

PLANNING YOUR ARRIVAL TO THE UNITED STATES

The International Education Services (IES) Office would like to congratulate you and welcome you to the UMBC community!

We hope that as you prepare to come to the United States this important information will enable your transition plans to be as smooth as possible. **Read through carefully** & please ask us any questions.

For a detailed overview of the F-1 visa, use this website:

http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1268.html

VISA APPLICATION PROCESS

Students are encouraged to apply for their visa early to provide ample time for visa processing. Students may apply for their visa as soon as they are prepared to do so. The consular officer may need to get special clearances depending on the course of study and nationality of the student. This can take some additional time. For more information on applicants who may have additional processing requirements see [Special Processing Requirements](#). Keep in mind that the earliest possible date a student is allowed to enter the U.S after obtaining a visa is **30** days before the program start date that appears on the form I-20.

An **interview** at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate is required for almost all visa applicants. Most embassies require online appointments, so please check with the U.S. embassy in your country. The waiting time for an interview appointment for applicants can vary, so early visa application is **strongly encouraged**. During the visa interview, an ink-free, digital fingerprint scan will be taken, as well as a digital photo. Some applicants will need additional screening, and will be notified when they apply.

*You can see average waiting times at a specific embassy here:

http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/wait/wait_4638.html

*Schedule your visa appointment through the website of the specific Embassy you will visit

*Specific guidelines about the visa interview are included in this package

The following are the documents you must take with you to your visa appointment at a U.S. Embassy or consulate:

1. Form I-20. You will need to submit the enclosed Form I-20 that we have issued. You must sign the bottom of the I-20. Go through the I-20 and make sure the information provided is accurate. If there are any discrepancies or questions about the I-20, contact the IES office.
2. A completed Nonimmigrant Visa Application (DS 160, the online application). A separate form is needed for dependents, even if they are included in a parent's passport. Copies of all forms can be found here: http://travel.state.gov/visa/forms/forms_1342.html
3. Your passport valid for travel to the United States and valid at least six months beyond the applicant's

intended period of stay in the United States (unless [country-specific agreements](#) provide exemptions).

4. One (1) 2x2 passport photograph. See non-immigrant photo requirements at http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/info/info_1287.html.
5. A MRV (machine readable Visa) fee receipt to show payment of the visa application fee. The **current fee is \$140**. A visa issuance fee (if applicable. Please consult the Visa Reciprocity Table at http://travel.state.gov/visa/fees/fees_3272.html).
6. A separate **SEVIS I-901 fee receipt**. While all F-visa applicants must pay the MRV fee, including dependents, only the F-1 principal applicants must pay the SEVIS fee. (see below)
7. Transcripts and diplomas from previous institutions attended.
8. Scores from standardized tests required by the educational institution such as the TOEFL, SAT, GRE, GMAT, etc.
9. Financial evidence that shows you or your parents who are sponsoring you have sufficient funds to cover your tuition and living expenses during the period of your intended study.

The SEVIS I-901 Fee

The SEVIS I-901 fee is a fee mandated by the U.S Congress to support the Student Exchange Visitor Program office and the automated system that keeps track of international students and exchange visitors and ensures that they maintain their status while in the United States. You **must** bring a receipt notice showing that you paid the SEVIS fee to the American consulate when applying for the visa. **The current SEVIS I-901 fee for F-1 students is \$200.**

To complete the SEVIS I-901 fee, you will need your SEVIS ID from your I-20 issued to you by UMBC. This number is on the top right side of the first page, above the bar code, and should start with N000... You will not be able to pay the SEVIS fee without an I-20.

There are 2 ways you can pay the SEVIS I-901 fee:

1. Online (highly recommended)

To pay the fee online go to www.fmjfee.com. Fill out the online form. The information should match what appears on the I-20. Select the pay by credit card option if you want to pay using either a credit card or debit card (also known as check card). You will need to immediately print an electronic receipt that shows a record of payment. **Make sure that the computer you use to pay the receipt has a printer connected to it that is functioning before beginning the process!**

You can also fill out the Form I-901 online and choose the option to pay by check or money order. You will be able to print a payment coupon. There is a control number on top of the coupon. Write the control number, your name and your SEVIS ID number on your check or money order and attach the coupon. Mail the payment coupon with your check or money order.

