



## USA

### Visa Arrangements

*Please be aware that Study Abroad Office staff are not qualified to offer consultations or in-depth advice regarding visa applications. Immigration laws are complex and subject to frequent changes. Therefore if you do have any further questions about the process of applying for your visa you will need to contact the appropriate Embassy directly. The information below is intended as guidance only and unless otherwise stated applies only to UK citizens without exceptional circumstances.*

There are two possible visas on which you may travel to the United States of America, depending on the documentation that your host university sends you along with your acceptance package.

You cannot begin applying for a visa until you have received your acceptance pack from the host university, which will contain certain visa documents. Acceptance packages will usually be sent via the Study Abroad Office and you will be emailed at your Leeds email account to collect them in person. Because of the sensitive nature of immigration documentation, students may only collect their own acceptance packs.

Full details of the information below can be found here: <https://uk.usembassy.gov/visas/study-exchange/>

### Exchange Student Visa

If you are sent a DS-2019 (Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor [J-1] Status) you will use this to apply for a J-1 visa. The holder of an exchange visitor J-1 visa may enter the United States up to 30 days before the designated start date on the DS-2019. He or she may remain for up to 30 days after the completion date on the DS-2019.

### Student Visa

If you are sent an I-20 (Certificate of Eligibility for Non-Immigrant [F-1] Student Status) you will use this to apply for an F-1 visa. The holder of a student F-1 visa may enter the United States up to 30 days before the designated registration date on the I-20. The holder of an F-1 visa may remain in the United States for up to 60 days following the completion of the course or practical training.

Most students will be sent the documents to apply for a J-1 Visa but occasionally institutions will issue the documents for an F-1 due to internal administrative processes. This should have no practical implications other than on length of stay.

### How to apply for your visa

1. Check all of the details on your DS-2019 or I-20 form are correct

Then double check. Ten minutes at this stage can save you weeks further down the line if any of your details are incorrect. In particular, check that your host university has listed your correct date of birth, that they've

spelled your name correctly, that the name on your form matches the name in your passport exactly, and that your period of study is accurate. If any details are wrong, notify the Study Abroad Office immediately as a new copy will need to be issued. Your eligibility to apply for a visa and the terms of your visa are directly tied to your DS-2019 or I-20 and there is a risk that your visa will not be issued if any details are incorrect.

## 2. Pay the SEVIS fee

The SEVIS fee is a one off, non-refundable fee of \$180 USD to cover the cost of administering the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). The personal information used to fill out your SEVIS payment form (form I-901) must be an exact match for the information on your I-20 or DS-2019. You should allow at least three working days after submitting the online SEVIS payment before your visa interview date. Print a copy of your payment confirmation. You will need this to take to the Embassy for your interview and you will also need to take it to the US with you.

You can find instructions for paying your SEVIS fee here: <https://www.fmjfee.com/>

## 3. Complete the visa application form DS-160 online

Instructions and a link to the form can be found at:

<http://london.usembassy.gov/niv/ds160.html>

You should have your passport and DS-2019 or I-20 form to hand when completing the DS-160.

If you have travelled to the USA previously, you will be asked for the dates of your last five trips. You may also be asked about any international travel you have done in the past five years.

You will need to upload a digital photograph of yourself that meets specific photographic specifications so will need access to a digital camera and editing software. Alternatively you can take a physical photograph with you to your interview that meets specifications (note that specifications for a US passport photo are different to standard UK specifications) – usually you will have to have this taken professionally. You can find further guidance on photographs for the DS-160 application form at:

<http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/general/photos.html>

## 4. Schedule an appointment for an interview with a consular officer at the Embassy in London or Belfast.

An appointment for an interview may only be scheduled through the Official U.S. Department of State Visa Appointment Service website: <https://ais.usvisa-info.com/en-gb/niv> (Link not compatible with internet explorer browser).

You must complete your DS-160 online form before accessing the Visa Appointment Service website and at least 48 hours before your visa appointment.

