Pre-Arrival Information for International Students

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Review the Documents

Before applying for the visa stamp, please review the information that appears on your Form I-20 or your Form DS-2019. If any information on your form is incorrect, contact the Office of International Services at Washington DC (OIS) immediately using the contact information provided in the cover letter accompanying this packet.

**Note:** The spelling of your name on all U.S. visa and immigration documents must be exactly the same as the spelling of your name in your passport. The same is true for dependents (spouse or children accompanying you to the U.S.). If your name and/or date of birth on Form I-20 or Form DS-2019 are not exactly the same as the information in the passport, please request a corrected document. The incorrect document must be returned to ISSS.

In order to avoid possible problems applying for a visa or entering the U.S., your passport should be valid for at least 6 months beyond the date you plan to enter the country.

*If you are a J-1 student* (you have received form DS-2019) and all information on your document is correct, **sign your name** in the place indicated for your signature. If you have dependents (husband or wife, or unmarried children under the age of 21) who will accompany you to the United States, a separate Form DS-2019 must be issued for each of them to use when entering the U.S. Check each form to make sure all of the information is correct and sign at the indicated places.

*If you are an F-1 student* (you have received form I-20) and all information is correct, **complete and sign your name** on item 11 on page 1. If you have dependents (husband or wife, children under the age of 21) who will accompany you to the United States they must each have a separate I-20 document. Please review all the information and sign your name (not the name of the dependent) in item 11 on page 1.

**General Instructions to apply for Student Visa**

- Search the U.S. Embassy/Consulate website where you wish to apply for the student visa. [http://usembassy.gov](http://usembassy.gov) and check the visa application procedures.
- International students whose country of citizenship is Canada, Bermuda, Bahamas, or contiguous islands do not need to apply for the visa from the US Embassy and need not to complete the visa application process but each student must pay SEVIS fee and obtain the receipt. (see SEVIS fee payment section)
- Picture, make sure you have your picture scan and save it as a JPG file, please check the picture requirement. [http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/visa_1750.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/visa_1750.html)
- Complete visa application on-line DS-160, you will have to upload your picture while completing the DS-160. At the end, please print the confirmation page with has a barcode number.
Schedule an appointment with the US Embassy. You will need to know your barcode number from the confirmation page of DS-160 when scheduling an appointment. International students whose country of citizenship is Canada, Bermuda, Bahamas, or contiguous islands do not need to apply for the visa from the US Embassy.

Pay SEVIS fee. All international students are required to pay SEVIS fee including students whose country of citizenship is Canada, Bermuda, Bahamas or contiguous islands.

Follow an instruction on the U.S. Embassy/Consulate website for the required visa application process including paying visa application fee.

Prepare the required support documents.

Report to the U.S. Embassy/Consulate for the visa interview.

**Required documents/Evidences for student visa**

In general, the following documents are required to apply for a student visa. However, each U.S. Embassy /Consulate may have different procedures for the visa application processing. Please check on the website of the U.S. Embassy/Consulate for the visa instructions to ensure the proper required procedures [http://www.usembassy.gov/](http://www.usembassy.gov/)  In general, you will need;

1. Visa application Forms: DS-160. Please complete the forms online and print out the confirmation sheet at the end.
2. Receipt of the SEVIS fee payment. *(see explanation below)*
3. Receipt of the visa application. *(see explanation below-method of payment varies from one country to another)*
4. Either a duly endorsed Form I-20 (F-1 visa) or Form DS-2019 (J-1 visa).
5. Photograph (s) showing full face without head coverage, against a light background.
6. Passport valid for at least 6 months beyond the intended period of stay.
7. Original documents proving the financial sufficient funds to meet the expenses. This has to be the total of all amounts stated on item 5 on Form DS-2019 or on item 7 on Form I-20.
8. Documents that demonstrate that you intend to depart the U.S. after completion of study. *(see explanation below)*

**Paying the SEVIS Fee**

As of September 1, 2004, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) rule came into effect. This rule requires F-1 and J-1 visa applicants to pay a one-time fee to cover the administration and maintenance costs of the Student and Exchange Information System (SEVIS).

