

Studying in the U.S.

F, M and J Visa Options



Fast, Easy, Economical Visa Processing

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The United States offers several ways to enter and study as a full-time student.

Below is a list of various ways that you may qualify for a student visa.



I. F-1 Visa

The [F-1](#) nonimmigrant visa is for international students who are qualified to attend a full course of study at colleges, universities, conservatories, academic high schools (subject to strict regulations) and institutions with language-training programs in the U.S.

1. Requirements

a. Admission to full course of study

You have been accepted for a full course of study by an educational institution approved by the USCIS. The institution must send you a [Form I-20A-B](#), Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant F-1 Student Status for Academic and Language Students.

b. Foreign residence

You must have a permanent residence in your home country which you do not intend to abandon.

c. Nonimmigrant intention

You intend to depart the U.S. upon completion of the course of study. You may establish this by presenting evidence of economic, social and/or family ties in your home country sufficient to induce you to leave the U.S. upon completion of studies.

d. Financial resources

You have sufficient funds to cover the first year of study, and access to sufficient funds to cover subsequent years.



TIP

The Form I-20A-B issued by the school should be created within the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) system.

2. Benefits

a. Employment

You may obtain, in certain limited circumstances, permission to work on-campus during your stay in the U.S. You may also obtain off-campus employment if you can prove that unforeseen circumstances beyond your control have occurred causing you unexpected financial hardship.

b. Transfer schools

You may transfer from one school to another if you have been a bona fide student and have been pursuing a full course of study. You should also intend to pursue a full course and have the financial ability to attend the transferred school. Transfer includes changing programs (e.g., Bachelor's to Master's) within the same school.

c. Dependants

Your dependant spouse and unmarried children under the age of 21 may accompany or join you in the U.S. for the duration of your stay on [F-2](#) visa.

d. Multiple Entry

You may travel in and out of the U.S. as often as you want while your visa is valid.



TIPS

If you are employed without authorization, or not pursuing a full course of study, or transfer schools without permission or fail to complete a full course of study in time and are ineligible for a program extension, you are considered out of status and subject to deportation.

F-2 dependants may not be employed.

3. Duration and Extension of Stay

a. Period of stay

You will be admitted and given duration of status for the period needed to complete 'one educational program' including progression to higher levels, and you may remain in the U.S. for up to 60 days following the completion of the course.

b. Extensions

You are not required to apply for an Extension of Stay as long as you are maintaining status and making normal progress toward completing the educational objective.



TIPS

If you are admitted in 'duration of status' you are not considered an 'overstay' unless an Immigration Officer or Judge has made a determination that a status violation has occurred.

'One educational program' includes:

- o Junior High to Senior High
- o Associate then Bachelor's Degree
- o Ph.D. program where Master's is included

4. Change of Status

You may [change status](#) to any other nonimmigrant visa category. If you are changing status to H-1B and the H-1B cap has been reached, the Commissioner may extend duration of status beyond the 60 day period until the next fiscal year.



TIPS

You may accept a signing bonus from the prospective employer while waiting to Change Status from F-1 to [H-1B](#).

A Consular Officer will issue a B-2 visa and mark it 'prospective student' if a student seeks entry more than 60 days before attending school or choosing school. The student must then change status to F-1. However, the USCIS will no longer allow a foreign national in B-1/B-2 status to begin school until he has changed status to F-1 or obtained an F-1 visa abroad and re-entered. A Change of Status to F-1 will be denied if the foreign national on B-1/B-2 enrolled in a course of study prior to obtaining the approval.



II. M-1 Visa

The [M-1](#) nonimmigrant visa is for international students who wish to pursue a course of study that is not principally academic in nature at an established vocational or other recognized nonacademic institution such as a post secondary vocational or business school.

1. Requirements

a. Admission to full course of study

You have been accepted for a full course of study by a vocational or nonacademic institution approved by the USCIS. The institution must send you a [Form I-20M-N](#), Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant M-1 Student Status for Vocational Students.

b. Foreign residence

You must have a permanent residence in your home country which you do not intend to abandon.

c. Nonimmigrant intention

You intend to depart the U.S. upon completion of the course of study. You may establish this by presenting evidence of economic, social and/or family ties in your home country sufficient to induce you to leave the U.S. upon completion of studies.

d. Financial resources

You have sufficient funds to cover the first year of study, and access to sufficient funds to cover subsequent years.



Full course of study includes:

- o Study in community or junior college leading to a specific educational and/or vocational objective
- o Study at a post-secondary vocational or business school
- o Study in vocational or other nonacademic curriculum where flight schools, cooking schools and others would be included
- o Study in vocational or other nonacademic high school curriculum



The Form I-20M-N issued by the school should be created within the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System

2. Benefits

a. Dependants

Your dependant spouse and unmarried children under the age of 21 may accompany or join you in the U.S. for the duration of your stay on [M-2](#) visa.

b. Multiple Entry

You may travel in and out of the U.S. as often as you want while your visa is valid.



