



VISA GUIDELINES FOR HELP STUDENTS

Visa Requirements:

HELP students who want to study full time (more than 16 hours/week) must have an F-1 student visa form. HELP is authorized to issue the I-20 form required to apply for a student visa. Students who enter the U.S. on a B-2 (tourist) visa or WT status (visa waiver) may **not** study full time at HELP, but may be eligible for part-time study (16 hours or less) incidental to visiting in Hawaii. Email us at eslhelp@hawaii.edu with any questions about this.

Getting an I-20 form for a student visa

After we receive your complete application packet, we will enter you into the SEVIS database and send you an I-20 Form—a U.S. government form for applying for a student visa. We will also send you an acceptance letter and other information about studying at HELP. If you have not received your HELP I-20 within two weeks of being notified that your application form was received, please contact us via email or phone. When you receive your I-20 from HELP, check the information, then sign and date the bottom of page 1. The SEVIS ID# is in the upper right corner of your I-20. Go to the SEVIS fee website: <https://www.fmjfee.com>. Follow the instructions to pay the \$200 SEVIS fee via credit card and print out a receipt.

Visiting the embassy for a student visa

You will have to appear at a U.S. embassy or consulate for an in-person interview. Go to this website to find the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate: <http://www.usembassy.gov>. Most embassies and consulates allow you to register online for a visa interview and give preference to students. Visas can be issued no more than 120 days before you plan to start studying, so do not apply more than 120 days before your study at HELP begins.

Fill out the visa application form called DS 156 and also the form DS 158. You can find these forms on this site:

<http://www.state.gov/m/a/dir/forms/>.

Take these things with you to your visa interview:

- your passport valid for at least 6 months longer than your study dates;
- I-20 Form from HELP;
- visa application forms DS 156 and DS 158 (males ages 16-45 also need form DS 157);
- SEVIS payment receipt (form I-797);
- two passport-sized (5cm X 5cm) photos;
- the visa application fee;
- your acceptance letter from HELP; and
- evidence of financial support for your entire length of study, e.g. a current bank statement for an account in your name. If the account is not in your name, bring a letter of financial support from the account holder.

The F-1 Visa Interview

The F-1 visa is a non-immigrant visa for those who will return home after study, so when you get to the visa interview window, be prepared to explain:

- (1) your academic and career goals—why you want to study in the U.S., and specifically at HELP;
- (2) your intention to return to your home country upon completion of your academic studies.

More tips:

1. Consider the interview a formal event. Business clothes are appropriate.
2. The interview will probably be in English and not your native language. However, the visa interview **can** be conducted in your native language so there is no misunderstanding.
3. Speak for yourself. Do not bring relatives unless you are less than 18 years of age.

4. Remain calm and answer all the Visa Officer's questions openly and honestly. Be clear and specific but do not memorize your speech.
5. Be brief. Keep your answers short and to the point. Consular officials are under a lot of pressure to conduct a quick and efficient interview.
6. You should be ready to discuss your plans for the future and how this experience will help you.

Visa officers want to know that you have strong ties to your home country, so it is OK to bring any information or evidence that proves you will return to home after finishing your studies in the U.S., for example:

- Letter from someone in government or business management who plans to offer you a job when you return
- Letter from your employer stating your job will be held for you while you are away and that English will be useful for your future employment with the company
- If a brother or sister studied in the U.S. and then returned home, a copy of their diploma or certificate and a letter from their school or employer stating they returned home. You can also bring their passport to show they returned home.
- Transcripts from school, college and/or university you are attending and plan to return to after U.S. study
- Land ownership or family business documents
- Documents to prove the functioning stable and prosperous business
- Birth and/or marriage certificates
- Any other documents that might help prove your economic and social ties to your home country.

Important Notes:

- Do not plan to enter the U.S. more than 30 days before your study date
- DO NOT try to use an I-20 issued by another school if you plan to attend HELP
- DO NOT try to enter on a B-2 (tourist) visa unless your visa stamp bears the notation "prospective student".
- DO NOT enter under the visa waiver program unless you are taking less than 16 hours of classes for less than 90 days

When your visa is approved, the consular officer will give you an envelope of documents—do not open this, but keep it with your passport.

Transfer students

If you are transferring to HELP from another institution without leaving the U.S., you will need to be "released" from that school before HELP can prepare an I-20 form. Please ask the International Student Adviser at your old school to release your SEVIS file to HELP, so that we can issue you the I-20. Bring both your old and new I-20 to HELP when you arrive.

If you are transferring to HELP from another institution but are currently outside the U.S., you also must be released in SEVIS, as stated before. When you enter the US, you must present a valid passport with a valid visa in your passport, but it is not necessary to obtain a new visa to correct the school notation. All students entering the U.S. on a student visa must present an I-20 form (F-1 status)

If you currently have a non-student visa status, but want to change to student status, you will need to file for a Change of Status (COS). Contact us to discuss your situation at least 3-5 months prior to when you want to begin studying at HELP.