**SEVIS FEE**

- F-1 student visa………………………………………….US$ 200.00
- J-1 student visa…………………………………………. US$ 180.00
Payment Options

There are three basic payment options:

**Paying By Credit Card (online only)**
1. Go to the web site [www.fmjfee.com](http://www.fmjfee.com)
2. Complete the form online and supply the necessary Visa, MasterCard or American Express information.
   - Be sure to write your name exactly as it appears on your I-20 form.
   - SAIS codes are:
     - **For I-20s** - the school code is listed in # 2 of your I-20 (starts with the letters "WAS");
     - **For DS-2019s** - the program number is in # 2 on the DS-2019 (starts with letter "P")
   - The SEVIS number is found in the top right-hand box of the I-20 or DS-2019 above the barcode. This is a 10 digit number beginning with the letter “N”.
3. Print a copy of the online receipt. Do not exit the receipt page until you have successfully printed the receipt. You will not be able to return to the receipt page.
4. Be sure to **make a copy of your receipt**, and keep it with your other important immigration documents.

**Paying By U.S. Check/Money Order/Foreign Draft (by mail only)**
2. Click the link “Paper Form I-901 (PDF),” and print this form.
3. Complete Form I-901.
   - Be sure to write your name exactly as it appears on your I-20 form.
   - For item #14 the SAIS codes are:
     - **For I-20s** - the school code is listed in # 2 of your I-20 (starts with the letters "WAS");
     - **For DS-2019s** - the program number is in # 2 on the DS-2019 (starts with letter "P")
   - The SEVIS number for question #15 is found in the top right-hand box of the I-20 or DS-2019 above the barcode. This is a 10 digit number beginning with the letter “N.”
4. Prepare a U.S. check, international money order, or foreign draft (drawn on US banks only*) for the proper amount in US dollar, made payable to “The Department of Homeland Security.” Please be sure to print your name and SEVIS ID number on the lower left-hand corner of the check, money order, or bank draft.
5. Mail the completed I-901 and payment to the address listed in the instructions for Form I-901.
6. Form I-797 (receipt notice) should be mailed to you within 3 days of processing the fee. Be sure to make copies of your receipt, and keep it with your other important immigration documents.

*Many foreign banks are able to issue checks or money orders drawn on a U.S. bank. You may therefore obtain a check from: a) a bank chartered or operated in the United States; b) a foreign subsidiary of a U.S. bank, or c) a foreign bank that has an arrangement with a U.S. bank to issue a check, money order, or foreign draft that is drawn on a U.S. bank.

**Note:** The SEVIS fee should be processed by immigration at least 3 business days prior to the consular interview. Fees will not be payable at the consulate.

**Western Union Quick Pay**
The Department of Homeland Security has recently added this payment option. For instructions, please follow these links:
Instruction Website [http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/wu_instr.htm](http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/wu_instr.htm)

- **F-1 students:**
  [http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/wu_fm_inter.htm](http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/wu_fm_inter.htm)
J-1 Exchange Visitors (students and all other categories):
http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/wu_j_inter.htm

Help with Fee Payment Issues
If you are having a problem with the SEVIS fee payment process please visit the following website: http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/faq.htm

Non-Immigrant Visa Application Fee

Visa application procedures including method of visa application fee payment vary considerably from one country to another. It is highly recommended to check on the US Embassy/Consulate website for the accurate requirements.

In general applicants for U.S. non-immigrant visas for travel to the U.S. must pay a non-refundable visa-processing fee, equivalent to $160 U.S.

Applying for the Visa Stamp at the U.S. Embassy/Consulate

Citizens of all countries except Canada, the Bermuda, Bahamas or the adjacent islands are required to have the appropriate visa stamps in their passports if they are to enter the U.S. in student status.

Citizens of Canada, the Bermuda, Bahamas or any adjacent islands do not need US visa stamp, may obtain the appropriate visa status at the US Port of Entry when they enter the US by showing passport, the visa certificate (I-20 or DS-2019), receipt of SEVIS fee payment, and proof of financial support documents.

The US Department of State highly recommends that international students apply for a visa stamp at the US Embassy/Consulate in his/her home country. However, it is possible to apply for a visa stamp at the US Embassy/Consulate located in the country which is not the student’s home country. The students must check on the US Embassy/Consulate website in the country where they wish to apply for a visa to enquire this possibility.

It is recommended that you allow yourself ample time to obtain the appropriate visa stamp from a US Embassy/Consulate.

