

Cottey is pleased to provide admitted international students with the following important visa-related information. Please read it carefully.

PLANNING FOR ARRIVAL

Obtaining an F-1 Visa

You will receive in the mail or by express mail a Form I-20. This form is necessary to apply for an F-1 student visa. Unless you are a Canadian citizen, you must obtain an F-1 visa before you will be permitted to enter the United States. (Canadian citizens should see the Special Note for Citizens of Canada below.)

IMPORTANT: Your letter of acceptance indicates the date on which classes begin. New students are required to arrive to Cottey several days before the beginning of the semester. Your Form I-20 indicates the date by which you should enter the U.S. Students who arrive to the U.S. after the date indicated on the Form I-20 may not be allowed to enter the country. ***Be sure to carefully review the information in your letter of acceptance for information about when you are expected to arrive.***

Your Passport

You must have a valid passport in order to apply for a visa and enter the U.S. The passport must be valid for at least six months after the date on which you enter the U.S.

APPLYING FOR YOUR U.S. VISA

SEVIS I-901 Fee

If you will be applying for an F-1 visa for the first time, you will need to pay the SEVIS I-901 fee before your visa interview. The fee can be paid on-line by going to www.fmjfee.com/. When paying your SEVIS I-901 fee, you should have your Form I-20 on hand. Complete the I-901 electronically, enter your credit card information, and submit the form electronically. Print out a receipt, which you will need for your visa interview.

Schedule an Appointment for a Visa Interview

If you are currently abroad, and do not yet have a valid U.S. student visa, you generally apply for one at the U.S. embassy or consulate with jurisdiction over your place of permanent residence. Although visa applicants may apply at any U.S. consular office abroad, it is generally more difficult to qualify for the visa outside the country of permanent residence.

You should apply for your student visa well in advance of the date you would like to depart for the US. Remember that you are required to show proof of having paid the SEVIS I-901 fee when you appear for your visa interview. Holiday and vacation periods are very busy times at the U.S. embassies and consulates worldwide, and it is important for you to have your visa in time to arrive and begin orientation and registration activities on the date indicated on your I-20.

Appointments are now mandatory for all student visas, and some U.S. embassies and consulates require that appointments be made at least four to eight weeks in advance. The actual visa interview may be as early as 120 days prior to your planned arrival date in the U.S.

There have been, and continue to be, changes in the visa application process, and the most up-to-date information about the visa process is generally provided on U.S. Embassy and Consular websites. Visit: www.usembassy.gov/ to locate the embassy or consulate near you.

For information on waiting times for student visa appointments, visit the following link: http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/wait/wait_4638.html

What to Bring With You to the Visa Interview

Be sure to bring the following with you to the visa appointment:

- Passport
- Required photo(s)
- Visa fee or proof of visa fee payment (see embassy or consular website for more information)
- SEVIS I-901 fee payment receipt
- U.S. non-immigrant visa application forms (unless you will be completing it at the consulate or embassy)
- Cottey letter of acceptance
- Form I-20 issued by Cottey
- Test scores and academic records
- Proof of English proficiency (for students whose native language is not English)
- Proof of financial support
- Evidence of ties to your home country
- Any other documents required by the embassy or consulate

Remember that if you plan to attend Cottey, you must present the visa officer with a Form I-20 issued by Cottey. You cannot apply for a U.S. visa using another school's Form I-20, and then try to attend Cottey as that is considered to be a fraudulent entry by the U.S. immigration authorities.

Understanding the F-1 Visa Process

Before you apply for the visa, it is important for you to understand the process and the rules governing visas. Although most students applying for an F-1 visa to study at Cottey are successful, each year some students' visa applications are denied. Students may be denied because the applicant does not know the rules or is not prepared. We do not want this to happen to you. Please read what follows very carefully.

The consular officer will take a very legalistic view. In the U.S., it is considered important to be impersonal when administering laws. This is considered rude or improper in many countries, but not in the U.S., where the ideal is to apply laws equally to all, regardless of status or sex. Do not try to negotiate or discuss personal matters.

The most important rule may seem strange to you. The consular officer who makes the decision on your visa application is required to think of you as someone who plans to come to the U.S. permanently, and you must prove that you intend to return to your country after completing your program. U.S. law very clearly states that F visas may be given only to persons who intend to remain in the U.S. temporarily. This rule is the number one reason that visa applications are denied.

Other important guidelines/requirements:

You must have a definite academic or professional objective. You must know what you are going to study and where it will lead. Be ready to say what you want to study and what kind of career it will prepare you for in your home country. Be prepared to explain why it is better for you to study in the U.S. than at home.

You must be definite about your choice of school. If you do not seem certain that you want to study at Cottey, you will not get a visa.

You must be adequately financed and have documents to prove it. Keep in mind that you should not plan to use employment as a means of support while you are in the U.S.

U.S. government officials are convinced more easily by written documents than by spoken statements. When possible, have papers to show your connections to your home country. If your family owns 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 your brother's or sister's diploma and a statement from an employer showing that they have returned home. If your family owns a business, take letters from a bank, describing the business, to the visa interview with you. Do not emphasize any ties you may have to the U.S. or to family members in the U.S. Your visa application is stronger and better if at least part of your financial support comes from your home country, even if most of it comes from the U.S.

