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The Process to Becoming an International Student

Applicable Programs

The first step that needs to be taken for students is to be accepted into an eligible program in the United States. This is separated into the two primary subsections of student visas: F visas for academic and language programs and M visas for vocational work. There is a final form of student visa, J visas for those who live near a US border and would commute over it for their program; these are exclusive to Mexico and Canada.

Application Process

After being accepted into an eligible program, the [visa application](#) can begin in earnest, starting with registration with [SEVIS](#) (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System), which is accompanied by a fee. Then the actual visa application, Form [DS-160](#), must be submitted. After this, things do vary from country to country about the specifics, with applicants being guided to contact their nation's U.S. [embassy/consulate](#) for more detailed information.

Interview

Commonly, the most intimidating part of the application process is the in-person interview at the nation's U.S. embassy/consulate. [Many documents](#) are required for verifications, and a bevy of questions are asked, [mainly focused around academic plans, financials, and post-graduation.](#)

Background Checks

While background checks have long been a part of the student visa process, the current administration has looked to put higher scrutiny on the point of "[public charges](#)." Being a public charge refers to those who may not be able to fully support themselves when in the U.S. and may become a burden on the public. [A newly proposed rule](#) would rescind the 2022 rules giving greater authority to DHS when making determinations on applicants.

Approval

After the interview, applicants generally know if they have been approved; all that is left is processing that can [take a few business days.](#)

Country exclusions

Since the student visa's inception, some countries have been barred from the program for political or safety reasons. As of writing, [38 countries](#) are barred from U.S. student visas. Notable in the most recent wave of adjustments, nationals of Turkmenistan are now eligible for nonimmigrant visas, including student visas.

Elimination of "Duration of Status"

On July 17, 2026, [DHS finalized a rule eliminating "Duration of Status"](#) for F students and replacing it with fixed periods of admission. Beginning September 15, 2026, students will generally receive an Admit Until Date based on their program end date, with admissions generally limited to four years. Students requiring additional time will need to request an Extension of Stay. The rule also reduces the standard post-program grace period to 30 days and introduces additional restrictions on changes to academic programs.