

## Student Visa FAQs

### General information:

- What visas typically are issued for study in the US, and how do I know which visa to apply for? (Most students don't realize that the university or sponsoring organization will determine this for them.)

F and J visas are the appropriate categories for student visas. The specific type of visa will be determined by the sponsoring university or organization.

- I've just been accepted to a U.S. university. What are the basic steps to apply for a visa?

See the U.S. Embassy London website:

<http://london.usembassy.gov/nonimmigrant-visas.html>

- How much does it cost to apply for a visa?

The application fee is \$140 USD.

- I've heard it's hard to get a visa to study in the US. Is this true?

The hardest part of studying in the U.S. is often getting accepted into the university. The United States welcomes international students to its colleges and universities. Students are always given high priority for visa appointments.

### Special cases:

- I live in the UK, but am not a UK citizen. How does this impact my visa application?

You are welcome to apply at any U.S. Embassy or Consulate; however, keep in mind that all applicants must demonstrate strong ties to another country outside of the U.S. You will need to decide where your ties are strongest before you determine where to apply for the student visa.

- I would like to complete a summer program that is less than three months in length. Can I do this on the visa waiver program and not apply for a student visa?

All students enrolled in a college or university, even for a summer program, must apply for the proper visa. In most cases, an F, a J, or an M visa and a DS-2019 or an I-20 is needed. For a small number of short-term, non-degree programs of less than 18 hours a week where study is incidental to the visit, it may be possible to travel on the visa waiver program, if otherwise qualified. . If your institution has not issued you an I-20 or a DS-2019 and you do not

know whether you need a visa, you should call our call center for case specific advice.

- I would like to enroll in a community college and then return to the UK with an Associates degree. Will this affect my visa application?

No. An application for a community college is treated the same way as an application for a four year institution. All student visa applications are subject to the same U.S. immigration laws. The outcome of every visa application is based on the case's own merits and the applicant's personal situation.

- I would like to enroll in a community college and then transfer to a four-year Bachelor's. Will I have to return to the UK to re-apply for my visa?

No. When a student transfers universities in the United States, s/he is required to file for and receive a new I-20 or DS-2019. The student must apply for a new visa the first time s/he leaves the United States with the intention of re-entering the United States to attend the new institution.

- I will be 17 years old when I begin my studies in the US. Will this affect my visa application?

No.

- I am a dual U.S. and UK citizen. Do I need to apply for a visa?

No, all American citizens are required by law to enter and exit the United States on their U.S. passport. Visas are only for those individuals who do not have a claim to U.S. citizenship.

#### Dependents:

- I will be taking dependents with me to the US. What is the process like to apply for their visas?

Spouses and children of student visa applicants (F2 or J2 derivatives) may also join the primary applicant in the U.S. during the course of study. Each dependent must pay the application fee and possess a valid DS-2019 or I-20 from the respective university. All applicants 14 or older must attend an in-person visa interview.

- Will my spouse be able to work in the US?

Spouses are referred to as 'derivatives' of the primary applicant's visa. F-2 derivatives are not eligible to work in the U.S. However, J-2 derivatives may contact the Dept. of Homeland Security for work authorization.

- Can I apply for a visa for my civil partner?

The U.S. does not legally recognize civil partnerships; however, partners may apply to accompany the primary beneficiary with a regular B-2 tourist visa.

- My spouse or partner will remain in the UK, but would like to visit me several times while I am in the US. Should he/she apply for a F-2/J-2 or visit me on the visa waiver program?

Spouses or partners of J-1 or F-1 visa holders, who plan to make frequent trips to the United States, should apply for the appropriate dependent visa even if he/she plans on remaining in the UK. If a spouse intends to only visit the United States as a tourist, s/he may be eligible to travel on the visa waiver program.

Timing:

- How early can I begin applying for a visa?

Once you have been accepted by the college/university and have received your DS-2019 or I-20, you may begin the visa process. The next steps can be found at: <http://london.usembassy.gov/students.html>

- I made a last minute decision to take up my offer at a U.S. university. Is there anyway to expedite my visa application?

There are no expedited visa services available; however, student visa appointments are separate from regular tourist visa interviews and are given priority when scheduling.

- How long does it usually take between the visa interview and when I actually receive my visa and passport in the post?

