

Foreign Students - Tips for U.S. Visas:

The Immigration and Nationality Act provides two nonimmigrant visa categories for persons wishing to study in the United States. The "F" visa is for academic studies, and the "M" visa is for nonacademic or vocational studies.

Background Requirements

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Changes in U.S. immigration law, effective November 30, 1996, require that no alien may be issued an F-1 visa to attend a U.S. public elementary or middle school (K-8). Any alien who wishes to attend public high school (grades 9-12) in the United States in student visa (F-1) status must submit evidence that the local school district has been reimbursed in advance for the unsubsidized per capita cost of the education. Also, attendance at U.S. public high schools cannot exceed a total of 12 months. Please note that these changes do not affect other visa categories such as the J-1 exchange visitor program or the qualified school-age child of an alien who holds another type of nonimmigrant visa (i.e., A, E, H, I, L, etc.).

No alien may be issued an F-1 visa in order to attend a publicly-funded adult education program.

Scholastic Preparation

The student visa applicant must have successfully completed a course of study normally required for enrollment. The student, unless coming to participate exclusively in an English language training program, must either be sufficiently proficient in English to pursue the intended course of study, or the school must have made special arrangements for English language courses or teach the course in the student's native language.

Financial Resources

Applicants must also prove that sufficient funds are or will be available from an identified and reliable financial source to defray all living and school expenses during the entire period of anticipated study in the United States. Specifically, applicants must prove they have enough readily available funds to meet all expenses for the first year of study, and that adequate funds will be available for each subsequent year of study. The M-1 student visa applicants must have evidence that sufficient funds are immediately available to pay all tuition and living costs for the entire period of intended stay.

Acceptance Form

An applicant coming to the United States to study must be accepted for a full course of study by an educational institution approved by the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services in the Department of Homeland Security (BCIS). The institution must send to the applicant a Form I-20A-B, Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Student Status for Academic and Language Students. The nonacademic or vocational institution must send to the student a Form I-20M-N, Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (M-1) Student Status For Vocational Students. Educational institutions obtain Forms I-20A-B and I-20M-N from the BCIS.

Visa ineligibility / Waiver

The nonimmigrant visa application Form DS-156 lists classes of persons who are ineligible under U.S. law to receive visas. In some instances an applicant who is ineligible, but who is otherwise properly classifiable as a student, may apply for a waiver of ineligibility and be issued a visa if the waiver is approved.

Applying for a Student Visa

Select [Applying-Student Visas](#) and review the section, **When Do I Need to Apply for My Student Visa to find out very important information about timeframes for applying for your student visa.**

Applicants for student visas should generally apply at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate with jurisdiction over their place of permanent residence. Although visa applicants may apply at any U.S. consular office abroad, it may be more difficult to qualify for the visa outside the country of permanent residence.

Required Documentation

Each applicant for a student visa must pay a nonrefundable US\$100 application fee and submit:

- 1) 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. A separate form is needed for children, even if they are included in a parent's passport. Blank forms are available without charge at all U.S. consular offices and on the Visa Services website under Visa Application Forms.
- 2) 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. If more than one person is included in the passport, each person desiring a visa must make an application;
- 3) One (1) 2x2 photograph. [See the photo format explained in nonimmigrant photograph requirements.](#)
- 4) For the "F" applicant, a Form I-20A-B. For the "M" applicant, a Form I-20M-N.
- 5) Evidence of sufficient funds.

Other Documentation

Student visa applicants must establish to the satisfaction of the consular officer that they have binding ties to a residence in a foreign country which they have no intention of abandoning, and that they will depart the United States when they have completed their studies. It is impossible to specify the exact form the evidence should take since applicants' circumstances vary greatly.

U.S. Port of Entry

Applicants should be aware that a visa does not guarantee entry into the United States. The Directorate of Border and Transportation Security has authority to deny admission. Also, the period for which the bearer of an exchange visitor visa is authorized to remain in the United States is determined by the Directorate of Border and Transportation Security, not the consular officer. At the port of entry, a Directorate of Border and Transportation Security official validates Form I-94, Record of Arrival-Departure, which notes the length of stay permitted.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Employment

An F-1 student may not accept off-campus employment at any time during the first year of study; however, the BCIS may grant permission to accept off-campus employment after one year. F-1 students may accept on-campus employment from the school without BCIS permission. Except for temporary employment for practical training, an M-1 student may not accept employment.

Family Members

A spouse and unmarried, minor children may also be classified for a nonimmigrant visa to accompany or follow the student. Family members must meet all visa eligibility requirements, including evidence that they will have sufficient funds for their support, and that they will depart the U.S. when the student's program ends. Spouses and children of students may not accept employment at any time.

Further Inquiries

Questions on how to obtain Forms I-20A-B and I-20M-N should be made to the educational institution. If the institution does not have the forms, it needs to contact the local BCIS office. Questions on visa application procedures at the American consular offices abroad should be addressed to that consular office by the applicant.

[General visa questions may be directed via e-mail to the State Department by clicking here](#). Due to the volume of inquiries, Visa Services cannot promise an immediate reply to your inquiry. However, to serve you better, **please indicate the subject of your inquiry on the subject line** (e.g., student visa, visitor visa, worker visa, spouse visa, affidavit of support, etc.) Inquiries on visa cases in progress overseas should contact the appropriate [U.S. Embassy or Consulate](#) handling your case.

[Return to Visa Services Page](#)

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