



UNDERSTANDING YOUR F-1 VISA

What is an F-1 visa?

An F-1 visa is a stamp or document placed in your passport at a U.S. Consulate abroad. It was issued when you presented your Form I-

e visa includes the following information:

the school at which you intend to study;

the length of time you are permitted to stay in the U.S.

Notes: A visa is not the same as an I-94 card. An I-94 card is issued when you enter the U.S. and is NOT an F-1 visa.

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What if my F-1 visa expires while I am in the U.S.?

An F-1 visa does not expire while you are in the U.S. If your F-1 visa expires while you are in the U.S., you will need to make sure you have a valid F-1 visa. The F-1 visa itself (unlike your F-1 status) is only important at the port of entry to the U.S.

The length of time you may remain in the U.S. is indicated on the Form I-94 card. For most students, the I-94 card has the notation "D/S." D/S means "duration of status" or the length of time you are permitted to stay in the U.S. Please see the handout entitled "[Maintaining Legal F-1 Student Status](#)" for further information. (If your I-94 does not have the notation "D/S," you should speak to an ISSO advisor well before it expires.)

When do I need to renew my F-1 visa?

You must renew your F-1 visa if you decide to travel outside the U.S. and your current F-1 visa expires before you re-enter the U.S. There is one exception to this: a student who travels to Mexico, Canada, and islands adjacent to the U.S. (except Cuba) for less than 30 days is not required to have a current F-1 visa in his/her passport in order to re-enter the U.S. ("automatic visa revalidation." (For more information read the ISSO handout, "[U.S. Visas and Travel to Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean](#)."))

What do I need to get an F-1 visa?

In order to obtain a new F-1 visa, you will need to apply at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in your home country. You will need to ask the following index page: http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/visa_1750.html

In most cases you must present the following items when you apply for a visa:

visa application forms, DS-156, DS-157 (for students 18-45 years of age) and DS-158, which are all available at the Consulate or online at http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/ifa/ifa_forms/forms_1340.html;

visa application fee (fee amount can be determined at http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/ifa/ifa_forms/forms_1340.html);

it varies your Form I-20 for "initial attendance" (entry on page 3) or a new Form I-20 for "re-entry";

documents which show financial resources for your stay in the U.S. (in the form of bank statements, etc.);

your passport

two color photographs

evidence of your intent to return to your home country upon completion of your studies.

Although not required, we recommend that you also take your university transcripts, registration receipts, letter from the ISSO stating your full-time enrollment, and all other documents that you may need.

What kind of documents can show intent to return to my home country?

An F-1 visa will more likely be approved if you maintain closer ties to your home country than to the U.S. This can be shown in the following ways.

Your immediate family members reside in your home country.

You own property and/or maintain a bank account in your home country.

You have employment at home or have the ability to find employment in your home country (e.g., evidence of job searches or interviews you have done).

You have made frequent visits home (every year or 18 months).

You have maintained membership in cultural organizations at home while you have studied in the U.S.

Can I apply for an F-1 visa in a country other than my home country?

You may apply for an F-1 visa in a country other than your home country (a "third country"), unless you are subject to the "visa overstay" provisions of the Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA). However, an application for a visa in a third country does not guarantee that you will be able to obtain a visa. You should be prepared to make your visa application in your home country if you are denied when applying abroad.

Please be aware that citizens of certain countries (e.g., Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya, Sudan, North Korea, and Cuba) no longer benefit from "automatic visa revalidation." (For more information read the ICSO handout "[Visas and Travel: Automatic Extension of an Expired Non-Immigrant Visa.](#)")

advisor if any of these cases applies to you.

You intend to make an application in a "third" country (e.g., you are from P.R. China, but you intend to go to Canada to obtain an F-1 visa).

You are returning home after a long stay in the U.S. (3 or more years).

There is a serious political or economic crisis in your home country.

You are engaged in practical training after the completion of your academic program.

You have limited time to obtain your visa. (Your visit will only be for a short period of time.)

You are waiting for the results of an application.