



**Dear Student.**

**We look forward to welcoming you to Cal U.**

International students interested in studying inside the US have extra steps to take to legally enroll in a US university. The F-1 Visa student visa application interview is conducted using the English language; the language you will use in your studies in the U.S. Not only will the students need to ensure that they attend the interview with all of the required documentation, they need to be prepared to answer specific, personal questions regarding their plans for study and stay in the US.

**We wish to provide some general information for applying for an F-1 student visa**

**Register with EducationUSA: <https://educationusa.state.gov/>**

EducationUSA is an organization of non-profit advising centers that are supported and/or endorsed by the U.S. Department of State. Their purpose is to provide assistance to students who would like to study in the United States. Students who work with EducationUSA are more informed about the visa process and therefore more likely to be successful in obtaining a student visa.

F-1 Visa application information, including information on process, forms, fees, required documentation and more: <https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/study-exchange/student.html>

From Cal U:

**1) I-20 preparation and mailing**

Shortly after you have been admitted, you will receive instructions via email from Mr. John Watkins (watkins@calu.edu) on how to have your SEVP I-20 and, as applicable, an I-20 for each of your dependents shipped to you. The email will also include your SEVIS ID number so that you can schedule a visa appointment as you await arrival of your documents. The I-20 is a U.S. government authorized document issued by Cal U that enables you to apply for an F-1 student visa and enter the U.S. to attend Cal U. It cannot be used to transfer your I-20 to another school in the U.S. before attending Cal U.

To locate a U.S. Embassy or Consulate assigned to your location and to view appointment wait time, go to:

<http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/general/wait-times.html/>

Note that you can schedule an F-1 student visa application appointment up to 120 days in advance of the program start date listed on your I-20.



## **2) Receive your I-20**

You will be required to present your I-20 to the consular officer when you attend your F-1 visa interview. If your dependent spouse and/or children plan to reside in the USA with you while you study, they will be required to present their individual I-20s as well.

## **3) Complete the Visa Application & pay SEVIS I-901 fee**

Know the process of applying for an F-1 student visa at the particular U.S. embassy or consulate in your home country as the process of applying for an F-1 student visa can vary from one U.S. embassy or consulate to another. You will be required to pay a non-refundable visa application fee assessed by the U.S. embassy or consulate in your home country.

It is highly recommended that you pay the SEVIS I-901 Fee prior to your F-1 student visa application appointment.

Pay the I-901/SEVIS fee prior to your application appointment. Learn more about the SEVIS fee and make payment at <https://www.fmjfee.com/i901fee/>

## **4) Schedule and Prepare for your Interview**

Note that application procedures and required documentation varies by U.S. Embassy, so check on this before you appear in person and be prepared.

You can schedule your F-1 visa interview with the U.S. embassy or consulate. Wait times for interview appointments vary by location, season, and visa category, so you should apply for your visa early. An F-1 student visa for the USA can be issued up to 120 days in advance of your course of study start date. You will only be able to enter the US with an F-1 visa 30 days before your start date.

The following documents are required for your F-1 visa interview:

- A valid passport
- The Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-160
- The application fee payment receipt
- A passport photo
- A Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Student Status (Form 1-20)
- Additional documents may be requested to prove your eligibility for the F-1 student visa, including academic transcripts, diplomas, degrees, or certificates. Test scores such as the TOEFL, SAT, GRE, or GMAT may also be requested, as well as proof of your intent to depart the U.S. after your program is complete and proof of your financial stability.



## 5) Attend your F-1 Visa Interview

Your F-1 visa interview will determine whether you are qualified to receive an F-1 student visa for the USA. Assuming that you have prepared the appropriate documents and meet all of the F-1 visa requirements, your visa will be approved at the discretion of the consular officer.

You may be required to pay a visa issuance fee. Digital fingerprint scans will be taken for records. Your passport will be taken so that you can get your visa and you will be informed when you can get it back, either by pick-up or in the mail.

## 6) Sample questions during the visa interview.

Knowing what questions to expect can be a huge advantage. Below are common sample questions for F-1 Student Visa Interview:

Why did you choose the US as opposed to studying at home or in another country?

Have you traveled to the US before?

What do you know about the US?

What do you expect to do when you return to your home country?

What proof can you provide that you will come back?

Does anybody from your family stay or study abroad?

How many years do you intend to stay in US?

What will you do if your visa is rejected?

Will you come home during summer?

Do you have any family members in the US?

What are your hobbies?

Where does your family reside?

Do you have any brothers and sisters – where do they live?

How are you going to pay for your program and living expenses?

Where did you hear about this school?

What do you plan to do when you graduate from this university?



