



F-1 Student Visa Application and Interview

We have prepared the following information to help you prepare for your F-1 visa application and interview at the US Consulate or Embassy.

What is a visa?

A visa is an official stamp or document affixed within a passport, or given to you as a separate document, that has been issued by a foreign government granting permission for entry *specifically* to study, work, or live in a particular country. There is no right to a visa, even upon presentation of all required documents.

When do I apply?

The actual date depends on the individual consulate requirements. Start gathering the required documents for your student visa application the moment you apply to your program. Each consulate sets its own timeline for accepting and processing student visa applications. Typically you may not be *allowed* to apply more than 120 days before your program begins. But you should also know the latest date for submission. **If the consulate says apply "at least" 60 days before your program departure, this means *no fewer than 60 days, and for some this can be no fewer than 120 days before departure!***

As well as varying deadlines for submitting visa applications, those deadlines can also suddenly *change*. Some consulates stop processing visa applications 4-6 weeks before a student's departure date. Some other consulates do not state a deadline on their Web site or in their application instructions, but they could suddenly announce that they will no longer take visa appointments if they are short-staffed during a period of high volume. **To avoid getting trapped in this situation**, submit your visa application at the earliest date the consulate will accept it.

All students currently outside the United States (except Canadian citizens) must apply for an F-1 student visa. Locate your local US Embassy / Consulate at <http://usembassy.state.gov/> to review the visa application process and schedule an interview. Interviews can be scheduled no earlier than 120 days prior to the start of the semester, as indicated on your I-20 form. At the appointment you will need to provide:

- I-20 form, issued by Fullerton College, bearing your SEVIS record number
- Application Forms DS-156 and DS-158; some males must submit Form DS-157 (forms can be downloaded from the Embassy Webpage)
- A passport valid for at least six months after your proposed date of entry into the United States.
- One 2x2 inch photograph
- A receipt of your visa application fee(s). Pay *before* your appointment
- A receipt of your SEVIS I-901 fee. Pay \$200 fee online at www.fmjfee.com *before* your appointment
- Financial evidence showing your/your parents/your sponsor's sufficient funds to cover your tuition and living expenses during your studies
- Transcripts / diplomas from previous schools (suggested for new visas & required for visa renewals)
- Scores from standardized tests required by the college, such as the TOEFL (suggested, not required)

10 Points to Remember When Applying for a Nonimmigrant Visa

1. **Ties to Your Home Country:** Under U.S. law, all applicants for nonimmigrant visas, such as F-1, 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 home town, 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 officer may ask about your specific intentions or promise of future employment, relationships, educational goals, grades, long-term plans and a career in your home country.

Each person's situation is different, and there is no magic explanation or single document, certificate, or letter which can guarantee a visa. If you have applied for the U.S. Green Card Lottery, you may be asked if you are intending to immigrate. A simple answer would be that you applied for the lottery since it was available but not with a specific intent to immigrate.

2. **English:** Anticipate that the interview will be conducted in English and not in your native language. One suggestion is to practice English conversation with a native speaker before the interview, but do NOT prepare speeches! If you are coming to the United States solely to study intensive English, be prepared to explain how English will be useful for you in your home country.
3. **Speak for Yourself:** Do not bring parents or family members with you to the interview. The consular officer wants to interview you, not your family. A negative impression is created if you are not prepared to speak on your own behalf.
4. **Know the Program and How It Fits Your Career Plans:** If you are not able to explain the reasons you will study in the United States, you may not succeed in convincing the consular officer that you are actually planning to study, rather than to immigrate. You should also be able to explain how studying in the U.S. relates to your future professional career when you return home.
5. **Be Brief:** Consular officers are under considerable time pressure to conduct a quick and efficient interview. They must make a decision on the impressions they form during the first minute 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.
6. **Additional Documentation:** It should be immediately clear to the consular officer what written documents you are presenting and what they signify. Lengthy written explanations cannot be quickly read or evaluated. Remember that you will have 2-3 minutes of interview time, at the most.
7. **Not All Countries are Equal:** 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.
8. **Employment:** Your main purpose in coming to the United States is to study, not to work. While many students do work off-campus, such employment is incidental to their main purpose of completing their education. You must be able to clearly explain your plan to return home. If your spouse is applying for an F-2 visa, be aware that F-2 dependents cannot, under any circumstances, be employed in the U.S. If asked, be prepared to address what your spouse intends to do with his or her time while in the U.S. Volunteer work and attending school part-time are permitted activities.
9. **Dependents Remaining at Home:** 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 an especially difficult 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 money from the United States in order to support themselves, your student visa application will almost certainly be denied.
10. **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 the reason you were denied in writing.

Source: NAFSA: Association of International Educators www.nafsa.org