

Immigration Requirements for Entry to the United States (F-1 Students)



If you have questions about this form please contact Ann Corbett	corbetta@bu.edu	617-353-4492
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Purpose

The International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO) at Boston University has prepared this handout for students who have a *Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Student Status* (SEVIS Form I-20) for a program of study at Boston University. It describes the steps you need to take in order to pay the SEVIS fee, apply for an F-1 student visa, if necessary, and to enter the U.S. as a student in F-1 immigration status.

Step 1: Read your enclosed SEVIS Form I-20

Your SEVIS Form I-20 indicates that we have created a record for you in the Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). Your assigned SEVIS ID number is in the upper right corner of page 1 of your SEVIS Form I-20. If any information on your SEVIS Form I-20 is incorrect, please contact the ISSO immediately. If all of the information is correct, complete item 11 on page 1. If you have informed us of your dependents (husband or wife, children under the age of 21) who will travel with you to the United States, each of them will receive their own dependent SEVIS Form I-20 to assist them in applying for their F-2 visa.

Note: The spelling of your name and your date of birth must be exactly the same as reflected in your passport. The same is true for dependents. If your name and/or date of birth on SEVIS Form I-20 are not exactly the same as the information that appears in your passport, please request that we issue you a corrected Form I-20. Please send a photocopy of the passport so that we can make sure that all information is consistent.

Step 2: Make sure your passport is valid

In order to avoid possible problems applying for a visa or entering the U.S., it is recommended that your passport must be valid for at least 6 months beyond the date you intend to remain in the U.S.

Step 3: Pay the SEVIS Fee

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is now requiring proof of payment of the SEVIS fee before issuing a visa or approving any benefits of status. This fee must be paid by new F-1 students with "initial attendance" I-20s issued on or after September 1, 2004 who are beginning an academic program in the US in F-1 status. While immigration regulations indicate that the fee should be paid a minimum of three business days prior to a visa application at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate, we suggest that students pay the fee as soon as they receive the Form I-20 to allow sufficient time for DHS to update the fee payment in the student's electronic SEVIS record. Please refer to the Student and Exchange Visitor website for more information: <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/>.

F-2 dependents are not required to pay the SEVIS fee. The SEVIS fee is **NOT** required from students currently in the U.S. in valid F-1 immigration status. Similarly, the fee is not required from students transferring to a new school or changing to another degree program or level within five months from the completion of the previous F-1 program. However, students who have studied in the U.S. in F-1 status in the past, but have departed the U.S. for longer than a five month period or changed to another immigration status must pay a new SEVIS fee before commencing the new program regardless of whether the student will need a new F-1 visa. Citizens of Canada and Bermuda are exempt from the requirement to possess a visa to enter the U.S., however, they are still required to pay the SEVIS fee. Proof of SEVIS fee payment for these individuals will be verified at the U.S. port of entry before they are admitted to the United States in F-1 status.

The fee can be paid to DHS by any one of the following three methods:

1. over the internet with an electronic application form and a credit card
2. by mailing a paper application with a check or bank draft drawn in U.S. dollars to a processing center in the U.S.
3. by making a payment at a participating Western Union in your area

There is currently no mechanism to pay the fee at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate or at a U.S. port of entry. The fee can be paid by the student or by a third party inside or outside the U.S. However, the student must have proof of payment when applying for the visa and entering the U.S. We strongly recommend that students pay the fee online with a credit card whenever possible to secure an immediate receipt.

All students who pay the SEVIS fee will receive a formal receipt that should be used as proof of fee payment. The receipt Form I-797 will be sent to the mailing address provided on the Form I-901. This receipt notice will take time to process and to arrive in the mail. The Form I-901 instructions state that receipts will be sent via airmail at no additional cost. The payee can request expedited courier delivery by indicating this request on the Form I-901 and by paying an extra \$30 at the time of initial payment. If the courier delivery option is selected, the student must include a contact telephone number and actual street address since the courier will not deliver to a P.O. Box. Although fee payments may be entered into the immigration (SEVIS) record, it is strongly recommended that students retain the fee receipt with other important immigration documents to use as needed.

If you have been accepted to more than one school in the U.S., it is strongly recommended that you decide which school you will attend before paying the fee as the student must include the unique SEVIS ID number and school code found on the SEVIS Form I-20 issued by the appropriate institution. Although DHS has confirmed that a fee payment made on one SEVIS ID number can be applied to another SEVIS ID number issued to the same individual, it could complicate a visa application and should be avoided whenever possible.

