

Applying for the I-20 and F-1 Visa: International Undergraduate and Graduate Students

Dear Student:

Congratulations on your acceptance to Brooklyn College of the City University of New York. All of us at Brooklyn College look forward to welcoming you to the United States and the Brooklyn College campus. You will work closely with the Office of International Student and Scholar Services (ISS) while a student at Brooklyn College. ISS is dedicated to assisting international students with visa and immigration processes and compliance; to providing referrals to both on- and off-campus resources; and to serving as an advocate for international students. The Office of International Student and Scholar Services will assist you with the I-20 application process.

Please read the following information carefully and completely. It will help you obtain the Certificate of Eligibility for Non-Immigrant F-1 Students, which is also known as an I-20 or Form I-20. The I-20 is one of the important documents needed to apply for an F-1 visa. The F-1 visa enables a student to enter the United States for the purpose of studying full time at an institution of higher learning. To help you understand the process, the following information is divided into eight sections:

1. Required Documents to Receive an I-20
2. Applying for and Processing an I-20
3. Sending you an I-20
4. The Embassy Interview
5. CUNY Assessment Test for Undergraduate Students
6. Travel Arrangements and Reporting Date
7. Budget for Cost of Attendance
8. Ten Rules to Follow for Getting Your Form I-20

Again, congratulations on your acceptance to Brooklyn College. On behalf of the Office International Student and Scholar Services, I look forward to welcoming you to campus.

Sincerely,

Keisha Wilson
Director
International Student and Scholar Services

1. Required Documents to Receive an I-20 (Form I-20)

The I-20 is a government form on which Brooklyn College certifies to the U.S. government that you are eligible for F-1 student status. The Form I-20 certifies that you:

- are or are expected to be a “bona fide” student;
- meet Brooklyn College’s admissions requirements;
- will pursue a full course of study; and
- prove that you have enough money to study and live in the United States without working illegally or suffering from poverty.

As an incoming undergraduate or graduate international student, you will need to provide us with the [Application for the Certificate of Eligibility \(I-20\)](#) and related supporting documents. We are requesting these documents in order to determine if you are eligible for the Certificate of Eligibility for Non-Immigrant (F-1) student, I-20.

You need an I-20 to obtain an F-1 student visa. While in the United States, you need an I-20 to maintain F-1 status and to keep lawful F-1 status when transferring or changing schools.

Now that you are planning to be a student in the United States, please consider the following:

Before entering the United States to study, you must obtain an F-1 visa. Do not enter the United States on a non-student visa (B-1, B-2, OP, B-1/2) before you attend classes here. If you enter the United States with another class of visa with the intention of applying for a change of status while in the United States, it is possible that United States Citizenship and Immigration Services will deny your petition for change of status.

2. Applying for and Processing an I-20

You must apply for an I-20. First, complete the [Application for the Certificate of Eligibility \(I-20\)](#). You can scan the I-20 application and all accompanying original documents to iss@brooklyn.cuny.edu or mail them to:

Brooklyn College
2900 Bedford Avenue
International Student and Scholar Services, 235 West Quad
Brooklyn, NY 11210
USA

If you have a representative in the United States who will manage your affairs, please give us his or her name, e-mail address and phone number. This will ensure the confidentiality of the information that you submit.

You will receive an acknowledgment and update on the status of your application within five (5) to ten (10) business days after we receive your documents.

We will review your application for an I-20. If you meet the criteria, the Form I-20 will be prepared within five (5) business days.

After the I-20 is prepared, you will receive an e-mail with your SEVIS number and school code. This information is required to schedule an appointment at the United States Embassy or Consulate.

3. Sending You an I-20

ISS can send your I-20 to you in one of three ways:

- **University Express Mail Service** —When a student registers and schedules a shipment with this service, the service will notify the ISS. As soon as your I-20 is ready for shipment, the ISS will schedule a pick-up with either FedEx or DHL. ***The student is responsible for all shipment costs.*** Check rates and schedule a pickup by visiting the University Express Mail Service: <https://study.eshipglobal.com>.
- **United States Postal Service (USPS)** — ISS can mail your I-20 via standard post. If we mail your I-20 by USPS, we cannot track it at the United States Post Office. Courier service is better than USPS because it is faster and easier to track. If you do not receive your mail within your country's postal service delivery schedule, please contact your postal service first before you contact us.
- **Your representative or designee** in the United States can arrange to personally pick up your I-20 at the Office of International Student and Scholar Services and send it to you via courier service.

