulate Contact Information

For a list of US Embassy websites, you may go to the US State Department website: www.usembassy.state.gov