Your visa interview will most likely be very short. During this time, you must make a good impression. Be positive and respond to the questions with clear, concise answers.
Applying for visa stamp at the US Embassy/Consulate

As stated earlier, visa application procedures vary considerably from one country to another. Please check the application procedures at the particular consulate. For a list of U.S. Embassy/Consulate around the world, please go to the following website:

http://www.usembassy.gov/

Proving Nonimmigrant Intent

Anyone seeking to enter the U.S. in F-1 or J-1 status must establish his or her “nonimmigrant intent.” F-1 and J-1 visas are predicated on the assumption that you will be returning to your home country after you have completed your course of study. In other words, you must establish to the satisfaction of the U.S. consular officer that your ties to your home country are stronger than your ties to the U.S.

You may not be asked to provide any particular documentation to establish that you intend to return home. It may be sufficient for you to say, if asked, that you plan to return to your country to work, to continue your studies, or to do whatever you plan to do when you return home. However, many people applying for F or J visas are asked to establish their ties to their home country and their intention to return there.

Below are some questions to help you decide if you should make a special effort to prove your “nonimmigrant intent.” The more questions to which you respond with the answer “yes,” the more important it will likely be for you to make a special effort to prove your intent to return home after your activities in the U.S.

- Is it difficult to obtain either tourist visas or F-1 or J-1 visas in your home country?
- Are a significant percentage of F or J visa applications denied by the U.S. consulate in your country?
- Are one or more members of your immediate family (mother, father, brother, sister, spouse, or child) living in the U.S.?
- Are your spouse and children accompanying you to the U.S.?
- Are one or more of your immediate relatives legal permanent residents of the United States?
- Is this your first trip to the United States?
- If no, have you recently returned from the U.S. after completing a degree or another teaching or research assignment?
- Have you ever been denied a visa to come to the U.S.?

If, based upon your answers to these questions, you believe you should make a special effort to prove that you intend to return home; the following factors may be taken into consideration:
Your Visa and Immigration History
If you have visited other countries and returned to your country after those visits, you have demonstrated a pattern of behavior that may lead the U.S. Consular Officer to believe that you will return home after your time in the U.S. The more trips you have made, the better your situation.

Documents to submit
Current and/or previous passports containing entry and exit stamps from your country to other countries, other official documents indicating departure and return.

Family Ties
If all members of your immediate family live in your country, the U.S. Consular officer may understand that you have strong family ties to that country. If you are your parents’ oldest child or only child, the Consular officer may believe that you are more likely to return home because of that fact. If one or both of your parents are not in good health, this is another reason you might be expected to return home.

Documents to Submit
Copies of official document proving family relationships and residence of each family member, letters from physicians explaining important medical conditions of one or both parents.

Employment Ties
If you will be employed full-time upon your return, this indicates strong employment ties to your country. The “higher” your job in terms of prestige, importance, and salary, the stronger are your employment ties.

Documents to Submit
A letter from your current employer stating that you will resume your work with them after your time in the U.S., a letter from a prospective employer stating that a position will be offered to you upon your return. Note: The best letter is one that guarantees a job upon your return and states how important your U.S. activities will be for the type of work the employer wants you to do upon your return.

Financial Ties
If you own property or have financial investments in your country, documenting them may help prove you have strong financial ties. To prove this, you may not use any assets that will be needed to pay for your F-1 or J-1 activities. You will need to prove the availability of that financial support separately in order to meet the minimum requirements for the visa.
Documents to Submit
Official papers proving property ownership, copies of investment statements or certificates, a letter or financial statement from your bank or accountant.

What to do if your application is delayed

All individuals who apply at a U.S. Consulate or Embassy abroad for a U.S. entry or re-entry visa are screened before the visa is issued, regardless of nationality. After the events of September 11, 2001, the U.S. Department of State is especially strict and requires consulates to comply with pre-visa clearances on all cases, with no exceptions.

The US consular post conducts an initial review of the application and interviews the applicant about his/her planned activity in the U.S. It is at this initial stage that clear and concise information about what you will be doing in the US is crucial. In most cases, the visa is issued within a matter of days or weeks. However, in some cases it is decided that further checks are needed.

