

WELCOME TO BOSTON UNIVERSITY



Congratulations! We are thrilled to welcome you to the BU community. As a top host for international students, we have extensive experience working with students from across the globe and are always available to support you.

We have prepared this document for students who have a *Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Student Status (SEVIS Form I-20)* for a program of study at BU. It describes the steps you need to take in order to pay the SEVIS fee, apply for an F-1 student visa, if necessary, and to enter the U.S. as a student in F-1 immigration status.

If you have any questions, please contact us at 617-353-3565 or issogac@bu.edu

Guidelines for Applying for the F-1 Student Visa and for Entering the United States

1 Carefully review your Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) Form I-20

- Please be sure that **all** information on your I-20 is correct. Contact us immediately if anything is incorrect.
- Your name and date of birth must appear exactly as reflected on your passport.
- Your assigned SEVIS ID number is in the upper left corner of page 1 of your SEVIS Form I-20.
- While we can send the SEVIS Form I-20 to you electronically via the **ISSOPortal**, you must print the form, sign and date the student attestation at the bottom of page 1 and present the printed form when applying for your visa or traveling to the US.

2 Make sure your passport is valid

We recommend that your passport be valid for at least six months beyond your expected entry date to the U.S.

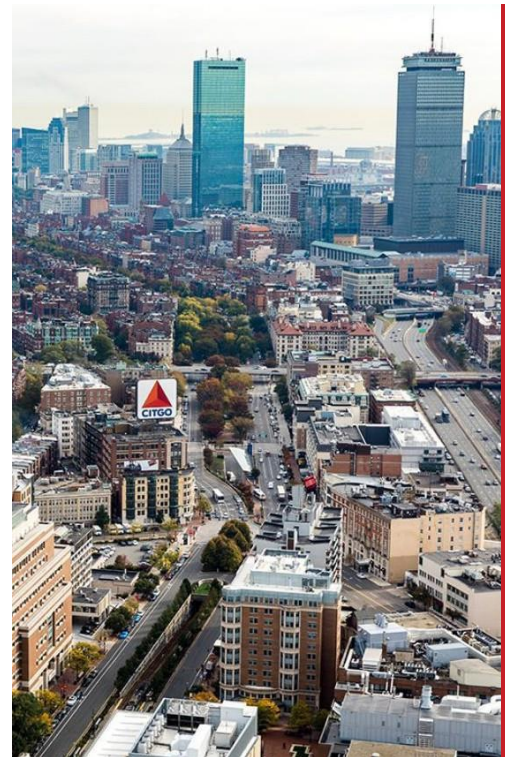
3 Pay the SEVIS Fee

- The US Department of State (USDOS) and US Department of Homeland Security (USDHS) require proof of SEVIS fee payment before issuing a visa or approving any benefits of status.
- The fee must be paid by all students with I-20s for “initial attendance” who are beginning an academic program in the US.
- You must also pay the SEVIS Fee if:
 - You have studied in F-1 status in the past, but are entering the U.S. on a new SEVIS record number
 - You have studied in F-1 status in the past, but have since changed to another immigration status, and are now changing back to F-1 status.
 - You are a Canadian citizen. While Canadian citizens do not have to apply for a visa, they must still pay the SEVIS fee.
- **You do not have to pay the SEVIS Fee if:**
 - You are an F-2 dependent.
 - You are an F-1 student who is currently in the U.S. under valid F-1 immigration status.
 - You are an F-1 student who is transferring to a new school or changing degree program or level using the same SEVIS record number.

- To pay the SEVIS fee, please refer to the Student and Exchange Visitor website at www.fmjfee.com.
- Retain a copy of a printed fee receipt along with other immigration documents to use as needed.
- You must include the unique SEVIS ID number and school code found on the SEVIS Form I-20 issued by the institution you will be attending. If you have been accepted to more than one school, we strongly recommend that you determine which school you will attend before paying the SEVIS fee. Although SEVIS allows you to transfer your SEVIS fee to a different SEVIS ID number, it could complicate a visa application and should be avoided when possible.

4 Contact the nearest consular office to begin your visa application

- Citizens of all countries (with the exception of Canada) are required to obtain an F-1 student visa to enter the US. See the following websites for more information on the student visa:
 - <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study/student-visa.html>
 - <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students>
- You must schedule a visa application interview with the nearest US Embassy or Consulate.
- Review the website for the nearest US Embassy or Consulate for country specific requirements. Visit www.usembassy.gov for a list of embassies and consulates.
- The U.S. Department of State (DOS) website offers information and a list of required documents for the visa application: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study/student-visa.html#documentation>
In addition to the documents listed on the U.S. DOS website, you will also need to be ready to submit the following documents:
 - Admission Letter from Boston University (you may print a copy from MyBU portal)
 - Original financial documents proving the availability of sufficient funds as reflected on your SEVIS Form I-20
- Generally, your student visa will only be issued a maximum of 365 days prior to the start date of the academic program listed on your SEVIS Form I-20, but we recommend that you begin your application **as soon as possible**. Please keep in mind that it may take a few weeks to schedule an appointment, so you should initiate your visa application as early as possible after receiving your SEVIS Form I-20.
- You will need to complete the DS-160 Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application and schedule a visa appointment at: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/forms/ds-160-online-nonimmigrant-visa-application.html>



Did you know?