4. The Embassy Interview

You can apply for your student visa 120 days prior to the start date on your I-20. In order to make your appointment with the embassy, you must first pay the SEVIS fee. In order to pay the fee, visit <https://fmjfee.com/i901fee> and follow the instructions. After paying the fee, visit <http://www.usembassy.gov/> to find the embassy closest to your address. Follow the instructions and fill out the form DS-160 online for the non-immigrant visa application <https://ceac.state.gov/genniv/>. United States embassies vary in their appointment scheduling process and the time frame in which they issue the F-1 visa. Therefore, we reserve the right not to issue an I-20 if we believe that you will not report to Brooklyn College by the reporting date.

Please note the following:

- The United States Department of State decides who is eligible for a visa to enter the United States.

Preparing for the interview

By law you are seen as someone who plans to remain in the U.S. permanently. Student visas are only given to persons who can convince the consulate or embassy official that they intend to return permanently to their home country. Visa interviews last 3-5 minutes. Please go to your interview prepared with papers to show the official that you qualify for the visa and ready to answer the following 4 questions:

1. Who are you and why do you want to study in the U.S.?
2. What do you want to do at Brooklyn College and why?
3. How are you going to fund your education?
4. What do you intend to do when you complete your program and return to your home country?

Papers that you can submit as proof that you have ties to your home country

- If your program of study is in great demand in your country, get a letter from a possible employer saying that they are interested in hiring people with degrees like the one you will receive from Brooklyn College
- If your family owns a business, take a letter from the bank describing it. If they own property, take the deeds.
- If you have a brother or sister who studied in the U.S. and then returned home, take a copy of their diploma and a statement from their employer.
- If you have traveled to the U.S. before as a visitor, emphasize that you have returned home before!

Things to avoid

- Do not emphasize any ties you have to the U.S. or to a family member in the U.S
- Do not talk about working in the U.S. unless you have been awarded a fellowship on campus. You are required to prove that you can support yourself

Visa denial reasons

Brooklyn College cannot appeal the decisions of the U.S. Consular officer if you are denied the F-1 visa. However, the 3 most common reasons students are denied visas

1. INA section 214(b) - You did not sufficiently demonstrate to the consular officer that you qualify for the F-1 visa and/or you did not demonstrate that you have strong ties to your home country and you did not overcome the presumption that you are planning to immigrate to the US.
2. INA section 221(g) - The documents you submitted for the F-1 visa are incomplete. You are then given a letter stating the missing information and how to provide it to the embassy or consulate. Or further administrative processing of your application is needed to make a better determination if you qualify for the visa.
3. INA section 212(a)- You have either not proven that you will become a public charge (dependent on the social services in the US), misrepresented information on your application in order to receive a visa, or have stayed in the US without authorization.

5. CUNY Assessment Test for Undergraduate Students

Prior to arriving in New York, you will be informed whether you need to take the CUNY Assessment test or the Placement test. When you report to the Office of International Student and Scholar Services with an F-1 visa, we will direct you to the Office of Testing for a test date. ***If you receive an appointment to take the CUNY Assessment Test prior to getting your visa and entering the United States, please do not travel to the United States with another class of visa specifically for this purpose. It is important that you study for this assessment and the placement examination.***

6. Travel Arrangements and Reporting Date

Please do not resign from your job, purchase an airline ticket, or dispose of property before you are issued an I-20 and before you obtain an F-1 visa.

The reporting date on the I-20 is the latest that you must report to the Office of International Student and Scholar Services at Brooklyn College. ***It is not the date on which you should be traveling to the United States.*** Please note that you are allowed to enter the United States 30 prior to your date on your I-20 and may not enter any earlier than that.

Please keep in mind that the Office of International Student and Scholar Services and the Office of the Registrar have set deadlines to which we all must adhere. Therefore, we will not extend your reporting date.

Students who cannot arrive by the reporting date can defer their admission for a future semester by contacting the Office of Admissions. When requesting to defer your admission to another semester, please include the Office of International Student and Scholar Services at ISS@brooklyn.cuny.edu.

