

Preparing For Your F-1 Visa Application and Interview

This information is for people who plan to enter the United States for the first time to study. For information on bringing dependents to the U.S., returning to continue studies, or renewing your visa, or for more details on how to apply for a student visa, refer to the U.S. Department of State - Bureau of Consular Affairs website, at:

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas.html>

Student Visa Application Process

In most countries, first-time student visa applicants are required to appear for an in-person interview. However, each U.S. Consulate/Embassy sets its own interview policies and procedures regarding student visas. Please be sure to consult the local U.S. Consulate/Embassy for specific application instructions:

<http://www.usembassy.gov/>

The U.S. Consulate/Embassy website will indicate the required documents for a visa interview. However, in general, all applicants for a student visa must provide the documents below:

- F-1 students must present all 3 pages of the I-20 form to the consular officer for review.
- Completed non-immigrant visa application form (DS-156) with photo for each person applying: A separate form is needed for children, even if they are included on a parent's passport. This form along with the DS-157 is available online on the U.S. Embassy/Consulate website.
- Passport valid for at least six months after proposed date of entry into the United States
- Receipt for visa processing fee payment: this fee is paid when students go to the U.S. Consulate/Embassy to apply for the student visa. Fee payment receipt will be issued and students must keep this receipt for each applicant, including each child listed on a parent's passport who is also applying for a U.S. visa. The receipt(s) must be presented to the consular officer during the interview.
- SEVIS I-901 Fee Payment Receipt
- Proof of Funding

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, they should bring a copy of the student visa holder's passport and visa, along with all other required documents.

In addition to those documents, the International Student Programs (ISP) at De Anza College advises that all applicants should be prepared to provide:

- Transcripts and diplomas from any previous institutions attended
- Scores from standardized tests that are required by ISP
- Any additional documents that might help establish strong social and economical ties to their home country. **Please see the next section for tips on demonstrating ties to home country.*

Please visit the U.S. Department of State website to view visa processing times at U.S. consulates or embassies:

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas.html>

*Showing Ties to Home Country

Occasionally students have been denied visas due to the consular officer not being sufficiently convinced of the student's intentions to return to their native country after completing their studies. The common reason for a visa denial is on the basis of Section 214(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) that states: "Every alien shall be presumed to be an immigrant until he establishes to the satisfaction of the consular officer, at the time of application for admission, that he is entitled to a nonimmigrant status..."

This essentially means that the student must prove beyond doubt "permanent residence" or "strong ties" to his home country. Fortunately, a visa denial is not permanent and can be reversed, if the student can show new, irrefutable evidence.

Here are some tips to demonstrate students' strong ties to their home country:

- Convince the consular officer that the sole (not just "primary") purpose of the visit to the U.S. is to pursue a program of study
- Outline post-graduation plans upon returning to home country
- Document family ties, business interests, and assets in home country
- Discuss job prospects in home country upon completion of education in the U.S.

Additional Tips on Applying for a Student Visa

In addition to providing the right documents and having the right reasons, making a positive impression on the consular officer is critical in the application process:

1. **Speak in English** - Practice interviewing in English with a native English speaker. Being fluent and confident will help present the case. However, avoid preparing a speech.
2. **Speak for yourself** - Make the case independently. Having parents or others speak on a student's behalf does not make a good impression on the consular officer
3. **Be brief** - Keep answers and explanations short and to the point, as consular officers can only spend a few minutes with each applicant
4. **Be positive** - Do not argue with the consular officer or come across as rude and sarcastic; even if the visa application is denied.

In the event that students are denied a student visa, it is important to not get upset or argue with the consular officer. Most often, these students will be given a letter that explains why the request has been denied. Students should politely ask the officer how they can improve their chances the next time and what additional documentation they should provide to reverse the denial. They should thank the officer and take down their name for future reference. Students should conduct a thorough re-evaluation of their case and contact ISP for assistance.

NOTE: When students successfully receive their student visa, the consular officer will seal their immigration documents in an envelope and attach it to their passport. **Students should not open this envelope!** The officer at the U.S. port of entry will open it.

SEVIS Fee Paying Options

1. To Pay SEVIS Fee by Mail

- (a) Get a Form I-901 “Fee Remittance for Certain F, J, and M Nonimmigrants.”
- Download form I-901 from the U.S. Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE):
<https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2015/i901.pdf>
- OR**
- Ask for the form by phone at 1-800-870-3676 (inside the US)
- (b) Complete the Form I-901. Be sure to write your name exactly how it appears on your I-20 form.
- (c) Prepare a check, international money order or foreign draft (drawn on US banks only ¹) in the amount of **\$200 USD**, made payable to “The Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement.”
- (d) Mail the completed I-901 and payment to the address listed on Form I-901.
- (e) A receipt will be sent by mail to the address that you indicate with your payment.
(Depending on your country’s postal service, the total amount of time between mailing the check, processing of check and receiving the confirmation letter/receipt, the entire process could take a minimum of three weeks or longer.)

¹Many foreign banks are able to issue checks or money orders drawn on a U.S. bank. You may therefore obtain a check from:
1) a bank chartered or operated in the United States; b) a foreign subsidiary of a U.S. bank, or c) a foreign bank that has an arrangement with a U.S. bank to issue a check, money order, or foreign draft that is drawn on a U.S. bank

2. To Pay SEVIS Fee Online

If you have a personal credit card or have access to one, payment online is the fastest method.

- (a) Find the online Form I-901 at <https://www.fmjfee.com/i901fee/index.html#>
- (b) Complete the form online and supply the necessary Visa, MasterCard or American Express information.
***Be sure to write your name exactly how it appears on your I-20 form.**
- (c) Print a copy of the online receipt.
- (d) Be sure to make copies of your receipt, and keep it with your other important immigration documents.
- (e) A receipt will be sent by mail to the address that you indicate with your payment.

Important!!!

You must bring the receipt of fee payment with you to the interview. If you have lost the receipt, the Consular Officer should be able to view your payment history in his or her database.

If you are transferring schools, extending your program, applying for an F-2 dependent visa, or have paid this fee and been denied a visa within the last twelve months, you do not need to pay the **\$200** SEVIS fee.

If you have any questions, please contact International Student Programs office at (408) 864-8826 or by email dainternational@deanza.edu