



Cornell University International Students and Scholars Office

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Applying for a U.S. Visa Stamp

International students and scholars must have a valid stamp in their passport to be eligible for entry or re-entry to the United States (there are some exceptions for travel to Canada, Mexico or an adjacent island for less than 30 days AND citizens of Canada do not need a visa stamp in their passports in order to enter the U.S.). However you do not need to have a valid visa stamp to remain within the U.S. Visa stamps are obtained at US Consulates abroad. Some of the challenges of getting a U.S. visa stamp are detailed here.

Paying the SEVIS fee:

Please read our handout or our web page on the SEVIS fee to find out if you have to pay the SEVIS fee and how to pay it. <http://www.isso.cornell.edu/immigration/visas/sevisfee.php>

Non-immigrant Intent:

All applicants for an F or J visa are required to demonstrate their intent to return to their home country following the completion of their academic programs and practical training. There are several ways you can be prepared to support your intent to return home in your visa interview:

- have a few sentences in mind that express how you intend to use your training at home
- bring copies of deeds to any property (land, house, apartment) that you or your family own at home
- bring bank statements of any accounts that you or your family maintain at home
- if you have an employer who intends to employ you when you return home, bring a letter from that employer

Security Clearances:

Field of Study: If a visa applicant's area of study is on the U.S. federal government's "technology alert list" (<http://www.isso.cornell.edu/immigration/visas/state147566.pdf>), the U.S. consulate may complete a security clearance prior to granting the visa. This process may delay your visa application by anywhere from one to three months. There is no way to know for certain ahead of time whether you will be subject to this type of clearance. If you find that your field of study is on the list, it would be advisable to **get a letter from a professor on your committee which describes briefly and in layman's terms the specific area of your research.** This letter will not deter a security clearance, but it may expedite the clearance.

Country of Citizenship, Nationality or Birth: A security clearance may also be required by the U.S. consulate if a visa applicant is born in or is a citizen or national of certain countries. The list of countries is not published, but seems to include the following:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Morocco, North Korea, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, and the territories of Gaza and West Bank .

Interviews Required for Visa Applications:

In May of 2003, the regulations governing visa applications were revised to require that U.S. consulates interview nearly all internationals applying for non-immigrant visa stamps. There will be only rare situations in which an applicant will be able to get a visa without the interview. The requirement for the interview will mean that you may experience longer delays in getting an appointment at the U.S. consulate than you have in the past.

SEVIS and the Consolidated Consular Database (CCD):

If you have an I-20 or a DS-2019 from Cornell University, then we have entered you in to the SEVIS database system. However, even though we have entered you in to that database, the consulates still may not be able to see your record. This is because the consulates actually look at your SEVIS record through their own database, referred to as the Consolidated Consular Database or the CCD. Records from SEVIS are supposed to be exported and uploaded to the CCD every 24 hours. Unfortunately, the system is not working perfectly, and the records of the CCD are not always complete. If a consular officer informs you that your records are not available in SEVIS, please contact the ISSO immediately. We will then contact the National SEVIS helpdesk and attempt to resolve the problem. Unfortunately, we are not able to make any advance arrangements to ensure that your record will be seen by the consulate.

Documents Required for Visa Application:

We are here to help you in whatever ways we are able. If you do plan to travel out of the U.S. and are going to need to apply for a visa, come in to the ISSO before you go to discuss the documents you need to have with you:

- valid passport
- valid I-20 for F-1, DS-2019 for J-1, or other documents such as H1B approval notice (see H1B travel handout or web page if you are applying for an H1B visa stamp)
- If you are an F-1 student on OPT after graduating, also bring your OPT card and job offer letter
- SEVIS fee for NEW F-1 or J-1 status (read handout or web page for SEVIS fee info)
- recent financial support documents
- proof of enrollment (certificate of enrollment or transcript). You can obtain a certificate of enrollment from the registrar's office or, if you have an SSN, you can download it from the registrar's web site: <http://certification.cornell.edu>
- for F or J status, be sure to include documents in support of your non-immigrant intent as described above
- employment offer letter if you are an academic staff member at Cornell

Contact the U.S. Consulate where you will apply:

Those applying for new visas may wish to contact the U.S. consulate in their home country (<http://usembassy.state.gov>) to determine if any additional documents may be required for visa applications and to confirm the hours of operation and length of time needed to secure the visa. It is important to note that the U.S. consulate may require a security clearance which could result in delays in obtaining your visa. We recommend that you apply for your visa as soon as possible after arriving in your home country so that you may reduce the chances that your return to the U.S. will be delayed.