F Visa Application Process
International Student Form

The F Visa Application Process and Preparing for the Visa Interview

1. Student will apply for Visa
   a. Student visits U.S. consulate or embassy with the following documents:
      - 1. SEVIS I-20 (for F-1 students)
      - 2. Acceptance Letter
      - 3. Financial Statements
      - 4. Proof of SEVIS fee payment
      - 5. Passport valid for 6 months into the future
   b. Student completes visa application
   c. Every American embassy/consulate works from the same set of regulations and laws but will have different procedures for its location. Some will require a person-to-person interview; some will collect the documents and give the student an appointment and ask the student to come back with all the documentation; some will even conduct the process by mail. If the visa is approved, the student will be given an F-1 or J-1 visa stamp in the passport. The visa is a stamp in the passport that indicates where the visa was issued, the date the visa was issued, the date the visa will expire, the number of entries allowed (i.e. single, multiple), the type of visa, and the visa number. A newer type of American visa is a machine-readable paper stamp glued to a page in the passport.
   d. When the student collects the passport with the visa, he/she will also be given a sealed envelope that contains all pages of the SEVIS I-20.

2. On the flight to the United States, the student will be given an I-94
   This includes 3 sections: the instructions, the arrival record card and the departure record card to complete.

3. At the port-of-entry, student will present to the immigration officer the following:
   - 1. Valid passport with valid visa
   - 2. Sealed envelope with SEVIS I-20
   - 3. Completed I-94 (all sections)
   - 4. Any other requested information such as financial documents or admission letter.
4. The immigration officer will:

1. Return the valid passport with valid visa with a DHS entry stamp.
2. Return the departure record card with an entry stamp to the student (usually stapled in the passport).
3. Return the I-20 with the DHS stamp in the upper right hand corner.
4. Return any other requested information to the student.

NOTE: For all students entering the U.S.A. for the first time in F-1 status, please make sure to have your documents stamped properly or you will not be eligible for certain benefits of the F-1 student visa. Therefore, check your documents thoroughly before leaving the counter. If you notice any mistakes, return to the same immigration officer. If s/he refuses to assist you, ask for a supervisor. Do not leave the area until your documents are in order.

Special Note Regarding Canadians and Citizens of the British Territory of Bermuda

Canadians and citizens of Bermuda do not need visas to enter the U.S.A. You should take the SEVIS I-20 with proof of citizenship or passport, financial documentation, and proof of payment of the SEVIS fee, to the port of entry. The DHS officer will date stamp the SEVIS I-20 (on the upper right hand corner). The DHS officer will have you complete the I-94 card and return the departure record card to you as evidence of your legal entry to the U.S.A. as an F-1 or J-1 student. If you are entering the U.S. from a third country outside the Western hemisphere you do not have to obtain a visa stamp. Certain landed immigrants are required to have the F-1 visa to enter the U.S.A. from Canada. You should consult U.S. Consulate/Embassy for current requirements.

Preparing for the Visa Interview

All students receiving the SEVIS I-20 will request the F-1 visa for self and F-2 for spouse and children if appropriate.

When you apply for a visa at an American embassy or consulate, a consular official will interview you. The interview usually lasts only two or three minutes. It is good to understand that the main purpose of the visa interview is for you to “prove” to the consular officials that you will return to your home country after finishing your academic program. Of course, it is impossible to actually prove or know that the person will or will not do something in the future. Thus, the consular official must believe that you will return to your home country, or the visa will not be issued.
You can reassure the consular officials by talking about the things that tie you to your home: family, property, employment.

**Here are some specific suggestions to help you prepare for your visa interview:**

The interview will be conducted in English and not in your native language.

1. You need to know and show what you will do with your degree from a U.S. institution (or, if you want to attend an English language program, with your improved English) when you return home. You need to have good (plausible) future plans in your own country.

2. It is often very helpful to have a job offer - in writing – from an employer in your home country promising you a good job or a higher position in the company when you return from the U.S.

3. You should know what the job situation is in your field in your home country. With a little research you can find out what the job prospects are. The U.S. consular officials will know about these things, too. It’s usually better for you if you can show that you will have good job prospects in your home country after finishing your program in the U.S.

4. You should practice for the interview with friends. The practice interviews should be no more than three minutes long and very *unfriendly*. While the consular officer will probably be cordial in the real interview, it is best to be prepared for the worst. You should be ready to answer questions such as “Where did you hear about this school?” etc. If you don’t know very much about your chosen school, the consular official will often refuse to give you a visa. Consular officials may think that you are not really planning to go to school but are simply trying to enter the U.S. to work.

5. You should write a “statement of purpose” explaining why you want to go to this particular school and what you hope to do with the knowledge later on in your home country.