The average processing time for a U.S. visa is approximately 5-7 working days. A small percentage of applications are subject to additional administrative processing, which takes on average 90 days. In some instances, administrative processing can take 6 months or longer.

- I would like to travel after my exams and before going to the US. How early can I schedule my visa interview?

Once you have been accepted by the college/university and receive your DS-2019 or I-20, you may begin the visa process. The next steps can be found at: <http://london.usembassy.gov/students.html>

- I would like to travel in the U.S. before my studies begin. How soon can I enter the US?

F and J student visa holders may enter the U.S. up to 30 days prior to the beginning of their study program, as noted on the DS-2019 or I-20.

- I would like to travel in the U.S. after my studies. How long can I stay in the U.S. after my program ends?

J visa holders may remain in the U.S. up to 30 days after the conclusion of the study program and a F visa holders may remain for up to 60 days after the conclusion of the study program. Please note: Students are admitted for duration of status, i.e., the time that the student is pursuing a full course of study and authorized practical training. If a student leaves his or her program, s/he no longer has the right to remain in the United States, regardless of the expiration date on the visa.

- I would like to complete an internship in the U.S. or participate in a program like Camp America the summer before I begin my studies. Can I do this, and if so, do I have to return to the UK to re-apply for my student visa?

You may complete two separate programs back to back. You should apply for a visa in the appropriate category for the first program you will participate in. You must have a separate valid I-20 or DS-2019 for the second program, and must file to change status with the Department of Homeland Security. If you leave the United States for any period of time after you have changed status, you will be required to apply for a new visa in the appropriate category in order to reenter the United States. Once you have changed status and started the second program, you may not reenter the United States on the visa for the first program.

#### DS-2019 and I-20:

- What is a DS-2019 or I-20?

The DS-2019 and I-20 are Certificates of Eligibility issued by the university or sponsoring organization.

- How do I obtain these documents, and who issues them?

Upon your acceptance to the university or organization, the sponsoring institution will issue the DS-2019 or I-20.

- What documentation is required to show proof of funds to get my DS-2019 or I-20?

### SEVIS:

- What is SEVIS?

The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) is an internet-based database which tracks students and exchange visitors in F, M, and J visa status while in the United States. Designated Exchange Visitor Program sponsors will enter information into SEVIS, which is then printed on the DS-2019 form (Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status) or the I-20 form (Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Student Status).

- Why do I have to register?

The SEVIS registration and fee is mandated by the U.S. Congress to support the program office and the automated system that keeps track of students and exchange visitors. It also ensures that they maintain their status while in the United States.

- How much does it cost to register with SEVIS?

F-1 visa applicants = \$200.00

J-1 visa applicants = \$180.00. Certain short-term exchange visitor (au-pairs, summer work/travel and camp counselors) will pay a reduced fee of \$35.00.

- How do I register? <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/>

### Visa interview:

- How do I schedule a visa interview at the Embassy in London?

The Operator Assisted Visa Information and Nonimmigrant Appointment Booking Service is available at the following times: • Monday - Friday : 8.00 a.m. until 9.00 p.m. GMT, Saturdays : 09.00 a.m. until 4.00 p.m. GMT. The Service is not available on UK public holidays. Callers from within the United Kingdom should dial 09042-450-100. Calls to this line are charged at £1.23/min from BT landlines; some mobile and network providers may charge more.

- When are interviews offered? (days of the week, times of day)

Visa appointments are available most working days, but are subject to availability. Please contact the call center for availability.

- How far in advance can I schedule my interview from the date I would like for it to take place on?

Wait times for appointments vary by season and demand. Current wait times can be found at: <http://london.usembassy.gov/visa-waittimes.html>. Travelers

are encouraged to always schedule a visa appointment well in advance of your travel dates and never book travel tickets before your visa has been approved.

- Do I need to have my DS-2019 or I-20 before scheduling an interview?

It is not a requirement to have a DS-2019 or I-20 before scheduling an interview; however, you must bring the original documents with you to your interview appointment.

- Where is the Embassy located, and how do I get there?

The Embassy is located in Grosvenor Square the Mayfair area of Central London. <http://london.usembassy.gov/location.html>.

- What can I expect in terms of security procedures when I arrive?

