Dear Student,

We are delighted to know you have been admitted to Stanford University and look forward to meeting you in September! This handout will explain how to obtain your F-1 student visa. Over the next few weeks, we will email you other important information on topics such as Stanford’s student health insurance requirements and international orientation programs for graduate students. If you have further questions we have provided an email address at the end of this letter.

With best wishes,

John Pearson, Director

Obtaining your F-1 Student Visa

This information is for students who plan to enter the U.S. for the first time using the F-1 visa to study at Stanford University. Students already studying in the U.S. on an F-1 (or other) visa and who plan on attending Stanford in F-1 visa status, should see the section on page 2 titled “Information for Non-Immigrants Currently Residing in the U.S.”

STEPS:

1. **Pay the SEVIS fee.**
   Instructions on how to pay this fee can be found at: [http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/](http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/). You should pay this fee at least 2 weeks before your visa interview and take the proof of SEVIS fee payment when you go to your visa interview. You will need SEVIS ID number (on your I-20) to pay the fee.

2. **Make an appointment for your visa interview.**
   Information on how to apply for an F-1 visa can be found at your local U.S. Consulate or Embassy website ([http://usembassy.state.gov/](http://usembassy.state.gov/)). We suggest you apply as early as possible; however, U.S. consulates may issue an F-1 visa no more than 120 days in advance of the program start date. **Exception: Canadian citizens** do not require an F-1 visa, but they must present their Stanford I-20, proof of SEVIS fee payment, proof of financial support, and admission letter when they enter the U.S.

3. **Prepare for your visa interview.**
   Remember that first impressions are very important. At the interview, be respectful, dress well, answer honestly, and maintain "eye contact" with the consular official. In U.S. culture, failure to make eye contact (looking away, or down too often) could be interpreted as being evasive. Be clear about your educational plans, anticipate that the interview will be in English, and remember that the interview will not be long, so be clear and concise.

4. **Bring the following documents to your visa interview:**
   - The Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Student Status (or "I-20") from Stanford
   - Original financial documents*
   - Valid passport
   - Two passport-size (37 mm X 37 mm) photographs
   - Proof of SEVIS fee payment
   - Admission letter
   - Evidence of language proficiency
   - Any information that shows you will return to your home country after finishing your studies in the U.S

You will be also required to complete form DS-160 (Electronic Nonimmigrant Visa Application Form) and any other forms required by the particular Consulate in your home country.

*The Consular Officer will require you to provide the same (and possibly additional) financial documentation you provided to Stanford. You will most likely also be required to show this documentation at the port of entry in the U.S., so get a duplicate set of original financial documents.

Occasionally there may be a visa denial or delay. If your visa is denied, you should receive the reason for the denial in writing. If it is delayed, the reason could be that your SEVIS record doesn’t appear in the Consulate database, or that a security clearance background check is needed. Usually a security clearance could take an average 3-8 weeks. Please email john.pearson@stanford.edu if you do not receive your visa within 30 days of your visa interview.

The length of the visa validity, number of entries permitted, and application fee are based on reciprocity, and generally reflect your country's policies in granting visa privileges to visiting U.S. students.
After obtaining your I-20, if you determine you will NOT attend Stanford University, it is your responsibility to inform your Department. You must also return the original I-20 to the I-Center (Bechtel International Center, 584 Capistrano Way, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305 USA).

**Entering the U.S. and Future Travel and Re-Entry**

Upon your initial entry into the U.S. with an F-1 visa, the officer at the port of entry will review your documents. Make sure you carry the following items with you on the plane: passport, I-20, the admission letter, proof of SEVIS Fee payment and proof of financial support. For the initial F-1 entry into the U.S., regulations require you to attend the school that issued the I-20 you use to enter the United States and for which the U.S. Consulate has issued your visa stamp. Failure to do so is considered a violation of your visa status. You may enter the U.S. up to 30 days prior to the start date indicated in section #5 of the I-20.

