Brandeis University

F-1 / J-1 STUDENT VISA BOOKLET

International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO)
Welcomes you to Brandeis!

This booklet will give you an overview of the following:
- Quick Facts About Your I-20 / DS-2019
- Incoming International Student Check List
- Scheduling Your Visa Interview
- Preparing for Your Visa Interview
- Entering the U.S. through Customs and Border Protection (CBP)
- ISSO Contact Information

QUICK FACTS ABOUT YOUR I-20 / DS-2019

- Your SEVIS Identification Number (it begins with the letter "N") is located on the top corner on the form.
- Your major as it appears on your I-20 or DS-2019 is a general description provided by the government and may vary slightly from your actual Brandeis major or program name. The minor variation in wording has no impact on your visa application.
- Your initial attendance I-20 or DS-2019 will be signed by ISSO staff on the first page only. The travel signature line on page three of your I-20 or on the bottom right corner of your DS-2019 will be unsigned. Travel signature lines will only be signed after you enter the U.S., are granted F-1 or J-1 status and are enrolled full-time.
- If you decide not to attend Brandeis, please immediately return your I-20 or DS-2019 to the ISSO (please see ISSO Contact Information* for mailing address).

INCOMING INTERNATIONAL STUDENT CHECK LIST

☐ Carefully read all information on your I-20 or DS-2019 to verify that it is correct. If you find an error, please contact the ISSO via email so that your document can be corrected and resent to you before your visa interview.
☐ Sign the bottom ("Student Attestation" on page 1 of Form I-20 or the Exchange Visitor Certification on the bottom of page 1 on Form DS-2019)
☐ Pay the SEVIS Fee (see SEVIS Fee Handout)
☐ Schedule and prepare for your Visa Interview
☐ Attend your Visa Interview to obtain your U.S. F-1 or J-1 entry visa.
☐ Familiarize yourself with the ISSO website: www.brandeis.edu/issa
☐ Complete the required ISSO Online Orientation through latte.brandeis.edu before you arrive
☐ Carry your original I-20 or DS-2019 (not a photocopy), passport, Brandeis admission letter, financial award letter (if any), and financial documentation on the plane with you. Do NOT pack this documentation in your checked luggage.
☐ Check your stamp you receive in your passport (issued to you when you enter the U.S.) to make sure the immigration officer noted "F-1—D/S" or "J-1—D/S". YOU CANNOT STUDY IF YOU ENTER THE U.S. IN B1/B2 TOURIST VISA STATUS. Next double check the status on your passport stamp matches your status at www.cbp.gov/I94. Use your visa information to log in.
☐ Attend the required ISSO Orientation Session once you have arrived on campus (see your Orientation schedule for details)
☐ Complete ISSO Online Check-In once you have arrived on campus (you will receive information on how to complete ISSO Check-In during Orientation)
PREPARING FOR YOUR VISA INTERVIEW

To be issued a student visa, the Consular Officer will ask you to prove that you plan to return to your home country when you complete your studies in the U.S. In order to demonstrate to the Consular Officer that you plan to return to your home country, you will be asked to show that:

1. You have sufficient assured funds to cover all your expenses for the duration of your stay in the U.S. If you are receiving a scholarship from Brandeis, be prepared to show a letter of award. If you are sponsored by an agency or organization, be prepared to show a letter of award. If your funding is from personal and/or family funds, be prepared to show bank statements/letters, certified letters of credit, proof of your annual salary and/or your total available assets or that of your immediate family.

F-1 Students: At minimum, you must prove to the satisfaction of the United States Consular Officer that you have sufficient funds for at least one year of study. According to the limitations of your visa status, you will not be permitted to work off-campus during your first year at Brandeis. Also note that on-campus jobs are limited.

2. You have "strong ties" to your home country and that you will return home upon completion of your program. Strong ties are various aspects of your life (professional, family, financial, etc.) that bind you to your country of residence. Strong ties may include all your family residing in your home country and not in the U.S., you have a job awaiting you at home upon completing your studies, all of your assets are at home and not in the U.S., etc.

3. You can articulate your plan. What do you want to study or research? Why did you choose Brandeis University? What activities will you pursue in your home country after you complete your degree/program? You may be asked many questions in the interview or your time in the interview may be very brief. It is important to be calm, clear, and concise.

If you cannot prove these points to the Consular Officer, you may be denied a visa.

At the time of your visa interview, you will be told one of the following:

1. You have been granted the visa and it will be issued to you at that time or it will be mailed to you.

2. You have been denied the visa and the Consular Officer should provide you with an explanation. If you are denied a visa, contact the ISSO immediately and we will provide you with some guidance for next steps. It is possible to be denied a visa during the first interview and granted a visa during the next interview.

3. Your application needs further review and will be sent for a Security Advisory Opinion (SAO). This does not mean that you have been denied a visa. However, it does mean that your file will be sent to Washington D.C. for further security screening. It is not possible for Brandeis, or anyone, to expedite the processing time for an SAO. The approximate processing time is 30 days, however SAOs may take longer. Please keep the ISSO and Admissions informed of your application status if your visa application is selected for an SAO.

