



Applying for a F-1 Student Visa and Entering the United States

Congratulations on admission to Roanoke College! To begin your studies, you will need an F-1 Nonimmigrant Student Visa to enter the U.S. The information below will help with the application process.

General information about how to apply for the F-1 student visa can be found in the prospective student section of the “Study in the States” website at <http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students>. The website of the U.S. embassy and consulate nearest you provides information specific to citizens of your country. Links to all embassy and consular websites are at www.usembassy.gov. Each of the embassy’s websites has a link to “visas” and then a link to “nonimmigrant visas,” and another to “student visas” or “F-1 student visas.” Follow the instructions provided on these sites to apply for your visa.

Note that your visa cannot be issued more than 120 days before the starting date listed in Section 5 of your I-20 Form. For more information on how long it takes to get a visa appointment and for your visa to be processed, visit travel.state.gov/visa/temp/wait/wait_4638.html and enter the location of the consulate to which you will apply.

Before applying for a visa, there are several things you must do, including:

- Pay a fee called the “SEVIS fee” or the “I-901 fee” online. Instructions for doing this are at <https://www.fmjfee.com/i901fee/index.jsp>. We recommend that you pay the fee with a credit card for fastest processing. When you pay the fee online, be sure to print a receipt before you exit the system. You will need this receipt as proof that you paid the fee when you apply for the visa. Bring the receipt with you to the visa appointment.
- Submit your on-line Nonimmigrant Visa Electronic Application, Form DS 160, at travel.state.gov/visa/forms/forms_4230.html. Print the confirmation page and bring it to your visa interview.
- Contact the consulate for a visa appointment. Some consulates have online appointment scheduling systems; others have various ways for scheduling appointments. The consular website will indicate how to set up your appointment. A few consulates allow application by mail or a drop box. This information will also be on the consular website.
- Pay your visa fee (information on how to do this will be on the consulate’s website).

The documents you must bring to your visa appointment include:

- A valid passport. Your passport should be valid for at least six months longer than your intended date of return to your country or than the end of your first year of study.
- The I-20 Certificate of Eligibility Form from Roanoke College. Be sure to sign and date the form at the bottom.
- The electronic receipt for your I-901 fee.
- Proof of payment of your visa fee.
- The DS-160 bar code page that you printed when you submitted your on-line visa application.
- One photograph. The requirements for the photograph are at http://travel.state.gov/visa/visaphotoreq/visaphotoreq_5334.html.
- Official transcripts and diplomas from your high school or previous college or university.
- Score reports from standardized tests required by Roanoke College (TOEFL, IELTS, SAT, ACT, etc.).

- Financial documentation (such as bank statements) indicating that you have the resources to pay for at least one year's tuition and living expenses.

Please note that these are general instructions. Individual consulates may require additional or different documents. Always consult the consulate's website for current requirements.

Applicants must prove to the satisfaction of the consular officer that they do not intend to immigrate to the U.S. The consular officer is likely to ask you about ties that you have to your home country (for example, family ties) and your plans for the future.

Once you have successfully completed your forms and interview, you will be told when to return to the consulate to pick up your passport with visa or when your passport with visa will be mailed to you. In a short time, you will have your visa! Note that you cannot enter the U.S. more than 30 days before the program start date listed in Section 5 of your I-20 Form.

Upon arrival in the U.S., an officer will ask you for:

- Your passport, valid for at least six months
- Your valid visa (this will be stamped in your passport)
- Your I-20 Form
- Your financial documents (the same ones you provided at your visa interview)
- The receipt for your I-901 fee (this is not always requested)

The officer will review your documents, take your photograph and ten digital fingerprints, and enter your information into the I-94 arrival system to create an electronic I-94 record. **It is VERY important that they enter your name, passport number, and date of birth correctly. If there are any errors, your I-94 record will not be able to be retrieved later and this may require a trip to Washington, D.C. after you arrive at Roanoke.** Therefore, please check with the officer how they have input this data. Each year we see mistakes made with a student's name or birthdate.

Information for Canadian Citizens:

Canadians are not required to have visas to study in the U.S. This means that determination of your eligibility to enter the U.S. will be made by the officer at your U.S. port of entry, so expect to spend some time at the border.

Effective May 23, 2023, the I-94 form needs to be filled out via electronic form prior to entering the border at <https://www.cbp.gov/travel/international-visitors/i-94>.

Pay your I-901 fee online and print out a copy of the receipt prior to entering the border with the other documents below.

When you enter the U.S. from Canada for the purpose of studying at Roanoke College you will need:

- Your Canadian passport
- Your Roanoke College I-20 Form
- I-94 Form (previously filled out online)
- Your I-901 fee receipt (see information above)
- Financial documentation (see information above)

You will be asked about your ties to Canada and your plans to return to Canada after you complete your studies in the U.S. You should indicate that you have strong ties to Canada (family and home) and that your intention is to return home to Canada after your studies.

Advice for Your Visa Interview

- The U.S. Embassy consulate officers will typically conduct interviews that are between 1-3 minutes in length with the visa applicant.
- While Roanoke recommends that you be well-prepared with the list of documents (see page 1), the consulate officer *may or may not* ask to see your supporting documents.
- It is very important that you are able to establish that you have the financial means to pay for your education. The definition of the ability to pay for your education differs from country to country. You should not rely on establishing your ability to pay with a bank statement alone. If you can provide proof prior to the interview through your parents' income/ tax returns that there is sufficient income annually, this is better than simply showing a bank statement with the amount of one year's balance at Roanoke.
- The second most important part of the interview is to establish that you do not have "immigrant intent." This means that you demonstrate that you have no familial ties to the U.S. and that you plan to study in the U.S. and return home after graduation. Another way that you can establish that you do not have immigrant intent is to show that your college list was well-researched and well-thought out. It is better to show that you have 4-6 colleges that you applied to and were very interested in than to mention that you applied to 10+ colleges in the U.S. You should be very familiar with your intended college's location, special features, internship opportunities, size, and the academic program that you are planning to study.
- Most students are rejected because the consulate officer does not believe they have sufficient financial resources to fund their education or that the student is serious about the college that they are planning to attend.

Here are the most commonly asked visa interview questions:

- What college are you planning to attend?
- What is your intended major/academic program?
- Why did you pick this major/academic program?
- How do you intend to pay for your balance?
- What other universities did you apply to?
- Why did you select this college?
- Do you have any family in the U.S.?
- What do you plan to do after you graduate?

Additional Resources for Visa Interview Preparation

- This link will allow you to watch a YouTube video on the visa interview process and read more about how to handle these questions: <https://shorelight.com/student-stories/f-1-visa-interview-questions/>. There are many videos on YouTube that address the visa interview questions and possible answers. Please try to watch a few of these to be well-prepared.