2. **By mail**

You will need to print and fill out the I-901 fee remittance form. Go to www.ice.gov/sevis/i901 to print the form. Write/type clearly and legibly. Fill out all the entries as required and check the necessary boxes. **Make sure your last name and first name are entered exactly as they appear on the I-20.** Your date of birth must appear exactly as it appears on the I-20. Information on number 14 and 15 of the Form I-901 can be found on the I-20 (see notes below).

Make sure the return address on your payment receipt is correct. Your total must include the fee and delivery charge if you request expedited delivery. A paper receipt will be mailed to you.

For an additional charge of \$35, you can request expedited mail service for your I-901 receipt. For more information, use this website: http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/faq5.htm#_Toc81222117

For detailed information on payment methods, addresses, and more for paying the fee via mail, please use this website:

<http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/faq.htm>

Please note:

- The school code can be found on the last box in number 2 of the I-20. Your SEVIS ID number can be found on the top right corner of your I-20 starting with the letter N.
- Allow 3 working days from the date of payment to allow information on payment to be posted to SEVIS (Student Exchange Visitor Information System) and the Department of State consular information system. We suggest paying your SEVIS I-901 fee as early as possible.
- Make sure the fee is the correct and exact amount. Do not underpay or overpay; otherwise, the Form I-901 and payment will be returned to you.
- Applicants in the United States can use the same methods as applicants outside the US.
- A third party can pay your SEVIS fee. The credit card or debit/check card does not have to be under your name. Be sure to provide them with information from your Form I-20 to enable them to pay the fee and obtain a receipt
- For more information on the SEVIS I-901 fee, visit <http://www.ice.gov/SEVIS/i901/faq.htm>

VISA INTERVIEW PROCESS

The interview process creates a lot of anxiety for students. Your time in front of a visa officer is usually brief and your goal is to convince them of your desire to study at UMBC. The following are some helpful tips about the visa interview process:

- **Ties to Your Home Country:** Under U.S. law, all applicants for non-immigrant visas are viewed as intending to remain in the US unless they can **convince the visa officer that they do not plan to stay beyond their time as a student.** You must therefore be able to show that you have reasons for returning to your home country that are **stronger** than those for remaining in the United States. "Ties" to your home country are the things that bind you to your home or current place of residence. Job, family, educational goals, grades, future plans, career prospects that you have, property you own or will inherit, investments, etc. are all things you may be asked about. Be sure to refer to these in your home country. Each person's situation is different, and there is no single explanation, document or letter that can guarantee visa issuance.
- **English:** Anticipate that the visa interview will be conducted in English and not in your native language. Be prepared and be confident in your speech. Your parents or family members cannot speak on your

behalf during the interview process. A negative impression is created if you are not prepared to speak on your own behalf.