6. If your financial status is an issue, you may want to pay tuition to the school in advance and present the receipt to the consular official. The official will almost certainly respect this gesture. Bank loans are NOT good evidence of financial support for students. Consular officials think that people with loans are more likely to seek employment in the U.S. so they can pay back the loan.

7. You should be honest with consular officials at all times. For example, applicants in some countries might now want to show their true financial status because they may be trying to “shield” income from taxes. Thus, their financial statements may not show this “black money, and so may not show enough money for education in the
U.S. However, consular officials actually don’t care at all if your family is hiding income from your own government. They will, however, appreciate your honesty and be much more likely to grant the visa if they know your true financial status. Conversely, if the consular officials believe that you are lying or have lied in a previous interview – about anything – they will probably not issue the visa.

8. Do not bring family members with you to the interview. The officer wants to interview you, not your family. A negative impression is created if you are not prepared to speak on your own behalf.

9. Maintain a positive attitude. Do not engage the consular officer in an argument. If you are denied a student visa, ask the officer for a list of documents he or she would suggest you bring in order to overcome the refusal and try to get their reason you were denied in writing.

10. Do not concede, under any circumstance, that you intend to work in the U.S. after completing your studies. While many students do work off-campus during their studies, this work is incidental to their main purpose of completing their education.

11. If your spouse is also applying for an accompanying F-2 visa, be aware that F-2 dependants cannot, under any circumstance, be employed in the U.S. or attend school. If asked, be prepared to address what your spouse intends to do with his or her time while in the U.S.

12. If your spouse and children are remaining behind in your country, be prepared to address how they will support themselves in your absence. This can be especially tricky area if you are the primary source of income for your family. If the consular officer gains the impression that your family will need you to remit the money from the United States in order to support themselves, your student visa application will almost certainly be denied.

Points to remember when applying for a nonimmigrant visa

1. Ties to Home Country

Under U.S law, all applicants for non-immigrant visas are viewed as intending immigrants until they can convince the consular officer that they are not. You must therefore be able to show that you have reasons for returning to your home country that are stronger than those for remaining in the United States. “Ties to your home country are the things that bind you to your hometown, homeland, or current place of residence: job, family, financial prospects that you own or will inherit investments, etc. If you are a prospective undergraduate, the interviewing office may ask about your specific intentions or promise of future employment,
family or other relationships, educational objectives, grades, long-range plans, and career prospects in your home country. Each person’s situation is different, of course, and there is no magic explanation or single document, certificate, or letter which can guarantee visa issuance.

2. Be Concise

Because of the volume of applications received, all consular officers are under considerable time pressure to conduct a quick and efficient interview. They must make a decision, for the most part, on the impressions they form during the first minute or two of the interview. Consequently, what you say first and the initial impression you create are critical to your success. Keep your answers to the officer’s questions short and to the point.

3. Supplemental Documentation

It should be clear at a glance to the consular officer what written documents you are presenting and what they signify. Lengthy writer explanations cannot be quickly read or evaluated. Remember that you will have two-three minutes of interview time, if you’re lucky.

4. Not all countries are equals

Applicants from countries suffering economic problems or from countries where many students have remained in the United States as immigrants will have more difficulty getting visas. Statistically, applicants from those countries are more likely to be intending immigrants. They are also more likely to be asked about job opportunities at home after their study in the United States.

5. DS-160, Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application

The DS-160, Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application, is a fully integrated online application form that is used to collect the necessary application information from a person seeking a nonimmigrant visa for temporary travel to the United States. Form DS-160 is submitted electronically to the Department of State website via the Internet. Consular Officers use the information entered on the DS-160 to process the visa application and, combined with a personal interview, determine an applicant’s eligibility for a nonimmigrant visa.

Visa applicants must submit a completed DS-160, Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application for all nonimmigrant visa categories (except for K, N, S, T, and U categories, which still use the Form DS-156, Nonimmigrant Visa Application).
Please note that after you have completed the DS-160, you need to take these next steps:

- Print and keep the DS-160 barcode page. (You will not need to print the full application.)
- Visit the U.S. Embassy or Consulate website where you will apply for additional country-specific instructions. Before an interview, nonimmigrant visa applicants, with few exceptions, need to:
  - Schedule an interview appointment; and
  - Pay the visa application processing fee.

Please visit http://travel.state.gov/visa/forms/forms_4230.html for more information and to fill out the online application.

**What if the F-1 visa application is denied?**

Most visa denials are based on students not being able to convince the consular officer that they have sufficiently compelling ties to their home country to force them to return after completing their studies. These are called **214(b) denials**. In order to reapply you must be able to present new additional evidence to overcome the objection. Your application must be made in writing. If the visa is granted, you will be contacted to come in person. If you are denied on the grounds that you do not possess the required English proficiency or for any other academic reason, submit the name of the officer, the reason for denial, (214(b)), the date of the denial and the name of the visa post, to the Office of International Affairs at Pratt. We will try to assist you in any way.