7. Budget for Cost of Attendance

The annual budget estimates are separated for undergraduate and graduate international students. The tuition and fees are set by The Board of Trustees of the City University of New York and are subject to change. The cost of living budget is for a 12-month period and is modest. No “extras” are in this budget, and it does not include costs such as telephone calls, transportation to and from your country of origin, health insurance, etc. ***It is recommended that you budget 10 percent more than what is estimated on the last page of the I-20 application.***

8. Ten Rules to Follow for Getting Your Form I-20

Please read the following rules very carefully. This is a process that must be followed. The rules

below will help you in your I-20 application process:

1. You must be a “bona fide” student intending to pursue a full course of study in the program to which you have been admitted. We recommend that you start preparing your financial documents as soon as possible. Your Form I-20 can only be issued after you have been admitted to Brooklyn College of the City University of New York.
2. Carefully review Brooklyn College’s “estimated annual financial requirements for international students.”

Note that *these requirements are not negotiable*. They represent a modest average budget, which does not include luxuries of any kind. We strongly recommend that you budget at least 10 percent more if possible. You should also expect annual increases in tuition and living costs of about 7 percent.

3. U.S. law requires that you prove that you can support your estimated annual costs for every year of your program of study. You must provide us with documents that will convince the government that you have:
 - cash to cover your first year in the United States, and
 - sufficient and dependable financial resources to cover every additional year.
4. Do not expect that you will be able to work in the United States to help meet your annual costs. Off-campus employment is strictly controlled by USCIS. Opportunities for on-campus employment are limited and very competitive.
5. All documents you give to us must be less than 3 months old and in English. (We cannot review documents that are not in English.)
6. You must be able to support yourself with your own personal funds, which come only from your own income or resources. Unless you have enough cash to support yourself for your entire program of study or can prove other sources of personal income, you will need a sponsor with an income sufficient to support you.

You can prove your personal funds with the following documents:

- Bank statements in your name only, which states the date the account was opened, the current balance in U.S. dollars, average deposits and average balances. We cannot accept statements that do not specify balances unless it is stated to be a minimum of six figures in U.S. dollars. If your statement shows that your funds are “fixed,” meaning that they do not produce substantial income, your balance will be divided by the number of years in your program of study to determine the amount you will have

available to you for each year of study.

- Employment letter certifying your salary if you are on authorized employment or continuing to be paid by your home country employer.
 - Statement of liquid investments.
7. You may support yourself with funds from other sponsors, such as parents, relatives and organizations. You may have as many sponsors as you need. It is highly recommended that at least part of your financial support come from your home country for purposes of visa issuance. Sponsors may provide you with support in the form of cash and/or room and board. Free room and board is when you live with someone and do not have to pay for your room or food.
8. A sponsor should promise only as much money as he or she is able to give you. Some sponsors believe that the more money they promise to give, the easier it will be to get your 1-20. ***The most common reason for rejection of financial documents is that we do not believe the sponsor can afford to give as much as promised.*** A sponsor should promise only what he or she intends to give and only as much as can be afforded.
9. Each sponsor providing cash support must give us all the following documents to prove financial responsibility. If all these documents are not received, your sponsor's support will not be considered.
- Affidavit of annual financial support. Affidavits must be *signed by the sponsor*.
 - Proof of income.
 - Individual sponsor. This must be on the employer's letterhead, on income tax returns or receipts, or estimated by a bank or private accountant when the sponsor is a self-employed business person or retired. The income of a company is not the income of the owner of the business and will not be accepted as proof of income. You must provide an official statement of the salary paid to the owner/sponsor. If you are self employed, you must provide an income estimate by a bank or private accountant.
 - Company sponsor. Submit the most recent "Profit and Loss Statement" for the company.
 - Bank statement in the name of the sponsor only, which states the date the account was opened, current balance in U.S. dollars, average deposits and average balances. We cannot accept statements that do not specify balances unless it is stated to be a minimum of six figures in U.S. dollars.

10. A sponsor providing free room and board (free room and board is when you live with someone who gives you your room and food for no payment) must provide *all* of the following, evidence of financial ability:

- affidavit of free room and board fully completed and signed;
- photocopy of lease deed, deed, rent receipts in sponsor's name; and
- proof of income. This must be on the employer's letterhead, on income tax returns or receipts, or estimated by a bank or private accountant when the sponsor is self-employed, a business person or retired.

Remember if you are presently in the United States, you must be living with the sponsor at the time of filing your application for the Form I-20 for it to be counted toward your means of support.