Issues that may cause problems or delays in the visa application process:

- The applicant has not spelled his/her name consistently on all documents (passport, visa application, supporting documentation). This can cause delays and confusion. The name given on the visa application and supporting documentation should be exactly the same as the name listed in the passport.
- The applicant has not read and followed the tips and guidance on the website of the http://www.usembassy.gov/; this can cause delays or denial.
- The consular post cannot understand the kind of work the person is doing and officers cannot assess the risk/benefit of granting the person a visa. A security clearance will likely be requested if the field is unclear.
- The applicant is from a country considered to pose a risk or is working in a field that is considered "sensitive" in some way.
- There are other individuals with the same or similar names. The consulate must rule out any incidents and clear up any "hits" the Consular Lookout (CLASS) system reveals on the name(s) in question.
- The consular officer may tell the individual that a security advisory opinion (SAO) is needed and that he/she will be notified when it has been completed. In most cases, security clearances are completed within 30 days; however, there is no set time frame. The U.S. Department of State will neither discuss nor reveal the reason for a security advisory opinion on a particular case.

Security Advisory Opinion (SAO): The consular post asks the Department of State in Washington, D.C. to initiate the process of requesting clearances from various government agencies and databases including the FBI, CIA, Drug Enforcement Agency, Department of Commerce, Office of Foreign Asset Control, Interpol, the national
criminal and law enforcement databases, the DOS Bureau of Non-proliferation, and others.

If the delay appears to be so great that you will not be able to make your planned arrival date as shown on the front of your Form I-20 or Form DS-2019, please contact the Office of International Student and Scholar Services immediately.

ISSS will act appropriately to assist you. A new immigration document may need to be issued to reflect the new anticipated start date of your SAIS program in Washington DC.

**What to do if your visa is denied**

Do not panic. If your visa application is denied, ask the Consular Officer to give you a written explanation of the reason. Also, ask the officer for a list of documents you might bring back in order to address the reason for denial.

If your visa is denied because you have not sufficiently proven your intent to return home, there is little that SAIS can do to help you. If your visa is denied for any other reason, please contact ISSS immediately. We will try to provide you with suggestions that may strengthen your next application.

**Housing Information in DC area**

SAIS in Washington DC does not have on campus housing. You must plan in advance to make an arrangement for housing prior to arrival to DC. In general, you may be able to secure your housing if you start to search early from late May. Office of Student Life has a housing resource available on line. Please visit its website at [http://www.sais-jhu.edu/prospective-students/housing-resources.htm](http://www.sais-jhu.edu/prospective-students/housing-resources.htm)

**Entering the U.S. with the approved visa stamp**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place any documents that you may need to present to a U.S. immigration inspector in a folder or envelope that you carry with you at all times during your travels.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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With the F-1 or the J-1 visa affixed to your passport, you are ready to travel to the U.S. In the past when you fly into the U.S., airline personnel will give you a form called *Arrival Record/Departure Record* (Form I-94). However after May 2013, this process stops. Instead your entry information will be available electronically. The Immigration Officer will stamp and write the visa status on your passport. You can print your I-94 by visiting [www.cbp.gov/i94](http://www.cbp.gov/i94) in case you need to have the I-94 information to verify your visa status for employment purpose or else.
When you arrive in the U.S., you must present the following documents to the Immigration Inspector:

1. Form I-20 or Form DS-2019
2. Passport with valid F-1 or J-1 entry visa

You should have the following documents ready to present if the Inspector asks for them:

1. Original financial documents
2. Admission letter from SAIS, if available.
3. Documents that demonstrate your intent to return home

The Inspector may ask you one or more questions. If you are asked about your funding, answer the question and offer to show the Inspector your financial documents. If you are asked about your “intentions,” answer the question and offer to show any documents that demonstrate your intent to return home.

If your documents are in order and your answers are acceptable, the Inspector will “admit” you to the U.S. by placing a stamp in your passport. When you leave the inspection area, make certain that you have the following documents in your possession:

1. Passport
2. Form I-20/DS 2019
3. All financial documents you may have presented

The Two-Year Home Country Residency Requirement

Some students who enter the U.S. on the J-1 visa are subject to a two-year home country residency requirement that could have a significant impact on your future plans. The J-1 visa is an “Exchange Visitor Visa” designed to facilitate international educational and cultural exchange. An integral part of this “exchange” is the principle that J-1 visa holders return to their home country and share the knowledge and experience gained while in the U.S. The two-year home residency requirement was created to ensure that certain individuals return to their home countries.

The two-year home residency requirement applies to you if any of the following apply:

1. You have received direct financial support from your government or from the U.S. government for the purpose of your participation in the J-1 program.
2. You come from a country that has a “skills list” and your skill or specialty is on that list. The skills lists exist to prevent “brain drain” of needed knowledge and skills from a given country.

