

# VISA

and

## Immigration Information

FOR

Admitted

International Students



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## Understanding Your Visa & Immigration Status

Your US visa is an entry in your passport which allows you to enter the United States. The classification of a US visa (F-1, B-1, etc.) specifies your purpose for coming here. Once admitted to the United States, you will then have a corresponding “immigration status” which relates to your purpose for being here and regulates what you may and may not do.

Most international students who enter the United States to attend The University of Iowa are issued form I-20 to apply for an F-1 (student) visa and immigration status.

Certain government-sponsored students, those in exchange programs, and some other students who have special affiliations with the University are given form DS-2019 to obtain a J-1 (exchange visitor) visa and immigration status. A very few students who are participating in specialized certificate programs are provided form I-20MN for M-1 status.

### Your Immigration Document: I-20 or DS-2019

Both of these forms consist of multiple pages, all of which must remain together to be valid. Be sure to check the accuracy of the following information listed on your form:

- name (it must match the name listed in your passport)
- date of birth
- country of birth and citizenship
- legal permanent residence (DS-2019 only)
- academic level and program of study (the program of study listed on your form might not exactly match the name used by The University of Iowa for that program—the terminology provided by the US government takes precedence)
- source of financial support

If any information is incorrect, contact the Office of Admissions for a new form. Validate your form (sign it) **before** you apply for your visa.

### Dependents

If you have indicated that you have a spouse or children under age 21 who will accompany you to the United States, you will get an I-20 or a DS-2019 form for each dependent so they can obtain F-2 or J-2 visa. These are the only dependents who qualify for F-2 or J-2 status. If you have an unmarried domestic partner, adult children, parents, or other family members who will come to the United States with you, they must receive B-2 (visitor) visas for that purpose.

If you failed to include information on your dependents when you applied to The University (and therefore did not receive dependent visa documents), provide the Office of Admissions with each dependent’s name, birthdate, place of birth, citizenship, gender, and your relationship to them, along with documentation that you have the funds to support them.

## Restrictions on Study

F-2 dependents may enroll at a university-level institution only as part-time students and only in courses that are “avocational or recreational,” (i.e., courses taken for enrichment purposes only—those which will not be used at any time toward a degree). F-2 dependents who wish to study full time need to apply for a change of status to F-1 student. Note that F-2 children may (and often are required to) attend elementary or secondary school without a change of status.

There are no restrictions on study for J-2 dependents. Most other dependent immigration classifications (such as H-4) allow full-time study.

## Notes about Other Immigration Classifications

Most other immigration classifications that allow individuals to remain in the United States for extended periods of time also permit college enrollment, as long as this is not the individual’s main purpose for being here.

### B-1/B-2 Visitor Status & Those Using the Visa Waiver Program

If you intend to study at The University of Iowa, **do not** under any circumstances enter the United States using this status. US law forbids individuals who enter as tourists or business visitors from enrolling in a course of study until a change in immigration status (making it possible for them to study here) has been approved.

Students who plan to enter the United States as a visitor and then begin study must inform the US Consulate and request that their visitor visa be marked with the notation “Prospective Student.” Without this endorsement, an application to change from visitor status to student status will most likely be denied.

Be aware that if the B-2 visa or the I-94 card you obtain upon being admitted here lacks this notation, you will likely have to leave the United States and apply for an F-1 (student) visa or a J-1 (exchange visitor) visa. Only then may you request reentry to the United States.

### Other Concerns

Even if full-time study were allowed, individuals who are not in F-1 and J-1 status do not receive any benefits that are granted to F-1 and J-1 students, such as on-campus work authorization. To be permitted to work at an on-campus job (including graduate assistantships), students without F-1 or J-1 status must have appropriate unexpired immigration work authorization.

Due to the full-time nature of the employment which is their purpose for entering the United States, primary nonimmigrants (H-1, L-1, etc.) are normally able to study no more than part time.

