



HOW TO APPLY FOR YOUR F-1 STUDENT VISA

Now that you have applied for, and received your Form I-20 (Certificate of Eligibility for F-1 Student Status), the next step is to apply for your F-1 Student visa!

For complete information on this process, visit U.S. Department of Homeland Security's website: <http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/getting-a-visa/>

It is very important that you understand the process and rules for obtaining the F-1 Student Visa or status. **The most common reason students are denied the F-1 visa or not admitted to the U.S. is because they were not prepared.** Don't let this happen to you! Read the following information very carefully and contact us if you need more information or help. If you are exempt from the visa requirement (for example, a Canadian citizen), you must still follow all of the following rules and procedures when you are inspected at the U.S. Port of Entry.

KNOW THE STEPS

- **Step 1:** Pay the U.S. SEVIS I-901 Fee of \$350 and have a printed receipt that proves payment before your visa interview. Pay your SEVIS Fee at www.FMJFee.com.
- **Step 2:** Apply for your visa and schedule your interview as soon as possible! Though the US government is prioritizing F-1 visa requests, there may be considerable wait time for both the visa interview and visa processing. Wait time information for specific embassies and consulates is available at: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas.html>
 - (1) The DS-160 application can be found here: <https://ceac.state.gov/genniv/>
 - a. NOTE: **The DS-160 now requires that all social media accounts from the last 5 years be listed and made public. Not listing an account (even one you don't maintain anymore) and not making your accounts public can be seen as a negative mark against getting a visa.**
 - (2) You can list the following information on your **DS-160** as your US Contact:
 - a. Angelina Horst
International Student Adviser, DSO
iss@fandm.edu
717-358-4054
Address: PO Box 3003, F&M International Programs, Lancaster, PA 17604
- **Step 3:** Prepare for and complete your interview
 - (1) Read the next section, ["How to Prepare for Your Interview"](#)
- **Step 4:** Inspect your visa
 - (1) Check that your name matches your passport name **and that it shows that it is an F-1 visa**. If either of these things is incorrect, ask for it to be fixed. This is very important! If you do not get your visa fixed, you will have problems later.

- **Step 5:** [Read Exhibit A](#). What You Need to Know About Entering the US

What if your visa is denied?

Contact us with complete details of what was said and what documents you presented with your application. Send a copy of any written reason for the denial you may have been given. If you were denied on 214(b) grounds, it likely means you did not present enough evidence that you will depart the US following completion of your studies. We can give you some tips on how to better prepare for your next visa interview.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR YOUR INTERVIEW

1. **Dress for success, and keep a positive attitude. Appear confident!**
2. **Be ready to clearly explain why you want to come to the U.S. to study - and at Franklin & Marshall College, specifically.**
 - a. Why do you want to study in the U.S.?
 - b. Why do you want to pursue this program of study?
 - c. Why did you choose Franklin & Marshall College?
 - d. What career will your studies prepare you for back home?
3. **Take evidence of your educational and financial qualifications** for admission to Franklin & Marshall College, such as original copies of your transcripts and test scores, as well as original copies of the financial documents you gave us. Your financial documents must match your Form I-20's Funding information. You are required to prove that you have the ability to pay for your portion of the cost to attend F&M.
 - a. Detailed information regarding the documentation you will need to bring may be found at: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study.html> and on your embassy/consulate's website <http://www.usembassy.gov/>.
4. **Be ready to convince the consul that you will return home permanently after you complete your studies.** The F-1 is classified as a non-immigrant visa. This means you do not have permanent immigrant intent to the US. F-1 visas are only given to those who can convince the consul that they intend to return to their home country. You are initially seen by the consular officer as someone who plans to remain in the U.S. permanently. You must convince the consul that he or she is wrong and that you DO plan to go back home to stay. *THIS IS THE NUMBER ONE REASON FOR VISA DENIAL!*

You must prove that you have "ties" to your country which are so strong, they will force you to return. These ties are usually social, economic and/or family. Be prepared to explain this, and bring documentation. You may not be asked to present your documentation, but if you are asked, politely show documents that:

- a. Prove that you have a permanent residence in your country that you do not intend to abandon by taking a photocopy of a deed or lease to your home.
- b. If your family owns a business, take a letter from the bank describing it. If they own property, take the deeds.
- c. If you have traveled to the U.S. before, emphasize that you have returned home before!
- d. If you have a brother or sister who studied in the U.S. and then returned home, take a copy of his or her diploma and a statement from his or her employer.
- e. If your program of study is in great demand in your country, get a letter from a possible employer stating that they are interested in hiring people with degrees like the one you will get at Franklin & Marshall College.
- f. Do not emphasize ties to the U.S. or to family members in the U.S.