If you are subject to the two-year home residency requirement, you will be prevented from the following:
1. Obtaining an H-1B (temporary work) visa
2. Changing your status from J-1 to any other nonimmigrant status (other than G or A) inside the U.S.
3. Obtaining immigrant visa (legal permanent residency) in the U.S.

**Other useful pre-arrival information**

**SAIS Guide to Washington DC handbook**

In order to help you get acclimate to DC neighborhoods, Office of Student Life provides SAIS Guide to Washington DC handbook for every student. Information including, Travel in Washington DC, Housing in Washington DC, Living in Washington DC, and Student Life at SAIS is available on line. Please visit its website and obtain the information at [http://www.sais-jhu.edu/students/studentlife/housing/GuidetoSAISDC0809.pdf](http://www.sais-jhu.edu/students/studentlife/housing/GuidetoSAISDC0809.pdf)

**Documents to Bring**

It is recommended that you bring with you any important documents regarding your academic background, medical history, financial documents, driving records, etc. Carrying those documents with you can save you both time and money. If you have children who will be entering school in the United States, evidence of vaccinations against certain diseases are required. It is recommended that copies of any existing vaccination records be brought with you to the United States.

Also you may wish to take care of any medical, dental and optical examinations and treatments prior to leaving your home country, as these services can be very expensive in the United States.

If your passport is less than one year old, it is recommended that you also bring with you another form of identification that is at least one year old. Some U.S. government institutions such as the Social Security Administration require applicants to present a form of identification that is at east one year old before they will issue any documents. [A social security number, which is issued by the Social Security Administration, is required of any one who will receive money from a U.S. source.]

In the United States, a birth certificate is considered a very important document in establishing identity. It is a good idea to bring a copy of your birth certificate, if you have one.
Banking and Personal Finances

If you wish to transfer money to the United States, you may need to purchase a U.S. dollar draft from a bank in your country, which has a corresponding relationship with a bank in New York. Request the dollar draft be payable to you. Deposit this draft into your own bank account, which you can establish once you arrive in the U.S.

Additionally, you should bring enough money with you to cover your immediate living expenses in the form of some cash, credit cards and traveler’s checks.

Credit Cards

Credit Cards are widely used in the U.S. and are necessary for many things, including making reservations for hotels, rental cars, getting discounted airfares over the Internet, etc. Unfortunately, it might be difficult for you as a newly arrived foreign national to obtain a credit card in the U.S. Because of this difficulty, it is recommended that you obtain a credit card (Master Card or VISA) from your home country and bring it with you to assist in those situations where a credit card might be needed.

Student Medical Insurance

Medical insurance is required of all students and any accompanying dependents. If you choose not to enroll in the SAIS insurance, you will be required to present evidence of insurance coverage for yourself and any accompanying dependents.

For J-1 students, federal immigration law requires that insurance coverage must meet at least the following minimal levels:

- Medical benefits of at least $50,000 per person per accident/illness
- Deductible cannot exceed $500 per accident or illness
- Repatriation of remains in the amount of $7,500
- Medical evacuation coverage of $10,000

U.S. law requires all J-1 visa holders to maintain these coverage levels for themselves and their dependents for the duration of their stay in J-1 status. Failure to comply with these requirements is considered a failure to maintain your immigration status and may render you ineligible for future immigration benefits associated with J-1 status.
Travelers Insurance
It is recommended that you obtain traveler’s insurance to cover any unexpected medical emergencies that may arise between the time you leave your home country and the time any medical insurance plans in the U.S. go into effect.

Paying Your Tuition and Managing Your Student Account
You are responsible for paying your tuition in a timely manner. Payment for tuition, and any applicable student fees are due at the beginning of each semester. You are responsible for managing your financial obligations with respect to SAIS. It is important to remain in good contact with any individuals who may be financially supporting you.

If you ever have difficulties paying your bill, please contact your international student director as soon as possible to discuss your situation.

Financial Assistance
Unless you have already been informed of any scholarships, fellowships or assistantships, you should not assume you will receive any financial aid from the University. You must rely on the financial resources you documented as part of your admission application.

Employment Opportunities
Employment opportunities are limited for newly arriving students. Student employment is limited to 20 hours per week for on-campus employment. Off-campus employment is generally not available for newly arrived students and therefore should not be relied upon as a means of financial support.