

International Student Checklist

STEP 1: Be admitted to one of the LACM Programs

Diploma Program (4 quarters) or
Associate Program (6 quarters) or
Bachelor Program (12 quarters)

STEP 2: Sign Enrollment Agreement & Pay Enrollment Fee

Sign the enrollment agreement
Pay the **\$335** enrollment fee (includes the Form I-20 processing and mailing fee)

STEP 3: Submit the I-20 Requirements

Copy of your passport
Current financial statement(s) showing proof of adequate funds
Affidavit of Support (if you have a sponsor)
The "International Student Processing Form"

STEP 4: Form I-20 Issuance

After meeting the I-20 requirements, you will receive an I-20 draft. If all information on the draft is correct, your original Form I-20 will be mailed to you via Fedex.

When asked, verify if all information on the form is correct.
Once you receive your I-20 in the mail, read the terms of conditions of admission, and sign page 1 (student attestation section) using **blue ink**.

STEP 5: Pay Tuition

Remember to pay first quarter tuition, you will be contacted by the billing office with instructions. Your I-20 will be cancelled if the tuition payment is not received.

You can contact billing@lacm.edu TUITION DEADLINE: JULY 15, 2019

STEP 6: Pay the I-901 SEVIS fee

The SEVIS fee is a federally mandated fee, currently **\$350 USD**, which must be paid by all international students **at least three days prior to the visa appointment**. To pay the fee, go to www.ice.gov/sevis/i901.

Pay the I-901 SEVIS fee, print the receipt, and take it with you to your visa appointment. *Canadian citizens present the receipt at the U.S. Port of Entry.*

F-1/M-1 student visas can be issued up to **120 days in advance of your program start date.**

STEP 7: Complete the Form DS-160 (Visa Application)

Access and carefully complete the online Form DS-160 (Nonimmigrant Visa Application) from the Consular Electronic Application Center website: <https://ceac.state.gov/genniv> (you may be asked to upload a digital photo of yourself).

Print and keep the DS-160 barcode page. (You will not need to print the full application but email yourself a copy).

Pay the DS-160 visa application-processing fee, currently **\$160 USD** (not the same as the I-901 fee). Each embassy and consulate has a different requirement for paying fees, so review country-specific instructions on the U.S. Embassy website: www.usembassy.gov.

Print the "confirmation page" to bring to your interview.

STUDENTS FROM CANADA AND BERMUDA

If you are a citizen of Canada or Bermuda you do not require a visa to enter United States as a student. However, you must present a valid Form I-20 at the time of admission (at the U.S. Port of Entry), and you should be prepared to present all supporting financial and academic documentation. Additional resources for Canadian visitors to the United States can be found on the U.S. Embassy and Consulates in Canada website: ca.usembassy.gov

STEP 8: Schedule the Visa Interview

Schedule an appointment for your visa interview at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate in your home country. Visit www.usembassy.gov to locate a U.S. Embassy/Consulate near you. Each Consulate provides instructions on how to apply and make an appointment.

Prepare for your interview. Review the "Successful Interview Tips" on page 6.

Wait times for interview appointments vary by location, and delays are possible, so **apply early**. When your visa is approved, you may also be required to pay a visa issuance fee, if applicable to your nationality. For visa **appointment and processing wait times**, click [here](#).

STEP 9: Go to Your Visa Interview

Bring the following documents to your visa interview:

Valid passport (must be valid for at least six months beyond your period of stay in the U.S.)

Form DS-160 confirmation page

Application fee payment receipt (if you are required to pay before your interview). Otherwise, bring visa issuance fee

Original Form I-20, Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1 or M-1) Student Status.



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I-901 SEVIS fee payment receipt

LACM acceptance letter

Two passport-style (37 mm X 37 mm or 2"x2") photos (unless you are only required to upload a photo while completing the online Form DS-160). Review photo instructions.

If you have dependents you must also show proof of your relationship (birth certificate/marriage certificate). It's recommended for families to apply at the same time.

Original financial statements showing that you or your sponsor has sufficient funds. In most cases, the Consular Officer will require you to provide the same (possibly additional) financial evidence you provided to LACM. You need to bring these statements with you when entering the United States.

