

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT F-1 VISAS

In order for international students (defined as any student holding a foreign passport) to enroll at a school in the United States, they must obtain an F-1 (student) visa. To obtain an F-1 visa, a student must show the government:

- An I-20 form properly issued in SEVIS (government computer program) by a school approved by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).
- A passport valid for at least 6 months.
- Intention to stay in the United States temporarily and only for the purpose of pursuing a full course of study.
- Proof of a residence outside the U.S. to which the student intends to return after completing the temporary period of study.
- Financial ability to cover the cost of education and living expenses in the U.S.
- Proof of having paid the SEVIS fee.

Students should plan ahead for their study in the U.S. and should allow plenty of time for visa processing. U.S. embassies and consulates follow the same set of rules, which are then adapted to their host countries. Therefore, you should inquire in advance about individual policies in the U.S. embassy/consulate in your home country.

A student cannot apply for a student visa more than 90 days before the registration date indicated on the I-20 form. The timetable for visa processing can vary widely depending on the volume of applications processed by an individual consulate or embassy. Notifications of acceptance or denial can range from one to ten weeks. June, July, and August are the busiest months for visa processing. Students cannot enter the U.S. more than 30 days before the program start date on the I-20.

PROCESS FOR OBTAINING AN F-1 VISA

- STEP 1: Apply for admission to the U.S. school.**
Complete Tri-City Christian Academy's international student application (available on this website), and submit it with the Academy's \$500 application fee.
- STEP 2: TCA makes a decision regarding admission.**
The application will be evaluated for requirements regarding academic ability, English language proficiency, and financial ability.
- STEP 3: The school prepares the I-20 form for the guardian to pick up and send to the prospective student.** The official name for the I-20 Form is the Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status for Academic and Language Students. Approved schools may issue I-20's for one year or multiple years to cover the duration of a student's program.
- STEP 4: The student applies for a visa.**
After receiving the I-20, the student must apply in person for a visa at the nearest U.S. consulate or embassy in his/her home country. For specific information regarding consulates and embassies worldwide, refer to the State Department website at <http://usembassy.state.gov/>.

STEP 5: Call ahead to schedule an appointment and to confirm what documents are needed. The student should take the following documents when applying for a visa:

- Completed Nonimmigrant Visa Electronic Application form DS0-160, with a photo and receipt for any required visa processing fees.
- Completed I-20 from the school you plan to attend
- Passport, which must be valid for at least 6 months after the proposed date of entry into the U.S.
- Financial documentation that shows sufficient funds to cover the cost of tuition, room and board, books, and other related expenses
- Evidence of English language proficiency sufficient for course of study
- 2 x 2 inch photograph
- Evidence of intent to depart the U.S. after completion of studies
- Required proof of having paid the \$140 I-901 SEVIS fee
- Machine Readable Visa (MRV) surcharge fee
- Visa reciprocity fee (if applicable)
- Transcripts of previous schoolwork

STEP 6: The Consular Interview – In most countries, a consular interview is required. . Persons age 13 and younger generally do not require an interview, unless requested by the embassy or consulate. Please consult the U.S. consulate in your country for age limitations for the interview. These interviews are conducted by U.S. State Department Consular Officers and take place at the embassy or consulate. Some consulates/embassies request that students submit the required documentation before scheduling the interview, and others conduct the entire process on the same day.

The purpose of this interview is for a consular officer to determine the student's academic interests and English language proficiency. It is also the consular official's job to ensure that the applicant is a legitimate candidate for a student visa and is not entering the U.S. for some other reason – such as immigration. To prove that students are seeking a visa only for educational purposes, they will be asked to show proof of ties to their home country. Example of such ties might include evidence of a family business or family-owned real estate. If close family members have previously studied in the U.S. and then returned home, this information might also serve as evidence of ties to the home country.

Applicants should be prepared to answer a variety of questions. The consular official's job is to learn about the student and why he/she wishes to study in the U.S.). During the visa application process, usually at the interview, an ink-free, digital fingerprint scan will be quickly taken. The official will also want to know why the student wishes to attend a particular school. The student may also be asked about the documentation he/she has provided, and the official may want to see copies of materials sent to the school (such as transcripts and test scores). Sample questions may include:

- Tell me about this school and why you wish to enroll there? What does it offer that your current school does not?
- Where is the school located? (Be prepared to point out the location on a map of the U.S.)

- Who is the head of the school or the director of admissions?
- Why do you wish to study in the U.S.?
- How will studying at this school benefit you when you return home?

If the student visa application is approved, the student will be given an F-1 visa stamp in his/her passport. This stamp will indicate:

- Where the visa was issued
- Date the visa will expire
- Number of entries permitted – a multiple-entry visa enables a student to enter and leave the U.S. as many times as indicated on the document. A single entry visa will require the student to obtain a new visa every time he/she travels outside of the U.S. in order to return.
- Type of visa
- Visa number

STEP 7: The student arrives in the U.S.

During the flight to the U.S., the student will be given the I-94 card (Arrival/Departure Record) to complete. At the Port of Entry, the student will go through customs. The student's fingerprints will be scanned and a digital photograph will be taken. The following documents must be presented to the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) official:

1. Valid passport and visa
2. Sealed envelope with I-20
3. Completed I-94 card
4. Any other requested information (financial documents, admission letter, etc.)
5. Proof of having paid the SEVIS I-901 fee may be required

The customs official will:

1. Scan fingerprints and take digital photograph
2. Return the passport/visa with an entry stamp
3. Return the I-94 card with an entry stamp – usually the card will be stapled to the student's passport. The card will be marked with the date and place of entry, the student's status as an F-1 student, a unique admission number, and the period of admissions shown as "duration of status" (abbreviated "DS")
4. Return the I-20 to the student with the entry stamp in the right-hand corner.

STEP 8: The school is notified of the student's arrival in the U.S.

Although the student's arrival is noted in SEVIS, please contact Laurinda Mordh, the Director of International Programs at Tri-City Christian Academy, regarding the outcome of your consular interview and the date of your arrival in the U.S. Notification can be e-mailed to marianne.domico@tcawarriors.org

STEP 9: The student reports to the school.

The student should report to the school immediately after his/her arrival in Phoenix. At that time, copies will be made of his/her I-20, passport, and visa; these copies will be placed in the student's file at the school.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE F-1 VISA

The student must keep the passport/visa with the I-20 Form, the I-94 card, and all other important documents in a safe place and near at hand. Replacing these items is a complicated and time-consuming process and may create problems.

If the student leaves the United States during their approved stay (for winter break or during the summer) with the intention of returning, it is the student's responsibility to have the Director of International Programs at Tri-City Christian Academy sign and date their I-20 application prior to the date of departure. The signature must be on the original stamped I-20 form. Duplicates are NOT valid. **This signature is mandatory for re-entry into the United States.**

In order to avoid jeopardizing visa eligibility, students should pay close attention to the requirements of their status as F-1 students. When a student enters the United States on a student visa, they will usually be admitted for the duration of their student status. This means they may remain in the U.S. to complete their educational program as long as they are a full-time student, even if their passport expires while they are in the U.S. If a student's visa expires and they leave the U.S., they will be required to apply for a new visa before returning. The student visa cannot be renewed in the U.S. It must be renewed at a consulate or embassy in their home country. Much of the same documentation is required for a visa renewal that is required when the first visa is received. After completing a program of study, the student has a 60-day grace period before being required to exit the U.S.

For more information or details about studying in the United States, please check out this website <http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/>