5. **Answer questions clearly and briefly.**
6. **Practice your English.** Unless your Form I-20 says you are not proficient in English, you will be required to speak it and show your TOEFL score. The consul may even ask you to read something and discuss what it says. All F&M admits are considered proficient in English.
7. Consuls are impersonal when administering laws. In the U.S., laws are applied equally to all people regardless of status or gender. **DO NOT TRY TO NEGOTIATE OR DISCUSS PERSONAL MATTERS** with them.
8. **Do not talk about working in the U.S. unless you have been awarded a teaching assistantship or fellowship on campus.** You are required to prove that you can support the costs of studying and living in the U.S. Employment is strictly controlled by the Department of Homeland Security and is not guaranteed. Once in the US, you will be advised on the legal types of on-campus employment and practical experience you can engage in.
9. If you already began your studies in another nonimmigrant status and you received a change of status to F-1, **be prepared to discuss how your original purpose for being in the U.S. changed to that of a full-time student.** Take transcripts to show what you have been studying.
10. Be mindful that consular officials are continuing to monitor applicant's social media. **You are expected to make your accounts public for this purpose. This includes any account you have had in the last 5 years, whether or not you maintain it now.**

EXHIBIT A: What You Need to Know About Entering the US

We are looking forward to your arrival at Franklin & Marshall College and have prepared this information to help everything to go smoothly! If you follow the instructions we have outlined below, you will have a great chance of a smooth entry to begin a successful educational career here! If you have any questions, contact us.

1. **DO NOT come earlier than the EARLIEST ADMISSION DATE on your Form I-20.** You are not permitted to enter the U.S. earlier than that date. If you arrive too early, you risk being denied entry or being charged a fee and admitted as a Visitor instead of a Student. Visitors are not allowed to study full-time so this would be a problem for you. If you arrive as a visitor or any other status than student, you would need to depart and re-enter!
2. **Do not come later than the program start date on your Form I-20 without our permission.** If you think that you won't be able to arrive by that date, contact us immediately. You must have permission from International Student Services and the College to arrive later than your Form I-20 says.
3. **Pay attention to the specific dates and times of move-in for new international students.** We cannot allow early arrivals and as such you will need to find alternate accommodations before move-in day.
4. **Keep your immigration documents with you at all times.** Do NOT put them in your checked luggage. Do not leave your bags unattended. Theft of immigration documents is unfortunately common in airports and your items will be difficult to replace.
5. ***** Take the F&M Department of Public Safety's phone number in case of emergency while traveling: 1-717-358-3939 ***.** They are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and can contact a DSO if a Port of Entry emergency comes up.
6. **Have your documents ready to show the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer.**
 - You will be asked to show your passport containing your valid F-1 Student visa, Form I-20, Form I-94 Arrival/Departure Record (only if coming by land) and proof of funding when you are going through the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Inspection.
7. **Be prepared to explain why you're coming to the U.S.** The CBP officer may ask you a few simple questions about the purpose of your stay in the U.S. Your purpose is to study. Be prepared to tell him or her why you are coming to study at Franklin & Marshall College.
8. **SUPER IMPORTANT: Check that the CBP officer properly stamped your passport "F-1 D/S".**
 - The CBP officer will look at your documents and stamp your passport and return it to you. It is important that this process is done properly, so check your passport to see that it shows you were admitted "F-1 D/S" before leaving the inspection area.

- F-1 means you were admitted under the correct status. D/S means that you are permitted to stay inside the US as a student for the duration of status. In this case, the duration is the program dates on your I-20.
 - If you get wrongly entered as any other immigration status, it could pose serious issues in the future!
9. **You may be asked to go to secondary inspections.** If there are any questions about your documents, the CBP officer may ask you to go to secondary inspections. This is no cause for concern. This might be because you were issued I-20s from multiple schools before finally deciding on F&M or something that they misunderstood. *Stay calm, and if there are further issues, you can ask that they call your DSO (see #5)*
10. **Make two sets of copies of your immigration documents.** Copies of your immigration documents are important to safe-keep.
- *International Student Services also requires that you upload a set into your iss.fandm.edu portal.*
11. **If for some reason you do not have your Form I-20 when you arrive, or if it was not properly signed, the CBP officer will give you a provisional entry of 30 days via a Form 515A.**
- You must bring the Form I-515A to the International Student Services Office as soon as you get to campus so we can help you extend your permission to be in the country for the duration of your status

Remember that the International Student Services office is one of many important offices you will work with regularly throughout your time with us. You will have many support systems at the College here to help you every step of your academic journey. Whether you have questions, concerns, or challenges - no problem is too small, or too big to come to us to discuss.