Strategies for the Visa Appointment

You are well advised to consider the following matters prior to your visa appointment, as you may be asked about each item.

1. **Good Impression:** Make a good first impression. Dress nicely, be businesslike.
2. **Document Preparation:** Have all of your documents in order and be ready to show them as they are requested. Do NOT just give the officer a bunch of disorganized documents. Provide ONLY what is requested.
3. **Qualifications:** Be prepared to show that you are qualified for admission to Cottey with diplomas, certificates, transcripts and test scores, etc.

4. **Academic Plans at Cottey:** Be definite and clear about your educational plans. You should be able to explain precisely what you wish to study and why you chose Cottey for your education. Be especially prepared to explain reasons for studying in the U.S. rather than your country.

5. **English:** Anticipate that the visa interview will be conducted in English. Do not bring parents or family members with you to the visa interview. The consular official will want to interview you, not your family. A negative impression is created if you are not prepared to speak on your own behalf.

6. **Ties to Your Home Country:** Demonstrate convincing reasons for consular officials to believe that you intend to return home after studies in the U.S. Emphasize ties to your home country such as employment, family obligations, bank accounts, family members at home, property or investments that you own or will inherit, and clear explanations of how you plan to use your education to help your country or pursue a career when you return home.

7. **Financial Documentation:** Be prepared to prove financial ability to pay for your education and living expenses. While some students will be able to work part time during their studies, such employment is incidental to their main purpose of completing their education. You must show the consular officer that you have the annual amount in U.S. dollars listed on your Form I-20. Your financial evidence should be in the form of bank statements, affidavits of support, scholarship award letters, etc.

8. **Be Concise:** Because of the volume of visa applications, all consular officials are under considerable pressure to conduct a quick and efficient interview. They must make a decision, for the most part, on the impression they form during the first minute or two of the interview. Consequently, what you say first and the initial impression you create are critical to your success. Keep your answers short and to the point.

9. **Be Honest and Open:** Answer all questions honestly in a frank and straightforward manner. Do not be evasive in any way.

10. **Not All Countries are the Same:** Applicants from countries suffering economic problems or from countries where many students have remained in the U.S. as immigrants will have more difficulty getting visas. Statistically, applicants from these countries are more likely to be intending immigrants.

11. **Dependents Remaining at Home:** If you have a spouse and/or children remaining behind in your home country, be prepared to address how they will support themselves in your absence. This can be an especially tricky area if you are the primary source of income for your family. If the consular official gains the impression that your family members will need you to remit money from the U.S. in order to support them, your student visa will almost surely be denied.

Visa Denial or Visa Delay

The vast majority of Cottey students will be successful in obtaining their student visas. Despite this, a small number of students may have their visa applications denied. The most common reasons for visa denial are:

- failure to prove sufficient ties to your home country, or
- failure to provide sufficient evidence of financial support

Other reasons for visa denials include health-related issues such as Tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, etc., criminal background, security risk, previous illegal entrance to the U.S., immigration status violators previously removed from the U.S., and unlawful voters.

The visa officer must verbally inform you of the reason for the visa denial. If your visa is denied, please send an e-mail message to admit@cottey.edu and provide the date and location of your visa interview, and details regarding the reason given by the visa officer for the denial.

Much more common than a visa denial is a visa delay. This is why it is so important to apply for your visa EARLY! Here are some of the most common reasons for visa delays:

- Closings or reduced hours at U.S. visa issuing posts abroad due to security concerns or political instability in the host country
- Student's record does not appear in the SEVIS system at the U.S. embassy or consulate, even though the student presents a Form I-20.

If you are told that your record does not appear in the visa officer's SEVIS system, immediately contact us at admit@cottey.edu and provide the date and location of your visa interview. We will contact the appropriate authority.

- Student not presenting proof of SEVIS I-901 fee payment.
- A finding based on Section 221(g), which means that the visa officer found that the information provided at the visa interview was insufficient to support approval or denial of a visa. The applicant will be asked to return with additional information.
- The need for a security clearance prior to visa issuance if the visa applicant has ever been arrested in the U.S., or if the applicant has a name identical to or similar to a person with a previous arrest record.
- The need for a security clearance prior to visa issuance if the visa applicant is male, between the age of 16-46 and a citizen of or born in one of the designated countries requiring security clearances (Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Egypt, Eritrea, Indonesia, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, North Korea, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen).
- The need for a security clearance for any non-immigrant visa applicant male or female, age 16 or older who is a national of or permanently residing in Cuba, Iran, Libya, Sudan or Syria.

Similar to a visa denial, the visa officer must verbally inform you of the reason for the visa delay. If your visa is delayed, please send an e-mail message to admit@cottey.edu and provide the date and location of your visa interview, and details regarding the reason given by the visa officer for the delay.

The U.S. State Department has prepared information on student visas on its website that may be useful to you.