- **Academics:** Know the academic program to which you have been admitted and how it fits into your future career plans. If you are not able to articulate your reasons for studying a particular field, you may not succeed in convincing the U.S. consular official that you are indeed planning to pursue a degree, rather than immigrating permanently. You should be able to explain how studying in the U.S. relates to your future professional career **when you return home**. You should also be prepared to emphasize how UMBC in particular is the best fit for your career and academic goals.
- **Be concise:** Because of the volume of applications received, all consular officers are under considerable pressure to conduct a quick and efficient interview. They must make a decision, for the most part, on the impressions 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 to the officer's questions short and to the point.
- **Supplemental information:** All documents you are presenting should be clearly organized and what they signify should be readily apparent to the consular officer. Lengthy written explanations cannot be quickly read or evaluated. Remember that you will have 2-3 minutes of interview time at best.
- **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 may have more difficulty getting an F-1 visa. Statistically, applicants from those countries are more likely to be intending immigrants. They are also more likely to be asked about job opportunities at home after their study in the U.S.
- **Financial Documentation:** If you are receiving funding from UMBC, your home university, your employer, or from your government, be prepared to present the appropriate letters or documents that verify that funding. If your financial support is coming from personal or family funds, bank statements alone are seldom considered credible enough evidence to demonstrate sufficient finances. Only when coupled with highly credible documentation which can substantiate the source (such as job contracts, letters from an employer, income tax documents, pay stubs, or deposit slips) will bank statements be accepted. Bank statements are most credible if they are a series of reliable computer-generated or ordinary paper monthly bank account statements.
- **Employment:** Your main purpose for coming to the U.S. is **to study, not for the chance of work** before or after graduation. While many students may work on campus on a part-time basis during their studies, such employment is incidental to their main purpose, which is studying. You are also allowed certain opportunities for internships and working for one year after you graduate, to gain experience in your field, but these opportunities should not be mentioned in your interview. **You must be able to clearly articulate your plan to return home at the end of your program.** If your spouse and dependents are also planning to accompany you via F-2 visa, be aware that they cannot, **under any circumstances**, be employed in the U.S. If asked, be prepared to address what your spouse intends to do with his or her time while in the U.S. Volunteer work and attending school part time (for "recreational or a vocational" purposes only) are permitted activities.
- **Dependents Remaining at Home:** If your spouse and children are remaining behind in your 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 officer 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 application will almost certainly be denied. If your family does decide to join you at a later time, it is helpful to have them apply at the same post where you applied for your visa.

- **Maintain a Positive Attitude:** Do not engage the consular official in an argument.

***If you are denied a student visa, ask the officer for a list of documents he or she would suggest you bring in order to overcome the refusal, and obtain, in writing, an explanation of the reason you were denied.**

CANADIAN CITIZENS

Citizens of Canada are not required to obtain a U.S. visa to enter the United States. However, an immigration officer at a U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) post will inspect your documents, either at a pre-inspection site in Canada or at the port of entry. **You must have with you proof of Canadian citizenship, your admission letter, your I-20, the SEVIS fee I-901 receipt, and proof of financial support that corresponds to the information on your I-20.** It is essential that you enter the U.S. in the appropriate F-1 status, so be sure to have **all** documentation with you. An I-94 card will be issued, which is very important. Keep it safe! If you enter the U.S. as a student be sure to let the customs officer know that and present your documents. **Do not attempt to enter as a tourist.**

If You Are Currently In The United States

If you already have valid F-1 student status by being enrolled at another school, college or university in the United States, and do not plan to travel outside the U.S. prior to beginning your studies at UMBC. Contact IES for directions on how to obtain a new I-20 from UMBC, which you can then travel with.

HEALTH INSURANCE & IMMUNIZATION REQUIREMENTS

International Students are required by law to carry health insurance. **There are no exceptions to this rule.** Please plan to budget for health insurance when you come to UMBC. Health Insurance costs are included in the amount required when you provide proof of funding. The University's policy on health insurance is that it must be a policy purchased within the United States. UMBC offers a health insurance policy to students. For more information on the coverage please visit the University Health Services (UHS) website at www.umbc.edu/uhs/.

UHS further requires, as a condition of enrollment, that all students produce medical history records of immunization. They have to be in English. The immunizations required are the MMR (Measles, Mumps and Rubella). If you cannot obtain records of these vaccinations you will have to be immunized again. UHS can provide that service. A tuberculosis test (PPD) is also required. The test **MUST** be done within the United States. UHS can also provide that service. In addition, Maryland law requires that all students living in on-campus housing have a meningitis vaccine within 3 years of entering UMBC or sign a waiver stating that they understand the risks of meningitis and elect not to have the vaccine. For questions on health insurance or immunizations requirements, email UHS at uhs@umbc.edu or call them at 410-455-1125.

