How to Apply for a Student Visa

International students must obtain a student visa in order to study in the U.S. You must make an appointment with your nearest American Embassy or Consulate and apply for an F-1 (if you have Form I-20) or J-1 (if you have Form DS-2019) student visa. To locate the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate, visit www.usembassy.state.gov and obtain the detailed information about the procedures for obtaining your student visa.

Before you apply for the visa, you need to understand the process and rules governing the issuance of a U.S. visa. Many visa applications are denied. In some countries, most applications are denied often because the student did not understand the rules or was not adequately prepared. Don’t let this happen to you! Please read the following information carefully and contact us if you need more information or assistance.

The Procedure

1. Apply for your student visa as soon as possible to allow enough time for visa processing. The embassy/consulate may accept your application but not issue your visa more than 6 months before the date you are required to report to St. John’s University as shown on your Form I-20 or DS-2019.

2. Pay the $200 SEVIS I-901 Fee. If your I-20/DS-2019 was issued on or after September 1, 2004, and is marked for “initial” attendance (item #3 on your I-20), you are required to pay the SEVIS I-901 fee.

To Pay Online:
   a) Visit fmjfee.com
   b) Complete the I-901 form online and submit payment using a Visa, MasterCard or American Express. Be sure to write your name EXACTLY as it appears on your Form I-20.
   c) Print a copy of the online receipt.

To Pay by Mail:
   a) Obtain a Form I-901 “Fee Remittance for Certain F,J, and M Non-immigrants” online at fmjfee.com or by calling The Department of Homeland Security at + 011-785-330-1048.
   b) Complete the Form I-901. Be sure to write your name EXACTLY as it appears on your I-20.
   c) Prepare a check, international money order or foreign draft (drawn on U.S. Banks only) in the amount of $200 USD, made payable to “I-901 Student/Exchange Visitor Processing Fee”
   d) Mail the completed Form I-901 and payment to the address listed on Form I-901.

To Pay using the Western Union Quick Pay:
   a) Visit www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/wu_instr.htm for Western Union instructions.
   b) Print and bring a copy of these instructions along with a copy of the sample form to a local participating Western Union Agent location.

What if Your Visa is Denied?
Contact us with details of your denial so we may advise you on how to better prepare your next visa application.

International Student and Scholar Services Office
St. John Hall, Room 116  Phone: (718) 990-6083 Fax: (718) 990-2070  ISS@stjohns.edu
The Rules
1. By law, you are seen as someone who plans to remain in the U.S. permanently. A consular officer will decide whether or not to grant you a visa to come to the U.S. The consular officer is required by law to assume that you do not plan to return to your home country when you finish your studies. Do not be upset or take this personally. They MUST see you as someone who wants to emigrate to the U.S. Student visas are only given to those who convince the consulate that they intend to return permanently to their home country after completing their studies in the Unites States. Failure to convince them of this is the NUMBER ONE REASON FOR VISA DENIAL!!!!
2. You must have a valid academic or professional objective in the U.S. You must provide proof of your qualifications for the program of study and how St. John’s University will prepare you for a career in your home country. You must also provide evidence of your ability to finance your educational program.
3. Answer questions honestly, directly and to the point. Be brief.
4. Consular officers are impersonal when administering the law. In the United States, laws are applied equally to all people regardless of status or gender. DO NOT TRY TO NEGOTIATE OR DISCUSS PERSONAL MATTERS with the consular officer.
5. U.S. government officials like documents. Have all evidence of qualifications for a student visa.

Be Prepared
1. Be ready to clearly explain why you want to study in the U.S. at St. John’s University.
   - Why do you want to study in the U.S.?
   - Why do you want to pursue this program of study?
   - Why did you choose St. John’s University?
   - What career will your studies prepare you for in your home country?
2. Present evidence of your educational qualifications for admission to St. John’s University and original copies of financial documents you submitted to us. Your documents must match exactly what appears on your Form I-20 (in item #8) or DS-2019 (in item #5).
3. Please present evidence that proves you have social, economic or family ties that will induce you to return home permanently upon completing your studies.
   - Prove that you have a permanent residence in your country that you do not intend to abandon. A photocopy of a deed or lease to your home is sufficient.
   - If your family owns a business, provide a letter from the bank describing it. If they own property, copies of the deed are helpful.
   - If you have a brother or sister who studied in the U.S. and then returned home, provide a copy of his or her diploma and a statement from his or her employer.
   - If you traveled to the U.S. before as a visitor, emphasize that you returned home before!
   - If your program of study is in great demand in your country, get a letter from a possible employer saying they are interested in hiring people with the degree you will receive.
4. Do not emphasize any ties you have to the U.S. or to family members in the U.S.
5. Practice your English. Unless you are going to study English on campus and it appears on your Form I-20 in item #6, you are expected to be able to speak it and show your TOEFL score to the consular officer. You may be asked to read from a U.S. newspaper or discuss what your I-20 or DS-2019 says.
6. Do not talk about working in the U.S. unless you have been awarded a teaching assistantship or fellowship on campus. You are required to prove that you can support the costs of studying and living in the U.S. Employment is strictly controlled by immigration and is not guaranteed.
7. If you began your studies in another nonimmigrant status and you received a change of status to F-1, be prepared to discuss how your original purpose for being in the U.S. changed to that of a full-time student. Provide copies of your transcripts to show your studies.