

UNDERSTANDING YOUR F-1 VISA

What is an F-1 visa?

An F-1 visa is a stamp or document placed in your passport at a U.S. Consulate abroad. It was issued when you presented your Form I-20, financial certification, SEVIS fee receipt and documents (listed below) that verify your intent to return to your home country upon completion of your degree. The visa includes the following information:

- ◆ the school at which you intend to study;
- ◆ the date which it expires;
- ◆ the number of times you can use it to enter the U.S.

Note: An approval notice from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) granting a change of status to F-1 is NOT an F-1 visa.

What if my F-1 visa expires while I am in the U.S.?

Your F-1 visa does **not** determine how long you can stay in the U.S. Once you are here, you do not need to be concerned about its expiration unless you decide to leave the U.S. for a short visit abroad prior to completing your studies. Before you re-enter the U.S., you will need to make sure you have a valid F-1 visa. The F-1 visa itself (unlike your F-1 status) is only important at the port of entry to the U.S.

The length of time you may remain in the U.S. is indicated on the Form I-94 card. For most students, the I-94 card has the notation "D/S." D/S means "duration of status" or the length of time you are maintaining your legal F-1 status. Please see the handout entitled "[Maintaining Legal F-1 Student Status](#)" for further information. (If your I-94 does not have the notation "D/S," you should speak to an ISSO advisor well before it expires.)

When must I renew my F-1 visa?

You must renew your F-1 visa if you decide to travel outside the U.S. **and** your current F-1 visa will expire before you re-enter the U.S. to continue your program. If this is the case, you will need to apply for another F-1 visa at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate. There is one **exception** to this: a student who travels to Mexico, Canada, and islands adjacent to the U.S. (except Cuba) for less than 30 days is not required to have a current F-1 visa in his/her passport in order to re-enter the U.S. This is referred to as "automatic visa revalidation." (For more information read the ISSO handout, "[U.S. Visas and Travel to Canada, Mexico, and Other Contiguous Territory: Automatic Extension of an Expired Non-Immigrant Visa.](#)")

What do I need to get an F-1 visa?

In order to obtain a new F-1 visa, you should contact the U.S. Embassy or Consulate where you intend to apply for the visa and ask about the application requirements. (This information is usually on the Consulate's web site, which can be found through the following index page: http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/visa_1750.html) In most cases you must present the following documents when you apply for a visa:

- ◆ visa application forms, DS-156, DS-157 (for all males 16-45 years of age) and DS-158, which are all available at the Consulate or online at http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/forms/forms_1342.html
- ◆ visa application fee (fee amount can be determined at http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/fees/fees_1341.html); it varies
- ◆ your Form I-20 (with endorsement by your international student advisor for re-entry on page 3) or a new Form I-20 for "initial attendance"
- ◆ documents which show financial resources for at least one year of study
- ◆ your passport
- ◆ two color photographs
- ◆ evidence of your intent to return to your home country upon completion of your studies

Although not required, we recommend that you also take your university transcripts, registration receipts, letter from the ISSO stating your full-time enrollment at TU, and all previous I-20 forms.

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What kind of documents can show intent to return to my home country?

While there is no set documentation to indicate your intent to return to your home country, your application for an F-1 visa will more likely be approved if you maintain closer ties to your home country than to the U.S. This can be shown in the following ways.

- ◆ Your immediate family members reside in your home country.
- ◆ You own property and/or maintain a bank account in your home country.
- ◆ The likelihood of employment at home in your field of study after you complete your degree is great. (Provide evidence of job searches or interviews you have done.)
- ◆ You have made frequent visits home (every year or 18 months).
- ◆ You have maintained membership in cultural organizations at home while you have studied in the U.S.
- ◆ You have maintained important social ties in your home country.

Can I apply for an F-1 visa in a country other than my home country?

You may apply for a visa in a country other than your home country (a "third country"), unless you are subject to the "visa overstay" provisions of the Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA). However, an application for a U.S. visa in a third country can be more difficult, as the visa officer may take the position that s/he cannot evaluate your intention to return to your home country, or even evaluate your documentation of financial ability. You should be prepared to make your visa application in your home country if you are denied when applying abroad.

Please be aware that students/scholars who apply for a U.S. visa in Canada, Mexico, or adjacent islands and those from Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya, Sudan, North Korea, and Cuba no longer benefit from "automatic visa revalidation." (For more information read the ISSO handout, "[Visas and Travel: Automatic Extension of an Expired Non-Immigrant Visa.](#)")

In what situations might my request for an F-1 visa be denied?

Below are examples of situations in which your visa application may be at risk. You should make an appointment to see an ISSO advisor if any of these cases applies to you.

- ◆ You intend to make an application in a "third" country (e.g., you are from P.R. China, but you intend to go to Canada to obtain an F-1 visa).
- ◆ This is your first application for an F-1 visa.
- ◆ You are returning home after a long stay in the U.S. (3 or more years)
- ◆ There is a serious political or economic crisis in your home country.
- ◆ You are engaged in practical training after the completion of your academic program.
- ◆ You have limited time to obtain your visa. (Your visit will only be for a short period of time.)
- ◆ You are waiting for the results of an application for permanent residency (immigrant status) or you are married to a U.S. citizen or permanent resident
- ◆ You have violated your legal F-1 status in the past

What can you do if your visa request is denied?

If your visa application is denied, before you leave the U.S. Embassy or Consulate, obtain an explanation of the specific reason you are denied the visa and ask about re-application procedures. Also, try to obtain the full name of the officer who interviewed you, as well as her/his fax number. The ISSO MAY be able to help you, if you can tell us this information.

What if I am traveling and my visa was issued for a school which I am not attending nor planning to attend?

If you have transferred schools since the time your visa was initially issued and you have been maintaining your legal F-1 status since that time, you do not have to renew your visa if it has not expired. Bring copies of all previous I-20's with you, as those immigration documents will provide an explanation.