To Pay the SEVIS Fee Online

1. Log onto the following website: <https://www.fmiffee.com> and follow instructions.
2. Complete the Form I-901 online. Make certain to type your name exactly as it appears on your SEVIS Form I-20 and complete each section accurately. Make certain to include the SEVIS ID number (located on the upper right hand corner of your Boston University SEVIS document) and the Boston University school code (BOS 214F 00056000). Indicate that you will use a credit card to make the payment. You must supply the necessary Visa, MasterCard or American Express information to submit the online payment.
3. Submit the electronic Form I-901 and electronic payment.
4. Print a copy of the online receipt to use as temporary proof of payment until you receive the Form I-797 receipt.
5. A formal Form I-797 receipt notice should be issued within three days from date of payment. It will be sent to the address you indicated on Form I-901. Be sure to make copies of your receipt, and keep the original with your other important immigration documents.

To Pay the SEVIS Fee By Mail

1. Log onto the following website: <https://www.fmiffee.com> and follow instructions.
2. Complete the Form I-901 online. Make certain to type your name exactly as it appears on your SEVIS Form I-20 and complete each section accurately. Make certain to include the SEVIS ID number (located on the upper right hand corner of your Boston University SEVIS document) and the Boston University school code (BOS 214F 00056000). Indicate that you will pay by check or money order. Print payment coupon.
3. Obtain a check, international money order or bank draft made payable to "I-901 Student/Exchange Visitor Processing Fee."
4. Mail payment coupon and check or money order to one of the addresses listed on the payment coupon depending on the mail service you use to send the materials to the processing center.
5. A formal Form I-797 receipt notice should be issued within three days from date of payment. It will be sent to the address you indicated on Form I-901. Be sure to make copies of your receipt, and keep the original with your other important immigration documents.

To Pay the SEVIS Fee at a participating Western Union Agent

1. Log onto the following site: http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/wu_instr.htm and follow the instructions for SEVIS I-901 Fee Payment by Western Union Quick Pay.
2. Print out and bring a copy of the instructions from this website along with a copy of the sample form from the same site http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/wu_instr.htm to a local participating Western Union Agent location.
3. Travel to the nearest Western Union Agent location. Find a Western Union Agent at: <http://www.payment-solutions.com/agent.asp> or call the telephone number of the Western Union Commercial Services Network Agent in your country.
4. Complete a "Blue Form" at the participating local Western Union Agent location. This form may show words such as "Payment Services" or "Quick Pay" printed in the applicable local language, however, all Quick Pay forms will be blue. Fill out all appropriate information. Make certain to include your name exactly as it appears on your SEVIS Form I-20 and complete each section accurately. Make certain to include the SEVIS ID number (located on the upper right hand corner of your Boston University SEVIS document) your date of birth and the Boston University school code (BOS 214F 00056000) exactly as it appears on the sample form.
5. Make the payment at the Western Union Agent.
6. Retain the Western Union receipt to use as temporary proof of payment until you receive the Form I-797 receipt.
7. A formal Form I-797 receipt notice should be issued within three days from date of payment. It will be sent to the address you indicated on Form I-901. Be sure to make copies of your receipt, and keep the original with your other important immigration documents.

If you do not have access to the internet, please contact the ISSO immediately and we will forward a paper I-901 to you. Please note that the SEVIS fee is non-refundable. However, if your F-1 visa application is denied by the U.S. Embassy or Consulate, you will not be required to pay a new SEVIS fee if you reapply for a new F-1 visa within 12 months of the denial. Please contact the staff of the ISSO at issogac@bu.edu if you have any questions regarding the payment of the SEVIS fee.

Step 4: Contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate to obtain a valid F-1 visa

Citizens of all countries, except citizens of Canada and Bermuda, are required to have F-1 visas to enter the U.S. to study. You must contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate to initiate your visa application. Most Consular Posts will process an application 90 days prior to the start date of the academic program listed on your SEVIS Form I-20. Please refer to the following U.S. Department of State (USDOS) website for more information: <http://www.state.gov/misc/59452.htm>.

To apply for a visa, you will need to submit the following documents to the U.S. Embassy or Consulate:

1. *Application for Nonimmigrant Visa* (Form DS-156), which can be obtained from any U.S. Consulate or downloaded from the following USDOS website: http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/forms/forms_1342.html
2. *Supplemental Nonimmigrant Visa Application* (Form DS-157), for all male applicants between the ages of 16 and 45, which can be obtained from any U.S. Consulate or downloaded from the following USDOS website: http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/forms/forms_1342.html
3. *Contact Information and Work History For Nonimmigrant visa applicant* (Form DS-158), which can be obtained from any U.S. Consulate or downloaded from the following USDOS website: http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/forms/forms_1342.html
4. Application fee (check with the Consulate for the fee amount and how it must be paid or visit the following USDOS website at http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi_fees.html)
5. One photograph (1½ inches square [37 x 37mm], showing full face, without head covering, against a light background as explained on the following USDOS website: http://travel.state.gov/passport/guide/guide_2081.html)
6. Passport
7. *Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Student Status* (SEVIS Form I-20) from Boston University
8. Form I-797 Receipt or online proof of SEVIS Fee payment.
9. Admission letter from Boston University
10. Original financial documents proving the availability of sufficient funds as reflected on your SEVIS Form I-20
11. Documents which demonstrate that you intend to return home after your studies (see explanation below)

