



College of the Atlantic

Pre-arrival handbook for International Students

105 eden street · bar harbor, maine 04609 ·
www.coa.edu

Welcome

We are very excited to have you as a member of the COA community and look forward to having you join us.

As you get ready to attend COA you will receive information and requests from different offices at the College, each piece will help with the transition to COA and establish foundations to support your path in the year ahead.

We prepared this packet to assist incoming international students and to answer some of the questions you may have as you obtain a visa and take the next steps to being a student here on campus. We will share more information about being an F-1 student, and about COA in particular, in the two-day international student orientation. This orientation will give you a chance to recuperate from jet lag, learn more about being a student in the US, meet staff members who will work closely with you, as well as connect with fellow students.

COA will work with you to arrange your travel to campus, including shuttles from the Bangor, Maine bus stations and airport.

General COA rules and policies can be found in the student handbook. Information that pertains to international students is on our website, and will be shared in additional packets.

It is natural to be nervous about living in a new environment, especially in a foreign country. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to ask. You are always welcome (and encouraged!) to call, email, or after you arrive - stop by the International Student Services (ISS) Office on the second floor of the Deering Common Community Center.

We hope that your experience at College of the Atlantic will be an exciting and enriching experience. Please remember that your academic advisor, faculty, and staff are all here to assist you and to make this experience positive and fulfilling.

Warm Regards,
Josh Luce

Dean of Student Life
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international-student-services@coa.edu

Steps to get to COA

COA will send a request for information and then email a packet of materials needed for your **F-1 visa** application. Keep track of the materials for your visa interview and for subsequent travel to the US.

The [Study in the States website](#) is a very helpful resource, and we recommend you reference that for information. The International Student Services office is also happy to answer questions for you. A glossary of terms and abbreviations (teal colored text) is at the end of this guide.

In order to ease your arrival, please fill out all COA forms in your application portal. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out at international-student-services@coa.edu.

Pre-arrival packet contents

Immigration Materials:

- _ **SEVIS**-issued Form **I-20**
- _ Proof of payment of the **SEVIS** fee-receipt **I-901** (a copy)

Admission and Financial Aid Materials:

- _ Copy of your COA Letter of Admission (use original for visa appointment, copy is a back-up)
- _ Financial Aid Scholarship Award Letter (if applicable)

Campus Information:

- _ Campus Map

International Student Services (ISS) Forms: please complete these electronic forms

- _ International Student Travel and Arrival Form (sent in separate email)
- _ Student Profile (sent in separate email)

What to do with your I-20

- _ Read the **I-20** document carefully.
- _ Make sure all of your personal information is correct: spelling of names, date of birth (in order of: month/day/year), country of citizenship. If anything is incorrect, please email international-student-services@coa.edu.
- _ Sign the bottom of page one. Please print your name and then provide your signature in blue ink.
- _ Use your **I-20** to apply for your **F-1** Visa at the nearest US embassy or consulate. This document, along with the electronic **I-94**, which you will print out when you arrive in the US, proves your lawful status in the United States.
- _ Always keep copies for yourself and for administrative use and travel. International Student Services can replace your lost **I-20**.

Papers you will need for your F-1 visa application

- Form **DS-156** Non-immigrant Visa Application or [Form DS-160 \(online version\)](#)
 - Form **DS-158** (completed with **DS-156/DS-160**)
 - Form **DS-157** (If you are a male student between the ages of 16 and 45, regardless of your nationality and regardless of the consular office where you are applying)
 - A passport valid for at least 6 months
 - Your COA admission letter
 - A **SEVIS**-issued Form **I-20** (we will send this to you in your pre-arrival packet)
 - Proof of payment of the **SEVIS** fee (the College pays this fee on your behalf, and sends you a copy of a receipt). You will also receive a copy from the Department of Homeland Security, Form **I-901**. You may present either receipt at your visa interview.
 - Verification of financial support (if Davis Scholar, your COA financial aid award notice)
 - Proof of English language ability
 - Two facial photographs (head and shoulders)
 - Visa application fee payment receipt, if you are required to pay before your interview
- Also recommended:
- Transcripts from the last school you have attended
 - Scores from standardized tests, such as TOEFL

Note: Check with the specific US Embassy or Consulate where you will apply for an exact list of required documents and the specific application process for that office.

