

Getting to the United States

How should I prepare for my trip to the United States?

Before you leave for the United States, familiarize yourself with the [different kinds of documents](#) you might need. It is always a good idea to carry your original documents with you at all times. Do not put them in your checked baggage.

It is also a good idea to make at least two sets of copies of these documents: one copy to leave with your family before you depart and one copy to give to your school officials. Here is a list of the important immigration documents:

- Passport;
- [Visa](#); and
- [Form I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status."](#)

What should I do when I arrive?

Arriving in the United States should be a smooth experience if you have everything ready.

Form I-94

The Form I-94, "Arrival/Departure Record," is a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) document issued to nonimmigrant aliens at the time of lawful entry into the United States at an air or sea port of entry. The Form I-94 is evidence of a nonimmigrant's term of admission and used to document legal status in the United States, including length of stay and departure.

On March 27, 2013, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) published an interim final rule, Definition of Form I-94 To Include Electronic Format in the *Federal Register* to automate the Form I-94. With the new automated Form I-94 process, the CBP officer will create an electronic automated arrival Form I-94 during the admissions process for nonimmigrants entering the United States at an air or sea port, with information already available in various law enforcement databases.

The new Form I-94 automation process took effect on April 30, 2013, and streamlines the admissions process for individuals lawfully visiting the United States through an air and sea port.

The [Form I-94, "Arrival/Departure Record"](#) is a critical record. It shows that you have been legally admitted to the United States, the class of admission, and the authorized period of stay. It is very important that the information on the record is correct. Inconsistencies between the information on the Form I-94 and Student and [Exchange Visitor Information System \(SEVIS\)](#) records can reduce the chances of a successful systems interface. In particular, this can cause issues with status verification for Social Security numbers.

If you arrive by a land port, you will receive a paper Form I-94. If you arrive at the port of entry by air or sea, an automated Form I-94 record will automatically be generated for you by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers. CBP will provide you with an admission stamp on your passport that is annotated with date of admission, class of admission and admitted-until date. The electronic arrival/departure record can be obtained at www.cbp.gov/I94.

Secondary Inspection

If the CBP officer at the port of entry cannot verify your information, or if you do not have all of the required documentation, a CBP officer may direct you to an interview area known as [secondary inspection](#).

Form I-515A

If you arrive at the U.S. border without all the necessary paperwork, CBP officials may issue you a [Form I-515A, "Notice to Student or Exchange Visitor"](#). This document allows you to have temporary admission into the United States for 30 days. To maintain your nonimmigrant student status, you must address your Form I-515A within the time provided to you.

Q: What do I need to do if I receive a Form I-515A?

A: It is very important to work with your designated school official (DSO) to address the Form I-515A within the 30 days given to you. It is serious and can become a problem if you do not address the matter. Not taking action could mean that you will not be able to remain in the United States. If you receive a Form I-515A, you must take the steps below to remedy the issue:

1. Alert your DSO as soon as you arrive on campus that you received an I-515A.
2. Review with your DSO the reason why the Form I-515A was issued. For example, this can be because you need to make an I-901 SEVIS Fee payment on your current SEVIS

record, your DSO needs to assist you in correcting your SEVIS status through a data correction request or reinstatement, or your Form I-20 or DS-2019, “Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status,” is not signed by a DSO.

3. Once you take proper action and receive the proper documentation needed as proof the issue is resolved, you need to work with your DSO to mail the following to SEVP:
 - Form I-515A;
 - Form I-20 or DS-2019, with original signatures;
 - Form I-94, “Arrival/Departure Record,” with the identification number or a print-out from the paperless Form I-94 system;
 - Copy of the admission stamp in your passport;
 - The biographical page of your passport; and
 - I-901 SEVIS Fee receipt for the SEVIS ID used to enter the country.
4. Submit your paperwork within 30 days of your entry date. If you fail to complete any required action or send all the necessary documents to SEVP by that date, your SEVIS status may be Terminated. If you fail to take action or send necessary documents and your SEVIS status is already Terminated, you may be required to depart the United States immediately or file for reinstatement.
5. Mail your required documents to the address below:

Student and Exchange Visitor Program
DHS/ICE
ATTN: SEVIS/I-515A Processing Team
500 12th Street SW STOP 5600
Washington, DC 20536-5600

SEVP will process your documents and return them to a DSO at your school. If your submission is correct, SEVP will return your documents with a letter of approval, along with the Form I-94 that will have an extended departure date listed. SEVP will return your Form I-20 or DS-2019 to your DSO or alternate responsible officer (ARO), along with a letter that confirms your nonimmigrant student status has been extended. At this point, you can then get the documents back from your DSO. J-1 exchange visitors will have all returned documents sent to their program sponsors at that sponsor’s physical location address listed in SEVIS.

Reporting to your School

You have 30 days to enter the country before your official program start date, which is recorded in [SEVIS](#). You must report to your school by the program start date listed on the [Form I-20](#) you received. This is one of the rules you agree to when you received your student or [exchange visitor](#) status. If you do not follow this rule, you are not [maintaining your status](#). It is best to contact your school immediately after entering the country so that there is no question of your arrival.

If you cannot enter the United States for the term listed on your [Form I-20](#) or if you will be late by a few days, immediately contact your designated school officials so that they can accurately enter this information in your SEVIS record.