Copy of LACM scholarship and/or grant award letter (if applicable)

Additional documents may be required depending on your personal and academic situation. All students should be prepared to also present:

Transcripts, diplomas, degrees, or certificates from previous schools attended

Standardized test scores required by the school (ex. TOEFL)

Any information that shows you will return to your home country after completing your studies. See "Successful Interview Tips" on page 6.

AFTER YOUR VISA INTERVIEW, the consular officer will determine whether you are qualified to receive a visa. You will be informed how your passport with the visa will be returned to you.

VISA DENIAL/DELAY

Occasionally there may be a visa denial or delay. If your visa is denied, you should receive the reason for the denial in writing. If it is delayed, the reason could be that your SEVIS record does not appear in the Consulate database, or that a security clearance background check is needed, which on average takes 3-8 weeks.

Email international@lacm.edu if you do not receive your visa within 45 days of your visa interview. Again, we recommend you start the visa process early.

Please note, LACM cannot guarantee that you will be issued a student visa.

STEP 10: Once Approved

Once you have received your visa you can start to make travel plans and other living arrangements. *Do not make final travel plans until you have your student visa.*

Book airfare and make other travel arrangements.

Research health insurance and if desired, enroll in a plan (it is not required for international students; however, it is highly recommended). If you have questions regarding health insurance, feel free to contact International Student Services.

Make any necessary living arrangements. For questions regarding LACM housing, please contact our Housing Coordinator, Abigail Gunther at abigail@lacm.edu

Notify your DSO what day you plan to arrive in the U.S. and of any changes.

Make sure to **bring all visa-related documents** with you in your **hand luggage** or **carry on** when you travel:

- Passport
- Original Form I-20
- LACM Acceptance Letter
- I-901 SEVIS Fee Payment Receipt
- Financial Statements (showing proof of adequate funds)

Be aware that a valid visa does not guarantee entry into the US: it only allows you to travel to a U.S. Port of Entry and request permission to enter the United States. Permission to enter is given by a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Customs and Border Protection (CBP) official.

The earliest you can enter United States in F-1/M-1 initial status (as a new student) is 30 days before your program start date.

Successful Interview Tips

Here are some tips prospective students should consider when preparing for a visa interview.

1. TIES TO HOME COUNTRY

According to U.S. immigration law, every applicant is considered to be an intending immigrant until he or she can prove otherwise during an interview with a Consular Officer. You must therefore be able to show that you have reasons for returning to your home country that are stronger than those for remaining in the United States.

These “ties” may include socio-economic, professional, and/or family ties (i.e., job, family, financial prospects that you own or will inherit, investments, etc). Each person’s situation is different, of course, and there is no magic explanation or single document, certificate, or letter, which can guarantee visa issuance.

2. ENGLISH

Anticipate that the interview will be conducted in English and not in your native language. One suggestion is to practice English conversation with a native speaker before the interview. If you are coming to the United States solely to study intensive English, be prepared to explain how English will be useful for you in your home country.

3. SPEAK FOR YOURSELF

Do not bring parents or family members with you to your interview. The consular officer wants to interview you, not your family. A negative impression is created if you are not prepared to speak on your own behalf.

4. KNOW THE PROGRAM AND HOW IT FITS YOUR CAREER PLANS

If you are not able to articulate the reasons you will study in a particular program in the United States, you may not succeed in convincing the consular officer that you are indeed planning to study, rather than to immigrate. You should also be able to explain how studying in the United States relates to your future professional career in your home country.

5. BE CONCISE

Because of the volume of applications that are received, all consular officers are under considerable time pressure to conduct a quick and efficient interview. They must make a decision, for the most part, on the impressions they form during the first minute or two of the interview. Consequently, what you say first and the initial impression you create are critical to your success. Keep your answers to the officer’s questions short and to the point.

6. SUPPLEMENTAL DOCUMENTATION

It should be clear at a glance to the consular officer what written documents you are presenting and what they signify. Lengthy written explanations cannot be quickly read or evaluated.

7. SOME COUNTRIES ISSUE VISAS MORE READILY THAN OTHERS

Applicants from countries where many students have remained in the United States as immigrants may have more difficulty getting visas. Statistically, applicants from those countries are more likely to be asked about job opportunities at home after their study in the United States.