NOTE: Was your U.S. visa denied on the basis of 214(b)? What is that? 214(b) is a section of immigration regulation in the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) stating:

"Every alien shall be presumed to be an immigrant until he establishes to the satisfaction of the consular officer, at the time of application for admission, that he is entitled to a nonimmigrant status..."

Reference and more information on visa denials based on 214(b) can be found on the U.S. Department of State website at: http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvl/denials/denials _1361.html
SCHEDULING YOUR VISA INTERVIEW

Your Form I-20 (F-1 Visa) or Form DS-2019 (J-1 Visa) is necessary to obtain a non-immigrant visa from the U.S. Embassy or Consulate. Although citizens of many countries are eligible for the Visa Waiver Pilot Program and therefore may travel to the U.S. as tourists without a visa, students must have an appropriate student or exchange visitor visa to engage in study at Brandeis.

If you enter the U.S. on a tourist visa or without a visa, you will be required to leave the U.S. in order to enter on the appropriate F-1 or J-1 visa. Therefore, it is important that you follow these instructions for obtaining the proper visa.

If you do not have a passport, you must obtain one from the appropriate office of your government. Your passport must be valid at least six months into the future at all times. It is your responsibility to be aware of the expiration date of your passport and to renew it at the appropriate time.

Once you have received your Form I-20 or Form DS-2019 from Brandeis University and your SEVIS fee has been paid, ISSO recommends that you schedule a visa appointment at the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate as soon as possible. All new F-1 or J-1 applicants must go for an in-person visa interview (Exception: Although Canadian citizens are not required to obtain an entry visa stamp, all Canadians must obtain a Form I-20 or Form DS-2019 and pay the appropriate SEVIS fee at least 3 business days before entering the U.S. and applying for F-1 or J-1 student status at the U.S. Port of Entry.)

The earliest that F-1 or J-1 students may be granted a visa is 120 days prior to the start of the student's academic program at Brandeis (see start date on Form I-20 or DS-2019).

Visa processing times vary and may require additional time due to security checks on applications.

Bring the following documents with you to your Visa Interview:

- Valid Passport
- Proof of Assured Funds (Financial Documents) as reflected on your Certificate of Eligibility Form I-20 or Form DS-2019 (bring all ORIGINAL bank documents and support letters)
- Original Brandeis Certificate of Eligibility Form I-20 or Form DS-2019 (be sure to carefully review for possible errors and sign your document prior to your interview)
- SEVIS Fee Payment Confirmation
- Your Brandeis Admission Letter and Financial Aid Award Letter (if any)
- Check your local U.S. Embassy or Consulate website for additional requirements such as application fees, photos, etc.

The U.S. Consular Officer will review your documents during your visa interview. Be prepared to answer potential questions about your family, finances, choice of degree program and why you are choosing to come to Brandeis.

If the U.S. Consular Officer believes that all is in order, s/he will issue you an F-1 student visa or J-1 student exchange visitor visa permitting you to request entry to the U.S. for the purpose of studying at Brandeis University.

NOTE:
Brandeis University will be printed on the U.S. visa issued to you in your passport. If you have received a Form I-20 or Form DS-2019 from more than one school, be sure to use the document issued for study at Brandeis when applying for your visa. The Consular Officer will only issue the visa for one Form I-20 or one Form DS-2019 and will cancel all other documents from other schools in SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System).
ENTERING THE UNITED STATES THROUGH U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION (CBP)

F-1 and J-1 students may enter the U.S. no more than 30 days before the program start date as listed on Form I-20 or Form DS-2019. The program start date is the first day of classes, which is listed in item number 5 on the Form I-20 or item number 3 on the Form DS-2019.

When scheduling travel arrangements, please keep in mind that you should arrive at Brandeis in time to attend the first day of orientation programming.

While you may find it helpful to arrive early to settle in before starting your orientation program, please be aware that you will need to wait until orientation begins prior to receiving a campus ID card and/or you will need to wait to move in to any pre-arranged on-campus housing until residence halls open. Students will receive additional information from Admissions, the graduate school or their academic department regarding on-campus housing assignments (if available) and orientation schedules.

When you arrive in the U.S., you will be required to present your passport with a valid F-1 or J-1 U.S. visa, financial documents, admission letter and your Form I-20 or Form DS-2019 to a U.S. Customs and Border Protection Officer. Always carry these documents on your person. Do NOT pack them in your checked luggage, as you must show your documents to the CBP officer before you are allowed to claim your bags. The CBP officer may ask similar questions to those asked during the visa interview. Individuals should also be prepared to have their photo and index fingerprints digitally taken as part of the entry process.

