



U.S. Department of State Guidance on Visa Issuance

Frequently Asked Questions

Background

The U.S. Department of State (DOS) provided [updated guidance](#) to stakeholders on Feb. 21, 2023, which announced that consular officers can issue a visa up to 365 days in advance of a student's Program Start Date. Previously, DOS only issued visas up to 120 days before the Program Start Date.

Visit [Study in the States](#) for additional information about the change. Below are frequently asked questions about how this change may impact students and school officials.

Frequently Asked Questions

How does this guidance impact Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) requirements?

This guidance does not change the requirements for issuing a Form I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status," in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), paying the I-901 SEVIS Fee or admission into the United States. **Students can only enter the United States 30 days before the Program Start Date** listed on their Form I-20. Students who attempt to enter the United States more than 30 days before their Program Start Date may be found inadmissible by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the associated nonimmigrant visa(s) can be cancelled when found inadmissible.

What can international students and school officials do to help ensure a student's smooth reentry to the United States?

Students and school officials should ensure the following prior to arrival at a U.S. port of entry:

- Students have an active I-901 SEVIS Fee payment on the Form I-20 that they are traveling under.
- The name of the school on the Form I-20 matches the name of the school on the visa.
- Student financial information remains up to date in SEVIS.
- Students do not attempt to enter the United States more than 30 days in advance of their Program Start Date.

How does this guidance impact the I-901 SEVIS Fee?

The I-901 SEVIS Fee is valid for a 12-month period after payment. A student's I-901 SEVIS Fee payment must be valid at the time of their visa appointment. SEVP advises that students pay the I-901 SEVIS Fee within one year of their intended entry to the United States.

When may students need to repay the I-901 SEVIS Fee?



Students may need to repay the I-901 SEVIS Fee in certain situations, such as if they defer their enrollment beyond one year of initial I-901 SEVIS Fee payment. CBP officers may stop students with I-901 SEVIS Fee payments older than one year and require that they repay the Fee before seeking admission to the United States. Refer to the [I-901 SEVIS Fee FAQ](#) on ICE.gov/SEVP for information about when students need to repay the I-901 SEVIS Fee.

How should students and school officials ensure accurate financial information on a student's Form I-20?

Designated school officials (DSO) and students should ensure that student financial information remains up to date and accurate on the Form I-20. Students should notify their DSO of any significant changes to their financial information between initial visa issuance and entry into the United States. DSOs should update the Form I-20 either prior to students entering the country or at the time of initial registration if there has been a substantial change to a student's financial situation.

How does this guidance impact Initial students who receive a valid visa, but want to change schools before entering the United States?

Per federal regulation, the school notated on an Initial student's visa must match the school on their Form I-20 for initial admission to the United States. Initial students who apply for and receive a visa for one school but want to attend another school before arrival in the United States must apply for and receive an updated student visa from DOS that reflects the new school that they want to attend. As a reminder, DSOs should not register and transfer a student's Form I-20 to another school if the student has not arrived in the United States.

Will Initial Students who want to change schools before entering the United States need to repay the I-901 SEVIS Fee?

Students can transfer their I-901 SEVIS Fee to a new SEVIS record in certain situations. Refer to the [I-901 SEVIS Fee FAQ](#) on ICE.gov/SEVP for information about when students can request an I-901 SEVIS Fee payment transfer.

How should students handle a situation where they receive a visa and now want to begin their program at an earlier date?

Students should work with their DSO to receive an updated Form I-20 with the new Program Start Date. Remember, students can only enter the United States 30 days before their Program Start Date listed on the Form I-20.