8. EMPLOYMENT

Your main purpose for coming to the United States should be to study, not for the chance to work before or after graduation. You must be able to clearly articulate your plan to return home at the end of your program. If your spouse is also applying for an accompanying F-2 visa, be aware that F-2 dependents cannot, under any circumstances, be employed in the United States. If asked, be prepared to address what your spouse intends to do with his or her time while in the United States. Volunteer work and attending school part-time vocational studies are permitted activities.

9. DEPENDENTS REMAINING AT HOME

If your spouse and children are remaining behind in your country, be prepared to address how they will support themselves in your absence. This can be an especially tricky area if you are the primary source of income for your family. If the consular officer gains the impression that your family members will need you to remit money from the United States in order to support them, your student visa application will almost certainly be denied. If your family does decide to join you at a later time, it is helpful to have them apply at the same post where you applied for your visa.

10. MAINTAIN A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Do not engage the consular officer in an argument. If you are denied a student visa, ask the officer for a list of documents he or she would suggest you bring in order to overcome the refusal, and try to get the reason you were denied in writing.

After Your Visa is Approved

BEFORE TRAVEL

Remember that the **earliest you may enter United States with initial student status is 30 days before your Program Start Date**, indicated on your I-20.

You should also **arrive before the Program Start Date**. If you, due to unavoidable circumstances, are unable to arrive by your Program Start Date, then you must contact the International Student Services to have your start date deferred. Otherwise, you may be denied entry. Although it depends on your situation, we recommend you arrive at least one week before your Program Start Date.

Do not enter the U.S. on a Tourist Visa, visa waiver, or any other visa type. Entering the U.S. on a visa type other than the student visa may temporarily bar your enrollment at LACM. It will also forfeit your employment benefit as an F-1 visa holder.

CARRY THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS WITH YOU AND PRESENT THEM AT THE PORT OF ENTRY:

- Valid Passport
- Original Form I-20
- LACM Acceptance Letter
- I-901 SEVIS Fee Payment Receipt
- Financial Statements (showing proof of adequate funds)

AT THE PORT OF ENTRY

Upon your initial entry into the U.S., the **officer at the Port of Entry (POE) will review your documents** and decide if you are eligible to enter.

You will be **fingerprinted and photographed** (a regulation that applies to ALL visa holders).

After approval to enter, **check your documents** before you walk away to make sure that they are stamped for the right visa status. If you are accidentally issued an erroneous status, politely ask an officer to correct it. Do not put it off; this is a hassle to correct once you have left customs.

On the admission stamp, the U.S. immigration inspector records either an **admitted-until date** or **"D/S" (duration of status)**. If your admission stamp contains a specific date, then that is the date by which you must leave the United State. If you have D/S on your admission stamp, you may remain in the United States as long as you continue your course of studies, or qualifying employment. Note that your status as a student ends upon completion of your studies and not necessarily the completion date noted on your I-20.

Regulations require you to attend the school that issued the Form I-20 you use to enter the United States. Failure to do so is considered a violation of status.

AFTER ARRIVAL

Your I-20 is a very important document, just like your passport. Therefore, **be sure to keep your I-20 (and all other student visa related documents) in a safe place**. We highly recommend you make copies of your immigration documents and store them collected in a folder. You will need them each time you travel.

Another reason for arriving before your start date is to give yourself time to **get settled**. Living in a different country is usually an exciting and rewarding experience, but in the beginning there are many things to arrange and adjust to. The International Office and LACM will be here to help you cope with cultural adjustments for a fulfilling experience, both academically and personally. If you have any questions regarding American culture, recommendations, where to find things, how to get there, etc., always feel free to stop by or email International Student Services: international@lacm.edu.

NEW STUDENT MANDATORY CHECK-IN

As part of the student visa regulations, all international students are required to report to the school by the program start date. Failure to do so could cause your SEVIS record (student visa status) to be terminated.

Contact your DSO at LACM upon arrival in the U.S.

All international students are required to attend the **MANDATORY International Student Orientation**. The Orientation schedule will be communicated to you via email.

Before the meeting, **make a copy of the documents below and bring them to Orientation** (or email them in advance to international@lacm.edu).

At the meeting your International Student Advisor will review your documents, present relevant information to help you understand important student visa regulations, and answer questions.

