

Applying for an F-1 Student Visa at a U.S. Embassy/Consulate

This information is intended for those students who will apply for an F-1 student visa at a US Embassy or Consulate. *This information does not apply to Canadian citizens.*

It is advisable to apply for your visa well in advance of the date you will begin your studies, but not more than 120 days before the program start date listed in “Program of Study” section of your I-20. Applying early will give you extra time if there are delays at the embassy, or if you wish to reapply in the event of a denial.

There are two things you should do to increase your chances of a favorable decision on your visa application: **have all the required documentation** and **be well prepared for the interview.**

Step 1: Most of the procedures and requirements for applying for F-1 student visas are standardized for all U.S. Embassies/Consulates abroad. However, some procedures can be specific for the particular country. For detailed information on requirements, procedures, and the location of the U.S. Embassy or Consulate nearest you, please visit www.usembassy.gov. If you cannot find answers to your questions about visas on the Embassy’s website, you may contact the Education USA Advising Center nearest you, or visit www.educationusa.state.gov. Studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students is also a great resource. It is recommended that you apply for your visa at the U.S. Embassy located in your country of citizenship. If you wish to apply in a different country, you should contact the embassy to inquire if they will process visas for “third country nationals.” Please be advised that “third country nationals” have a higher rate of visa denial.

Step 2: When you receive your I-20, you will need to check the following:

- Is your name spelled correctly and according to how it appears in your passport?
- Are your date of birth, country of birth, and country citizenship all listed correctly?
- Is it signed by the Designated School Official (DSO) on page one? (Note: The I-20 will not be signed by the DSO on page two as the signatures on page two are only for *reentry* to the USA.)

Please read the instructions on page three of the I-20 and sign page one. Signing the I-20 means that you understand the regulations of F-1 visa status.

Step 3: Pay the **SEVIS I-901 fee (\$200 USD)**. Information on the SEVIS fee can be found at www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/. Students from most countries can pay the fee online with a credit card at www.fmjfee.com. Once you pay the fee, print your receipt and keep it with your other visa application documents to take with you to your visa interview. If you do not have a credit card, or are from certain countries from which credit card payments are not accepted, you can follow the instructions for the Western Union Quick Pay option at the above mentioned website.

Step 4: Make an appointment for the visa interview by following the specific instructions listed on the U.S. Embassy’s website and gather all of the necessary documentation. Most embassies will have you pay the visa application fee in order to schedule your interview. It is important to follow the visa application procedures precisely to help avoid delays or denials.

Step 5: Prepare for the visa interview. Due to the volume of applications received, all consular officers are under considerable pressure to conduct quick and efficient interviews. Keep your answers to the

officer's questions short and to the point. Written documents you present must be concise, and easy to read and evaluate. Remember that the interview takes only a few minutes and the officer must make a decision, for the most part, on the impression he/she forms during the first minute of the interview. Anticipate that the interview will be conducted in English and not in your native language.

The following are potential areas that you may be questioned about:

1. **Your educational plans.** You should be able to explain precisely what you wish to study and why you chose Colgate University for your education. Be especially prepared to explain your reason for studying in the United States rather than in your country.
2. **Reasons why you intend to return home after studies in the United States.** Emphasize ties to your home country such as employment, family obligations, property or investments that you own or will inherit, and clearly explain how you plan to use your education to help your country or pursue a career when you return home.
3. **Financial ability to pay for your education and living expenses.** You must show that funding is sufficient and available throughout your program. If you have financial aid from Colgate, you should present your award letter. Provide solid and recent evidence of your sponsor's finances. If you will be sponsored by a person *other* than by your parents, you may be asked to explain your special relationship with this person, who may be committing tens of thousands of dollars to your education.
4. **Remain calm and answer all the Consular Officer's questions openly and honestly.** Be prepared to give your information quickly and completely.
5. Applicants from countries suffering economic problems or from countries where many students have remained in the US as immigrants can have more difficulty getting visas. They are more likely to be asked about job opportunities at home after completing their study in the U.S.

Your fingers will be digitally scanned at the embassy. This scan will then be matched with another finger scan when you enter the United States.

All applicants' names must be submitted for a security clearance. Citizens of some countries, or students who will study certain disciplines related to science or technology, are subject to additional screening, called Administrative Processing, which can take several weeks. There is no way to "expedite" administrative processing. Visa issuance procedures and processing times vary greatly at U.S. Embassies around the world.

If Your Visa Application is Denied: If you are refused a visa, the Consular Officer is required to give you the reason for the denial in writing. Often times, this explanation is in the form of a pre-printed sheet of paper, with the reason for the denial circled on the list. You have the right to apply a second time, but if you reapply, you will need to provide fresh and compelling new documentation to overcome the reason for the initial denial.

**The Office of International Student Services wishes you success with your visa application!
We look forward to welcoming you to Colgate University.**