

Pre-Arrival Checklist

Student Handbook



Center for International Program
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ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY

Step One: Prepare for your Visa Appointment

☐ Important Documents

Create a folder to keep all of your immigration documents together and safe.

☐ Verify the information on the Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Visa

(either the I-20 Form for F-1 visa applicants and their dependents applying for the F-2 visa) or the DS-2019 Form for J-1 visa applicants and their dependents applying for the J-2 visa). It is very important that all of your personal information listed on the I-20 or DS-2019 matches the personal information on your passport and on your dependents' passports. If any personal information, particularly your name, on your I-20 or DS-2019 is incorrect and/or does not match the information on your passport, email your admission officer as soon as possible. We will send you a corrected I-20 or DS-2019 form as soon as possible. After you verify the information is correct, keep all documents in a safe place. Take note of your SEVIS ID number, which is located on the top, right side of your I-20/DS-2019 and begins with the letter N. If you lose your I-20/DS-2019 before your visa appointment, contact your admission officer to make arrangements for a replacement.

☐ Pay the SEVIS I-901 Fee

At least three days before your visa interview, you must make the required Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) fee payment at www.fmjfee.com. At this site, you will submit the I-901 form electronically and can pay with a credit or debit card. Print the receipt generated after your online payment and bring it with you to your visa appointment. *Note: F-2 and J-2 dependents are not required to pay this fee.*

☐ Refer to <http://travel.state.gov>, for specific information and advice on applying for a visa.

This site also contains information on wait times for appointments and visa processing. Please note that these are only estimates. *It is not advisable to make travel arrangements until you receive your visa from the consulate.*

☐ **Make a visa appointment** with the embassy or consulate responsible for issuing nonimmigrant visas for your area of your home country as soon as you receive your I-20 or DS-2019 form. Visa applications may be accepted by the consulate at any time, and may be issued up to 120 days before your program start date. Learn how to schedule an appointment for an interview, pay the application processing fee, review embassy specific instructions, and much more by visiting the Embassy or Consulate website where you will apply.

☐ **Visa Application Fee**

Pay the visa application fee and any applicable reciprocity fee for yourself (and each dependent) by the method indicated by the consulate with jurisdiction for your area. The U.S. embassies and consular offices have websites with this information.

☐ **Passport**

Make sure your passport is updated and valid for at least months after your entry into the U.S.

☐ **Photographs**

Get photographs taken for your visa application. The photo requirements can be found at: <https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/general/photos.html>

☐ **Additional Resources**

- F-1 Visa Students: <http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/>
- J-1 Visa Exchange Visitors: <https://j1visa.state.gov/>



Step Two: Visa Appointment

☐ Bring the following documents with you to your visa appointment at a US Embassy or Consular Office:

- Form DS-160: The DS-160 Online is a new Nonimmigrant Visa Electronic Application. Some F-1 and J-1 visa applicants may be required to complete additional forms (DS-157 and/or DS-158). For more information about the forms, go to this website:
<https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/forms.html>
- Photographs
- Appropriate visa fee and, if applicable, reciprocity fee, or receipt for payment of these.
- Receipt for payment of the I-901 SEVIS fee required for F-1/J-1 applicants (www.fmjfee.com).
- A valid passport (must be valid at least 6 months from your date of entry to the US).
- Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Student Status Form I-20 or (J-1) DS-2019. Bring the original copy, signed by the Designated School Official (DSO) or (Alternate) Responsible Officer (ARO/RO) and by you.
- Proof of funding as stated on your I-20 or DS-2019 form.
- Evidence of ties to your home country which demonstrates your intent to return home (e.g., assured employment, ownership of property, etc.).
- St. Mary's acceptance/invitation letter.
- Scores from standardized tests required by the educational institution such as the TOEFL, SAT, GRE, GMAT, etc.
- Dependent information. If your spouse and/or children are accompanying you, you will need a SEVIS form I-20 or DS-2019 for each dependent, evidence of their relationship to you (marriage license/certificate for spouse and/or birth certificate for children translated to English), and evidence of sufficient financial resources to support them as well as to fund your studies. Please note that other relatives (e.g., parents and siblings) do not qualify for the F-2 or J-2 visa.

Note: Upon issuance of your visa, make sure that you have received the correct visa type and that the notation, if any, on the visa indicates the correct institution: "St. Mary's University." Be sure that you receive your I-20 or DS-2019 form back from the consulate.

Step Three: Travel to the U.S.

Your visa will allow you to travel to the US, where you will present your immigration documents to an immigration officer. This person will decide whether or not to grant you entry to the US in F-1 or J-1 visa status. If you are properly prepared for entry, this should not be a problem. Keep your passport with applicable visa, signed I-20 or DS-2019 form, proof of funding, and translated academic records in a secure place in your carry-on luggage. Do not put them in your checked luggage or entrust them to anyone else. If you do, and your baggage is lost or delayed, you will be unable to present the documents at the Port of Entry (POE). As a result, you may not be able to enter the United States

Travel Arrangements

- ☐ Airport pick up - **TO BE ANNOUNCED**
- ☐ To avoid unnecessary expenses and difficulties, do not make unchangeable travel arrangements until you have received your visa from the U.S. consulate. There may be unanticipated delays in the processing of your documents.
- ☐ Submit the Arrival Confirmation Form by email to iss@stmarytx.edu **as soon as you have arrangements.**
- ☐ Make your living arrangements, both permanent and temporary prior to arriving in the United States.
- ☐ If you need temporary accommodations or hotel reservations, make those **BEFORE** you arrive. *StMU does not have an emergency or temporary facilities available.*
- ☐ Bring the following with you:
 - Passport
 - Visa
 - I-20 or DS-2019
 - Financial Documents
 - Admission/Acceptance Letter
 - Official Admission Documents
 - Test scores
 - Transcript
 - Medical Records and/or Immunization Records
 - Money to cover initial expenses (health insurance, rent, food, etc.)
 - Residential address where you will be staying
 - Dependent documents including:
 - Passport
 - Visa
 - I-20 or DS-2019
 - Birth Certificate Translated to English (Children)
 - Marriage Certificate Translated to English (Spouse)

Important Notes

☐ Prohibited Items

The US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) website has information about the items you can bring with you to the US, and which items are restricted and/or prohibited

<https://www.cbp.gov/travel/us-citizens/know-before-you-go/prohibited-and-restricted-items>.