We are here to help you be successful and get a degree. That is the ultimate goal and together we can achieve it.

EXHIBIT B: Top 5 Tips for Interview Preparation

1. Learn as much as possible before the interview about the underlying eligibility criteria for the particular visa you seek, and any possible negative factors (grounds of inadmissibility) that might apply to you. You'll have to prove that (a) your purpose for entering the U.S. is sincere and lawful, (b) you will enter temporarily and return to your foreign residence abroad (and you won't abandon it), and (c) you have sufficient funds available to avoid any unauthorized employment.
2. Consular officers expect to glean most of the information during the interview from the words you speak and your answers on the online visa application (Form DS-160), and only secondarily from printed materials. Bring any relevant evidence with you. Make sure your evidence is well organized
3. The applicant must always tell the truth. You also need to ensure that your spoken answers and your written answers on the DS-160 are aligned. Consular officers often look for inconsistencies; so if a correction or clarification needs to be made, make it proactively. Listen carefully to their questions!
4. Review the embassy or consular website to make sure about complying with any security restrictions (if you cannot bring laptops, chargers, etc). Get a good night's sleep, and dress for success — wear clothes that show respect.
 - Treat this as a job interview. Be respectful and genuine.
 - Expect the interview to be VERY SHORT in time. Only a few minutes! They have a lot of business to get through and your answers should be short and to the point
 - If you got into F&M, we know that you are awesome - so this is your time to show it!
5. The consular officer will tell you at the end of the interview if your visa will be issued or refused. If it is granted, you will learn whether to stay and wait for it, return later or expect to receive it (affixed to your passport) by delivery service.
 - If it is refused, politely ask the officer to explain in detail the reasons for the decision and ask if there is any other document, information or evidence that might cause the officer to reconsider.
 - Ask when you can reapply for another interview.
 - Contact ISS immediately to discuss your plans/options.

Once you receive your visa in your passport, take a photo of it and upload it into your ISS portal.

Check that your ppt number is correct.

Check that your name is spelled correctly.

Where your visa was issued.

Check that your date of birth is correct.

"R" means "regular" passport. "Class" is the type or visa. See "The class of visa by your purpose of travel".

"M" means that you can seek entry into the U.S. multiple times. If there is a number here, you may apply for entry that many times.

"Annotation" may include additional information about your visa. For example, on a student visa, it will show your SEVIS number and name of your school

"Expiration Date" is the last day you can use your visa to seek entry into the U.S. It has nothing to do with how long you may stay in the U.S. See "What is a Visa?"

- Issuing Post Name: The US embassy/consulate that issued the visa.
- Surname: Same as last name in US or family name
- Given Name: Same as first name in US; in the order in which it is on your passport.
- Passport Number: Visa holder's passport number
- Entries: M or S. If it is 'M', you can enter the United States multiple times until the expiration date of visa. F-1 visas should all have “Ms” on them so that you can come and go as needed for as long as the visa is valid and you have an open SEVIS record.
- Annotation: Any notes that the consulate would like to put such as any restrictions, special circumstances etc. Often you will find your SEVIS number listed there.
- Control Number: Visa number. This number is requested on many DHS and DOS application forms.
- Visa Type/Class: Type of non-immigrant visa. **Ensure this says F-1!!!**
- Sex: M/F (for Male/Female)
- Birth Date: Date of birth of the visa holder
- Nationality: Visa holder's country of citizenship

- Issue Date: The date (in DD/MM/YYYY format) when visa was issued.
- Expiration Date: The date (in DD/MM/YYYY format) until which the visa holder can present themselves for entry into the United States.
- Actual duration of stay in the US is determined at the port of entry as per the date stamped in I-94 form and your I-20.
- Number in red color: The number of the foil on the sheet of visas. This is not the visa number.
- Information at bottom: Computer generated and machine-readable visa information.