Applying for a Student Visa

Before entering the U.S., you must apply for an entry visa stamp in your passport. In order to apply for a U.S. student visa, you must first have received an I-20 or DS-2019 from a U.S. university. Make sure that you apply for the proper visa. F and J entry visas can only be obtained outside of the United States at a U.S. embassy or consulate. To apply for an entry visa, follow these steps:

1. **Review DS-2019 or I-20 for Accuracy.** Please review your form DS-2019 or I-20 to ensure its accuracy and sign the bottom of your I-20 or DS-2019 in blue ink. To avoid problems or delays in obtaining your visa and entering the US, ensure that all of your immigration documents reflect the same name, exactly as it appears in your passport. Do not use “nicknames” or shortened names on any of your documents, including your passport, I-20 or DS-2019, entry visa stamp, I-94 card, or any other official government documents that you acquire after arriving in the U.S. Please contact krusee@uwplatt.edu immediately if you see any errors in your name, date of birth, or citizenship (your name should exactly match that on your passport).

   **Note:** The major field of study listed on your admission letter and the major field of study listed on your I-20 or DS-2019 may not appear exactly the same. This is due to a coding discrepancy between SEVIS and the University and is not a cause for concern.

2. **Determine the type of visa you need.** If you received an I-20 document from the University, you will apply for an F-1 visa. If you received a DS-2019 document from the University or another U.S. agency, such as IIE, you will apply for a J-1 student visa.

   **Caution:** Do NOT enter the U.S. in visitor status (B1/B2 or WB/WT-Visa Waiver) or in F-2 (dependent of F-1) status. Individuals with these visa statuses are not eligible to register for classes. If you have questions about any other visa types, please contact ISSS at krusee@uwplatt.edu.

3. **Pay the SEVIS fee.** International students must pay the SEVIS fee before applying for an entry visa or entering the United States. This fee is assessed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and is not administered by the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. For more information about how to pay the fee and to pay the fee online, visit https://www.fmjfee.com/i901fee/index.jsp.

4. **Locate the nearest US embassy or consulate in your home country.** Embassy and consulate information is available on-line at www.travel.state.gov or at http://www.usembassy.gov/.

5. **Schedule an appointment for your visa interview.** Your local embassy or consulate will have specific instructions for scheduling an appointment. Schedule your appointment as soon as possible after receiving your I-20 or DS-2019, since you may not be able to make an appointment with the embassy for several weeks or longer. Approximate visa wait times at consular locations can be found at http://travel.state.gov/jvisa/temp/wait/wait_4638.html.

6. **Prepare documents for your visa interview.** All visa applicants must provide the following documents to the US embassy or consulate at the time of the application:

   - Valid passport
   - I-20 or DS-2019 document
   - Documented proof of financial support for at least one year
7. **Proof of SEVIS Fee payment (Receipt)**
7. **Visa application forms (available from the U.S. embassy/consulate)**
7. **Any other documents requested by your embassy/consulate**

**Practice for your visa interview.** During the interview at the embassy, you will need to prove that you will only study temporarily in the U.S. and will return home after your studies are complete. Answer all questions truthfully but only provide information related to the question asked. Be prepared to answer confidently and clearly in English:

- Your area of study
- Your reason for wanting to study in the U.S.
- Proof of sufficient funds and how your funds are able to cover all of your expenses for a minimum of one year
- Good reasons for returning home after you complete your studies. You should provide documentary evidence of the strong ties you have to your country, such as having all of your family in your country, having a job offer awaiting you when you return, or proof of property ownership. Other facts to emphasize are specific future educational, employment or career goals that will be carried out in your home country. Do not emphasize relatives who live or study in the U.S.

**Tracking Your Visa Status.** After applying for your visa, you can track your visa application status at [https://ceac.state.gov/CEAC/](https://ceac.state.gov/CEAC/)

**Visa Denials.** If your visa is denied, ask the consular officials to provide you with a written explanation of the denial, then contact ISSS at krusee@uwplatt.edu for assistance.

**Arriving in the U.S.** You can enter the United States NO earlier than 30 days before the start date listed on your I-20 or DS-2019. If you are booking a return flight, be aware that J-1 students are allowed to stay in the U.S. up to 30 days after their program end date, and F-1 students are allowed to stay in the U.S. up to 60 days after their program end date. Your program end date is the date on which you complete all the requirements for your degree.

**Dependents.** Your spouse and children under 21 are eligible to accompany you to the U.S. with a dependent visa (F-2 or J-2). You must request from ISSS a dependent I-20 or DS-2019 document for each of your eligible dependents. Note that F-2 visa holders may not work in the U.S. or be a student at UW-Platteville or other post-secondary institution in the U.S. J-2 dependents are eligible to apply for employment authorization from the USCIS as long as the employment is not for the purpose of supporting the J-1. Currently, the regulations do not have a prohibition for J-2s engaging in post-secondary study on a full-time basis, as long as their primary purpose in the U.S. is to accompany the J-1 status holder.

**Deciding between multiple schools.** You MUST attend the school that is indicated on the I-20 or DS-2019 that you use for your visa application. If you received more than one I-20 or DS-2019 from different schools, you should NOT apply for a visa until you are certain which school you would like to attend. Once you have made a decision and applied for your visa, return any unused I-20s or DS-2019s to the school or agency that issued them to you.