Please see: [http://london.usembassy.gov/visas\\_security.html](http://london.usembassy.gov/visas_security.html).

- How long will the interview last?

Interview times vary depending on each visa applicant's personal situation and the complexity of his or her case. While many interviews with a consular officer do not take any longer than 3-5 minutes, some interviews could take as long as 30 minutes.

- How long should I plan to wait?

Wait times vary, but you should plan on being at the Embassy for approximately 2-3 hours.

- What personal items can I bring into the Embassy? Can I bring a book to read or listen to my iPod while I wait?

You may bring a book or magazine to read; however, electronic devices are prohibited. For further details about what you should or should not bring to your interview, visit: [http://london.usembassy.gov/visas\\_security.html](http://london.usembassy.gov/visas_security.html).

- Who conducts the interviews?

U.S. Consular Officers trained in U.S. immigration law and accredited to the United Kingdom conduct the visa interviews at the Embassy in London and the Consulate in Belfast.

- What is the purpose of the interview?

The purpose of the visa interview is to determine whether an applicant is a bona fide student with legitimate plans to study in the United States. At the time of the visa interview, Consular Officers are also required to assess whether applicants will be able to pay for their first year of studies, including tuition, room, and board.

- What documentation should I bring to the interview?

Students are required to bring the confirmation page from their completed DS-160, an original DS-2019 or I-20 and a copy of the SEVIS fee payment. Applicants may also wish to bring supporting documentation to demonstrate their ability to pay for the first year of studies.

- What do you mean by immigrant intent, and how do I demonstrate that I don't intend to immigrate?

U.S. immigration law stipulates that all visa applicants are presumed to be intending immigrants until they can establish otherwise. Applicants typically confirm that they are bona fide visiting students by demonstrating sufficiently strong social, economic, and financial ties to their place of residence to compel them to depart the United States after the completion of their studies.

- I am studying in the U.S. for a semester/year. Would it be helpful for my university to provide a transcript or letter stating the length of the program and that I will need to return to the UK to complete my degree?

Only certain documents are required for student visa applicants. Though you are welcome to bring supporting documents that pertain to your study plans, these documents will not necessarily be reviewed by a Consular Officer.

- Can my parents come for the interview?

Generally, only applicants with a scheduled appointment will be admitted into the Embassy. However, children under the age of 18 may be accompanied by a parent. Translators for non-English speakers and assistants for the disabled are also permitted to accompany applicants. If anyone besides the applicant is going to attend the visa interview, the Embassy must be informed via the call center at the time the appointment is scheduled.

#### Working:

- Can I work while I study in the U.S.? If so, how many hours per week and where?

Students on F-1 visas are permitted to work in certain on-campus jobs for up to 20 hours a week throughout their studies. Students are allowed to work full-time when school is not in session if the student is eligible and intends to

register for the next term or session. Most U.S. universities offer a large range of on-campus jobs, from working in the student recreational center to doing research in a lab. Students cannot take earnings from on-campus employment into account when showing proof of funds for a visa.

- Is it possible to do paid work off-campus during my studies?

After students have completed one academic year of studies at a U.S. university there are two programs which allow them to work off campus. Students must apply for employment authorization from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services for practical training in a position directly related to his or her major area of study. In rare circumstances where there is severe economic need students may be permitted to work off-campus in a job unrelated to their studies.

- Is it possible to do an unpaid internship off-campus during my studies? Does it matter whether the internship is required for my degree programme? Does this affect the length of my OPT (F-1) or academic training (J-1)?

Students are eligible to participate in unpaid internships that are part of their degree program under the “Curricular Practical Training” program.

- I would like to volunteer at a local charity during my studies. Is this OK? Are there any limits to the number of hours or type of work I can do?

Students may take up volunteer work off-campus, provided that their primary purpose for being in the U.S. remains studying. To qualify as volunteer work, the student must:

- Not receive any form of compensation (salary, hourly wages, stipend, tips, bonus, transport costs, housing or any other benefit in exchange for work performed).
- Not displace a U.S. worker by taking over a position that was previously a paid post. You should be doing work that other interns/volunteers would have done without pay.

Please note unpaid work experience for which you do not receive academic credit may be classified as volunteer work rather than CPT or pre-completion OPT if it meets the above criteria.