## Changing Your Immigration Status while in the United States

Changing to F-1 status or J-1 status from some other nonimmigrant status (F-2, B-1, B-2, etc.) requires a formal application to US Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS). Such changes are not automatically approved, and until the change is approved you may not receive any of the benefits of F-1 status or J-1 status (e.g., the ability to work on campus).

The Office of International Students & Scholars (OISS) can assist you with the change of status application if you plan to enroll at The University of Iowa. Obtain a change of status information packet from the OISS website, complete the forms and gather the necessary documentation, and then make an appointment to speak with an advisor in that office.

### Applying for an F-1 Student or J-1 Exchange Visitor Visa

Although the basic process for obtaining a visa remains the same regardless of the consulate you are using, local policies and procedures do vary. Be sure to contact your US consulate (or access the consulate's website) for specific details.

To obtain an F-1 or J-1 visa, you must:

- have a printed receipt indicating that you have paid the \$100 SEVIS fee (Form I-901). This fee must be paid and fully processed before you arrive at the consulate for your visa interview.  
Refer to: [www.fmjfee.com](http://www.fmjfee.com) for more information and the options available for paying the fee. We recommend that you pay using the online option so you will be able to print a payment confirmation immediately after the payment is made. Keep this receipt with your other immigration documents—do not discard it following your visa interview.
- complete various US visa application forms as specified by the US consulate and pay the appropriate visa fees.
- provide the original I-20 or DS-2019 form you received from The University of Iowa.
- have a passport valid for at least 6 months beyond the date you plan to enter the United States
- present proof of your financial ability to pay all costs related to your study at the University (including tuition, living expenses, book, insurance, etc.).

You may also be required to show such documentation as your admission letter, academic transcripts, and standardized test scores depending upon the consulate's local policies. If you have dependents who are applying for F-2 or J-2 visas, you will need documentation that verifies your marriage or parental relationship.

Applicants for F, J, or M visas must show "nonimmigrant intent." You must establish that you plan to return to your home country after finishing study

in the United States. If you cannot demonstrate nonimmigrant intent (even if you meet all the other requirements), your visa will be denied.

You may want to prepare a brief statement that outlines why you plan to study in the United States and why you chose your program of study. This indicates to the consul that you have made a thoughtful, mature decision.

Understand that the I-20 or DS-2019 form you use to obtain your visa determines where you must initially enroll in school. By law, if you use a form from The University of Iowa to obtain your visa, then you must enter the United States using that document and complete at least one semester at The University of Iowa before you become eligible to change schools. Do not use our I-20 or DS-2019 form for a visa and then immediately enroll elsewhere. Students who do so are required to leave the United States.

### The 2-Year Residence Requirement

Certain J-1 Exchange Visitors are subject to a rule requiring them to reside in their country of last residence for at least two years before returning to the United States as either a worker or a permanent resident. This requirement is placed upon exchange visitors who receive funding from their home government, the US government, or an international agency.

It is also applied to students who are coming to the United States to study in fields which are on their home country's "skills list." If you are subject to this requirement, your visa will include a remark stating you are subject to Sec. 212(e) of the US immigration code.

### Special Note for Students from Canada and Bermuda.

You will need a written receipt indicating that you have paid the \$100 SEVIS fee (Form I-901) at least three business days prior to arriving at a US port-of-entry. This fee must be paid and fully processed before you apply for entry.

Refer to: [www.fmjfee.com](http://www.fmjfee.com) for more information and the options available for paying the fee. We recommend that you pay using the online option for faster processing.

You do not need a visa to enter the United States, but you must present an I-20 or a DS-2019 form, an I-109 receipt, proof of finances to cover your program of study, and a valid passport to enter the United States as a student or exchange visitor. You will receive an I-94 card that will be endorsed as noted below. If you fail to show these documents and are admitted as a visitor, you **cannot** legally enroll in classes.

### Entering the United States

Have your I-20 or DS-2019 form with you when you appear at a US port-of-entry. In most cases, the I-20 or DS-2019 will be sealed in an envelope when you obtain your visa, with instructions only to be opened by the immigration officer at the border. Make sure you have proof of your finances and your I-901 fee payment receipt with you, as sometimes these are asked for again upon entry.