- ★ **Signed Form I-20**
- ★ **Student Visa** (Canadian citizens are exempt)
- ★ **Passport** (only if renewed)
- ★ **Local U.S. Address**
- ★ **I-94 number confirmation page** (your arrival/departure record)
 - This number is created electronically when you enter United States.
 - You can obtain and print your I-94 number here: <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov> approximately 48 hours after arrival.

Maintaining Your Status

While studying in the United States, it is important you maintain your F-1 or M-1 student status for the duration of your program and any authorized practical training after your program. The U.S. Department of State issues you your visa based on your intended purpose, so you should not take any action that detracts from that purpose. Maintaining your status means fulfilling the purpose for which the Department of State issued you your visa and following the

regulations associated with that purpose. Be sure to read page 3 of your Form I-20, as it contains important information concerning visa regulations and what is required of you to maintain student visa status. While maintaining status is ultimately your responsibility, LACM and International Student Services (ISS) are here to help you do so, and to give advice. Always feel free to talk to your DSO at LACM if you have any questions regarding your student status.

DESIGNATED SCHOOL OFFICIAL (DSO)

Schools have Designated School Officials (DSOs), staff members dedicated to help you, as an international student, to maintain your nonimmigrant status during your studies. The DSO is the person who creates, updates, and maintains your SEVIS record (immigration record). Only the DSO is allowed to sign your immigration documents and make certain authorizations. The DSO can help you answer many international student visa or culture related questions, help you fill out important forms, help you cope with cultural adjustments, and should be the first person you talk to if you are planning to make any changes that may affect your immigration record. At LACM your DSO is: **Tom Aylesbury**

SEVP RESPONSE CENTER

If you have questions your DSO cannot answer or if you'd like to ask someone else, you can also contact SEVP at:
sevp@ice.dhs.gov or **703-603-2400**

In your email, describe your situation and include any questions you may have. SEVP provides responses on a first-come, first-served basis. Answer times may vary depending on the current number of inquiries.

ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS TO MAINTAIN STATUS

While studying in the United States, F-1 and M-1 students must:

- ☀ **Report to the school by the program start date.**
 - ☀ **Enroll full-time each quarter (12 credits minimum);** if you cannot study full-time, contact your DSO immediately.
 - ☀ **Meet the minimum LACM academic requirements:**
 - Grade Point Average (GPA): 2.0
 - Incremental Completion Rate (ICR): 67 %
 - ☀ **Attend and pass all your classes.** If you believe that you will be unable to complete your program by the end date listed on your Form I-20, talk with your DSO about requesting a possible program extension.
 - ☀ **NOTIFY YOUR DSO OF CHANGES TO YOUR:**
 - **Address (U.S. and foreign)** - international students are required to have a valid local mailing address and permanent foreign address at all times (P.O. Box addresses are not accepted). Address changes must be reported within 10 days of the change.
 - **Financial Support**
 - **Dependent status**
 - **Major, program, or degree level**
 - **Student status**
 - **Name**
- And;
- **Before any travel outside the U.S.**
 - **If you plan to take a break from school**
 - **If you intend to transfer to another school**
 - **Before you drop any classes**
 - **If you plan to apply for another visa type**
 - **If you need to request a program extension**

OTHER REQUIREMENTS

- ☀ **Do not engage in any unauthorized employment.** An international student may only work when authorized by the DSO in some cases, and USCIS in others.

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT)

OPT is a form of temporary work authorization, designed to give international students an opportunity to further their education by gaining work experience in the U.S. in **jobs directly related to their field of study.**

F-1 students are eligible for OPT **after one academic year** or **after the program of study** and students can request a maximum of **12 months** of OPT per degree level. Most students use their OPT after their program.

M-1 students are eligible for OPT **after their program** and students can request one month of OPT for every 4 months of study. This means, if your program is 12 months, you can request a maximum of **3 months** of OPT.

Contact your DSO for more information regarding OPT.

It is very important that you understand your responsibilities as an international student so that you do not violate your status, either intentionally or unintentionally. If you do violate your status, LACM is legally obligated to terminate your SEVIS record. You are then expected to depart the U.S. within 48-72 hours.

