

**APPLYING FOR A STUDENT (F-1) VISA AND**  
**REPORTING TO THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT & SCHOLAR INSTITUTE (ISSI)**

Congratulations on your acceptance to Northeastern University. The staff members of the International Student & Scholar Institute (ISSI) are looking forward to welcoming you here in Boston. This instruction sheet will help you to better understand the necessary procedures to obtain your student visa. We hope it will answer many of your questions. Please feel free to contact us ([issi@neu.edu](mailto:issi@neu.edu)) if you have any further questions after reading this information.

**What is a visa?**

To start with, a visa is the proof of assessment conducted by the officials at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate that certifies a person may seek admission to the U.S. for a specific purpose. Therefore, when you apply for a visa, you will need to submit certain documents to explain the purpose of your visit to the U.S. After the consular officials finish reviewing your case, and if they determine that you may be allowed to enter the U.S., they place a visa stamp in your passport. A visa stamp itself does not guarantee your admission to the U.S. You will still be inspected by a U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer at a port of entry (usually at an airport or border post). There, you will need to submit a few other documents to prove that you are visiting the U.S. for the reason you declared at the time of the visa application. The immigration officer has the authority to approve or deny your request for entry. If the officer grants approval, you will be allowed to enter the U.S. in the immigration status, which is then noted on your I-94 form.

**A nonimmigrant (F-1) student visa**

A student visa is one of many categories of nonimmigrant visas. Nonimmigrants are visitors who stay in the U.S. temporarily for specified purposes within a limited amount of time. Since they are temporary visitors, nonimmigrants should leave the U.S. after their stay expires. Conversely, immigrants are people who have authorization to stay permanently in the U.S.

Your Certificate of Eligibility document (I-20 form) is necessary to obtain a nonimmigrant (F-1) student visa to attend school in the United States. This visa permits you to enter the United States for the purpose of studying at Northeastern University. Do not enter the United States in Visitor status (B-1, B-2, WT, or WB) if you intend to enroll at Northeastern. If you enter the U.S. on a tourist visa or on Visa Waiver Pilot Program you will be required to leave the U.S. in order to re-enter on a proper student visa. Therefore, it is important that you follow these instructions for obtaining your F-1 student visa.

**Obtaining a Visa**

You may be accepted by several different institutions and may receive more than one I-20 forms. If you are intending to attend Northeastern University, then you will need to use Northeastern's I-20 to pay the SEVIS fee and apply for a student visa.

To obtain a student visa, the applicant must submit a valid I-20 form issued by Northeastern to the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in his/her country. Students are encouraged to apply for their visa as soon as they receive the I-20 form to provide ample time for visa processing. Note that U.S. Embassies or Consulates are able to issue F-1 entry visas up to 120 days in advance of a program's report date as provided on the I-20 form. However, students (F-1 visa holders) are not permitted to enter the U.S. more than 30 days in advance of the program start/report date.

In most countries, student visa applicants must appear in person for interview. However, each U.S. Embassy or Consulate sets its own interview policies and procedures regarding student visas, so students should consult Embassy websites or call for specific application instructions. For the current listings of U.S. Embassies and Consulates abroad, we recommend the following web link from the U.S. Department of State: <http://usembassy.state.gov>. For the latest information on visa processing, required material, visa applications and processing times please visit the following website: [http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types\\_1268.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1268.html)

In general, international students may apply for an F-1 visa by presenting the following documents to the U.S. Embassy or Consulate:

1. Certificate of Eligibility for nonimmigrant visa (I-20 form) issued by Northeastern University. Your assigned SEVIS ID number is in the upper right corner of page 1. Check to see that all information is correct and sign the form on line #11. If under the age of 18, a parent or guardian also must sign. Please note: the spelling of your name and your date of birth must be exactly the same as what appears in your passport.
2. Valid passport (passport must be valid for at least six months after your proposed date of entry into the United States)
3. Financial evidence that shows you have sufficient funds to cover your tuition and living expenses during the period you intend to study. At a minimum, you must prove that you have sufficient funds for at least one year of study as reflected on the I-20 form. If you have more than one source of funding, please provide the required documentation corresponding to each source listed on the I-20 form (e.g.: personal or family funds, Northeastern award or scholarship letter, etc.)
4. Proof of the SEVIS fee payment (the SEVIS fee must be paid prior to the scheduled visa interview)
5. Admission letter from Northeastern University
6. Completed visa application forms (DS-156, DS-157, and DS-158) required by the U.S. Department of State:
  - Form DS-156 (Application for Nonimmigrant Visa), this form can be obtained from any U.S. Consulate, or you may

- complete the form on-line and take a printed copy with you to the interview (<http://evisaforms.state.gov>)
  - Form DS-157 (Supplemental Nonimmigrant Visa Application), required for male applicants between the ages of 16 and 45 ([http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/forms/forms\\_1342.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/forms/forms_1342.html))
  - Form DS-158 (Contact Information and Work History for Nonimmigrant Visa Applicant), required for all F applicants ([http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/forms/forms\\_1342.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/forms/forms_1342.html))
7. One photograph (for the required photo format, please refer to the website [http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/info/info\\_1287.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/info/info_1287.html) )
  8. Visa Application Fee (please, check with the U.S. Embassy or Consulate for the fee amount and how it must be paid, or visit the following U.S. Department of State website at [http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi\\_fees.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi_fees.html) )

All applicants should be prepared to provide additional information, such as transcripts or diplomas from previously attended institutions, TOEFL /SAT scores, or documents which demonstrate that the applicant intends to return home after his/her studies, etc.

**SEVIS Fee:** New students (F-1) with an I-20 form are subject to a SEVIS fee of \$100 for the maintenance of this electronic record. A SEVIS fee payment receipt must be included with most visa applications. Students may pay the fee through the Internet by using credit card and completing the online Form I-901 or through the mail by submitting a completed I-901 form and a check or money order. For detailed information, please refer to the website [www.fmjfee.com](http://www.fmjfee.com). Please note, if you pay the fee by credit card, you will be able to print the receipt immediately. If you pay by check or money order, then you must wait for the receipt to be mailed to you. Students should also be prepared to present the SEVIS fee payment receipt at the U.S. port of entry. Canadian citizens must pay the SEVIS fee before entering the United States. F-2 dependents are not required to pay the SEVIS fee.

**Accompanying family members (F-2 visa holders):** Spouse and/or children (under age 21) will receive his /her own SEVIS-generated I-20 form, with her/his own SEVIS ID number. However, it is the F-1 principal who signs the I-20. The F-2 visa may be obtained by presenting to a U.S. consulate the dependent's I-20 form and proof of adequate funding for support of the family members. Proof of marriage for spouse and a birth certificate for each child are required for F-2 visa applicants. You are also required to complete a separate visa application form for each child, even if they are included on a parent's passport. It is preferred that families apply for F-1 and F-2 visas at the same time, but if the spouse and children must apply separately at a later time, they should bring copies of the F-1 student visa holder's passport with the F-1 visa stamp, and his/her I-20 form along with all other required documents.

**Canadian citizens do not need an F-1 visa, but they are required to have an I-20 form and pay the SEVIS fee before entering the U.S. to study.** Upon the receipt of the I-20 from Northeastern, Canadian students may enter the U.S. by presenting the I-20 form, evidence of Canadian citizenship, the admission letter from Northeastern, evidence of financial support and proof of SEVIS fee payment. SEVIS fee cannot be paid at the port of entry. All Canadian citizens entering the U.S. by air or sea will be required to show a passport to enter the United States. Effective December 31, 2007, a passport will be required for ALL entries to the U.S., including land borders.

**IMPORTANT: No assurances regarding the issuance of visas can be given in advance. Therefore final travel plans or the purchase of non-refundable tickets should not be made until a visa has been issued.**

After the visa is granted and processed, check your passport to be sure you obtained an F-1 visa stamp, and that any dependents obtained an F-2 visa stamp. Also, be certain that the original I-20 form was returned to you, as you must have the original with you when you arrive to the United States. Sometimes, the document is returned to you in a sealed envelope, which must be presented to the immigration inspector when you arrive (in this case, do not open the envelope).

### **Entering the United States**

According to immigration regulations, F-1 student visa holders can seek admission to the U.S. up to 30 days prior to a program's report date as shown on the I-20 form (item # 5). During your flight to the U.S., an airline attendant will distribute I-94 Arrival/Departure forms prior to landing in the U.S. Since you have a student visa stamp in your passport, be sure to obtain a white I-94 form; not a green I-94W form. At the U.S. port of entry, you will be required to submit your passport, I-20 form, I-94 form, and customs form to a representative of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The immigration officer will stamp your I-20 and I-94 forms upon entry. In most cases, the officer notes "D/S" ("Duration of Status") on the stamp. This means that you are allowed to stay in the U.S. for the length of time indicated on your I-20 form, so long as you are maintaining full-time enrollment at the school that issued your I-20 form (<http://www.northeastern.edu/issi/admissions/maintain.html>)

### **Reporting to Northeastern and the ISSI**

**An international student should arrive on campus no later than her/his program's report date (see item # 5 on your I-20 form) and report in person to ISSI during scheduled Immigration Clearance sessions, as outlined in the ISSI Orientation schedule. The student must complete Immigration Clearance prior to course registration. Completing immigration clearance is essential for compliance with University policies, federal government and SEVIS requirements. Please bring your passport, I-20 and I-94 forms with you.**

During Orientation, all undergraduate students will meet their academic advisors to receive important information about course registration, take a math placement exam, the English language test (if required), and attend a mandatory "I Am Here" registration session. Graduate Schools also will conduct mandatory orientation sessions for graduate students.

Therefore, if **the student is not able to arrive on campus by the program's report date, she/he must request a deferral** to the next available term by contacting Undergraduate Admissions (undergraduate students) or admitting Graduate Schools (graduate students). If the preliminary schedule of the program is not enclosed, the ISSI will mail it in the near future. The detailed orientation information/schedule will also be posted on-line <http://www.northeastern.edu/issi/orientation/index.html>.