



INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

Information for International Students about F-1 Visas

Getting Your Visa (Canadian citizens please see “Note to Canadians” below)

A visa is a stamp in your passport that allows you to enter the U.S. legally. The type of visa you will be applying for is an F-1 non-immigrant student visa.

Visas are issued by U.S. consulates throughout the world. You should apply for your F-1 visa at the embassy or consulate which is responsible for visa applications from your place of residence. You can apply at consulates elsewhere; however, in most cases it is expected that you will apply in your home country.

Although every U.S. embassy and consulate applies the same regulations and laws, each visa office follows its own procedures. **It is important to check the website of the consulate to which you will apply for your visa to learn about their particular procedures.** Links to the websites of U.S. consulates around the world can be found online at Travel.State.gov, along with a great deal of information about US student visas and immigration.

There are two things you must do before applying for your visa. You must request an appointment for a visa interview at the consulate. Your consulate’s webpage will tell you how to schedule your visa interview. In some countries you can get an interview very quickly; in other countries, it can take several weeks. To find out how long it takes to schedule an interview at your consulate, go to the link above and look for the section called “Plan Ahead” in the middle of the page to enter your consulate location. This will tell you how long the appointment wait time is, as well as how long it should take to process your visa.

You must also pay the \$200 Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) fee (also called the I-901 fee). To get information on how to pay the fee, visit USCIS’s online [Student Process Steps tool](#). You will need to have a receipt indicating that you have paid this fee when you go to the consulate for your visa interview.

At the consulate you will be asked to complete a visa application form and submit it with:

- a valid passport
- your Certificate of Eligibility (I-20 form) from Hollins
- documentation of financial resources in the amount indicated on the I-20
- your letter of admission to Hollins
- your receipt, indicating that you have paid the I-901 fee
- a color, passport-style photo (please see [photo requirements](#) on Travel.State.gov)
- the visa fee (which is separate from the I-901 fee)
- any other required documentation listed on the consulate’s website

You may also complete the [Nonimmigrant Visa Application \(DS-160\)](#) online prior to your visa appointment. If you do so, you will need to print the confirmation page and bring it with you to your visa appointment once you have scheduled one.

Some embassies or consulates may want particular kinds of financial documentation so it is best, if possible, to check the consulate's website and/or call in advance to find out exactly what documents they require. Student visa applicants from some countries may also be asked to establish that they have strong ties to their home country and will leave the United States when they have completed their studies. Different kinds of documentation may be required for this purpose.

Note that the same U.S. college or university must be listed on your I-20, your I-901 receipt, and your visa when you enter the U.S. and you must attend that university. You cannot apply for your visa with the I-20 form from one university and then attend a different university.

The earliest that an F-1 visa can be granted is 120 days before the program starting date listed in Section 5 of your I-20 form. You can apply earlier but your visa will not be issued earlier.

When your visa application is approved, an F-1 visa will be affixed to your passport. It will indicate your visa number, where and when it was issued, the number of times it allows you to enter the U.S., and when it will expire.

A visa is an **entry** document. **You can remain in the U.S. after your visa has expired but you cannot enter the U.S. after your visa has expired.** If you wish to enter the U.S. after your visa has expired, you must apply for a new visa. Generally, this must be done in your home country.

Note to Canadians: Canadian citizens do not need a visa to enter the U.S. but they must have proof of citizenship and identity, a valid I-20 form, documentation of their ability to pay their tuition and living expenses while studying in the U.S., and a receipt indicating that they have paid the I-901 fee (please see fifth paragraph under "Getting Your Visa").

Arrival in the U.S.

With your F-1 visa, you can enter the U.S. up to 30 days before the program starting date listed in Question 5 on your I-20 form. Be sure to bring your passport, your I-20 form, your documentation of financial resources, your letter of acceptance to Hollins, the receipt for your I-901 fee, and contact information for the international programs office (below). Some of these documents may be in the sealed envelope given to you by the consular officer. Do not open this envelope. Carry all of these documents with you on the plane. Do not pack them in the luggage that you check with the airline because you will need them before you collect your luggage.

Shortly before your plane lands in the U.S., or at the U.S. border if you are entering by car, you will be given a brief form, called an I-94 Arrival-Departure Form. You will need to complete the form before going through immigration procedures at the airport or border.

When you arrive in the U.S., follow the signs for "Non U.S. Citizens." You will meet with an immigration officer who will may take a digital photograph and fingerprint and ask to see your passport and visa, your completed I-94 form, and any other required information, such as financial documents and admission letter. The immigration officer will review your documents and then return them to you. At that point, you have been officially admitted to the United States and can continue your journey to Roanoke.

Please note: Some airports now require students to have their pictures and fingerprints taken at a kiosk upon first entering the customs and immigration area. If you arrive at one of these airports, you will still need to turn over the documents listed above (along with a receipt from the kiosk) to the immigration officer.

The arrival process is usually fairly easy. Have all of your documents ready (passport, I-94 form, I-20 form, etc.) when you arrive at the inspections area. Be polite to the officers and avoid drinking alcohol on

the airplane (passengers who have been drinking are often questioned longer). Be sure to have the name and contact information for Dr. Barbieri (listed below) with you and give it to the officer if there is any problem or question.

Resources

Dr. Jeanette Barbieri, director of international programs, or Danielle Davis, international programs coordinator, can help you with questions about visas. Please see their contact information below.

Websites:

[Student Process Steps: How to Navigate the US Immigration System](#)

- Information on what to expect when you first enter the U.S., maintaining status, leaving and re-entering the U.S., and other important topics.

[Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application \(DS-160\)](#)

- Application site for the DS-160. You will need to print the confirmation page once you've completed the application

Checklist for Departure

As you are getting ready to depart for the U.S., be sure you have all of the things in the list below with you. If you are arriving by airplane, be sure to bring all of these things with you on the plane. Do not pack them in the luggage that you check with the airline.

- ✓ Your passport, valid for at least six more months
- ✓ Your SEVIS form I-20
- ✓ Documentation of financial resources
- ✓ Your letter of acceptance to Hollins
- ✓ Paper receipt for the SEVIS (I-901) fee
- ✓ Name and contact information for your Designated School Officer:

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