# INTERNATIONAL STUDENT INFORMATION PACKET

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Congratulations on your acceptance to Columbia College Chicago!

This document contains a great deal of information that will help you prepare to study in the United States. Some of this information goes into detail regarding forms that you will be required to submit; if you feel that you have already submitted any of these required forms, please contact the Graduate Admissions Office at Columbia College to confirm they have been received.

Email: gradstudy@colum.edu
Phone: 312-369-7260

Mandatory New International Student Welcome & Information Session

All new international students are required to attend the International Student Welcome and Information Session. You will receive information on services and resources available to you while pursuing your graduate education at Columbia, as well get the chance to speak with other international students. This session will cover immigration matters relevant to you as an international student studying in the United States.

You will be notified of the date and time of the session by the Director of International Student Affairs.

International Student Health Insurance

Columbia College Chicago has implemented a mandatory Student Accident and Sickness Insurance Plan offered by Koster Insurance Agency, Inc. All F-1 and J-1 international students are eligible and are automatically enrolled. The current cost of the insurance can be found at: http://www.kosterweb.com
On-Campus Housing

The Residence Life Office provides a variety of housing options. All campus housing is fully furnished, and these facilities are conveniently located, only steps away from the main campus buildings and public transportation.

If you are planning to live on campus and you have not applied for housing, you must do so immediately! Housing assignments are made on a first-come-first-served basis according to the date your housing application is completed and received. You will find more detailed information about on-campus housing by visiting: www.colum.edu/residencelife The website also includes: photos, virtual tours, room configurations, and answers to frequently asked questions.

Temporary housing may be arranged if needed. Please contact Hostelling International - Chicago at (312) 360-0300 or by visiting their website at: www.hichicago.org

Off-Campus Housing

Living on campus is not a requirement for our graduate students, and many find living off campus to better suit their lifestyles. For those looking for housing off-campus, we have created a relocation guide which can be found at: http://www.colum.edu/Admissions/Graduate/images/Relocation.pdf

Photo of The Dwight at 642 S. Clark
SEVIS I-20 and F-1 Student Visa

As an international student, you will need an F-1 student visa to enter the United States to study. You will need to apply for the visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate, using the I-20 Certificate of Eligibility form issued by Columbia College Chicago.

However, if you are a citizen of Canada, Bermuda or one of the other islands described in 8 CFR 212.1(a), you do not need a visa. You may apply directly at the Port Of Entry for student (F-1) status.

Other items which may be required by the embassy or consulate include:

• Evidence of financial support for the period of time and amount indicated on the I-20 form;
• Your acceptance letter from Columbia College Chicago;
• A passport valid for at least 6 months after your proposed date of entry into the U.S.;
• Evidence of English proficiency;
• Proof that you have a permanent residence outside the U.S.;
• A nonimmigrant visa application DS-156 and Form DS-158. Some applicants will also be required to complete and sign Form DS-157. Applications are available at the American Consulate Office or can be downloaded from the internet at: www.travel.state.gov/visaforms
• One 2”x2” photograph. For details visit: www.travel.state.gov/photorequirements
• The “SEVIS I-901 Fee” receipt (if applicable). If you do not currently have F-1 or J-1 visa status, then you will be required to pay the fee. At this time the fee is $200 USD. For more information, visit: http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/index.htm
• Evidence supporting your nonimmigrant intent. You must show ties abroad that would compel you to leave the United States at the end of the temporary stay. These ties can be possessions, employment, or social and family relationships that bind you to your country of residence. Some examples of relevant ties in foreign countries are a job, a house, social and family relationships, or a bank
account. Consular officers are aware that ties differ from person to person.

If approved, the consular officer will place a visa in your passport. If you receive a multiple-entry visa, you may use it to reenter the U.S. up to the date of its expiration as long as you have a valid I-20.

After receiving the I-20 Certificate of Eligibility, you must attend Columbia College Chicago for at least one semester.

**If you already have F-1 student status...**

If you have attended another school in the United States within five months of your start date at Columbia College Chicago, are currently participating in Optional Practical Training, or you are in the 60 day grace period immediately following the end of your authorized employment period, you are considered a transfer student for immigration purposes. To be able to issue you a Columbia College Chicago SEVIS I-20, you will need to contact your foreign student advisor at your previous school and ask that they release your SEVIS student record to Columbia College Chicago. Once this has taken place, we will then be able to issue you an I-20.

You must report to the Office of International Student Affairs at Columbia College Chicago by the start date listed on your I-20 and request that we complete the transfer process. The I-20 issued to you by Columbia College Chicago indicates “Transfer Pending From...”