Travel & After Your Program

TRAVEL

You can travel during breaks, but first notify your DSO and make sure your DSO has endorsed your I-20 for travelling (page 2). The DSO signature is required for you to re-enter the United States and while you are a student, each endorsement is **valid for one year**.

For additional information regarding travel, refer to the document “International Student Travel” which you will receive during orientation, or ask your DSO.

GRACE PERIOD

Students who have maintained valid F-1 or M-1 status are automatically granted a grace period after completing their program of study or any authorized OPT. The grace period is the time through which the student may make preparations to leave the United States. The length of the grace period is:

F-1 students: 60 calendar days

M-1 students: 30 calendar days. However, with an M-1 visa the program and the grace period cannot exceed a total period of one year.

IMPORTANT: If you leave the U.S. during your grace period, you may NOT re-enter to finish any remaining days.

CONTINUE STUDIES

If you decide to continue studies after your program or OPT, you must, before your grace period ends:

1. Be admitted to the new program of study.
2. Have your DSO update your SEVIS record and issue you a new Form I-20.

OTHER VISA TYPES

Inquiries regarding any other visa type or immigration should be directed to a qualified immigration attorney.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

BEFORE ARRIVAL

I have a visa interview with the U.S. Embassy or Consulate scheduled, but I don't have my I-20 yet. What should I do?

You should reschedule your visa appointment. You must have your original I-20 with you when you go to your visa interview.

Will I need health insurance in the United States?

While international students are not required to have health insurance, we highly recommend it. In most cases, the easiest and most affordable option for international students is to request extended (international) coverage from their health insurance provider in their home country (or a separate plan with international coverage). However, if that option is not available, there are many health insurance options for international students in the United States. Contact your DSO for recommendations.

Does LACM offer any scholarships or financial aid for international students?

As an international student, you are not eligible for U.S. financial aid. You may be eligible for a scholarship. For questions regarding scholarships, contact the Admissions Department at admissions@lacm.edu.

AFTER ARRIVAL

I need to buy a cellphone and sign up for utilities, but I've heard I need to have a Social Security number (SSN). What do I do?

In general, only noncitizens who have permission to work can apply for a Social Security number. While most companies will ask for your SSN, it is not always a requirement to start a service. You will not need a SSN to open a U.S. bank account, to sign up for utilities, to get a U.S. driver's license, or enroll in a cell phone plan. However, some companies may require you to pay an extra deposit or provide additional proof of funds if you do not have a SSN.

My visa has been approved. Do I need to keep the financial statements?

Yes. Keep them in a safe place together with your other immigration-related documents. You will need them every time you travel.

Can I travel home during school breaks?

Yes you can. Just notify your DSO, make sure your Form I-20 has a valid travel signature (page 2), and bring your immigration documents with you when you travel.

Do I need to get a California driver's license to drive in the U.S.?

As an international student (non-resident), you do not need a U.S. license to drive in the United States. You are allowed to drive with a foreign driver's license. If your license is in another language than English, you need to first have it translated which you can do at your embassy. When driving, carry both the license and the translation with you.

Am I eligible to apply for a California driver's license?

Yes, any F-1/M-1 nonimmigrant in lawful status can apply for a driver's license or ID card. If you plan to, visit www.dmv.ca.gov and contact your DSO who can provide guidance. Wait at least ten calendar days from the date of entry into the United States before applying for a driver's license or ID to allow for arrival date processing. When you apply, you will be asked to present necessary supporting documents to verify legal status in the United States.

My F-1/M-1 visa will expire before my program ends. Do I need to renew it before it expires?

You can stay in the United States on an expired F-1/M-1 visa as long as you maintain your student status. However, if you travel outside of the U.S. after your visa has expired and before you have finished your studies, you must renew it before you return. Your visa must be valid when you re-enter United States.

I heard I'm eligible for Optional Practical Training (OPT) after one academic year, what is an academic year?

An academic year is considered 3 quarters (9 months).

Will I have the Summer Quarter off? Am I eligible for annual vacation?

Bachelor students who are maintaining status are eligible for one vacation quarter each year after one academic year (3 quarters). Students generally take annual vacation during the Summer Quarter when regular classes may not be offered, but it can be requested for any quarter. During annual vacation, you may choose to enroll part-time or not at all. Notify your DSO if you intend to take annual vacation.