Westfield
STATE UNIVERSITY
INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

APPLYING FOR THE F-1 STUDENT VISA

The visa process can be complicated and time-sensitive, and every consulate or embassy has its own rules, which can vary. In addition to carefully reviewing the information here, you should check with the US consulate or embassy in your home country to receive country-specific guidelines for obtaining an F-1 student visa. You should also carefully read the information provided by the U.S. Department of State.

You are encouraged to begin the visa appointment process as soon as you receive your I-20 document, as visa appointments may take several weeks or more. Most embassies do not permit you to schedule a visa application appointment until you have your Westfield State University I-20 in hand. It is highly recommended that you wait until you receive the document before making your visa appointment. **Please note that WSU cannot be responsible for missed appointments because they were made before receipt of your I-20 document.**

Become familiar with the documents and processes required for the visa application process:

The F-1 Visa Process

1. **Contact the nearest US Embassy or Consulate to obtain a valid F-1 visa.**

   After receiving your Westfield State University Form, I-20, schedule an appointment at the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate as soon as possible. Processing times for visa issuance vary and may require additional time due to security checks. Your local US embassy or consulate will also have information on visa processing and required materials specific to your country.

   Citizens of all countries, except citizens of Canada, are required to be in possession of F-1 visas to enter the U.S. to study. You must initiate the visa application process with the nearest US Embassy or Consulate. It is strongly recommended that you review the website (http://www.usembassy.gov) of that consular post to learn about their specific visa application procedures, required documents, and deadlines. Most consular posts will process an application 365 days (one year) 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 (DOS) website for more information: https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study.html.

2. In addition to the standard visa application fee, you must pay a **SEVIS fee *prior* to applying for your visa.** You will not be authorized to pay the SEVIS fee until you have your Form I-20 in hand. Please note, both sites are accessible using your mobile devices, and fees can be paid online in most cases. For more information about the SEVIS Fee visit Study in the States.

   Note: Visa wait times can vary depending on the time of year and location. You can use the appointment wait time tool to see how long you will have to wait for an appointment at a specific U.S. embassy or consulate.

   When making an appointment, if there are no convenient slots for an interview for you, you can choose one that is available and then do either of the following:

   - Visit the website of the U.S. Consulate in your country and check if they offer emergency visa appointments. To get an emergency visa for the US, you have to schedule a regular visa appointment online first and select "Request Expedite" after. If your request is denied, you should attend the visa interview at the original time when you submitted your application. You cannot submit a second request for an emergency visa.
   - Keep checking if any earlier dates for an interview appear (check it a few times every day as it may appear at any moment). If you found one, select "Cancel or Reschedule Appointment." This will allow you to reschedule your US visa appointment by postponing the appointment to a future date. Keep in mind that it is not possible to have two different set dates for your visa appointment. The moment you reschedule, the previously chosen date will be automatically canceled.

Nevertheless, none of these are guaranteed to work. Try to do your best to schedule an appointment in advance!

3. **Complete the DS-160.**
4. **Schedule a Visa Interview Appointment.**
5. **Attend Your Interview.**
6. **Receive and Review your Entry Visa.**
7. **Entering the U.S. Early.**

Required Documents for the F-1 Visa

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

1. **Passport valid for travel to the United States – Your passport must be valid for at least six months beyond your period of stay in the United States (unless exempt by country-specific agreements). Each individual who needs a visa must submit a separate application, including any family members listed in your passport.**

2. **Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-160 confirmation page.**
   https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/forms/ds-160-online-nonimmigrantvisa-application.html

3. **Application fee payment receipt, if you are required to pay before your interview.**

4. **Photo – You will upload your photo while completing the online Form DS-160. If the photo upload fails, you must bring one printed photo in the format explained in the Photograph Requirements.**

5. **Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Student Status- For Academic and Language Students, Form I-20. Your school will send you a Form I-20 once they have entered your information in the SEVIS database. You and your school official must sign the Form I-20. All students must be registered in the Student and**
   Exchange Visitor System (SEVIS). Your spouse and/or minor children, if they intend live in the United States with you, will each receive an individual Form I-20.

F-1 Visa Interview

1. Normally, family members are not allowed into the visa interview room.
2. Be prepared to answer questions about why you chose Westfield State University, what program you have chosen and why, and what your longer-term plans are after you graduate (see below information on demonstrating ties to your home country and non-immigrant intent)
3. Be prepared to present transcripts and diplomas from previous institutions attended and TOEFL scores, etc.
4. Be prepared to present an original set of bank and sponsorship documentation to the embassy. These documents MUST have a current date on them.
5. While you must only certify a specific amount of funding to receive a Westfield State University I-20, it may be helpful for you to provide bank statements in greater amounts when possible, depending on your country and your personal financial situation.
6. Many documents can be used to demonstrate "ties to the home country," such as home country salary statements, property deeds, employment, and investments.
7. **NOTE:** If you do not have a passport, you must obtain one from your government. Your passport must always be valid at least six months into the future. It is your responsibility to be aware of the expiration date and to renew it when appropriate.

