

Important Announcement on F, M, and Academic J Visas

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International students are now and always have been among the Department of State’s highest priorities. The Department recognizes the important contributions these students make to our college and university campuses; the positive impact they have on U.S. communities; and the rich benefits of academic cooperation in increasing cultural understanding, furthering research, knowledge, and supporting U.S. diplomacy. The Department is committed to supporting the U.S. academic community, while administering U.S. law. The Department also recognizes this is a critical period of time for students seeking to begin their studies at academic institutions across the United States.

To that end, the Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources, under the authority delegated to him by the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Department of Homeland Security, has authorized consular officers through the end of 2021 to expand the categories of F, M, and “academic J visa applicants” (students, professors, research scholars, short-term scholars, or specialists) whose applications can be adjudicated without an in-person interview in their consular district of residence, with certain exceptions. Consular officers may, if they so choose, and pursuant to local conditions, now waive the visa interview requirement for F, M, and academic J visa applicants who were previously issued any type of visa, and who have never been refused a visa unless such refusal was overcome or waived, and who have no apparent ineligibility or potential ineligibility; or first-time F, M, and academic J visa applicants who are citizens or nationals of a country that participates in the Visa Waiver Program (VWP), provided they have no apparent ineligibility or potential ineligibility.

This applies only to non-U.S. citizens who are nationals of eligible countries. Details about country eligibility and necessary procedures will be available on the website of the relevant embassy or consulate. Applicants from non VWP countries whose prior visa was issued when they were less than 14 years of age, may need to submit biometric fingerprints, but can still be approved for an interview waiver.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken has previously found F, M, and academic J visa applicants eligible for National Interest Exceptions (NIEs) under Presidential Proclamations that suspend entry of individuals present in one of the 33 countries subject to COVID-19 travel restrictions (see <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/covid-19-travel-restrictions-and-exceptions.html>). Students seeking to apply for a new F-1 or M-1 visa should check the status of visa services at the nearest embassy or consulate; those applicants who are found to be otherwise qualified for an F-1 or M-1 visa will

found to be otherwise qualified for an F, M, or J-1 visa will *automatically* be considered for an NIE to travel. Students and academics traveling on J-1 visas must contact the nearest embassy or consulate prior to travel to receive an NIE.

Consular resources and local government restrictions vary widely, and each consular section is continuously reviewing its capacity to adjudicate visa applications during this worldwide pandemic and as we address global issues and competing priorities. We encourage applicants to check the website of the relevant U.S. embassy or consulate to confirm the level of services currently offered and to find guidelines for applying for a visa without an interview.