



Embassy of the United States of America
100 Duke & Young Streets, Kingston, Georgetown, Guyana

Installment Eighty-One Ask the Consul – Student Visas

This installment of *Ask the Consul* seeks to inform prospective students about the requirements for obtaining a student visa.

What type of non-immigrant visa do foreign students need?

That depends upon the course of study. Academic and language students require an F1 visa. Students undertaking vocational training require an M1 visa. The requirements for either are nearly identical.

What are the requirements for making a student visa application?

There are three basic requirements. Student visa applicants must demonstrate to the satisfaction of the American consular officer that they: i) do not intend to permanently migrate to the U.S.; ii) are legitimate students accepted to an accredited educational institution; and iii) have sufficient funds to cover all academic and living expenses. Applicants must submit the following documents in support of these requirements:

- Non-immigrant visa application (DS-156) and supplementary form (DS-158).
- Proof of payment of standard application fee (currently \$131) to Demerara Bank.
- Certificate of Eligibility for Non-immigrant Student Visa Status (I-20 A-B)
 - Obtainable only through your school once they have accepted you.
- Proof of payment of SEVIS fee (one-time fee of \$180) to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.
- Official results of standardized test scores required for admission by your institution (e.g., SAT, GRE, GMAT, etc.) and transcripts or diplomas from all previous academic work.
- Evidence of sufficient financial resources to cover all tuition and living expenses in the U.S.

In contrast to standard visitor's visa applications in which Embassy policy is to not refer to documents submitted by applicants, student visa applications have considerable documentary requirements.

If I receive an approved I-20 Form, the Certificate of Eligibility for Non-immigrant Student Visa Status, doesn't it mean that I qualify for the visa?

No. The I-20 is a form accredited educational institutions send to international students once they have been accepted for enrollment by the school; it does not “pre-approve” a student visa applicant to receive the visa. Only a consular officer can make that determination. The I-20 lists a student's intended course of study, information about anticipated expenses (for example, how much financial aid a student has been granted from a school and how much financing a student claims to have secured for themselves) and other important information. The I-20 confirms to the consular officer only one of the three essential qualifications for being issued a student visa: that the student has been accepted to an accredited educational institution. Applicants must still prove to the consular officer that they do not intend to migrate permanently to the U.S. and that they have sufficient funds for educational and personal expenses while in the U.S.

When should I apply for my student visa?

Making a successful application for a student visa requires significant preparation. The U.S. Embassy Georgetown suggests students apply as early as possible once they have been accepted to an educational institution, have received their valid I-20 from the school in the U.S., and have arranged sufficient financial resources to cover all academic and living expenses for the first year of studies and be able to demonstrate that they will be able to cover the costs for subsequent years.

What does it mean if I have been refused a student visa?

If you apply and are refused a student visa it is because you did *not demonstrate* to the satisfaction of the consular officer that you meet all three of the following qualifications: i) do *not intend* to permanently migrate to the U.S.; ii) *are* a legitimate student accepted to an accredited educational institution; and iii) *have* sufficient funds to cover all academic and living expense while in the U.S. If you have been refused you may re-apply at anytime. If you have information that you did not present to the consular officer at your first interview, or if your circumstances have materially changed since then, then you may consider re-applying.

If I am granted a student visa, how long may I remain in the U.S.?

Your student visa will be valid for the length of your anticipated course of study, up to 60 months. The immigration inspector will give you “duration of status” when you enter to study on a student visa. You are permitted to enter the U.S. up to 30 days before your studies commence and may remain up to 60 days after you complete them. You may remain in the U.S. during holiday and summer recesses. You may return to Guyana or travel internationally during academic recess, but be sure not to take absences of greater than 5 months from the U.S., unless engaged in related academic study, as such absence would invalidate your visa.

May my family members accompany me while I am studying?

Only spouses and dependent children may accompany a student visa holder to live in the U.S. Such family members must apply for a F-2 or M-2 visa as the dependent of a student visa holder, appear for an interview with a consular officer, and demonstrate to the officer's satisfaction that they do not intend to migrate permanently to the U.S., have the appropriate family relationship to qualify for such visas and have sufficient funds to support themselves in the U.S. Family members are not authorized to work while living in the U.S. Other relatives, such as parents or siblings who wish to visit a student may apply for a visitor's visa and must then demonstrate their own ties to return to Guyana at the end of their visit.

Is there a source of guidance on all of these requirements?

Yes, there are several sources of guidance for prospective foreign students in the U.S. If you want general information about becoming a foreign student in the U.S., please visit www.educationUSA.state.gov. If you need guidance or clarification with your visa application, please contact the U.S. Embassy Visa Inquiries Unit at 225-7965 or 7966 or email at visageorge@state.gov. And if you have any questions or need guidance applying to American educational institutions, contact the U.S. Embassy Education Advisor at 225-4900, extension 4235 or via email at PDGeorge@state.gov.

“Ask the Consul” is a bi-weekly column from the U.S. Embassy answering questions about U.S. immigration law and visa issues. If you have a general question about visa policy please email it to us at AskGeorge@state.gov. We select questions every other week and publish the answers in Stabroek News and on our website at http://georgetown.usembassy.gov/guyana/ask_con.html. For more information about visas please see <http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov> or <http://georgetown.usembassy.gov/>.

Other than the questions we select, we DO NOT respond to questions sent to Ask the Consul. Please contact the visa inquiries unit (email visageorge@state.gov or call 225-7965 between 8 am and 4 pm Monday through Friday) if you have questions about a specific case.