You will need to create an account the first time that you visit the Visa Appointment Service website, by clicking on 'Apply' on the home screen. Once you have created an account, you will need to complete the following steps (the website should walk you through these stages):

1. Provide your DS-160 confirmation number
2. Determine your visa type
3. Select a courier return location
4. Pay your Nonimmigrant Visa (MRV) application fee via debit card
5. Schedule an appointment

You will be expected to pay an MRV application fee (the fee for processing your visa) at the time of scheduling your appointment. The fee is currently \$160 USD and must be paid by debit card. Please see <https://uk.usembassy.gov/visas/non-immigrant-visa-fees/> for further information.

You will need to arrange and pay (in the case of home delivery) for the return of your passport by courier at the time that you book your appointment. The courier service is free if you opt to collect your documents from one of the Embassy appointed courier service collection point. If you choose to have your documents returned to a home address, you will be charged a fee of \$30 USD.

### How to prepare for your interview

When you attend your interview, you will need to take the following documents:

- Confirmation page of the DS-160 nonimmigrant visa application form
- Appointment Confirmation page
- One 5 x 5 cm (2 x 2 in) colour photograph taken within the last six months. Even if you have successfully uploaded a photograph through the online DS-160, it is advisable to bring a physical photo with you anyway.
- A passport or other travel document valid for at least six months beyond the holder's period of stay in the United States with at least one blank page. You will need a machine-readable passport to enter the US. If your passport is a British passport issued in Great Britain in the last ten years, it will be machine-readable. If your passport is a British passport issued in another country (e.g. as a replacement passport for one lost while on holiday), then your passport **may not** be machine-readable. Please speak to the Passport Office and clarify whether you will be able to travel to the United States on the passport you have, or whether you will need to apply for a new one. If your passport is not a British passport, please check with the issuing country to ensure that it is machine-readable.
- If you do not hold a British passport, you will need to provide evidence of your status in the UK
- Evidence of previously issued U.S. visas if not contained in the current passport
- The Form I-20 or DS-2019 depending on which visa you're applying for
- A receipt showing payment of the SEVIS fee

You may also be asked to show the following additional evidence:

- Funds sufficient to cover all expenses including tuition while in the United States
- Residence details to which you intend to return at the end of the stay in the United States, e.g. parent's address
- If you have a medical condition that could have a bearing on your eligibility for a visa, you may be required to provide a letter from your doctor – more information can be found here: <https://uk.usembassy.gov/visas/ineligibilities-and-waivers-2/medical-ineligibility/>
- Detailed information concerning academic qualifications

A full list of required documents can be found here:

<https://uk.usembassy.gov/visas/study-exchange/where-to-apply/>

Your financial information is usually included in your application to the host university. We keep a copy of everything we submit to host universities, so please pop into our office for a copy if you need one. We can also produce an 'intention to return' letter for you, should you require it, confirming that you will be returning to Leeds to complete your degree after your year abroad.

Nationals of certain countries, students studying particular subjects (Physics, Chemistry, Chemical Engineering etc), students who have been arrested and/or have a police record, and students with certain medical conditions may have to submit additional material and follow additional processes. **You must check the embassy website early on to see if any additional requirements apply to you as this can add significantly to processing times:** <https://uk.usembassy.gov/visas/ineligibilities-and-waivers-2/>

### **What to expect at the interview**

You should anticipate being at the Embassy in London for approximately two to three hours. Advice from previous students is to take a good book! You are able to take a mobile phone, iPad, e-reader or simple tablet to the Embassy but you are advised not to take laptops, tablet keyboards, suitcases or large bags to the Embassy as these are not allowed in the building. For further guidance of prohibited items use the following link: [http://london.usembassy.gov/visas\\_security.html](http://london.usembassy.gov/visas_security.html). Students going to Belfast for interview may have to queue outside so take a coat/umbrella.

Don't be late! Applicants arriving more than 30 minutes after their scheduled appointment time will not be seen and will be required to reschedule their appointment for a later date.

Only appointment holders are allowed into the Embassy building. With the exception of small children, no one is allowed in with you.

On the day of your interview, a set of your fingerprints will be electronically scanned. If you have a cut or blister on any of your fingers or thumbs, your application will not be processed and you will be required to reschedule your appointment for a later date.

You will have to leave your passport at the Embassy so that they can process your application. It will be returned to you by courier, usually within two weeks. Once your passport has been handed over to the courier company for return, you will receive an email with instructions for tracking your passport.

### **Application processing**

Routine visa processing (not including return delivery time) usually takes 3-5 working days, with an extra 2 days for return postage.

