

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 **SEVIS fee (\$350 for F-1, \$220 for J-1)** 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: <https://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901>

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

There are **TWO** methods available for the **I-901 SEVIS** payment, **A OR B** listed below. See details of methods of payment at <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/paying-the-i-901-sevis-fee>

A) When using Western Union (<https://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/wu-instructions>):

1. Fill out the Form I-901 online at www.fmjfee.com. A payment coupon will be generated upon completion of the form.
2. Print a copy of the payment coupon and take it to your local Western Union.
3. Fill out the Quick Collect/Quick Pay Form according to the information found at the bottom of the printed coupon. Example below:

Company Name (or Code City): SEVISFEE
Account Number: Coupon Number (ex: 010222013872390)
Amount: 350.00*

**Please note that the payment amount may differ according to your specific visa type.*

4. Present the coupon and your payment to the Western Union Agent for processing.

Payment will be linked to your Form I-901 and your online payment confirmation will be available immediately at www.fmjfee.com. After entering your SEVIS ID, Last Name, and Date of Birth you will be able to print your payment confirmation.

Important Information for Nonimmigrant Students and Exchange Visitors:

- You must complete the Form I-901 online at www.fmjfee.com prior to visiting your local Western Union. Completing the form online will generate a unique coupon number that you will need to validate and process your I-901 SEVIS fee payment at Western Union. You cannot submit a payment via Western Union without the coupon number.
- You do not have to print and bring the coupon to Western Union; you only need the unique coupon number in order to submit your payment.
- If a third party is paying your I-901 SEVIS fee on your behalf, you will need to provide them with your coupon number to enter into the Account Number field of the Western Union Quick Pay/Quick Collect Form.

For additional information about the I-901 SEVIS fee payment process, visit [*Study in the States*](#).

B) If you would like to pay the I-901 SEVIS fee directly online at <https://www.fmjfee.com/i901fee/index.html>

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.

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 intlprograms@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. Please refer to the following U.S. Department of State (USDOS) website for more information about applying for your student visa: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study.html>

To apply for a visa, you will need to submit the following documents to the U.S. Embassy or Consulate: Gather and prepare the following required documents before your visa interview:

- **Passport** valid for travel to the United States - Your passport must be valid for at least six months beyond your period of stay in the United States (unless exempt by country-specific agreements). If more than one person is included in your passport, each person who needs a visa must submit a separate application.
- **Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-160 confirmation page**
- **Application fee payment receipt**, if you are required to pay before your interview
- **Photo** – You will upload your photo while completing the online Form DS-160. If the photo upload fails, you must bring one printed photo in the format explained in the Photograph Requirements.
- **Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Student Status-For Academic and Language Students, Form I-20A-B or Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Status, Form DS-2019**– Your school will send you a SEVIS-generated Form I-20 or DS-2019 once they have entered your information in the SEVIS database. You and your school official must sign the Form I-20 or DS-2019. All students, their spouse and minor children if they intend to reside in the United States with the student, must be registered in the Student and Exchange Visitor System (SEVIS). Each person receives an individual Form I-20 or DS-2019.

Additional Documentation May Be Required

Review the instructions for how to apply for a visa on the website of the embassy or consulate where you will apply. Additional documents may be requested to establish that you are qualified. For example, additional requested documents may include evidence of:

- Your academic preparation, such as:
 - Transcripts, diplomas, degrees, or certificates from schools you attended; and
 - Scores from tests that your U.S. school required, such as the TOEFL, SAT, GRE, or GMAT;
- Your intent to depart the United States upon completion of the course of study; and
- How you will pay all educational, living and travel costs.

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.

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: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/visa-denials.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 the items 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 or J-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 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. SEVIS Form I-20 or DS-2019
3. 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. are in the form of bank 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 vaccinations you have received. More information will be provided in the Clarion University Center of Wellness packet.

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 flight number). 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/international-programs/, or contact us via e-mail at intlprograms@clarion.edu.