Visit: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study.html>

Special Note for Citizens of Canada

Citizens of Canada are not required to obtain a U.S. visa to enter the U.S. However, a U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer will inspect your papers, either at a pre-inspection site in Canada or upon entry to the U.S. You must have with you:

- your Canadian passport
- your Cottey letter of acceptance
- proof of SEVIS I-901 fee payment
- your Form I-20 issued by Cottey
- proof of financial support that corresponds to the information on your Form I-20

It is essential that you enter the U.S. in F-1 student status (not in visitor/tourist status), so be sure to have complete documentation with you.

Length of Stay in the U.S. on an F-1 Student Visa When you enter the U.S. on a student visa, you will usually be admitted for the duration of your student status. That means you may stay as long as you are a full time student, even if the F-1 visa in your passport expires while you are in America. An F-1 student who has completed the course of studies shown on the I-20, and any authorized practical training, is allowed to stay in the U.S. an additional 60 days before departure, in order to prepare for the departure or to transfer to another school.

As an example regarding duration of status, if you have a visa that is valid for five years that will expire on January 1, 2014, and you are admitted into the U.S. for the duration of your studies (often abbreviated on your Form I-20 as "D/S"), you may stay in the U.S. as long as you are a full time student. Even if January 1, 2014 passes and your visa expires while in America, you will still be in legal student status. However, if you depart the U.S. with an expired visa, you will need to obtain a new one before being able to return to America and resume your studies. A student visa cannot be renewed or re-issued in the U.S.; it must be done at an Embassy or Consulate abroad.

ARRIVAL IN THE UNITED STATES

Once you have obtained your U.S. student visa, you are ready to finalize your travel plans. Be sure to hand-carry the documents below.

- Your passport, valid for at least six months beyond the date of your expected stay;
- Form I-20

Do not check these documents in your luggage. If your

luggage is lost or delayed, you will be unable to present them at your port of entry. As a result, you may not be able to enter the country.

In addition, it is strongly recommended that you hand-carry the following documentation:

- Evidence of financial resources
- Evidence of student status, such as an enrollment deposit receipt, transcripts, letter of acceptance, residence hall assignment
- Paper receipt for the SEVIS I-901 fee
- Name and contact information of a Cottey contact person.

DO NOT enter on another school's I-20, as that is considered to be a fraudulent entry by the U.S. Immigration authorities.

DO NOT attempt to enter the U.S. with large sums of money unless you declare it with U.S. Customs and Border Protection. It is a U.S. federal law that anyone carrying more than \$10,000 in a monetary instrument of any form must declare that money, or risk having it seized by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials.

DO NOT attempt to enter the U.S. on a visitor/tourist visa (B-2) unless it is designated "Prospective Student" by a consular officer. The U.S. Immigration Service rarely authorizes a change of status from B-2 to F-1, and you will be prevented from enrolling in school until your change of status application is approved, which could take several months.

DO NOT attempt to enter the U.S. under the visa waiver program, available to citizens from nearly 36 countries throughout the world. The waiver program is designed for tourists only, and attending school under the waiver program is a clear violation of U.S. immigration law.

Expect to go through both immigration and customs inspection at the U.S. port of entry. You may also be required to go through a pre-inspection procedure at certain airports abroad. At the immigration booth, present your passport, your Form I-20, your proof of SEVIS I-901 fee payment. Expect to have your fingers scanned for fingerprint purposes and a digital photograph taken, as required by U.S. federal regulations. All visitors to the U.S. must state their reason for wishing to enter the country. You will also be asked to provide information about your final destination. It is important that you tell the Customs and Border Patrol officer that you will be a student, and be prepared to tell the full name and address of the university.

In the vast majority of cases, there will be no difficulty. In certain cases, if there is some problem with your documents, you may be permitted a 30-day entry and issued a Form I-515A, usually with instructions to see your international student advisor. Examine your Form I-20 carefully as you leave the immigration booth. F-1 students should have their Form I-20 marked "D/S" which means Duration of Status. If

an expiration date is written on your Form I-20, come to the Office of International Programs as soon as possible.

Anyone who is denied admission at a U.S. port of entry should be very cautious about arguing with the immigration official. You may risk being issued "expedited removal," which now entails a five-year bar on admission to the U.S. If you are denied admission, first try to contact Cottey for assistance, but also make it known to the immigration official that you are willing to withdraw your application for admission to the country rather than be subject to expedited removal.

Form I-94

The Form I-94, "Arrival/Departure Record" (<http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/student-forms?form=Form I-94>) is a critical record. It shows that you have been legally admitted to the U.S., 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 after you have entered the country.

Reporting to Cottey

You must report to Cottey by the program start date listed on your Form I-20. 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 will be out of student status and will be legally required to depart the country. It is best to contact Cottey immediately after entering the country so that there is no question of your arrival.

International Education Coordinator

We recommend that you carry the contact information of Cottey with you, so that in the event you encounter any difficulties we can attempt to assist you.

Office telephone: 417-667-8181

Megan Corrigan, International Education Coordinator

Emergency cell phone: 443-255-7312

Email: mcorrigan@cottey.edu

Thank you to UW-Superior, who originally compiled this information and granted permission for its adaptation.