

Quick Guide

Immigration primer—Applying for a Visa to Study in the United States

There are a few important steps you must take when pursuing your dream to study in the United States. One critical step is to understand the most up-to-date student-visa guidelines, which constantly evolve in response to ever-changing economic and social needs. This guide offers basic information to help you get started on your path to obtaining a visa – and fulfilling your dream of studying in the US. For comprehensive information about visa requirements, you are encouraged to research related websites provided by your home country and relevant agencies in the United States, and to consult the additional resources that are referenced here.

What type of visa do international students studying in the United States need?

Generally, an F-1 student visa is required. This temporary visa, issued by the US Department of State, allows international students to travel to and enter the United States to study at an accredited US college or university.

Other student visas include J-1 for visitors participating in an educational or cultural exchange program, and M-1 for non-academic or vocational study.

What documentation do I need when applying for an F-1 visa?

You will need an I-20 or DS-2019 form generated by the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) and issued to you—only after you are admitted—by your MBA or other graduate program.

You must also:

- Pay the SEVIS I-901 fee
- Provide proof of SEVIS and visa fee payments
- Supply financial support documents
- Present a completed visa application form

Please note that each US embassy or consulate may have its own requirements. So be sure to check in advance and carefully read the website of the embassy or consulate where you will be applying.

Where and how do I apply for an F-1 visa?

Apply at the US embassy or consulate in your home country, and remember to take your I-20 or DS-2019 form, proof of fee payments, financial support documents, completed visa application form, and any other required documentation with you.

When will I get my visa?

The soonest you can get your visa is within 120 days of your program start-date. US embassies and consulates cannot issue a visa earlier. Even so, waiting periods in certain countries are potentially lengthy so you are encouraged to apply as soon as you are ready. Don't wait until the last month or week before classes begin to apply for your visa.

How soon can I enter the United States?

If this is your initial entry, you may only enter 30 days prior to your program start-date, and you must report to your designated school official (DSO) before your program begins.

Can I work while in the United States on a student visa?

You should **never** work in the US unless you speak first with your DSO and your employment is approved by the Department of Homeland Security. If you work without proper authorization, you will jeopardize your immigration status.

You can also jeopardize your immigration status if you:

- Fail to enroll in your program by the specified date
- Fail to maintain a full course load
- Fail to leave the United States once your program or program-related employment is completed

What if I want to stay in the United States after graduation?

With proper authorization, foreign nationals can work in the US on either a temporary or permanent basis. One option is to apply for work authorization as part of Optional Practical Training (OPT). This allows you to work in a field directly related to your MBA or other graduate degree for one year. You need to consult with your DSO and receive work authorization from the Department of Homeland Security before beginning your OPT work.

As an alternative, you may qualify for a temporary work visa. Categories include:

- H-1B for individuals who will perform services in a “specialty occupation”, which generally means you need a bachelor's degree or higher, or its equivalent, for the position
- O-1 for “aliens of extraordinary ability” in certain fields, including business, who can demonstrate national or international acclaim in their field and who will engage in work for an employer in their area of “extraordinary ability”
- TN for certain professionals from Mexico and Canada who will engage in business activities at a professional level

- E-3 for Australian “specialty occupation” workers

Visit the US Citizenship and Immigration Services' website about working in the United States after graduation and to learn more about temporary worker visa categories.

Learn about SEVIS

SEVIS is the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System, administered by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), an agency within the US Department of Homeland Security. It is an Internet-based system that monitors and tracks international students and exchange visitors before and during their stay in the United States. You can learn more about SEVIS by visiting the ICE website. It offers a clickable map that lets you see whether the school you plan to attend has been approved by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP). In order to enroll international students, a school must be approved by SEVP.

Websites of Interest

Education USA
(educationusa.state.gov)

Study in the United States initiative
(studyinthestates.dhs.gov)

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
(uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis)

U.S. Customs and Border Protection
(cbp.gov)

U.S. Department of State
(state.gov)

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement—SEVIS
(ice.gov/sevis/i901)