**NOTE:** If you do not have proper documentation upon arrival, the CBP officer may either deny your entrance to the U.S. or grant you a temporary 30-day entry as noted with a Form I-515A. Please contact the ISSO immediately in case of any difficulties entering the United States or if you are issued a Form I-515A.

If you are entering the U.S. by air or sea, the immigration officer should stamp your passport at the port of entry after completing an inspection of your documentation and returning your documents to you. The stamp should have a notation that reads either "F-1—D/S" or "J-1-D/S." This indicates that you have an F-1 or J-1 visa and have been granted admission for duration of status ("D/S"). Duration of status means that as long as you are maintaining your F-1 or J-1 status, you may legally remain in the U.S. until the end of your academic program.

If you are entering the U.S. by land, the immigration officer will issue you an I-94 Departure Record, a small white card stapled into your passport. Again, it should read "F-1—D/S" or "J-1-D/S."

**NOTE:** If entering the U.S. by air or sea, your arrival information will be available to print on www.cbp.gov/I94. Please check this website to see if your arrival information is correct. You can also print a copy, which you will need if you will be applying for a social security number or driver's license.

If you notice a mistake on your stamp in your passport or online at www.cbp.gov/I94, please try to request a correction while you are at the airport. If you do not notice the mistake until after you depart the airport, please bring it to the ISSO as soon as possible so that we can advise you on how to request a correction.

**ISSO CONTACT INFORMATION**

International Students and Scholars Office  
415 South Street | Kutz Hall 215 | MS 040 | Waltham, MA 02454-9110  
781-736-3480 | 781-736-3484 Fax | isso@brandeis.edu | www.brandeis.edu/issso  
Join ISSO at Brandeis University on FaceBook!
SEVIS I-901 FEE REQUIREMENT
A Guide for Incoming Students at Brandeis University

What is SEVIS and the SEVIS I-901 Fee?
SEVIS, the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System, is a central computerized system that maintains and manages data about Foreign Students (F-1), Exchange Visitors (J-1 Students, J-1 Scholars), and their Dependents (F-2 and J-2) during their stay in the United States.

In October 2004, the Department of Homeland Security mandated the SEVIS I-901 Fee for all new F-1 and J-1 applicants. This fee is required by U.S. law and is used to cover the costs of operating the program. The SEVIS fee is a separate fee in addition to any other visa application/processing fees.

Is there a SEVIS Fee payment receipt?
In March 2013, the Student & Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) announced they will be phasing out the mailed Form I-797C, which is the I-901 SEVIS fee payment receipt. Hard copies of this payment receipt will continue to be issued by mail through summer of 2013. After that time, it will be replaced by the payment confirmation that you can print from www.fmjfee.com when you pay your SEVIS fee (user should bring this to their visa interview).

How much is the SEVIS fee?
As of October 2008, the SEVIS fee is $200 for students with a Form I-20 (F-1 visa) and $180 for students with a Form DS-2019 (J-1 visa Exchange visitors).

Exemptions from the fee:
• F-2 and J-2 Dependents
• J-1 Exchange Visitors whose Forms DS-2019 are issued by the U.S. government

When do prospective students or exchange visitors pay the SEVIS fee?
• Applicants needing a visa to enter the U.S. should pay the SEVIS fee at least 3 business days before going to the U.S. embassy or consulate for their visa interview.
• Applicants who are citizens of Canada or Bermuda or residents of certain other islands (described in 8 CFR 212.1a) applying for F-1 or J-1 status should pay the SEVIS fee at least 3 business days before entering the U.S. The fee cannot be paid at the port-of-entry.
• Non-immigrants currently in the U.S. who apply for student or exchange visitor status must pay the fee prior to filing their change of status application.

If a new student is applying to more than one school, is the SEVIS fee transferable?
Yes. The Department of Homeland Security has confirmed that fee payment made on one SEVIS ID number (i.e. Form I-20) can be applied to another SEVIS ID number issued to the same individual. The new student will need to bring in proof of the SEVIS ID number connected to the SEVIS fee – i.e. the unused I-20 or DS-2019.

How do I pay the SEVIS I-901 Fee?
Please find SEVIS Fee FAQs and SEVIS Form I-901 Payment Instructions online at:
http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/index.htm

If you are unable to pay the SEVIS I-901 Fee on-line via credit card, please find instructions on other payment methods at:
http://www.brandeis.edu/acserv/isso/incoming/stepstosecurevisa/sevisfee/index.html
Airport Status:

What to Expect Upon Arrival at a U.S. Port of Entry:

Visas for Third Country Nationals in Canada or Mexico:

Special Visa Processing for Citizens of Cuba, Syria, Sudan, Iran:

Visa Wait Times for Interview Appointments and Processing:

Visa Photo Requirements:

Visa Dental Information:

Check the Status of Your Visa Application:

Visa Application Fees:

List of U.S. Embassies/Consulates:

SEVIS I-901 Fee Frequently Asked Questions:

SEVIS I-901 Fee and Form I-901 Payment Instructions: