Applying for a U.S. Visa Stamp

Office of International Students and Scholars
Eastern Illinois University

International students and scholars must have a valid stamp in their passport to be eligible for entry or re-entry to the United States (there are some exceptions for travel to Canada, Mexico or an adjacent island for less than 30 days AND citizens of Canada do not need a visa stamp in their passports in order to enter the U.S.). However you do not need to have a valid visa stamp to remain within the U.S. Visa stamps are obtained at US Consulates abroad.

FOR PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS

Paying the SEVIS fee:
Information and instructions on paying the SEVIS fee are posted on the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) webpage.

Non-immigrant Intent:
All applicants for an F or J visa are required to demonstrate their intent to return to their home country following the completion of their academic programs and practical training. There are several ways you can be prepared to support your intent to return home in your visa interview:
- have a few sentences in mind that express how you intend to use your training at home
- bring copies of deeds to any property (land, house, apartment) that you or your family own at home
- bring bank statements of any accounts that you or your family maintain at home
- if you have an employer who intends to employ you when you return home, bring a letter from that employer

Security Clearances:
Field of Study: If a visa applicant's area of study is on the U.S. federal government's "technology alert list", the U.S. consulate may complete a security clearance prior to granting the visa. This process may delay your visa application by anywhere from one to three months. There is no way to know for certain ahead of time whether you will be subject to this type of clearance. If you find that your field of study is on the list, it would be advisable to **get a letter from a professor on your committee which describes briefly and in layman's terms the specific area of your research.** This letter will not deter a security clearance, but it may expedite the clearance.

Country of Citizenship, Nationality or Birth: A security clearance may also be required by the U.S. consulate if a visa applicant is born in or is a citizen or national of certain countries. The list of countries is not published, but seems to include the following:
Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Morocco, North Korea, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, and the territories of Gaza and West Bank.

Interviews Required for Visa Applications:
U.S. consulates interview nearly all internationals applying for non-immigrant visa stamps. There will be only rare situations in which an applicant will be able to get a visa without the interview. The requirement for the interview will mean that you may experience longer delays in getting an appointment at the U.S. consulate than you have in the past.

SEVIS and the Consolidated Consular Database (CCD):
If you have an I-20 or a DS-2019 from Eastern Illinois University, you have been entered in the SEVIS database system. However, the consulates still may not be able to see your record. This is because the consulates actually look at your SEVIS record through their own database, referred to as the Consolidated Consular Database or the CCD. Records from SEVIS are normally exported and uploaded to the CCD every 24 hours. However, there have been instances when the system is not working perfectly causing the records of the CCD to be incomplete. In the event that a consular officer informs you that your record is not available in SEVIS, please contact OISS so we can contact the National SEVIS helpdesk to attempt to resolve the problem. Unfortunately, we are not able to make any advance arrangements to ensure that your record will be seen by the consulate.

CURRENT STUDENTS

Documents Required for Visa Application:
If you do plan to travel out of the U.S. and are going to need to apply for a visa, you will need the following documents for the visa application:
- valid passport
- valid I-20 for F-1 or DS-2019 for J-1
- If you are an F-1 student on OPT after graduating, bring your OPT card and job offer letter
- SEVIS fee for NEW F-1 or J-1 status
- recent financial support documents
- proof of enrollment (certificate of enrollment or transcript) if you are continuing student.
- visa application materials as stated by the specific U.S. consulate at which you will apply.

Contact the U.S. Consulate where you will apply:
It is a good idea to contact the U.S. consulate where you will apply to determine if any additional documents may be required for visa applications and to confirm the hours of operation and length of time needed to secure the visa. It is important to note that the U.S. consulate may require a security clearance which could result in delays in obtaining your visa. We recommend that you apply for your visa as soon as possible so that you may reduce the chances that your return to the U.S. will be delayed.