

## Immigration & Visa Information for F-1/J-1 Students

This information has been prepared for students who have a SEVIS Form I-20 (F-1 students) or a DS-2019 (J-1 students) for a program of study at Clarion University. It describes the steps you need to take in order to pay the SEVIS fee, to apply for an F-1/J-1 student visa, and to enter the U.S. as a student in F-1 or J-1 immigration status.

### Step 1: Read your enclosed SEVIS Form I-20/DS-2019

Your SEVIS immigration document indicates that we have created a record for you in the Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). Your assigned SEVIS ID number is in the upper right corner of page 1 of your SEVIS Form. If any information on this form is incorrect, please contact the Office of International Programs (OIP) immediately. If all of the information is correct, complete and sign the bottom portion of the form. If you have informed us of your dependents (husband or wife, children under the age of 21) who will travel with you to the United States, each of them will receive their own dependent SEVIS Form to assist them in applying for their F-2/J-2 visa.

**Note:** The spelling of your name and your date of birth must be exactly the same as reflected in your passport. The same is true for dependents. If your name and/or date of birth on SEVIS immigration document are not exactly the same as the information that appears in your passport, please request that we issue you a corrected Form I-20 or DS-2019. Please send a photocopy of the passport so that we can make sure that all information is consistent.

### Step 2: Make Sure Your Passport is Valid

In order to avoid possible problems applying for a visa or entering the U.S., it is recommended that your passport must be valid for at least 6 months beyond the date you intend to remain in the U.S.

### Step 3: Pay the SEVIS Fee

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) requires proof of payment of the \$200 SEVIS fee before issuing a visa or approving any benefits of status. This fee must be paid by new F-1 and J-1 students with who are beginning an academic program in the US in F-1 or J-1 status. While immigration regulations indicate that the fee should be paid a minimum of three business days prior to a visa application at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate, we suggest that students pay the fee as soon as they receive the Form I-20 or DS-2019 to allow sufficient time for DHS to update the fee payment in the student's electronic SEVIS record. Please refer to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement web page for more information: <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/index.htm>.

F-2 dependents are not required to pay the SEVIS fee. The SEVIS fee is **NOT** required from students currently in the U.S. in valid F-1 immigration status. Similarly, the fee is not required from students transferring to a new school or changing to another degree program or level within five months from the completion of the previous F-1 program. However, students who have studied in the U.S. in F-1 status in the past, but have departed the U.S. for longer than a five month period or changed to another immigration status must pay a new SEVIS fee before commencing the new program regardless of whether the student will need a new F-1 visa. Citizens of Canada and Bermuda are exempt from the requirement to possess a visa to enter the U.S., however, they are still required to pay the SEVIS fee. Proof of SEVIS fee payment for these individuals will be verified at the U.S. port of entry before they are admitted to the United States in F-1 status.

## **Payment**

See details of methods of payment in enclosed I-901 INSTRUCTIONS.

### **Your Payment Receipt**

- After paying the fee, you will receive a payment receipt (form I-797). If paying on-line, be sure to print the receipt at the end of your transaction.
- Make and keep extra copies of your SEVIS fee payment receipt. You should keep your receipt for your entire period in the U.S.
- Present a copy of the receipt with your visa application at the U.S. consulate and at the U.S. port of entry. Carry the receipt with you during any future travel into the U.S.
- F-2 and J-2 dependent family members should present a copy of the receipt when applying for F-2 or J-2 visas and when traveling into the U.S.

If you have been accepted to more than one school in the U.S., it is strongly recommended that you decide which school you will attend before paying the fee as the student must include the unique SEVIS ID number and school code found on the SEVIS Form I-20 issued by the appropriate institution. Although DHS has confirmed that a fee payment made on one SEVIS ID number can be applied to another SEVIS ID number issued to the same individual, it could complicate a visa application and should be avoided whenever possible.

If you do not have access to the internet, we have enclosed with this packet a paper I-901 for you to use. Please note that the SEVIS fee is non-refundable. However, if your visa application is denied by the U.S. Embassy or Consulate, you might not be required to pay a new SEVIS fee if you reapply for a new visa within 12 months of the denial. Please contact the staff of the OIP at [lhepfl@clarion.edu](mailto:lhepfl@clarion.edu) if you have any questions regarding the payment of the SEVIS fee.