Upon admission to the United States, you will be issued a small, white card called an “I-94,” which will be stapled to your passport. This card indicates your immigration status and the length of time you may remain in the United States. It should be marked by the inspector at the port-of-entry with “F-1” or “J-1” status and a length of stay as “D/S.”

Each F-2 or J-2 dependent will have an I-94 card marked “F-2” or “J-2” and “D/S” as well. Keep these I-94 cards in a **safe** place. Replacement cards cost \$320 each.

When completing your portion of the I-94 card, use the exact same name that is on your I-20 or DS-2019 and the OISS address if you do not know the address where you will be living in the Iowa City area.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Are visa interviews required? What are they like?

Interviews are mandatory, and normally require an advance appointment with the consulate. Be aware that current US law does not allow the issuance of a student visa more than 120 days before the beginning date on your I-20 or DS-2019.

The US consul who interviews you is required to determine that your documents are genuine, that you intend to enroll as a full-time student, that you have enough money to support yourself and any dependents accompanying you, and that you intend to return home after you finish your studies here.

There is no entitlement to a visa. You will not be granted a visa if, in the judgment of the consular officer, you have not met all of the necessary criteria. To establish this, the consul may ask you a variety of questions:

- Where are you going to study?
- What are you going to study?
- Is this the first time you are applying for a student visa?
- Have you ever traveled to the United States before? If yes, what did you do while there?
- Does your family (or other financial sponsor) really have enough money to support you?
- Are any members of your family currently living in the United States? If yes, what are they doing there?
- If you are married, is your spouse going to travel with you? What about any children?
- When do you plan to finish your degree?
- What will be your first destination in the United States?

The consul who interviews you could be overworked or tired, and probably has many people to interview besides you. The consul may or may not be friendly, and may or may not ask you several questions. Do not be concerned about any of these factors, as they should have no bearing on your application.

It is important to convey a positive personal impression during your interview. A “positive impression” can be conveyed by:

- Being clean and neat in your appearance.
- Looking at the consul when talking with him or her.
- Answering questions directly and honestly. Do not make untrue statements, however, answer only the questions asked.
- Maintaining your composure and a smile.

### I’m nervous about applying for a visa. What are the two main reasons that visas are denied?

- Inadequate financial support—If the consul believes you do not have enough money to be a full-time student, a visa will not be issued. It is important to have proof of your ability to pay for your tuition, fees, living expenses, books, and health insurance with you. Often a bank statement or a letter from your department (if you have a graduate assistantship) will be sufficient, but the consul may require additional financial certification.
- Failure to prove nonimmigrant intent—Be prepared to convince the consul (if you are asked) that you intend to return to your home country after you finish your studies here. Remember that consuls are required by law to deny a student visa to anyone they believe intends to remain in the United States permanently (i.e., intends to get a “green card”).

Recent changes in visa guidelines recognize that student visa applicants will normally not have the property, employment, and family ties to their home country that are typical of other visa applicants, and that lack of these should not disqualify you for a student visa. While you may still be asked about such ties and should answer such questions if asked, realize that not having such ties should not be used against your application.

### What if my visa is denied?

Ask the consul to give you a written explanation for the denial. If the reason for the denial is Sec. 214(b) of the US immigration code, having to do with “ties to the home country or immigrant intent,” there is nothing the OISS can do to help you. You are the person in the best position to provide information about your ties to your home country and your future intentions.

Likewise, the OISS cannot help if the denial is based on doubt about the adequacy of your financial support. You will need to supply different or additional documentation about your financial support to satisfy the concerns.

If the denial seems based on a misunderstanding or a problem with your documents, we might be able to help you provide the information or clarification needed to help you get the visa. Send an e-mail to: [oiss@uiowa.edu](mailto:oiss@uiowa.edu) with a detailed account of the interview (i.e., questions you were asked and what you said in reply).