***All UMBC F-1 visa students will be automatically enrolled in UMBC's student health plan, and will be automatically billed accordingly.** If you have your own comparable insurance, you will need to work with UHS to complete a waiver.

PACKING FOR TRAVEL TO UMBC

Climate and clothing: Maryland has a varying climate with four distinct seasons: spring, summer, fall and winter. During these seasons, temperatures vary considerably.

Spring (March – May) and Fall (September – November) are mild and pleasant, with some chilly days. Temperatures can range around 50-75°F or 10-24°C. Rain is common, though there are many clear days as well. **Winter (December – February/March)** is often very cold, with occasional snow showers. Temperatures usually range from about 20-40°F or -7-4°C. **Summer (June – August)** is hot and sunny. Temperatures usually range from 75-95°F or 24-35°C.

Student style of dress varies tremendously. Some students dress extremely informally, while some prefer to dress more formally. Additionally, UMBC has both indoor and outdoor pools, and the Atlantic Ocean beaches are only a few hours' drive away, so if you like, swimwear may also be useful. There also many opportunities for athletic wear, whether for exercising on campus or hiking, biking, engaging in water sports, or otherwise enjoying Maryland's bountiful outdoor recreational opportunities all year long.

Personal items: Bring items that are not only essential to your studies, but equally important to your well-being. Music, traditional dress, photographs, games, books, movies and other items descriptive of your culture and country are important in helping you adjust to being in the U.S. Americans would also love to learn about you and your culture. You may also want to bring items you use regularly in your country that may not be readily available, or may be more expensive, in the United States.

Food: Agricultural items **cannot** be brought into the United States because they may carry animal and plant pests and diseases. Restricted items include meats, fruits, vegetables, plants, soil, and products made from animal or plant materials. However, most packaged non-perishable items and dried spices may be allowed in to the U.S. UMBC's campus offers many options for meals and snacks, and multiple grocery stores and restaurants are close by.

Furniture & bedding: If you will be **living on campus** in the residence halls or apartments, basic furniture is provided, but bed linens, blankets, pillows, and towels are not. Students living on campus will be contacted by the Office of Residential Life with packing lists, suggested items, and items that are NOT allowed, such as pets or open flames, like candles. Nearby stores, including Wal-Mart, multiple malls, and more, provide opportunities to purchase most things you may need. If you will be **living off-campus**, furniture may or may not be provided and you may have to purchase your own. If you can, contact the landlord prior to arriving and get housing details.

Money: It is a good idea to exchange currency for U.S. dollars before your departure, but you should not travel with large amounts of cash. There is much danger of loss or theft. If you anticipate bringing large sums of money to the United States, ask a bank about the safest and most convenient means of carrying or transferring funds. Travelers checks are a convenient and safe way of transporting funds. Keep in mind foreign currencies cannot be used in the U.S.

Important Notes: If your plans change, and you decide not to attend UMBC, mail back the I-20 to the IES Office and notify the Admissions Office of your decision not to attend. If you wish to defer your admission to a subsequent semester, you will need to email both IES and the admission office and request to defer your attendance.

***Do not proceed to the University with the expectation that you may be awarded a scholarship or assistantship at a later date;** plan on meeting your own educational expenses for the duration of your studies. No

long term loan funds are available through the University. All students must therefore have enough funds to cover their tuition and all other expenses.

ARRIVAL IN THE UNITED STATES

Expect to go through U.S. Customs and Border protection at the U.S. port of entry.

****DO NOT PACK YOUR IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS – you will not be able to get documents out of your checked luggage before going through immigration!**

At the immigration booth, present your passport, F-1 visa stamp in your passport, your I-20 and your completed I-94 arrival/departure card (which was distributed on the airplane). Examine your I-94 card carefully as you leave the immigration booth. The card should be stapled in your passport, and must not be lost. A replacement costs around US\$400. You should have your I-94 card marked F-1/ "D/S" which means Duration of Status, along with a stamp indicating the date you entered the U.S. This card will be turned in again when you next leave the US, and you will receive a new card when you re-enter the US after that. Always staple your card in your passport!