### **Step 4: Contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate to obtain a valid F-1/J-1 visa**

Citizens of all countries, except citizens of Canada and Bermuda, are required to have F-1/J-1 visas to enter the U.S. to study. You must contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate to initiate your visa application. Most Consular Posts will process an application 90 days prior to the start date of the academic program listed on your SEVIS Form I-20 or DS-2019. Please refer to the following U.S. Department of State (USDOS) website for more information:  
[http://travel.state.gov/visa/questions/questions\\_1253.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/questions/questions_1253.html)

To apply for a visa, you will need to submit the following documents to the U.S. Embassy or Consulate:

1. *Application for Nonimmigrant Visa* (Form DS-156) which can be obtained from any U.S. Consulate or downloaded from the following USDOS website:  
[http://travel.state.gov/visa/forms/forms\\_1342.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/forms/forms_1342.html)
2. *Supplemental Nonimmigrant Visa Application* (Form DS-157), for all male applicants between the ages of 16 and 45, which can be obtained from any U.S. Consulate or downloaded from the following USDOS website: [http://travel.state.gov/visa/forms/forms\\_1342.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/forms/forms_1342.html)
3. *Contact Information and Work History For Nonimmigrant visa applicant* (Form DS-158), which can be obtained from any U.S. Consulate or downloaded from the following USDOS website:  
[http://travel.state.gov/visa/forms/forms\\_1342.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/forms/forms_1342.html)
4. Application fee (check with the Consulate for the fee amount and how it must be paid or visit the following USDOS website at [http://travel.state.gov/visa/forms/forms\\_1342.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/forms/forms_1342.html))
5. One photograph (1½ inches square [37 x 37mm], showing full face, without head covering, against a light background as explained on the following USDOS website:  
[http://travel.state.gov/visa/visaphotoreq/visaphotoreq\\_5334.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/visaphotoreq/visaphotoreq_5334.html))
6. Passport
7. SEVIS form I-20 or DS-2019 from Clarion University
8. Form I-797 Receipt or online proof of SEVIS Fee payment
9. Admission letter from Clarion University
10. Original financial documents proving the availability of sufficient funds as reflected on your SEVIS Form I-20 or DS-2019
11. Documents which demonstrate that you intend to return home after your studies

All visa applicants are now required to schedule an appointment for an interview. Please keep in mind that it may take a few weeks to schedule an appointment, so you should initiate your visa application as early as possible. Before your interview, practice answering questions in English about your visa application, your plans in the U.S., and your plans after you return home. If your spouse and children will remain in your country, be prepared to explain how they will support themselves without you sending them money from the U.S. Be positive and respond to questions with clear, concise answers during your interview.

You may not need to do anything special to prove that you intend to return home. It may be sufficient for you to explain, if asked, that you plan to return to your country to work, to continue your studies, or to do whatever you plan to do when you return home. However, you may be required to prove that you have such strong ties to your country that you will return there. If you would like more information, please and refer to the Visa Process Guide on the following USDOS website:

<http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/tempvisitors.html>

The consular official may decide to process your application through a special “security clearance” before granting the visa. Security clearances may take as long as a few months, so it is very important that you apply for your F-1/J-1 visa as early as possible. Most consular officials request a security clearance for a visa application based on the national origin of the applicant or on a determined level of sensitivity in a prospective field of study. Once the application has been sent for security clearance, the applicant must simply wait until the consular post approves the visa.

If a visa application is denied, it is difficult to get the Consulate to change its decision. For this reason, it is important that you arrive at your appointment with the best and most complete supporting information. If your visa is denied, we suggest that you ask for the reason for the denial and request a reason in writing if possible. Please visit the following USDOS website at:

[http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/denials/denials\\_1361.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/denials/denials_1361.html) and contact us and we will try to provide you with suggestions that may strengthen your next application.

### **Step 5: Travel to the U.S.**

Once you have obtained your F-1/J-1 visa, you are ready to travel to the U.S. Immigration regulations allow you to enter the U.S. no earlier than 30 days prior to the start of your program indicated on your SEVIS immigration document. You must carry with you items 6-11 listed in Step 4. Place these documents in a folder or envelope that you will have with you at all times during your travel.

### **Step 6: Apply for “admission” to the U.S.**

When you arrive in the U.S., you will apply for “admission” and an Immigration Inspector will examine your documents. You will need to present the following documents:

- Passport with valid F-1 visa
- SEVIS Form I-20 or DS-2019
- Proof of SEVIS fee payment

You will need to have the following documents ready to present, should the Inspector ask for them:

- Admission letter from Clarion University
- Original financial documents
- Documents which demonstrate your intent to return home

The Immigration Inspector may ask you one or more questions. If you are asked about the funds that will pay for your studies, answer the question and offer to show the Inspector your financial documents. If you are asked about your “intentions,” answer the question and offer to show the Inspector the documents that demonstrate your intent to return home.

