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Applying for a US Visa in a Country That is Not Your Home Country

Explanation

Applying for visa in a country which is not your home country (called a “third” country) can be more difficult than applying at home. You may need to prove that you have continuously maintained lawful immigration status during your time in the US or be sent back home to your country to apply for the visa. Since refusal in a third country is more likely than at home, students should plan well in advance of their date of travel. This handout will explain what steps you should take to get a visa in a third country. For more information, see handout entitled, “Travel Out of the US and Return for F-1 and J-1 Students.” If you plan to travel to Canada to apply for a US entry visa, please also refer to the handout entitled, “Applying for a US Visa in Canada.” *Note: Canadian citizens are exempt from US visa requirements.*

Conditions and Limitations

In order to apply for an F-1 or J-1 visa in a third country, you must:

- Have been continuously maintaining lawful non-immigrant status during your stay in the US.
- Be currently enrolled or planning to enroll for the next academic semester at Carnegie Mellon or have received an authorization to engage in optional practical training (for F-1 students) or Academic Training (for J-1 students). F-1 students on OPT will need an EAD card and J-1 students will need the Academic Training authorization letter. (Note: applying for a visa while on OPT can be risky; ask an advisor or read the OPT handouts for more information.)
- Use an I-20 or DS-2019 form from the school that you will attend when you return to the US (for example, if you have finished at Carnegie Mellon and will be returning to the US to study at another school). The only exception is if you plan to attend summer classes at another institution, but you will return to Carnegie Mellon for the Fall semester.
- Have a “valid” reason for applying in the country where the consulate is located; you are likely to be denied if your only reason for applying in that country is to avoid your home country consulate. Examples of “valid” reasons include: to attend a conference, to visit family or friends, etc.
- Be able to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the visa officer that you have enough funding to complete your program and that you plan to return to your home country. If you have relatives that are US citizens or permanent residents, this will be more difficult to do.

Process

STEP 1: Find Out if You Need a Visa to Enter all Country(s) You Are Traveling Through

Whether or not you need a visa to enter a specific country depends on your country of citizenship and legal permanent residence. Check with the Embassy or Consulate of each country to find out whether or not you need a visa. A good resource for finding foreign Embassies or Consulates in the US is <https://www.usembassy.gov/>. Applying for visas is costly and time consuming, so plan ahead. If your plane is landing in another country, you may need a visa for that country as well, even if you do not plan to exit the plane.

STEP 2: Contact the US Consulate in the “Third” Country to Investigate Procedures

Each Consulate/Embassy has different procedures and timelines for visa applications. Before you finalize your travel plans, consult the US Department of State website for procedures at individual consulates and to make sure they accept third country visa applications (<https://www.usembassy.gov/>) and to see how long it will take to obtain a visa appointment: (<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/wait-times.html>).

STEP 3: Obtain and Carry all the Documents You May Need to be Granted the Visa

- A valid passport
- A valid I-20 or DS-2019 from the school you are attending/will attend upon reentry
- A valid signature on page three of the I-20 which is *less than 12 months old* or the bottom right hand corner of the DS-2019 *which is less than 12 months old* from the foreign student advisor. If you are attending a new school upon reentry with a new I-20/DS-2019, you do not need a signature on page 3 (I-20) or the bottom (DS-2019).
- Expired visa (if available)
- Verification of enrollment letter (from the HUB) <https://www.cmu.edu/hub/registrar/student-records/verifications/index.html>
- Letter of invitation from person or organization in the third country which helps explain the reason you are traveling to that country (if available – IMPORTANT)
- Financial information showing proof of necessary funds to cover all costs of tuition plus expenses. This can be either 1) a letter from your *department* stating the amount of funding you are receiving or 2) a letter from another *financial sponsor* stating the amount they are giving you, *plus supporting financial documents*, such as bank statements or salary statements

While all of this documentation may not be strictly required, it is safest to bring as much as possible with you. You will also need to have the visa application fee, photos and other standard visa application materials as specified by the consulate. Details can be found at: <https://www.usembassy.gov/>.