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) lists additional items that are prohibited on airline flights for security reasons (see <https://www.tsa.gov/travel/security-screening/prohibited-items>). Check with your airline before you leave for the latest information about prohibited items for travel to the US.

☐ Place all valuable in carry-on bags

If you choose to lock your luggage, you must use TSA-approved locks only. TSA screeners will then have tools to open and re-lock your luggage, avoiding damage should a physical inspection be required. If you do not have TSA-approved locks, the TSA screeners will break your locks to open your luggage for inspection, and your luggage will not be locked for the remainder of the trip.

Arrive in the United States

☐ **US Port of Entry (POE):** You will receive a Customs Declaration Form, which you must complete and present to the US Customs & Border Patrol Officers (CBP), who may ask to inspect your luggage. For more information on required documentation as well as procedures to expect, visit: <https://www.cbp.gov/travel/international-visitors>.

- Valid passport with valid F-1 or J-1 visa (visa not required for Canadian citizens)
- Original, signed I-20 or DS-2019
- Admission/Acceptance Letter
- SEVIS -901 fee receipt
- Funding information (to support the amount documented on your I-20 or DS-2019 form)
- Customs Declaration form

☐ **Customs Declaration Form:** You will receive a Customs Declaration Form, which you must complete and present to the US Customs & Border Patrol Officers (CBP), who may ask to inspect your luggage. For more information on required documentation as well as procedures to expect, visit: <https://www.cbp.gov/travel/international-visitors>.

☐ **Questions to Expect:** The CBP officer will ask you the reason you wish to enter the United States. You will also be asked to provide information about your final destination (i.e., your school). It is important to tell the CBP officer that you will be a student or exchange visitor. You must also travel with proof of financial resources and your academic records, in case they ask for this documentation.

☐ **Fingerprinting:** You will be fingerprinted and photographed as part of the US-VISIT program. More information about US-VISIT is at:

https://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/usvisit/usvisit_edu_10-fingerprint_consumer_friendly_content_1400_words.pdf.

☐ **Once your customs and immigration inspection is complete,** you should receive:

- Your Original I-20 or DS-2019 stamped for the duration of status ('D/S') for holders of the F or J Visa.
 - **Please note:** Some CBP Officials may not stamp the I-20/DS-2019. They may stamp your passport and/or document your arrival electronically.
- If there are any errors in the notations, let the CBP officer know right away. It is much easier to correct the problem at the Port of Entry than it is later.

☐ **Questions to Expect:** The CBP officer will ask you the reason you wish to enter the United States. You will also be asked to provide information about your final destination (i.e., your school). It is important to tell the CBP officer that you will be a student or exchange visitor. You must also travel with proof of financial resources and your academic records, in case they ask for this documentation.

Additional Situations at the Point of Entry

☐ **Secondary Inspection:** If the CBP officer at the Port of Entry (POE) cannot initially verify your information, or if you do not have all of the required documentation, the officer may direct you to an interview area known as “secondary inspection.” Secondary inspection allows inspectors to conduct additional research to verify information without causing delays for other arriving passengers. If the CBP officer asks to contact the International Student and Scholar Services, the main phone line is 210-431-5091.

☐ **Form I-515:** If the CBP officer believes your immigration documents might not be completely satisfactory, you may receive a form I-515 with an instruction sheet. If you do, come to the Office of International Student and Scholar Services as soon as you arrive. Do not send any documents anywhere before consulting with one of our staff members, as the address provided for mailing the I515 varies. Form I-515 gives you only 30 days to remain in the US legally and provide proof of your visa status, so do not delay.

Step Four: Arriving in San Antonio

- ☐ Attend the Mandatory International Student Check-in.
 - January 20, at 10 am-12 pm which will help virtually. Please register here,
 - Have all required documents listed below:
 - I-20 or DS-2019
 - Passport
 - Visa
 - Dependent Documents
 - US Address Information (Temporary or Permanent)
 - I-94 Arrival/Departure Record
 - White card received if traveling by car into the US.
 - Online print out if arriving by plane (<https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94> - click on “Get Most Recent I-94”)
 - I-901 SEVIS Fee Receipt
- ☐ Attend a StMU Academic Orientation to meet with your advisor, register for classes, obtain the Rattler Student ID, etc.
- ☐ The Student Health Center has specific immunization and health insurance requirements for international students that must be met prior to the first day of class. To view these requirements, please visit: <https://www.stmarytx.edu/campuslife/student-services/health-center/>. Scroll down and look under the “Health Insurance” and “Health Requirements” sections.
- ☐ Pay tuition or make payment arrangements with the StMU Business Office <https://www.stmarytx.edu/campuslife/student-services/business-office/>. You will also find information on tuition, fees, etc. on this site.
- ☐ Participate in St. Mary’s University Welcome Week events and programs offered to assist you when you first arrive. Don’t forget to check your StMU email for more activities to participate in throughout the year.