Applying for an F-1 Visa

Excerpts from http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1268.html

If you are going to study in the United States, please read this information for general information on how to apply for an F1 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 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. Students should bring the documents suggested below, as well as any other documents that might help establish their ties to the local community.

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, please see Special Processing Requirements.

- Students should note that Embassies and Consulates are able to issue a 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 as listed 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.

- New Students may not enter the United States more than 30 days before 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.

What are SEVIS and SEVP? What should you know about it?

- The Department of Homeland Security and Department of State are responsible for monitoring schools, F-1 status students and others. Student information is maintained in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). SEVIS is an Internet-based system that maintains accurate information on non-immigrant students (F-1 visa) and their dependents (F-2). SEVIS enables schools to transmit mandatory information and event notifications, via the Internet, to the Department of Homeland Security and Department of State (DOS) throughout a student’s stay in the United States.
All student applicants must have a SEVIS-generated I-20, 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 must pay the 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 for further information on how to pay the fee.

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. 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. Wait times for interview appointments and visa processing time information is available on most embassy websites. Because each student’s personal and academic situation may differ, 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 abridged or expanded by consular officers overseas, depending on each student’s situation.

Required Documentation

Each applicant for a student visa must submit these forms and documentation, and submit fees as explained below:

- **Form I-20A-B, Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Student Status.** 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).

- A completed application, Nonimmigrant Visa Applicant, Form DS-156, together with 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.

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

- A passport valid for travel to the United States and with a validity at least 6 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 and 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, 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 TOEFL
- Financial evidence that you or your sponsors have sufficient funds to cover your tuition and living expenses during the period of your intended study.

All 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.