*Failure to report to the International Student Advisor within 15 days of the start date is a violation of your F-1 student visa status.*

If all of your documents are in order, the International Student Advisor at Columbia College Chicago will process your transfer in SEVIS by issuing an I-20 for “Continued Attendance.” After receiving the SEVIS I-20 Certificate of Eligibility, you must attend Columbia College Chicago.

**The SEVIS Fee**

F-1, M-1 and J-1 visa applicants with I-20 (or DS-2019) forms issued on or after September 1, 2004 are required to pay a SEVIS fee before applying for the visa. This is a one-time fee charged to F-1, M-1 and J-1 visa applicants to cover the cost of administering the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS).

The SEVIS fee is usually $200. The fee must be paid and fully processed at least 3 days prior to the date of the visa interview. Proof of payment of the fee should be presented
at the time of applying for the visa. The fee is nonrefundable.

The SEVIS fee may be paid by you, by your sponsor, or by a third party. The fee is paid to the Department of Homeland Security in the United States. It cannot be paid at the Embassy or U.S. Consulate.

You will not be required to pay the SEVIS fee each time you apply for a visa. It is charged only at the time of the initial visa application. If you reapply for a visa based on the same program, you will not be required to pay a new fee. If you apply for a new visa based on a different program, a new fee will be required.

The SEVIS fee receipt is valid for twelve months. If your application is refused, you may reapply using this fee receipt, provided it is within 12 months of the initial payment. The fee receipt may be used if you are reapplying for the same visa or applying for a new visa for a different program provided the SEVIS fee payment meets the fee required for the different program.

I-20 Issuance

At this time, issuance of the I-20 form cannot take place until the following has been received:

- A $450.00 Graduate Confirmation Deposit. You will be able to pay this online at: www.colum.edu/gradpayment Once we receive this payment, the Office of International Student Affairs will prepare and send your I-20.
- Current evidence of adequate funding to meet Columbia College’s estimated tuition and living expenses while pursuing a program of study. Financial documentation consists of:
  - A notarized letter from your sponsor (unless self-sponsored*);
  - An official letter from the sponsor’s banking institution or the sponsoring agency indicating the necessary funds to cover tuition, class fees, registration costs, living expenses, health insurance, books, supplies, etc.

*If you are self-supporting, then you must provide an official statement to that effect.

For the 2014-2015 academic year, estimated educational and living expenses are $40,944.

As you prepare your documents, please be aware that financial documentation is valid for 6 months only and must be valid at the time of your anticipated term of entry into Columbia College Chicago.
A FEW TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND:

- Inform yourself of the business processes in place at the U.S. consulate or embassy where you plan to apply for your visa. You will find this information at: http://usembassy.state.gov/ and http://educationusa.state.gov/usvisa.htm

Every visa post sets its own hours, has its own way to schedule visa application appointments, and has its own lead-time for visa applications (typically weeks rather than days).

- Read the information the U.S. Department of State provides regarding the student visa at: http://www.travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1268.html

- With a friend or by yourself, practice your visa interview. You will only have 2 or 3 minutes to make your case for the visa, and you should have thought about certain issues in depth. For example, you should be prepared to explain what you will study, what you plan to do after your studies are completed, why you want to study in the U.S. rather than your home country, why the visa officer should believe that you will return to your home country after completion of your studies, and more. The links above will help you prepare.

Doing all of the above will mean that you are ready for your visa application when your Form I-20 arrives.

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**Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant F-1 Student**

**Certificate Number:** [Insert Certificate Number]

**School Name:** [Insert School Name]

**School Address:** [Insert School Address]

**City:** [Insert City]

**State:** [Insert State]

**Zip Code:** [Insert Zip Code]

**Country:** [Insert Country]

**Issuing Authority:** [Insert Issuing Authority]

**Date:** [Insert Date]

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**Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant F-1 Student**

**Certificate Number:** [Insert Certificate Number]

**School Name:** [Insert School Name]

**School Address:** [Insert School Address]

**City:** [Insert City]

**State:** [Insert State]

**Zip Code:** [Insert Zip Code]

**Country:** [Insert Country]

**Issuing Authority:** [Insert Issuing Authority]

**Date:** [Insert Date]
The Visa Interview

Once you have contacted the appropriate U.S. embassy or consulate and have scheduled your visa interview, make sure that you have all appropriate documents with you at the time of your appointment:

- Your acceptance letter to Columbia College Chicago (Acceptance to the Exchange Program)
- Your passport (valid for at least 6 months after your entry into the U.S.)
- Your SEVIS Form I-20/DS-2019
- Copies of the financial documents that you submitted for admissions purposes to Columbia College Chicago
- Copies of your academic credentials
- SEVIS I-901 fee receipt

You will have to complete a form, possibly more than one, depending on your situation.

