Applying for the F-1 Student Visa

The worldwide outbreak of the COVID-19 virus currently presents many challenges to the process of obtaining a U.S. visa and traveling to Yale to begin your studies. We are hopeful that both visa issuance and air travel will be restored so that you can arrive at Yale for the fall semester. As soon as routine visa operations resume at U.S. consulates around the world, it will be important to start the application for your student visa as soon as possible, as it can in some cases take several weeks and occasionally longer to obtain the visa. These wait times will likely be impacted by the suspension of visa operations during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Please know that both OISS and Yale University are closely monitoring the COVID-19 global health emergency and will stay in close communication with you about any updates or changes. You will find COVID-19 updates on the OISS website [1], as well as Yale University updates [2].

Pre-Application Checklist

Before you begin the visa application process, you must have the following documents:

I-20 Form

This will be sent to you in the mail from Yale after you have been admitted. Your I-20 is required when applying for an F-1 student visa at an American embassy or consulate and for entry into the United States. This I-20 has been produced by Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) and is an acknowledgement that your record is in the SEVIS system. The form includes your SEVIS ID number, which is the number in the upper corner above the bar code, (usually starts with an N).

SEVIS Fee Receipt [3]

All new students coming in F-1 status must pay a one-time SEVIS fee prior to applying for your visa, and must submit the SEVIS fee receipt as part of their application. You can find instructions about paying the fee on this page [3]. If you are renewing your F-1 visa it is recommended that you have proof of SEVIS fee payment, even though it does not have to be paid again. You can view and print the receipt by clicking “Check I-901 Status” at the top of this page [4].

Important Note: Due to the COVID-19 public health emergency, you may want to consider waiting to pay the $350 SEVIS fee until U.S. consular services are fully restored. At this time, SEVP will not issue a refund if you cannot come to the U.S. for any reason.

Additional I-20 Forms

If you have family members traveling with you in F-2 status, Yale will mail an I-20 for their use. Each F-2 dependent should have their own I-20 form. Each F-2 dependent I-20 is issued their own SEVIS number but an additional SEVIS fee does not need to be paid for a dependent.

The Application Process

Complete the DS-160 [5]

The first step in applying for a U.S. visa is the online application DS-160.

Access the DS-160 application at the Consular Electronic Application Center website [6].

Watch an overview [7] of the online application process.
Schedule a Visa Interview Appointment

The next step in applying for a U.S. visa is making an appointment at your closest U.S. embassy or consulate. At this appointment you will need to present the following documents:

- Your form I-20
- The SEVIS fee receipt
- A copy of your financial support documents, i.e. evidence that you have sufficient funds to meet the expenses of studying at Yale, e.g. bank statement or your scholarship or financial aid award letter.

In addition, the application for a U.S. visa requires you to present:

- A valid passport
- Passport-size photographs
- Completed visa applications forms (visa application forms are available on the U.S. consular websites.)

An application fee and an interview will also be required. There have been (and continue to be) changes in the visa application process and these changes are usually reflected on the consular websites.

Find a U.S. Consulate or Embassy Now [9].

Visa Processing Times

You must begin the application process for your visa well in advance of your arrival, as it can in some instances take several weeks and occasionally longer to obtain the student visa.

Find the visa wait times at your local consulate [10].

Special Notes

When applying for your student visa, pay careful attention to the following.

Applying for the F-1 Visa Early

The U.S. Department of State has instructed U.S. consulates that they may issue an F-1 visa no more than 120 days in advance of the program start date. However, an application for an F-1 visa can be submitted more than 120 days in advance of the I-20 start date in order to accommodate long processing times but the visa validity will never be before the 120 day mark. Check the website of the consulate where you will apply for a visa for detailed instructions.

Entering the U.S. Early

You may enter the U.S. no more than 30 days prior to the starting date noted on the I-20 form. If you try to enter the U.S. more than 30 days before the start date on your I-20, you may not be permitted to enter the U.S.

Enter the U.S. by the I-20 Start Date

You must pay particular attention to the starting date noted on your I-20 form, as you must enter the U.S. by this date. If you cannot enter the U.S. by this date, please get in touch with OISS about the process for changing your start date.
Expiring Visas

The expiration date on your visa may not match the end date of your degree program. If your visa expires before you complete your degree program, you will apply for a new visa on your first trip outside the U.S. after your current visa expires.

A Final Note

If the U.S. consulate has any questions regarding your studies at Yale, please contact OISS [11]. If your visa application is delayed or denied for any reason, please email your OISS adviser [12] immediately. Safe travels and we look forward to meeting you when you arrive in New Haven!

Source URL: https://oiss.yale.edu/immigration/f-1-students/applying-for-the-f-1-student-visa

Links:
[1] https://oiss.yale.edu/covid-19
[5] https://ceac.state.gov/genniv
[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLxSobebKF0
[12] https://oiss.yale.edu/node/1286