100+
countries
are represented in
BU's student body



23%
of BU students are
international



#7
among campuses
with the most
international
students (*Open
Doors*)

- You may review the fees required for the DS-160 at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/fees/fees-visa-services.html>
- The DOS has also provided further information on the DS-160 in the form of Frequently Asked Questions at: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/forms/ds-160-online-nonimmigrant-visa-application/ds-160-faqs.html>

Visa Application Tips

During your visa interview, the consular officer will assess whether you qualify for an F-1 student visa for university study by taking into account your academic preparation, your financial security, and your English-language ability. The officer will also evaluate whether you pose a national security risk to the United States, whether your intention to study in the U.S. is “temporary,” and confirm that you intend to return home after you complete your studies. The visa interview is often a very brief encounter. It is important to be well prepared and make a strong first impression so that you have the best chance of obtaining your visa.

We have prepared a few suggestions for your interview:

- ✓ The documentation required for the visa application differs from consulate to consulate. Make certain to review checklists on the website for the consulate where you will be applying to make sure you have all requested documentation.
- ✓ The visa interview is usually a very brief exchange (often just a minute or two) at a consular window, sometimes in a crowded hall. Generally, the consular officer will be familiar with the details of your application before you are called and will ask a few questions in order to evaluate your intentions in the U.S. and your eligibility before making a decision.
- ✓ Before the interview, practice answering questions in English about your application, your academic objectives in the U.S., and your plans after you return home.
- ✓ The consular officer may ask questions about your “Nonimmigrant Intent” – that is, your intention to return home after you complete your studies. It may be sufficient to describe your plans after you return home, whether it is to work, continue your studies, or another reason. However, the officer may ask you to provide further proof of your plans. Please see the section on “Proving Nonimmigrant Intent” for more information.
- ✓ The consular officer may also ask for proof of financial ties to your home country as part of your proof of nonimmigrant intent. Familiarize yourself with types of financial documents to help you prove this, as well as explaining them in English.
- ✓ Be positive and respond to questions with clear, concise answers during your interview.
- ✓ For more information on U.S. Embassies and Consulates, and about the visa application process, please visit the U.S. Department of State website at www.travel.state.gov/

Proving Nonimmigrant Intent

The consular officer will determine whether you intend to enter the U.S. temporarily for study, or whether they believe you plan to immigrate permanently to the U.S. In order to prove your “nonimmigrant intent” you must show “strong ties to a home abroad which you do not intend to abandon.” Consider the questions below to help assess if you may have difficulty with this point of eligibility:

- Is it difficult to obtain an U.S. visa in your country?
- Do a significant percentage of F-1 visa applications in your country get denied by the U.S. Embassy or Consulate?
- Are any members of your immediate family U.S. citizens or permanent residents? Are any members of your immediate family living in the U.S.?
- Is a friend or relative acting as your financial sponsor for your activities at Boston University?
- Will this be your first trip to the U.S.?
- Have you recently finished one activity in the U.S. and will now begin a new activity?
- Have you ever been denied a U.S. visa?

If you answered “yes” to one or more of the above questions, it may be more likely that you will need to provide additional documentation to support your intent to return home after your activities in the U.S.

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| <p>Proving Financial Ties</p> <p>If you own property or have financial investments in your country, documenting these may help prove you have strong financial ties. You may not use any assets that will be needed to pay for your F-1 or J-1 activities. You will need to prove the availability of that financial support separately in order to meet the minimum requirements for the visa.</p> | <p>Recommended Documents to Submit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Official papers proving property ownership • Copies of investment statements or certificates • A letter or financial statement from your bank or accountant |
| <p>Proving Employment Ties</p> <p>If you will be employed full-time upon your return, this indicates strong employment ties to your country. Your employment ties are viewed as stronger based on the prestige, importance, and salary of your job.</p> | <p>Recommended Documents to Submit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A letter that guarantees a job upon your return and states how important your U.S. activities will be for the type of work the employer wants |
| <p>Proving Family Ties</p> <p>If all members of your immediate family live in your country, the U.S. Consular officer may understand that you have strong family ties to that country. If you are the oldest child or only child in your family, the Consular officer may believe that you are more likely to return home because of that fact. If one or both of your parents are not in good health, this is another reason you might be expected to return home.</p> | <p>Recommended Documents to Submit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copies of official documents proving family relationships and their residences • Letters from physicians explaining important medical conditions of your parents |
| <p>Your Visa and Immigration History</p> <p>If you have visited other countries and returned to your country after those visits, you have demonstrated a pattern of behavior which may lead the U.S. Consular officer to believe that you will return home after your time in the U.S. The more trips you have made, the stronger your case.</p> | <p>Recommended Documents to Submit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current and/or previous passport(s) containing entry and exit stamps from your country and other countries • Other official documents indicating departure and return to your home country |