About the Interview

Once you are at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate, several things will happen:

- The official will perform a "name check" on your name. This compares your name to the data in several large databases and is done for reasons of national security. If you happen to have the same name as a known criminal or terrorist, this may cause delays, as the official will have to ascertain (by a more extensive comparison of data) that you are not that person.
- If you are from one of the 27 countries listed below, your documents will be sent to the FBI in Washington, D.C., for clearance. (This usually affects male applicants only, but the visa officer has the discretionary authority to submit a female applicant's documents for a background check as well.) This may occur
regardless of whether you are a citizen of the country in question, a permanent resident, or were born there. The countries are Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, UAE, and Yemen.

- Once you receive your visa, the consular officer will seal your documents in a brown envelope and attach it to your passport. Do not open the envelope! It will be opened by the inspector at the port of entry.

What does this mean for you?

While background checks are never pleasant and tend to make the visa applicant nervous, please be aware that you are not being singled out. You should approach the situation calmly and politely. The more pleasant you are, the more pleasant the visa official will probably be. You should also be honest and direct in your interaction. Seeming to give vague answers or behaving in what may appear to be an elusive manner will only cause closer scrutiny and runs the risk of a visa refusal.

Photo courtesy of photos.state.gov
Making Travel Arrangements

Once you have your visa and are ready to travel to the U.S., you should make your travel arrangements as soon as possible.

One important fact to remember: You may enter the U.S. in initial F-1/J-1 status (meaning that you are a new international student, not a transfer student) up to 30 days before the program start date on your Form I-20/DS-2019. For example, if that date is 9-7-2014, you may enter the U.S. on 8-8-2014 or later. While you may be aware of students who have succeeded to enter the U.S. sooner than within that 30-day time frame, we urge you not to attempt this. The inspectors at U.S. ports of entry have the authority to refuse you entry into the U.S., which means that you would not be able to leave the airport. Rather, you would have to return to your country at your own expense.

The last step in the visa process will be to actually enter the U.S. It involves the inspection at the port of entry. (Most often, this is the airport where you first land in the U.S., but it could also be a sea port or a land port of entry, depending on your mode of travel.) In a number of countries, pre-checks are conducted at the airport where you begin rather than where you complete your journey. However, for most new students, the final inspection will occur at a U.S. airport. Many airports are now equipped for the US-VISIT program, under which all foreigners entering the country with a visa will be photographed and finger-printed. Both are done electronically and even though the process itself is not very time-consuming, the fact that every arriving foreigner must undergo this procedure will most likely cause delays in your travel schedule.

What does this mean for you? You must carry your documents on your person, not in your luggage. If you are flying from a foreign airport directly to Chicago, you may encounter delays at the airport there, which will mean that you may arrive late at your final destination here. However, if you are initially landing somewhere else in the U.S. and will then connect to Chicago from there, you should allow plenty of time between
your arrival and connecting flight. Last summer, students have reported that delays of 2 hours for inspection were not uncommon, and some missed their connecting flights.

Regardless of where you arrive in the U.S., upon inspection of your documents, you may be sent to "secondary" which is an additional inspection of your documents. This is often done on a random basis and may have nothing to do with your specific circumstances. If there is a question regarding your documents, inspectors at the port of entry will attempt to contact us to verify that you should be admitted. It may be helpful if you have the telephone number of the office with you. It is (312) 369-7458. Generally speaking, it is important that you remain calm during the process. Even if there are delays and your patience is tested, it will ease the process to be cooperative.
If at any time during this process you encounter difficulties, please contact Gigi at gposejpal@colum.edu or (312) 369-7458.

A word of caution: If, in your interaction with your U.S. consulate or embassy, you receive information that significantly differs from the information we are providing you, please check back with us before taking any action. If needed, we will attempt to intervene on your behalf with a specific visa post that has provided incorrect information. However, please be aware that the visa post has final authority and our intervention may not solve the problem.

Finally, while this process is complex and undoubtedly it will be frustrating for you at times, please remember that hundreds of new international students come to Columbia College Chicago every year. Much of the process works as it is supposed to, and it is worth the effort, given the many excellent people, places, and experiences that await you at Columbia.

We are looking forward to seeing you in the Fall!