For the vast majority of student crossing the entry point into the U.S is a smooth, straightforward process. However, you may encounter problems at customs or at the border. You may be asked to undergo a secondary inspection, normally due to lack of sufficient documentation, which takes place in a location separate from the inspection booth. In addition, it may take in excess of 2 hours if you are asked to go through this process, so be prepared to wait. If there is a problem, you will be issued a form I-515A that temporarily allows you to enter the U.S. for 30 days as well as an I-94 card showing the 30 day entry. If this happens to you, make sure you see an international student advisor immediately when you come to campus with these documents.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has a program called US VISIT that involves the digital fingerprinting and photographing of each non-U.S. passport or visa holding visitor. Further information on this program can be found at www.dhs.gov/us-visit.

ARRIVAL AT UMBC

- i. Once you arrive at UMBC one of the first things you **MUST** do is report to the IES Office. We are located in the second floor of the Administration Building in Room 224. You must bring the following documents with you when you come to check in:
 - Passport
 - I-94 card (small white card stapled into your passport)
 - I-20
- ii. We make copies of your documents so make sure you bring them with you. Keep them safe and do not lose them in transit.
- iii. We assess your documents and make sure that they were stamped correctly when you arrived. If they are incorrectly stamped we will assist you in making the necessary corrections.
- iv. We will provide you with information about our required Immigration Orientation as well as other items

- you should be familiar with as an international student.
- v. We will require you to provide an address of your U.S. local residence (where you will be staying). If you are staying in temporary housing you will provide your temporary housing address. Once you are settled in your own residence please inform us of the new address.
 - vi. It is important that you check in with our office so that we are aware that you are here. We also need to report to the Department of Homeland Security that you have reported to the school where you will be studying.

MAINTAINING YOUR STATUS

Once you are in the United States it is your responsibility as an international student to maintain your status. Failure to do so will mean you are in violation of your status. The IES Office is here to help you maintain your status, and we hope you will ask us any questions you might have to make sure you are following all rules for maintenance of status. Again, while we are here to help, **your status is YOUR responsibility.**

Here are actions you should take to maintain your status.

1. Full time academic registration.
Undergraduate students must register for 12 credits every semester. Graduate students without any assistantship must register for 9 credits. A graduate student with a full time assistantship can register for 4 credits and a half time graduate assistant can register for 6 credits. The exception is your last semester (which must be the last semester matching the end date on your I-20) where you can register for just the number of classes required to graduate.
There are other circumstances where a student can register less than full time – for example, for unexpected medical reasons. Students **must** seek permission from one of the international student advisors **prior** to dropping below the required full time status, which must be reported to USCIS.
2. Employment/work.
International students are permitted to work on campus **ONLY**. **Students cannot, under any circumstances, work off campus unless authorized by an international student advisor.** Students are also limited to 20 hours a week during the fall and spring semester. There are no exceptions allowing you to work more than 20 hours a week during this time. When school is not in session, up to 40 hours a week of work is allowed. This is normally during the summer and winter break. After one year of academic study in the US, students can potentially pursue off-campus employment through CPT (approved internships) and OPT (work related to your degree, usually done after completing your program). The IES office offers regular workshops on CPT and OPT to help you learn more about how to take advantage of these opportunities.
3. I-20 expiration.
If the program end date on your I-20 is coming to an end and you need more time to finish your program, you should speak to an international student advisor **prior** to your I-20 expiring. If you realize that you need more time to finish your studies but find that your I-20 has already expired, you are out of status. Always be aware of your program end date on your I-20.
4. Passport.
Your passport must be valid for at least 6 months into the future to obtain an F-1 visa. Once in the United States, if your passport is about to expire please make the necessary plans to get it extended or apply for a new one. Plan to do this 3-4 months **prior** to the passport expiring.

5. Transferring from one school to another.

If you decide that you are going to transfer from UMBC to another school or vice versa, please speak to the international student advisor about the transfer process. If it is not done correctly you could fall out of status.