## **10 Points to Remember When Applying for a Nonimmigrant Visa (adopted from NAFSA: Association of International Education)**

The F-1 student visa is a non-immigrant visa for students accepted to an approved college or university. As such, during the interview, you must demonstrate that your intent is to study at Cal U only.

### **1) TIES TO HOME COUNTRY**

Under US law, all applicants for nonimmigrant visas are viewed as intending immigrants until they can convince the consular officer that they are not. You must therefore be able to show that you have reasons for returning to your home country that are stronger than those for remaining in the United States.

"Ties" to your home country are the things that bind you to your hometown, homeland, or current place of residence (i.e., job, family, financial prospects that you own or will inherit, investments, etc).

If you are a prospective student, the interviewing officer may ask about your specific intentions or promise of future employment, family or other relationships, educational objectives, grades, long-long range plans, and career prospects in your home country. Each person's situation is different, of course, and there is no magic explanation or single document, certificate, or letter, which can guarantee visa issuance.

### **2) ENGLISH**

Anticipate that the interview will be conducted in English and not in your native language. One suggestion is to practice English conversation with a native speaker before the interview. If you are coming to the United States solely to study intensive English, be prepared to explain how English will be useful for you in your home country.

### **3) SPEAK FOR YOURSELF**

Do not bring parents or family members with you to your interview. The consular officer wants to interview you, not your family. A negative impression is created if you are not prepared to speak on your own behalf. If you are a minor applying for a high school program and need your parents there in case there are questions, for example, about funding, they should wait in the waiting room.

### **4) KNOW THE PROGRAM AND HOW IT FITS YOUR CAREER PLANS**

If you are not able to articulate the reasons you will study in a particular program in the United States, you may not succeed in convincing the consular officer that you are indeed planning to study, rather than to immigrate. You should also be able to explain how studying in the United States relates to your future professional career in your home country.



## 5) BE CONCISE

Because of the volume of applications that are received, all consular officers are under considerable time pressure to conduct a quick and efficient interview. They must make a decision, for the most part, on the impressions they form during the first minute or two of the interview. Consequently, what you say first and the initial impression you create are critical to your success. Keep your answers to the officer's questions short.

## 6) SUPPLEMENTAL DOCUMENTATION

It should be clear at a glance to the consular officer what written documents you are presenting and what they signify. Lengthy written explanations cannot be quickly read or evaluated. Remember that you will have 2-3 minutes of interview time, if you're lucky.

## 7) NOT ALL COUNTRIES ARE EQUAL

Applicants from countries suffering economic problems or from countries where many students have remained in the United States as immigrants will have more difficulty getting visas. Statistically, applicants from those countries are more likely to be asked about job opportunities at home after their study in the United States.

## 8) EMPLOYMENT

Your main purpose of coming to the United States should be to study, not for the chance to work before or after graduation. While many students do work off-campus during their studies, such employment is incidental to their main purpose of completing their US education.

You must be able to clearly articulate your plan to return home at the end of your program. If your spouse is also applying for an accompanying F-2 visa, be aware that F-2 dependents cannot, under any circumstances, be employed in the United States. If asked, be prepared to address what your spouse intends to do with his or her time while in the United States. Volunteer work and attending school part-time are permitted activities.

## 9) DEPENDENTS REMAINING AT HOME

If your spouse and children are remaining behind in your country, be prepared to address how they will support themselves in your absence. This can be an especially tricky area if you are the primary source of income for your family. If the consular officer gains the impression that your family members will need you to remit money from the United States in order to support themselves, your student visa application will almost certainly be denied. If your family does decide to join you at a later time, it is helpful to have them apply at the same post where you applied for your visa.



#### 10) MAINTAIN A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Do not engage the consular officer in an argument. If you are denied a student visa, ask the officer for a list of documents he or she would suggest you bring in order to overcome the refusal, and try to get the reason you were denied in writing.

It is important to demonstrate your ability to communicate using the English language to the degree that the embassy or consulate official is assured that you will be able to manage your studies. Embassy or consulate officials understand that the English language may be a second language for you and that you will require a period of adjustment. However, it is also their concern that you be able to manage instruction in English and they do want to place you in a position to fail. If you are not confident that your ability with the English language is sufficient, we highly recommend you take further English language instruction prior to engaging in a degree program.

The most important thing to remember during your F-1 visa interview is to remain calm! Being well prepared is extremely important. Be sure to have all of the required documents and receipts with you so that you can focus on your interview questions. Answer all of the questions asked of you, and remember to be open and honest!

Keep in mind that visa issuance is not guaranteed. Never make final travel plans until you have your visa approved. If your visa is denied, you will be given a reason based on the section of law which applies to your ineligibility. Filing a waiver of ineligibility is possible in some cases.

Please know that we will be glad to help you in any way we can and look forward to welcoming you to Cal U!

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