

Students planning an exchange semester or year in the U.S. are likely to consider combining this with an internship. However, careful planning and an understanding of the basic options are required.

THE VISA CATEGORIES

Visa for studying

1. F-1 student visa

- if the student organized & paid for the study him-/herself
- for some study programs financed by DAAD

Requires the "certificate of eligibility" I-20. Issued by the hosting school or university or language school, the I-20 contains important information, such as the required financial means, and the program start and end date.

2. J-1 exchange visitor visa

- if the stay is arranged through a cooperation agreement between the local and the U.S. school
 - if the stay will be financed by U.S. government sources or through other bi-nationally financed programs
- Requires the "certificate of eligibility" DS-2019. Issued by the hosting university, the DS-2019 contains important information, such as needed financial means and the program start and end date.

It is not always obvious in which visa category a stay might fall. Accept the "certificate of eligibility" your U.S. host university issues and apply for the corresponding visa.

The Exchange Visitor Program

The J-1 exchange visitor visa encompasses a variety of exchange programs, not only study. It is divided into different sub-categories for various purposes, such as High School, Au Pair, Intern, Short Term Scholar and more.

For more details check <http://j1visa.state.gov>

THE VARIOUS COMBINATIONS

1. Study on F-1 + Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Requirements:

- Minimum of 2 U.S. semesters
- U.S. degree (Associate, Bachelor, Master)
- the agreement from the U.S. school.
- approval from Dept of Homeland Security (DHS).

Within the F-1 visa: a new I-20 will be issued with the new program end date.

Maximum duration for OPT is 18 months (STEM: 36 months), but not longer than the period of study in the U.S.

2. Study on F-1 + Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

Requirements:

- minimum of 2 U.S. semesters (undergrad), or 1 semester (grad students)
- if the internship is required by the U.S. school & done for academic credit

- approval from Dept of Homeland Security (DHS).

Within the F-1 visa: a new I-20 with new program end date will be issued.

Graduate students may be eligible for curricular practical training during or after their first semester. Check with the international office at the U.S. university.

Maximum duration cannot exceed the period of study in the U.S.

3. Study on J-1 + Academic Training (AT)

Requirements:

- minimum 2 U.S. semesters (undergrad), or 1 semester (grad)

- approval from Dept of Homeland Security (DHS).

Within the J-1 visa: a new DS-2019 with new program end date will be issued.

Graduate students may be eligible for academic training during or after their first semester. Check with the international office at the U.S. university.

Maximum duration: up to 12 months, but not to exceed the period of study in the U.S.

Visa for internships

An internship not approved as Optional Practical Training, Curricular Practical Training, or Academic Training requires a separate J-1 exchange visitor visa in the category "intern". The DS-2019 will be issued by "legal sponsors" - organizations authorized by the U.S. Department of State to handle internship programs.

If the internship is on the U.S. campus itself, the university may act as sponsor, using the "student intern" category.

4. Study on F-1 for less than 2 semesters + internship (J-1 intern) or vice versa

Option 1: Apply for a "change of status" from one non-immigrant visa category to another while in the U.S.

However, apart from a fee of \$ 455, the "change of status" can take weeks or even months. As long as the Department of Homeland Security has not approved the change, the student cannot proceed with the 2nd part of his/her stay.

Option 2: If both study & internship places are confirmed before leaving home, the student may apply for both the F-1 and J-1 Intern visa at the same time. The student has to leave the country between the two programs.

Exit & re-entry via Canada, Mexico, or the Caribbean islands is theoretically possible but not guaranteed. The decision rests with the immigration official.

5. Study on J-1 visa for less than 2 U.S. semesters + internship (J-1 intern) or vice versa

Option 1: "Change of Category"

Only in rare cases ("exceptional and unusual") will the U.S. Department of State who oversees the exchange visitor program, allow participants to change from on J-1 category to another while in the U.S.

The fee of \$ 455 will not be reimbursed when an application is unsuccessful.

<http://j1visa.state.gov/participants/current/adjustments-and-extensions/>

Option 2: Even if you have secured both your study & internship before departing for the U.S., there is a visa rule prohibiting the issuance of two J-1 visas simultaneously. If you wish to participate in two J-1 programs, your only option is to return to your home country and apply for a new J-1 visa.