J-1 visa holders must have approval from their sponsor before volunteering. It is recommended that you clear all off-campus activities with your international students office in advance.

- What is the difference between OPT, CPT and academic training?



Students applying for the Optional Practical Training (OPT) and Curricular Practical Training (CPT) must work in jobs related to their field of studies.

Under OPT students are eligible to seek off-campus employment that is separate but directly related to their studies. OPT students are restricted to working 20 hours a week while school is in session and full-time when school is not in session, provided the student remains enrolled in his or her academic institution and intends to register for the next term.

CPT is a training program that is part of an established curriculum. Examples of CPT include alternative work/study, internship, cooperative education, or any other type of required internship or practicum that is offered by sponsoring employers through cooperative agreements with the school. Students who have participated in one academic year or more of CPT are ineligible for post-study practical training.

- What are the eligibility requirements for OPT and academic training?

Students are eligible to begin OPT after they have completed one academic year of studies. For this reason, students on semester or year exchanges are not eligible for OPT. If students start their OPT while studying, they may work full time during academic breaks and up to 20 hours a week during term time.

- How long can I work in the U.S. after my studies on either OPT or academic training?

If students choose to participate in OPT following completion of their studies, they must finish OPT within 14 months. Students may not work more than 12 months on OPT, and any time spent working during a student's studies will be deducted from the time allotted after graduation.

- Do I have to return to the UK to apply for OPT or academic training?

If a student did not originally have OPT on their I-20, and the visa ends at the end of their course of study, the student must apply for a new visa to reenter the United States if he or she leaves the country while on OPT.

- I would like to work in the U.S. long-term. How would I go about doing that?

Students who would like to remain in the U.S. for an extended period of time following their studies must apply for the appropriate work visa. In most cases, a student's place of employment must sponsor the student for a visa.

- I have studied in the United States for an academic year on a J-1 visa and would now like to stay for the summer to complete an internship in the U.S. Do I need to return to the UK and reapply for another J visa?

If the internship is not part of Optional Practical Training or the student's academic exchange, he or she is required to apply for and obtain a new DS-2019 and change status with USCIS. If the student departs the United States during the second program, he or she must apply for a new J-1 visa before re-entering the United States.

- I have been convicted of a crime. How will this affect my visa application?

Anyone who has been arrested or convicted must schedule an appointment with the Visa Coordination Unit (VCU). There are specific requirements for anyone who has been arrested. Please visit the following website for further details:  
[http://london.usembassy.gov/cons\\_new/visa/callcenter/vcu\\_pending\\_london2.html](http://london.usembassy.gov/cons_new/visa/callcenter/vcu_pending_london2.html)

- My visa application has not been approved. Can I appeal this decision?

If your visa was refused under 214(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, there is no appeal process and the consular officer's decision is final.

- I have been told that my visa application requires further review and may take several weeks to process. Why might this have happened? How can I check on the status of my application? How long does this typically take? I'm worried that I need to make alternate plans for the semester.

Some cases require additional administrative processing. If your application was refused under 221(g) and you received the "Administrative Processing" handout at the interview, you can check the status of your case online. The case status report will be updated periodically. The review of your application may take 90 days to complete. In some cases, processing can take several months, so if your case is not yet listed, please check back periodically for the latest information.

For more information:

- I have a question beyond what is covered on this page. What other resources does the Embassy provide? Embassy website for visas: <http://london.usembassy.gov/nonimmigrant-visas.html>  
YouTube videos: [http://london.usembassy.gov/cons\\_new/youtube2.html](http://london.usembassy.gov/cons_new/youtube2.html)  
Web Chats: [http://london.usembassy.gov/visa\\_webchats.html](http://london.usembassy.gov/visa_webchats.html)  
Visa blog: <http://london.usembassy.gov/visablog.html>

Twitter Feed: <http://twitter.com/#!/USAinUKCGcorner>

- I would like to speak with someone about my question. How can I contact the Embassy? [http://london.usembassy.gov/visa\\_contact\\_information.html](http://london.usembassy.gov/visa_contact_information.html)
- Are there other resources I should check out? (Fulbright for pre-departure information, their U.S. university or sponsoring organization)  
U.S.-UK Fulbright Commission: <http://www.fulbright.co.uk/>