All visa applicants are now required to schedule an appointment for an interview. Please keep in mind that it may take a few weeks to schedule an appointment, so you should initiate your visa application as early as possible. Before your interview, practice answering questions in English about your visa application, your plans in the U.S., and your plans after you return home. If your spouse and children will remain in your country, be prepared to explain how they will support themselves without you sending them money from the U.S. Be positive and respond to questions with clear, concise answers during your interview.

You may not need to do anything special to prove that you intend to return home. It may be sufficient for you to explain, 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, you may be required to prove that you have such strong ties to your country that you will return there. If you believe it is likely that you will need to prove this, or would like more information, please read the handout entitled *Proving "Nonimmigrant Intent" for U.S. Visa Application Purposes* and refer to the Visa Process Guide on the following USDOS website: <http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/tempvisitors.html>

There are special procedures for citizens of North Korea, Cuba, Syria, Sudan, Iran, Iraq, and Libya to apply for a U.S. visa. Please refer to the following USDOS website for more information: http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/info/info_1300.html

The consular official may decide to process your application through a special "security clearance" before granting the visa. Security clearances may take as long as a few months, so it is very important that you apply for your F-1 visa as early as possible. Most consular officials request a security clearance for a visa application based on the national origin of the applicant or on a determined level of sensitivity in a prospective field of study. Once the application has been sent for security clearance, the applicant must simply wait until the consular post approves the visa.

If a visa application is denied, it is difficult to get the Consulate to change its decision. For this reason, it is important that you arrive at your appointment with the best and most complete supporting information. If your visa is denied, we suggest that you ask for the reason for the denial and request the reason in writing if possible. Please visit the following USDOS website at: http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi_denials.html and contact us and we will try to provide you with suggestions that may strengthen your next application.

Step 5: Travel to the U.S.

Once you have obtained your F-1 visa, you are ready to travel to the U.S. Immigration regulations allow you to enter the U.S. no earlier than 30 days prior to the start of your program indicated in section 5 of your SEVIS Form I-20. You must carry with you items 6-11 listed in Step 4. Place these documents in a folder or envelope that you will have with you at all times during your travel. During your trip to, or upon your arrival in, the U.S., you will be given a form called *Arrival Record/Departure Record* (Form I-94). Using a pen, print the information requested on this form, making certain to spell your name exactly as it is spelled in your passport.

Step 6: Apply for “admission” to the U.S.

When you arrive in the U.S., you will apply for “admission” and an Immigration Inspector will examine your documents.

You will need to present the following documents:

1. Form I-94
2. Passport with valid F-1 visa
3. SEVIS Form I-20
4. Proof of SEVIS fee payment

You will need to have the following documents ready to present, should the Inspector ask for them:

1. Admission letter from Boston University
2. Original financial documents
3. Documents which demonstrate your intent to return home

The Immigration Inspector may ask you one or more questions. If you are asked about the funds that will pay for your studies, 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 the Inspector the documents that demonstrate your intent to return home.

Please be advised that citizens of certain countries may be subject to Special Registration procedures when entering the U.S. This process requires fingerprinting and photographing and could take extra time, please plan connecting flights accordingly. You should calmly provide all information requested by the immigration officer.

If you have the required documents and there are no more questions, the Inspector will “admit” you to the U.S. by processing your passport, your Form I-94, and your SEVIS Form I-20. When you leave the inspection area, make certain you have the following documents in your possession: (1) passport, (2) *Departure Record* (part of Form I-94), (3) the SEVIS Form I-20 and (4) all financial documents.

Caution

It is important that you do not enter the U.S. on a B-1 or B-2 visitor visa, or in WT or WB status through the “visa waiver” program. It is unlawful for individuals in these classifications to study full-time in the U.S., and it is difficult and sometimes impossible to change your immigration status to F-1 once you are in the country.

Additional Information

The staff of the ISSO would be pleased to provide you with information, advice, and assistance on any visa or immigration matter that relates to your activities at Boston University, please visit our website at: <http://www.bu.edu/isso/>