You may not accept employment, except as part of practical training, which may be obtained only after the completion of your study and not exceed six months.

You may transfer schools only in the first six months, unless the reason for not being able to remain at the present school is 'due to circumstances beyond your control'.

M-2 dependants may not be employed.

3. Duration and Extension of Stay

a. Period of stay

You may enter the U.S. up to 30 days before the designated registration date on the [Form I-20M-N](#). You can stay in the U.S. for the period of time it will take to complete the course of study as indicated on the Form I-20M-N plus 30 days, or for one year, whichever is less.

b. Extensions

You are required to extend your M-1 status after a year to be able to continue staying in the U.S.



TIP

If you are admitted in 'duration of status' you are not considered an 'overstay' unless an Immigration Officer or Judge has made a determination that a status violation has occurred.

4. Change of Status

You may not change to [H](#) status if the basis of H is the training or education received as M-1 student. You also may not change to F-1 status. However, none of these regulations apply to M-2 dependants.



TIP

A Consular Officer will issue a B-2 visa and mark it 'prospective student' if a student seeks entry more than 30 days before attending school or choosing school. The student must then change status to M-1. However, the USCIS will no longer allow a foreign national in B-1/B-2 status to begin school until he has changed status to M-1 or obtained an M-1 visa abroad and re-entered. A Change of Status to M-1 will be denied if the foreign national on B-1/B-2 enrolled in a course of study prior to obtaining the approval.

III. J-1 Visa

The [J-1](#) exchange visitor program is designed to promote the interchange of persons, knowledge, and skills in the fields of education, arts, and sciences.

1. Requirements

a. Sponsored by Approved Organization

You are sponsored by an organization approved by the Department of State (DOS), and granted authority to issue a Form DS-2019 to prospective J-1 applicants.

b. Foreign residence

You must have a permanent residence in your home country which you do not intend to abandon.

c. Nonimmigrant intention

You intend to depart the U.S. upon completion of the course of study. You may establish this by presenting evidence of economic, social and/or family ties in your home country sufficient to induce you to leave the U.S. upon completion of studies.

d. Financial resources

You have sufficient funds to cover all expenses, or funds must be provided by the sponsoring organization in the form of a scholarship or other stipend.



TIP

The Form DS-2019 issued by the school should be created within the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) system.

2. Benefits

a. Employment

Employment for J-1 visa holders depends upon the terms of the program. Participants in programs which provide for on-the-job training, teaching, research, or other activities which involve paid employment may accept such employment.

b. Transfer schools

Change of program category will be denied unless transfer 'is clearly consistent and closely related to your original exchange objective'.

c. Dependants

Your dependant spouse and unmarried children under the age of 21 may accompany or join you in the U.S. for the duration of your stay on [J-2](#) visa.

d. Multiple Entry

You may travel in and out of the U.S. as often as you want while your visa is valid.



TIPS

If you are employed without authorization, or not pursuing a full course of study, or transfer schools without permission or fail to complete a full course of study in time and are ineligible for a program extension, you are considered out of status and subject to deportation.

J-2 dependants are eligible for [employment authorization](#), however, the money earned should not be used to support the J-1 visa holder.

3. Duration and Extension of Stay

a. Period of stay

You will be admitted and given duration of status for the period needed to complete the J-1 program and you may remain in the U.S. up to 30 days following the completion of the course.

b. Extensions

You may be granted extensions for periods up to the maximum period of authorized stay for the particular J-1 category. Extensions beyond the maximum period authorized for the category, may be sought if the request is due to exceptional or unusual circumstances and is necessary for you to complete your program.



If you are admitted in 'duration of status' you are not considered an 'overstay' unless an Immigration Officer or Judge has made a determination that a status violation has occurred.

4. Change of Status

You may apply for a [Change of Status](#) to any other nonimmigrant visa category provided you are not subject to the two-year home residency requirement. If you are changing status to [H-1B](#) and the H-1B cap has been reached, the Commissioner may extend duration of status beyond the 30 day period until the next fiscal year.

How VisaPro can Help

Contact VisaPro to process your Student Visa as soon as you gain admission to a U.S. School.

VisaPro immigration attorneys will personally review your circumstances and prepare the Student Visa application for you.

About Us

VisaPro is a rich source of information about [work visas](#), [visitor visas](#), [student visas](#), [family visas](#), [green cards](#) and [U.S. citizenship](#). We offer email and telephone [consultation](#) with attorneys, useful [articles](#), [discussion groups](#), [online chat](#) with attorneys, [USCIS forms](#), [online visa status](#) and more.

What Customers Are Saying

"The immigration laws on foreign student status have become so complicated that even my school's attorney could not give me concrete advice. But VisaPro professional team helped me to clarify my questions patiently and prepare the documents diligently."

Mei-Po Tam

Hong Kong

"We cannot thank you enough for all your time & help. You made the process so easy for us with your friendly and helpful approach. You have been an absolute pleasure to deal with."

Arwen Evans-Batt

United Kingdom

Contact VisaPro

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