You will be fingerprinted and photographed (a regulation that applies to ALL visa holders). Please make sure you have a stamp in the passport annotated D/S at the port of entry. Please remember that your status as a student ends upon completion of your studies and not necessarily the completion date noted on your I-20, or the date you would like to attend the Graduation Ceremony.

The immigration officer will examine your documents before returning them to you. Be sure to keep your I-20 in a safe place, since you must use this form for travel and return to the U.S. In addition, immigration regulations require you to carry your passport at all times. **Do not enter the U.S. on a B tourist visa, visa waiver, or any other visa type.** Entering the U.S. on a visa type other than the F-1 student visa may temporarily bar your enrollment at Stanford. It will also forfeit your employment benefit as an F-1 visa holder.

**Orientation**

There will be an orientation for new international graduate students, which is scheduled to begin on Monday, September 14, 2015. If you are on campus earlier, we will offer some of the same workshops during the week of September 7, 2015. In early summer we will send you further information as well as update our web site at [http://icenter.stanford.edu](http://icenter.stanford.edu)

During orientation we will confirm 1) your physical arrival on campus and 2) that you have accurately entered your local Stanford address in Axess. Only after these verifications can your fall enrollment hold be removed. [http://icenter.stanford.edu/students/new/enrlmnt_hold.html](http://icenter.stanford.edu/students/new/enrlmnt_hold.html)

**Maintaining Your F-1 Visa Status**

Be sure to read Page 2 of your I-20, as it contains important information concerning visa regulations and what is required of you to maintain student visa status. Sign page 1 (section 11) after reading the terms and conditions of admission explained in page 2. **Since your passport and the I-20 are very important documents, you should make photocopies of them in case of loss.**

During your stay at Stanford, the I-Center will send email announcements about important immigration issues that affect you as an international student. Make sure to read these announcements, and speak to an advisor at the I-Center if you have questions.

Maintaining your legal student status is an important part of your stay in the U.S. While maintaining your legal status is ultimately your responsibility, we are here to assist you and you should always come and speak with an advisor whenever you have any questions about your status.

Information on maintaining your status can be found at: [http://icenter.stanford.edu/students/current/maintaining.html](http://icenter.stanford.edu/students/current/maintaining.html)

**Information for Non-immigrants Currently Residing in the U.S.**

- If you attended another U.S. school in F-1 visa status prior to beginning attendance at Stanford, “transfer pending” will be noted in Section #3 of your enclosed I-20. Once you have visited the I-Center with your passport to confirm physical presence, you will be issued a new I-20 showing “Transfer Completed” in Section #9. This must be done **within 15 days of starting classes** for you to maintain your visa status.
- If you are currently attending a U.S. school in F-1 status and the F-1 visa in your passport is valid and your Stanford I-20 bears the same SEVIS ID # as the I-20 from your old school, you do NOT need to obtain a new visa in your passport.
- If you are residing in the U.S. under another nonimmigrant visa type, you will need to apply to change your visa type to F-1 before enrolling at Stanford. There are two ways to do this: 1) Apply to the USCIS for a change of visa type while remaining in the U.S. This option can take about 120+ days, and, depending on your situation, may not allow you to enroll for classes until your change of status has been approved. 2) Leave the U.S. and obtain an F-1 student visa at a U.S. consulate (preferably in your home country) and use the Stanford I-20 to enter the U.S. in F-1 student status. This is usually the quickest and easiest way to change your visa status. In both cases you will need to pay the SEVIS fee. NOTE: If you have a B visa with a notation stating that it is not eligible for change of status, you will NOT be allowed to change visa status within the U.S. Immigration regulations prohibit students with pending change of status from B-2 to F-1 from enrolling in classes.

**If you still have questions regarding your visa status, please contact new_intl_students@stanford.edu. Information can also be found on the I-Center’s web page:** [http://icenter.stanford.edu](http://icenter.stanford.edu)

Please note that the International Center cannot return international phone calls.