

Applying for a Visa & Entering the U.S.

This information is for individuals who plan to enter the United States for the first time in F-1 or J-1 visa status.

Applying for a Visa

1. **Obtain your Form I-20/Form DS-2019** from the school you plan to conduct research at or attend.
2. **Contact your local U.S. consulate or embassy** to ask how to get an F-1 international student visa or J-1 exchange visitor visa. A list of consulates and embassies can be found at:
<https://www.usembassy.gov/>.
3. **Pay the SEVIS fee.** Go to <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/paying-the-i-901-sevis-fee> or see our *SEVIS Fee Fact Sheet* for detailed information and instructions.
4. **Schedule an interview.** Follow the U.S. embassy/consulate's instructions to schedule an interview to apply for your student/exchange visitor visa. It is important to apply for your visa as far in advance as possible. Many embassies/consulates recommend that appointments be made no more than 90 days from the intended date of travel, but some can make earlier arrangements for interviews.
5. **Prepare and bring the required documentation to your visa interview.** Confirm with the embassy/consulate what documentation is required. Below is a general check-list:
 - a) Passport valid for at least six months
 - b) Form I-20 (sign the form under *Item 11*) or Form DS-2019 (sign the form at the bottom of page 1)
 - c) School acceptance letter
 - d) Completed and signed visa application forms (see the travel.state.gov website)
 - e) Photograph(s) in the prescribed format (see the travel.state.gov website)
 - f) Receipt(s) for visa fee(s)
 - g) Receipt for SEVIS fee. If you have not received an official receipt in the mail showing payment and you paid the fee electronically, the consulate will accept the temporary receipt you printed from your computer. If you do not have a receipt, the consulate may be able to see your payment electronically if your fee payment was processed at least 3 business days before your interview.
 - h) Financial evidence that shows you have sufficient funds to cover your living expenses and/or tuition during the first year of your program (for students this can be the Wellesley College Certification of Finances and supporting documents)
 - i) Any information that proves that you will return to your home country after finishing your program in the U.S. This may include proof of property, family, or other ties to your community.



6. Points to remember when you apply for a nonimmigrant visa.

- **Ties to Home Country:** Under U.S. law, applicants for nonimmigrant visas 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 hometown, homeland, or current place of residence: job, family, financial prospects that you own or will inherit, investments, etc. The Consular Officer may ask you about your specific intentions for future employment, family or other relationships, educational objectives, grades, long-range plans, and career prospects **in your home country**.
- **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.
- **Know the Program and How it Fits Your Career Plans:** If you are not able to articulate the reasons you will study in a particular program in the United States, you may not succeed in convincing the consular officer that you are indeed planning to study, rather than to immigrate. You should also be able to explain how studying in the United States relates to your future professional career **when you return home**.
- **Be Concise:** Because of the volume of applications received, all consular officers are under considerable time pressure to conduct a quick and efficient interview. They must make a decision, for the most part, on the impressions they form during the first minute or two 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.
- **Supplemental Documentation:** It should be clear at a glance 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, if you're lucky.
- **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. They are also more likely to be asked about job opportunities at home after their study in the United States.
- **Employment:** Your main purpose of coming to the United States should be to study, not for the chance to work before or after graduation. While many students do work off-campus during their studies, such employment is incidental to their main purpose of completing their US education. You must be able to clearly articulate your plan to return home at the end of your program. If your spouse is also applying for an accompanying F-2 visa, be aware that F-2 dependents cannot, under any circumstances, be employed in the United States. If asked, be prepared to address what your spouse intends to do with his or her time while in the United States. Volunteer work and attending school part-time are permitted activities.
- **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.

Entering the U.S.

Careful planning and preparation ensures a smooth entry into the U.S. Here are some points to remember:

1. Plan your arrival:

As an international student in F-1 status or an exchange visitor in J-1 status, you may not enter the U.S. more than 30 days before the program start date listed on your Form I-20/Form DS-2019. Before leaving your home country, make sure that your passport and nonimmigrant visa are valid for entry into the U.S. Your passport should be valid for at least six months into the future at all times.

2. Carry the following documents:

(Do not pack these items in your suitcase!)

- Your passport with F-1 or J-1 visa
- Form I-20/Form DS-2019 from Wellesley College
- SEVIS Fee Receipt (Form I-797)
- Proof of financial support
- If you are a student - Evidence of student status (letter of acceptance, recent tuition receipts, verification of enrollment letter, transcripts)
- If you are a scholar - Evidence that you have been invited to the college
- Name and contact information for your International Student Advisor, including a 24-hour emergency contact number at the school (*Wellesley College Public Safety 781-283-5555*).

Name consistency on all U.S. immigration documents will allow for a smooth entrance into the U.S. and easy access to any benefits you may be eligible from U.S. government agencies.

3. When meeting with the border officer:

State your reason for entering the country and provide information about your final destination. **It is important that you tell the Officer that you will be a student or exchange visitor at Wellesley College.** Be prepared to include the name and address of the school program where you will enroll.

Once your inspection is successfully completed, the Officer will:

- Stamp your passport with your port of entry, your entry date, and your visa status

4. Following admission into the U.S.:

You must report to your school within 30 days of the date that appears on your Form I-20/DS-2019 to register for courses or to validate your intended program participation. Failure to do so may result in the termination of your SEVIS record.

SECONDARY INSPECTION

If the Officer at the port of entry cannot initially verify your information or if you do not have all of the required documentation, you may be directed to an interview area known as “secondary inspection.” Secondary inspection allows inspectors to conduct additional research in order to verify information. In the event that the Officer needs to verify information with your school or program, we strongly advise that you have the name and telephone number of the International Student Advisor at Wellesley College (Tana D. Ruegamer, 781-283-2082). Failure to provide proper documentation and to comply with entry/exit procedures is cause to refuse you admission into the United States.

TEMPORARY ENTRANCE/FORM I-515A

Under certain circumstances, if you are mostly, but not fully in compliance, you may be issued a **Form I-515A**, “Notice to Student or Exchange Visitor.” This form authorizes your temporary admission into the U.S. and requires you to take immediate action to submit proper documentation. **If you receive a Form I-515A upon entry to the U.S., please report to Slater International Center at Wellesley College as soon as possible after you enter the U.S. to speak with the International Student & Scholar Advisor about the procedure for getting your documents corrected.**

In addition to the information that is provided to you by Slater International Center in regards to obtaining your student non-immigrant visa, below is a list of some useful websites that may provide more information.

- F-1 Student Visas: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study/student-visa.html>
- J-1 Exchange Visitor Visas: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study/exchange.html>
- EducationUSA : <http://www.educationusa.info/>
- Visa Denials and Why They Happen: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/visa-denials.html>
- F-1 Student Information: <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/>

If you have any questions, please contact the Slater International Center by emailing slatecenter@wellesley.edu or calling (781) 283-2082.