6. Update your immigration record with changes of pertinent information.

If you change any of the following at any point while you are an F-1 visa holder at UMBC, you MUST inform the IES office as soon as possible. You may need a new I-20 to reflect the new information.

- Change of address
- Change of major
- Change of Education Level (Bachelor's, Master's, PhD)
- Change of status to a new visa
- Addition of a dependent
- Change of source of funding (for example, from family to Assistantship)

7. Maintain status of F-2 Dependents

Students who have their spouse or children at UMBC on F-1 visas, based on their F-1 visa, must also make sure their dependents are in status. F-2 visa holders must have a valid dependent I-20 at all times. Additionally, F-2 visa holders **may NOT work**, and **may NOT attend University classes**, except for “vocational or recreational” courses, such as those taken as a hobby, like art or photography.

8. Crime

Committing a crime is a violation of your status and you will be arrested. You can be deported or denied a visa in the future. Be sure to review the information in your UMBC student handbook to be fully aware of UMBC rules and expectations. Be sure to ask for clarification if you are unsure of any policy or regulation.

Again, we wish you a warm welcome to UMBC! If you arrive on campus after working hours (after 4:30 pm) and need emergency assistance, please call the UMBC campus police at 410-455-5555.

For further questions about this information please contact the IES office at ies@umbc.edu, or call us at 410-455-2624 or visit our website at <http://umbc.edu/ies>.

Sincerely

Arlene Wergin, Ph.D
Director, International Education Services
University of Maryland, Baltimore County

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPENSE ESTIMATE 2011-2012

The following student expenses are approximate and may vary slightly depending on the major.

| <u>Full-time Tuition</u> | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Undergraduate | \$8,641/semester (12 credits) | \$17,282/year |
| Graduate | \$7,227/semester (9 credits) | \$14,454/year |

| <u>Mandatory Fees</u> | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Undergraduate | \$1,294/semester (12 credits) | \$2,588/year* |
| Graduate | \$1,008/semester (9 credits) | \$1,944/year* |

| <u>Living Expenses</u> | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Housing (on-campus, estimate) | \$3,150/semester | \$6,300/year |
| Meals (on-campus, estimate) | \$2,000/semester | \$4,000/year |

| <u>Health Insurance</u> | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|---------------------|
| Fall semester | \$631 | |
| Spring semester | \$772 | \$1,403/year |
| Books & Supplies (estimate, varies) | | \$1,500/year |

| TOTAL | | |
|----------------------|--|-----------------|
| Undergraduate | | \$33,073 |
| Graduate | | \$29,601 |

Additional expenses for dependents (if applicable, see below for cost calculation)

| | | |
|---------------|--|---------------------|
| Spouse | | \$9,000/year |
| Child | | \$6,000/year |

***All students are responsible for paying fees. This includes graduate students who have been awarded an assistantship. Be prepared to arrive with enough funds to pay fees at the required time to avoid accruing late charges. For more information please visit <http://www.umbc.edu/sbs/tuition>**

Please note, Shady Grove campus programs and the Graduate programs in Management of Aging Services and the *online* Information Systems program follow separate fee schedules. Please see <http://www.umbc.edu/sbs/tuition> for more information.

Tuition is currently charged at \$691 a credit for undergraduate students and \$773 a credit for graduate students. Fee breakdown per credit hour include: \$9 technology fee, \$22 athletics fee, \$18 transportation fee, \$20 Auxiliary Facilities Fee, \$25 University Commons Fee, and \$5 Student Activity (undergraduates only) OR \$14 Graduate Program fee (Graduate students only). Other funds include cost of supplies and books that vary based on many factors: major, number of classes, level of classes, etc. Dependent expenses are as follows: For Spouse, 450x12=5400 plus required spousal health insurance of \$3556 annually. For each child, 300x12=3600 plus required child insurance of \$2381 per child annually. More than one child is \$4766 for all children.