Applicants who are advised at the time of the visa interview that their application will require additional administrative processing (e.g. nationals from China) should allow at least 60 days for this stage of the application to be completed. Some applications in this category can take up to six months. Further information about this can be found here:

<https://uk.usembassy.gov/visas/study-exchange/administrative-processing-london/>

### **Arrival in the USA**

If you hold a visa, you are not required to hold a return ticket and you may enter the United States on a one way ticket. All travellers should carry with them in their hand luggage for presentation to US officials evidence of funds sufficient for their visit and evidence that they have a residence abroad to which they intend returning at the end of their stay. Examples of such evidence include: traveller's cheques; return tickets; copy of latest bank statement; letter from parents saying they will support you; evidence of current employment; evidence of enrolment at an academic institution.

The Certificate of Eligibility is more important than the visa, which is only valid for entry to the US. Once there, the I-20 or DS-2019 demonstrates your eligibility to be in the country. However, both documents (the I-20 or DS-2019 and your visa) are required for entry to the US. You should also take your SEVIS payment receipt (Form I-797) with you in your hand luggage.

During the flight to the US, you will be given an I-94 Arrival/Departure Record Card. You need to complete this and it will be stamped by Immigration at the port of entry.

### **Travelling during your year abroad**

If you leave the US during your year abroad (except for visits to Canada/Mexico, although in these cases you will still need the document for re-entry to the US), you will need to have your DS-2019 or I-20 signed by somebody on campus. Take your form with you on your travels, as you will need it each time you enter the country.

### **Additional notes**

#### **Applicants who have been arrested**

Under US visa law, people who have been arrested are required to declare the arrest when applying for a visa. If the arrest resulted in a conviction, the individual may be permanently ineligible to receive a visa. In order to travel, a waiver of the permanent ineligibility may be required. Even travellers with a spent conviction are required to declare the arrest and/or conviction. This may significantly delay your visa application and you should allow as much time as possible for the processing of your visa application.

#### **Non UK students**

Most refusals of visas for international, non-UK students to visit the US are on the grounds that the student cannot demonstrate adequate ties to the country from which they are applying. A consular office in London cannot verify claims about an applicant's circumstances in their home country, so will be looking for evidence that the applicant is going to return to the UK. You should enclose a cover sheet on headed paper listing all the main points in your favour on one sheet, providing some or all of the following evidence:

- A serious study visit may be viewed more favourably than a holiday break. If the placement is an integral part of the course, say so. Include a statement about the importance of the Study Abroad placement to your studies.
- If a sponsor requires you to return home after your studies, this should be made clear, especially if the student faces penalties (e.g. financial) for failing to do so.
- Prior trips to the US or European Union countries may be viewed favourably, provided you did not stay on illegally or break the conditions of stay. If your present passport does not show this evidence, include old passports in the application as evidence of your travel history.
- A standard letter confirming academic progress and attendance on your current course of study, including examination successes and marks where relevant.
- A student (or their sponsor) may have invested large sums of money in their UK education: this is an incentive to return to the UK to complete studies. Give details of how much the course is costing you.
- If a student has spent a considerable time in the UK pursuing a course, this may indicate that they are unlikely to jeopardise completing their studies by attempting to stay illegally in the US. Give information about length of course, qualification being studied for and what stage you have reached in your studies.
- Include any information on a career plan in your home country, any links with sponsors or employers.
- If you are leaving behind any relatives (particularly dependants), say so.

- Having relatives in the USA may further weaken an already weak application. It is unlikely to be decisive if the application is otherwise strong.

**Work permission**

On a J-1 or F-1 visa, you are permitted to work up to 20 hours a week on campus but you are not normally permitted to work off-campus. Occasionally, students have been able to secure off-campus work if they can demonstrate that the work is directly linked to the course they are studying. Many US campuses make a greater use of student employees than UK campuses do. However, remember that you will be competing against US students for those jobs and therefore you should **not** rely on getting a job whilst abroad to support yourself financially.

**Further information about US student visas can be found here:**

<https://uk.usembassy.gov/visas/study-exchange/>

**Information about contacting the US Embassy with further questions can be found here:**

<https://uk.usembassy.gov/visas/visa-information-services/contact-us-nonimmigrant-visas/>