

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

What is an I-20 and how do I get one?

A Form I-20 is a government form that tells the U.S. government that you are eligible for F-1 Student Status. It certifies that

- 1) You are or expect to be a "bona fide" student
- 2) You meet the American Educational Institute's admissions requirement
- 3) You will pursue a full course of study
- 4) You proved to the college/university that you have enough money to study and live in the U.S. without working illegally or suffering from poverty.

The I-20 is sent to you by the university/college you have been accepted at. You need this form to apply for the student visa.

What is CPT?

Curricular Practical Training or CPT is an optional employment opportunity available to F-1 students where the training is considered to be an integral part of the curriculum or academic program. According to the immigration regulations, this employment may be an internship, cooperative education job, a practicum, or any other work experience that is either required for your degree which defined in the course catalog or for which academic credit is awarded.

What is OPT?

Optional Practical Training or OPT is temporary employment authorization that gives F-1 students an opportunity to apply knowledge gained in the classroom to a practical work experience off campus. You may use some or all of the available 12 months of practical training during your course of study or save the full twelve months to use after you complete your studies. Authorization for optional practical training is granted by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) formerly known as the Immigration and Naturalization Service or INS - and can take at least 90 days and frequently up to 120 days to obtain. It is important that you apply for the authorization at the earliest possible date.

What are the Eligibility Requirements for F-1 Optional Practical Training?

To be eligible to apply for optional practical training, you must:

- Have been in full time student status for at least one full academic year preceding the submission of your OPT application
- Be maintaining valid F-1 status at the time of the application, and
- Intend to work in a position directly related to your major field of study.

When should I apply?

If you are a student completing the first academic year of study (or are in a one year program), the earliest you can submit the application is 90 days prior to the date you complete your first academic year.

If you are beyond the first year of study, you may submit your application no earlier than 120 days prior to the start date you request for your OPT.

If you are applying for OPT based on completion of all coursework and/or completion of your academic program, you must submit an application for optional practical training prior to your completion date. Applications received at USCIS after the completion date will be denied.

Applications will be accepted by OISS at your pre scheduled OPT appointment (see below)

Dates of OPT Authorization

The OPT card is approved for a specific beginning and end date. You must identify those dates on the OPT Request Form. For OPT after completion of studies or graduation, the beginning date can be no later than 60 days after the date you complete your studies. If you have questions about your OPT dates, please discuss this with an OISS adviser.

How do I convert my F1 visa to a H1-B visa?

Once you find a suitable job and employer who can sponsor your H1B visa, you can convert F1 to H1 status and can start working based on that H1B visa for the that employer.

Can I get the H1B stamp in USA itself?

No, first time H1B stamp can only be done in your home country.

What is SEVIS?

US implemented the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System, known as the SEVIS. Universities issuing I-20s have to enter international student information in the SEVIS database and this information is then accessed by US consulates worldwide. So If your university does not enter your information in the database, your visa may not be issued . In this case, inform the university and request them to enter your information in the SEVIS database.

When is the right time to apply for the student visa?

One can apply 120 days before the date of enrolment mentioned in the I-20 form.

Can I change my university/school once I reach USA?

Once you are in the US, you are governed by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services rules. Accordingly, you cannot change your school before completing a year there. It is advisable you make your choice carefully, and avoid problems later.

I received the I-20 from a school, which I used to get my my student visa. But recently I recieved another I-20 from a different school, which I would prefer to attend. What should I do?

Apply again for a new visa based on the new I-20.

What types of things are the US consular's looking for in terms of proof that the applicant will come back to his/her home country? How much assets or liquid cash are they looking for?

There is no official fixed amount or numbers specified by immigration and visa authorities. You should be able to satisfy the consular officer that you are a bona-fide student, genuinely wanting to pursue higher studies in America.

The ties shown by you should involve your economic attraction to India after graduation and the social roots to which you would return rather than stay in the US.

If I don't have sufficient funds, can a bank loan help?

- The US consular will have to be convinced about how you will repay the loan.
- If huge loans are shown, getting a visa can become difficult. It is preferable to have a smaller loan.

Do visas for students get rejected if the applicants have brothers and sisters in America?

Depending on individual case, it is not the only reason for the rejection.

How do I prove I can afford to attend school in the US?

Part 7 on the I-20 shows the amount of funding you must have available to cover the first year's expenses. The total amount includes tuition and fees, living expenses, expenses of dependents (if applicable) and other expenses (as applicable). You must prove you have immediate funds available to cover this amount.

If your parents are sponsoring your study, an affidavit of their support with proof of funds will help.

Do I have to take the TOFEL or GRE exams to qualify for a student visa? What if some schools do not require that I take the TOEFL or GRE exams?

You must have a letter in writing from the school stating that they do not require TOEFL or GRE exams for attendance.

However, the embassy strongly recommends that all student visa applicants provide standardized test scores.