5 Attend your visa application interview at the US Embassy or Consulate

- Bring all of the documents required for the visa application on the US Department of State website at: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study/student-visa.html>
- For citizens of select countries or students entering certain fields of study, the consular officer may decide to process your application through a security clearance known as “Administrative Processing” before granting the visa. Administrative Processing may take several months to process, so it is important to apply for your F-1 visa as soon as possible in case your application may require further administrative processing.
- In the highly unlikely event that your visa application is denied, we recommend that you ask the Consulate for a written explanation of the denial reason. Please contact us immediately so that we may help you strategize how to strengthen your chances and your documentation in a second visa application. For more information on steps to take after a visa denial, please visit the DOS website: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/visa-denials.html>

6 Travel to and apply for formal “admission” to the US as a new F-1 student

- Immigration regulations allow you to enter the US up to, but no earlier than, 30 days prior to the program start date indicated on your SEVIS Form I-20. **Tip:** Pay attention to your program start date and the earliest arrival date on your Form I-20 before finalizing your travel plans.
- Watch the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (USCBP) “Know Before You Go” video to prepare for your arrival in the US at: www.cbp.gov/newsroom/video-gallery/video-library/know-you-visit
- When you arrive in the US, you will formally apply for “admission” at the US Port of Entry. A US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer will examine your documents. This is called an inspection. For Primary Inspection, you must present your passport with a valid F-1 visa and a printed version of your I-20.
- The USCBP officer may ask you questions similar to those in your visa interview to determine your eligibility for admission to the US. In most cases, this will be a very brief exchange and you will be approved quickly. The officer will officially “admit” you to the US, stamp your passport indicating the date of entry and the immigration status you have been granted.
- However, if the USCBP office needs to gather more information, you may be sent to Secondary Inspection so an officer can gather more information about your reason for travelling to the US and take more time to review more systems and documentation. Reasons for USCBP referral to Secondary Inspection can include:
 - Verification of SEVIS status
 - Advance admissibility review
 - Customs enforcement
 - Compliance Checks
- You should be prepared to provide all of the same documentation at Secondary Inspection required at your visa interview including financial documents, your BU acceptance letter and a copy of your SEVIS fee receipt. Follow the same tips referenced above and answer the officer’s questions honestly and concisely.
 - If you are asked about funding, answer the question, and offer to show the officer your financial documents.
 - If you are asked about your “intentions,” explain your plan to study and offer to show the officer the documents that demonstrate your intent to study while in the US and any documents you may have that help demonstrate your intent to return home after you finish your studies.
 - Please be advised that immigration officers have the right to request and search electronic devices and Social Media accounts.
- Secondary inspection may take a few hours so plan your connecting flights carefully to give you sufficient time to get through this process.



Questions?

We are more than happy to address any of your questions or concerns throughout the visa process.

You may contact the ISSO Admissions and Student Services Team at issogac@bu.edu or (617) 353-3565.

- Once you are approved for admission to the US leave the inspection area, make certain you have all of the following documents in your possession: (1) passport, (2) the SEVIS Form I-20, and (3) all supporting financial documents. Verify that the U.S. Entry Stamp in your passport is clear and indicates F-1 and D/S (Duration of Status).
- Verify that the US Entry Stamp in your passport is clear and indicates F-1 and D/ S (Duration of Status). Once you have arrived in Boston you may print your I-94 which is an electronic record of your entry for further verification. You may print your I-94 at: <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov>

Please visit the Study in the States website for additional information:
<https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/travel/getting-to-the-united-states>

Remember: It is important that you do not enter the US 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 US, and it is difficult (and sometimes impossible) to change your immigration status to F-1 once you are in the country.

7 Welcome to BU! Complete Check-in with the International Students and Scholars Office

After you arrive in the US you are required to complete an Initial ISSO Check-in. You will receive reminders and instructions to complete Initial ISSO Check-in in advance of your program start date.

Completing Initial ISSO Check-in allows you to:

- Welcome you to BU and assist you in answering questions you may have
- Review your immigration documents to confirm eligibility for intended activity at BU
- Update your University record to reflect your current immigration status
- Report your arrival in valid status to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to activate your SEVIS record, as a Boston University sponsored F-1 student

The International Student & Scholars Office (ISSO) provides professional expertise on immigration and employment issues for all international students, scholars, and faculty/staff at Boston University. The staff of the ISSO would be pleased to provide you with information, advice, and assistance on any visa or immigration matter that relates to your activities at BU. Please visit the ISSO website at: www.bu.edu/isso/



If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the ISSO Admissions and Student Services Team at issogac@bu.edu or (617) 353-3565.