

## Obtaining your F-1 Student Visa

Now that you have been admitted to Houston Christian University, you can use your HCU-issued SEVIS Form I-20 and acceptance letter to obtain your student visa. Please carefully read this worksheet and make all preparations necessary to ensure that you obtain your visa in a timely manner. Remember, don't be anxious: hundreds of students successfully complete this process every year. What is most essential is that you plan and prepare well.

### Scheduling and Preparing for Your Visa Appointment

1. Schedule a visa appointment with your nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. Please do this as soon as possible, as embassies can become very busy before the start of the school year. You can visit <http://www.usembassy.gov/> to find the website and contact info for your local embassy. Check with your embassy to determine exactly what to bring with you to your appointment.
2. Submit the Online Nonimmigrant Visa Electronic Application, Form DS-160: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/forms/ds-160-onlinenonimmigrant-visa-application.html>
3. Complete your I-901 and **pay your SEVIS Fee**. The quickest way to do this is online at <https://www.fmjfee.com/i901fee/>. Be sure to print out your receipt and bring it with you to the consulate.
4. Once again, please check with your local embassy to determine your exact requirements. However, you will generally need to bring the following documents with you to your visa appointment:
  - a. Your HCU-issued SEVIS Form I-20 (print all 3 pages), signed where indicated on page 1
  - b. Your SEVIS fee receipt
  - c. Your original HCU acceptance letter
  - d. Passport valid until at least 6 months after the entry date on your I-20
  - e. One or two passport-size photos
  - f. Original financial documents showing you have the ability to pay for your studies. Be sure to bring any scholarship award letters, if applicable. Please ensure that the financial documents correspond with the financial information on your I-20.
  - g. It is also advisable to provide:
    - i. Transcripts from any educational institutions attended, translated into English
    - ii. Official test scores (ex: TOEFL, SAT, etc) that were required for admission
    - iii. Any documents showing "binding ties" to your home country. These could include, for example, deeds to property, evidence of close family members remaining in the home country, or a job offer upon return.
5. If you are from a country where U.S. visas might be a little more difficult to obtain, here are some additional items to bring to your interview that may help with approval:
  - a. Detailed resume/CV that lists your professional and/or academic background and your past/present work and three professional references
  - b. A detailed statement of purpose and why you want to attend HCU and your specific program
  - c. A detailed itinerary

- d. A detailed description of funding
- e. List/details of travelers coming with you
- f. Dates and locations of all international travel for the last 10 years

### **Visa Interview**

At the time of your appointment, you will have an interview with a consular officer. These interviews are generally very brief (2-3 minutes). During this time, there are three main things the officer will want to establish: 1) that you are a real student, 2) that you can pay for your education and 3) that you have binding ties to your home country (non-immigrant intent). The F-1 Student Visa is a non-immigrant visa, so if the consular officer feels that your true intent is to immigrate to the U.S., your visa may be denied.

HCU advises that you put all of your documents together in a folder/binder with tabs so that you can quickly access information that pertains to a question from the consular officer. It is advisable to be prepared to talk about:

- Your educational and career goals, and how you plan to apply them in your home country. It is also helpful to be familiar with prospects for employment in your field once you return home. If you plan to return to a job in your home country, make sure to bring evidence of this.
- Be familiar with your academic field of study and with Houston Christian University. The consular officer will want to know that you plan to study what and where you say you will.
- Why you wish to study in the U.S. rather than in your home country.
- Any ties you have to your family and community in your home country.
- Example questions: Why do you want to study at HCU? What is your purpose of coming to the U.S? Who is paying for your school? What classes will you be taking? Will you be working? Have you applied for a visa before? How is your sponsor going to pay for school?
- Answer questions thoroughly and honestly. If the consular officer asks you about one aspect, make sure you fully answer the question and even think about what follow questions they might ask and go ahead and answer those. For example, if they ask you who is paying for your tuition, make sure to explain about any scholarships, personal funds, and your financial sponsors, and even offer to show documents.

### **Tips to Remember**

- Dress nicely and be organized. Take documents out of envelopes and sort them according to purpose so you can access them easily. Be sure that documents are clear at a glance and don't require complicated explanations. Bring English translations when necessary.
- You will likely only have 2-3 minutes for your interview, so be prepared to give concise answers to questions posed. Don't be anxious; just answer questions posed honestly and clearly. You may practice ahead of time with a friend or family member.
- Be prepared to have the interview conducted in English.

HCU has collaborated with a [visa consultancy firm Argo](#) if you would like to book an appointment with them. This is not required, and you will need to pay their fee. However, their services are offered in case you would like more guidance on the visa application process.

**Once you have received the Visa, please remember that if you have an initial I-20, you can only enter the U.S. 30 days prior to your program start date!**

**Some good links to explore:**

- <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study/student-visa.html#howtoapply> - Department of State (DOS) website about the F-1 visa type.
- <http://educationusa.state.gov/> - An incredible resource, also maintained by the DOS, with information about everything you could want to know about studying in the U.S.
- <https://www.nafsa.org/findresources/Default.aspx?id=8643> - advice for applying for nonimmigrant visas
- [https://drive.google.com/file/d/179qPljYfr2bSxSUX0ZJNrD\\_JfGHwKGAg/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/179qPljYfr2bSxSUX0ZJNrD_JfGHwKGAg/view) - what is an F-1 student visa