Important Documents

Form I-20

The I-20 is issued by a government approved, U.S. educational institution certifying that a student has been admitted to a full-time study program and that they have demonstrated sufficient financial resources to stay in the U.S. The I-20 is officially titled the "Certificate of Eligibility" because with it, the student is "eligible" to apply for an F-1 student visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate abroad. The spouse or children will also each need their own I-20 to obtain F-2 dependent status, if desired.

Getting the I-20 from a U.S. school is not enough to become a legal F-1 student; they must also be allowed entry to the U.S. as an F-1, or be approved for a change of status from another type of nonimmigrant visa classification.

The H-1B Notice of Action (Form I-797)
Consular Notification

The H-1B Notice of Action (Form I-797)
Change/Extension of Status
The Passport

Passports must be valid at all times during the international visitor’s stay in the U.S.

Passports can usually be renewed at the international visitor’s home country consulate in the U.S. Consulates are located in the San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York or Washington, D.C.

Passport Admission Stamp and Form I-94

At the U.S. port of entry, the Custom Border Protection (CBP) Officer places the passport admissions stamp and/or paper I-94 card (also called the Arrival & Departure Record) in the passport. It notates the international visitor’s immigration status and the length of stay allowed.

For international visitors in F and J visa status, the passport admission stamp, I-94 electronic record or paper I-94 card should be marked with the letters “D/S” which stands for “Duration of Status.”

The Visa

Nonimmigrant visas are granted to international visitors. The visa is affixed on a page of the passport by a U.S. Embassy or Consulate official outside the U.S. The visa is used to authorize entry into the U.S. for a certain number of times (ranging from one to multiple), and includes an expiration date. The visa stamp needs to be valid only on the day of entry or re-entry to the U.S.; it does not need to remain valid during the international visitor’s stay.

Form DS-2019

The Form DS-2019 is the document needed to obtain a J-1 visa stamp and J-1 status to lecture, conduct research, or study at an academic institution in the U.S. as a J-1 Exchange Visitor.

The right to issue Form DS-2019 is granted by the U.S. Department of State to certain academic research institutions, agencies, and organizations. J-2 dependents each have their own DS-2019s.

Note: The end date indicates how long the international visitor can lecture, conduct research, study, and/or get paid.