

Office of Global Education 1021 Dulaney Valley Road, Van Meter, 116 Baltimore, Maryland 21204

Understanding the F-1 Visa

What is a visa?

A visa is a document that gives a traveler permission to go to the U.S. border to enter for a specific purpose. While having the visa does not guarantee entry; it does show the inspector at the port-ofentry that a consular officer at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate abroad has determined eligibility to seek entry for that specific purpose. The visa must be obtained outside of the U.S. and is a sticker placed in the traveler's passport. The sticker will indicate identifying information, the purpose of the visit, the length of time it can be used to enter the US with supporting documents and the number of entries allowed. Students apply for an F-1 visa in order to enter as a full-time student.



Check the accuracy of the spelling of your name, date of birth and

Note the classification indicates the purpose of your visit. F-1 indicates that you intend to be a full-time

Note the expiration of the visa. This is the last date that you can use the document to enter the U.S.

The M means that you can use the document to enter multiple times. If there is a number here, you may apply for entry that many times.

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

The F-1 does not determine how long you can stay in the U.S. Once you are here, the designation of D/S on the I-94 record and Form I-20 are what govern your ability to remain in the U.S. as a student. (Please see the handout on Maintaining F-1 Status for further information.) Therefore, you do not need to be concerned with the expiration of your visa, unless you travel abroad for a short visit prior to completing your degree.

What if my visa is expired and I am traveling home and intend to return for the next semester?

You must have an unexpired visa in order to re-enter the U.S. Therefore, you must go through the same procedures as you completed initially in order to obtain a new visa in your passport. Each country has different requirements; however, in general, you should be prepared with the following:

- Valid passport
- Nonimmigrant visa application, Form DS-160
- Application fee payment receipt
- Photo
- Form I-20
- Financial support documents

- Proof of attendance at the school (transcripts, registration for the following semester, admission letter, etc.)
- Receipt for SEVIS I-901 (do not pay again)
- Proof of your intention to depart the U.S. upon completion of your studies and any applicable optional practical training.

Please visit the <u>Department of State</u> web site for more information on visa application procedures, interview appointment policies, <u>visa wait times</u> and additional visa issues.

What if my visa is not expired, but my previous school is indicated on my visa?

If you have transferred schools since your visa was initially issued and you having been maintaining F-1 status, you do not need to renew your unexpired visa. You should, however, bring copies of all previously issued I-20's to show your complete history.

I am from a visa waiver country; do I need to apply for an F-1 student visa?

Yes, the visa waiver applies to visits as tourists only. If your purpose for entry to the U.S. is to be a student, then you must apply for an F-1 visa. Those who enter on the visa waiver program are not able to study other than on a short-term avocational basis. They cannot apply for a change of status or extend their stay.

What is automatic visa revalidation and can I take advantage?

Automatic visa revalidation may apply for students holding expired nonimmigrant visas who seek to return to the U.S. after brief travel to Canada, Mexico, or an adjacent island for thirty days or less. (Please see the Office of Global Educatoin for a complete list of adjacent islands.)

Caution: Students may not use automatic visa revalidation if they have applied for a new visa which has not yet been issued or if the application for a new visa was denied. Students from countries that are considered state sponsors of terrorism are not eligible.

What if my passport is expired, but I have a valid F-1 visa in it?

If you have a valid visa in your expired passport, do not remove it from your expired passport. You may use your valid visa in your expired passport along with a new valid passport for travel and admission to the U.S.