Please be advised that citizens of certain countries may be subject to Special Registration procedures when entering the U.S. This process requires fingerprinting and photographing and could take extra time, please plan connecting flights accordingly. You should calmly provide all information requested by the immigration officer.

If you have the required documents and there are no more questions, the Inspector will “admit” you to the U.S. by processing your passport, your Form I-94, and your SEVIS Form I-20 or DS-2019. When you leave the inspection area, make certain you have the following documents in your possession:

1. Passport,
2. *Departure Record* (part of Form I-94),
3. SEVIS Form I-20 or DS-2019
4. All financial documents

**IMPORTANT:** To assist you with getting a U.S. social security number, driver’s license, and/or a Pennsylvania identification card, it is essential to make sure the date of birth, spelling and order of your name is the same on your passport, visa, I-20 or DS-2019 form, and I-94 which you will complete before arriving at the U.S. port of entry.

### **Caution**

It is important that you do not enter the U.S. on a B-1 or B-2 visitor visa, or in WT or WB status through the “visa waiver” program. It is unlawful for individuals in these classifications to study full-time in the U.S., and it is difficult and sometimes impossible to change your immigration status to F-1 or J-1 once you are in the country.

## **Other Pre-Arrival Information for International Students**

### Preparing to Come to the United States

**Clothing:** The Pennsylvania climate is typical of a temperate zone, with marked seasonal variations in temperature and precipitation. Because of the range in seasonal temperatures, you will need clothing suitable for both the hot, humid summers and the cold, snowy winters as well as some transitional clothing for the spring and fall seasons.

Clothes should be chosen for comfort and good wearing qualities. Clarion University students usually dress quite casually; however, you may want to bring along a business suit or appropriate dress for formal events. We also invite you to bring your national dress to wear during our international culture night and other special occasions.

You will need some sort of rain protection and, in addition to extra layers of clothing, heavy overcoat, hat, gloves, and warm boots are recommended for the winter. Since winter clothing is very bulky and will take up much space in your luggage, you may want to wait and purchase these items after you arrive in Clarion.

**Misc. Items:** extra eye glasses or contact lenses & prescription, medications (in clearly labeled containers) & prescriptions, bilingual dictionary, photos, contact information for friends and family back home and in the U.S., and compact items that will help to personalize your residence hall room and make it feel like home.

**Items Needed for Residence Hall:** Residence hall rooms are furnished with a single bed, dresser, desk and chair, and closet space. Items you are responsible for providing include bedding (sheets, blankets, pillow), towels, desk lamp, laundry basket, toiletries/cosmetics, hangers, alarm clock, telephone, electronics, etc. During the orientation program you will have an opportunity to go shopping and purchase these items.

**Money:** We recommend that any money you bring from any country outside the U.S. be in the form of travelers’ checks, payable in U.S. dollars. You should also carry a small amount of money in U.S. dollars to pay for immediate expenses. Most students open an account in a local bank to handle their money by writing checks for purchases they make. Clarion University will assist you with the banking process upon your arrival.

**Medical Records:** Be sure to bring copies (translated into English) of your medical records, including details of immunizations you have received.

### Getting to Clarion

The best way to reach Clarion is to fly to the Pittsburgh International Airport which is approximately 100 miles driving distance. Upon finalizing your flight arrangements, please send us details of your flight information (date and time of arrival in Pittsburgh; and name and number of flight). Arrangements will be made with a transportation service to meet you upon arrival and transport you to Clarion. Staff from the Office of International Programs and student orientation leaders will meet you when you arrive in Clarion to welcome you and assist you with moving into your residence hall room.

### International Student Orientation

It is recommended that students arrive no later than one week prior to the beginning of fall semester classes to attend the international orientation program. The orientation program is designed to make your transition to life at Clarion as easy as possible. We will provide you with essential information about immigration rules and regulations, information about academic expectations, healthcare matters, safety and security, tour of campus and community, information about the U.S. banking system, and other information about University services and procedures. Also, academic advisement and course registration take place during this time. During the orientation program, students have an opportunity to meet and socialize with other new international students as well as American students.

### **Additional Information**

The staff of the OIP would be pleased to provide you with information, advice, and assistance on any visa or immigration matter that relates to your activities at Clarion University, please visit our website at: [www.clarion.edu](http://www.clarion.edu), or contact us via e-mail at [lhpf@clarion.edu](mailto:lhpf@clarion.edu).