   Important Note: **It is your job to prove to the interviewing officer that you DO NOT plan to stay permanently in the United States by demonstrating "ties to the home country" (below) and non-immigrant intent.** You may be denied a visa if the Consular Officer believes you intend to stay in the U.S. after your studies. To demonstrate that you will return to your home country, you should show that:

a. You have **sufficient funds** to cover expenses for the duration of your stay in the U.S. WSU requires proof of one year of funding, but you are advised to provide proof of as much funding as possible, including additional proof that the funds will be available throughout your studies (through salary statements and employer letters, etc.).

b. **You are planning to return home when you finish your program, by showing "ties to the home country."** Documentation might be the property and deeds of your family; proof that all or most of your family is not already in the U.S.; letters indicating that you will have a job or excellent job prospects in your country after getting your degree; etc.).

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.
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There are special procedures for citizens of Cuba, Syria, Sudan, and Iran to apply for a US visa. Please refer to the following USDOS website for more information: https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-informationresources/frequently-asked-questions/visa-applicants-from-state-sponsors.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 crucial 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: https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/visa-denials.html

Travel to the US

Once you have obtained your F-1 visa, you are ready to travel to the U.S. Immigration regulations allow you to enter the US no earlier than 30 days prior to the start of your program, as indicated in section 5 of your SEVIS Form I-20..

Apply for "admission" to the US.

When you arrive in the US, you will apply for "admission" and an Immigration officer will examine your documents. Visit the US Customs and Border Protection website for details regarding preparing to enter the US and what to bring. You will need to present the following documents:

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

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

- Acceptance letter from Westfield State University
- Original financial documents
- Documents which demonstrate your intent to return home.

The Immigration officer 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 officer your financial documents. If you are asked about your "intentions," answer the question and offer to show the officer the documents that demonstrate your intent to return home.

If you have the required documents and there are no more questions, the officer will "admit" you to the US 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.
For more information on U.S. Embassies and Consulates and on the visa application process, you may visit the U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Consular Affairs Web page

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 IPO would be pleased to provide you with information, advice, and assistance on any visa or immigration matter that relates to your activities at Westfield State University.

Important note to citizens of Canada: Canadian students do not require application to the U.S. consulate for an entry visa. However, at the port of entry, Canadian Students must present their I-20, proof of financial support and passport to the immigration officer. The immigration officer may ask for the documents and answers to the questions that are required at the visa appointment so you should review all guidelines in this letter and on listed websites.

You are allowed to enter the US on an F-1 visa 30 days or less prior to the Program Start Date on your I-20 document. If you plan to enter the US more than 30 days prior to your start date, you must enter the US as a visitor and then leave and return as an F-1 student once you are within 30 days or less. The Westfield State University International Programs Office will help you with all immigration-related matters during your studies at WSU, but it is your responsibility to maintain your F-1 visa status by following all F-1 visa regulations. Study in the States has further information about getting and maintaining F-1 International Student Status.

Special note for those who will be living in Westfield State University On-Campus Housing: The Move-in date for international students is normally scheduled for the weekend prior to the beginning of semester.

Upon arrival in the U.S.: When you enter the United States, you must show your passport, your I-20 Form, your SEVIS receipt, and your financial documentation. Carry these papers with you and NOT in checked luggage. A Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) Officer will look at your papers, and may ask questions, much like the Consular Officer did. The CBP Officer will stamp your passport to show your date of admission, class of admission (F-1), and the date that you are admitted until (DS). DS means you are admitted for Duration of Stay and can be here for as long as you are attending classes at Westfield State University and abiding by all F-1 rules and regulations.

If you have any issues entering the United States, please advise Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) officials to call this number: 1-413-572-8834. A member of Westfield State University team member will be available to assist CBP in verification of your student status at WSU.

Upon arrival on campus and during your time here: It is critical that you follow the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) regulations and procedures to maintain F-1 student immigration status. Some of the regulations you must follow include:

1. Check in with the International Programs Office in-person at International Student Orientation. You should bring information about your local address and phone numbers, as well as your I-20 and passport to our meeting.

2. Always remain registered for a full-time course load during your time at WSU.

3. Ensure you have a valid travel signature from your international student advisor on your I-20 whenever you travel outside of the US.

Notify your international student advisor within 10 days of any change of address or change in your educational program.