EducationUSA: The [US Bureau of Cultural and Educational Affairs](#) supports 450 EducationUSA advising centers all over the world. If you live in a city with an advising center, you might find it helpful to visit and speak to someone about the visa process and for information about living and studying in the US. Their website also has helpful information, educationusa.state.gov.

For information on visa denials, go to www.abroadeducation.com/np/visa-preparation/reasons-student-visa-denial.html

Points to remember when applying for a visa

Ties to home country: Under United States law, all applicants for non-immigrant visas are viewed as intending immigrants until they can convince the consular officer that they are not. You must therefore be able to show that you have reasons for returning to your home country. Ties to your home country are the things that bind you to your home town, homeland, or current place of residence: job, family, financial prospects that you own or will inherit, investments, etc. If you are a prospective undergraduate, the interviewing officer may ask you about your specific intentions or promise of future employment, family or other relationships, educational objectives, grades, long-range plans, and career prospects in your home country. Each person's situation is different, of course, and there is no magic explanation or single document, certificate, or letter which can guarantee visa issuance.

English: Anticipate that the interview will be conducted in English and not in your native language. One suggestion is to practice English conversation with a native speaker before the interview. If you are coming to the United States solely to study intensive English, be prepared to explain how English will be useful for you in your home country.

Speak for yourself: Do not bring parents or family members with you into the interview. The consular officer wants to interview you, not your family.

Know COA and how it fits your career plans: If you are not able to articulate the reasons you will study in a particular program in the United States, you may not succeed in convincing the consular officer that you are indeed planning to study, rather than to immigrate. You should also be able to explain how studying in the United States relates to your future professional career when you return home.

Be concise: Because of the volume of applications received, all consular officers are under considerable time 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. Keep your answers to the officer's questions clear and to the point.

Supplemental documentation: It should be easily evident to the consular officer what is being presented in written documents and what they signify. Lengthy written explanations cannot be quickly read or evaluated.

Nationals from some countries may face additional hurdles to obtain a visa: Applicants from countries suffering economic problems or from countries where many students have remained in the United States as immigrants will have more difficulty getting visas. They are more likely to be asked about job opportunities at home after their study in the United States.

Employment: Your main purpose of coming to the United States should be to study, not for the chance to work before or after graduation. While many students do work off-campus during their studies, such employment is incidental to their main purpose of completing their US education. You must be able to clearly articulate your plan to return home at the end of your program. If your spouse is also applying for an accompanying **F-2** visa, be aware that **F-2** dependents cannot, under any circumstances, be employed in the United States. If asked, be prepared to address what your spouse intends to do with his or her time while in the United States.

Volunteer work and attending school part-time are permitted activities.

Explaining the Human Ecology major

Describe human ecology as an interdisciplinary approach for general studies. Note that it includes traditional subjects like economics, literature, physics, international studies, etc. If known, you may share the areas you are interested in studying. It will be helpful to read the literature on COA's website and course catalog about COA's academic approach and the human ecology major before going into your visa interview so that you feel prepared to talk about it.

If you have trouble getting a visa

Increased government regulations and tightened security at US consular offices have led to delays in some cases and in certain regions of the world. You may find the process very easy, or you may be denied your **F-1** Visa on your first attempt. Keep the following information in mind as you begin your visa application process and if you encounter problems:

Do Not Panic: In recent years, more than five students were initially denied their visas. These students all eventually obtained their visas and came to study at College of the Atlantic. If the consular officer denies your first application, there are measures COA and your current school can take to assist you. The college cannot guarantee you a visa, but it has access to resources that may help you out.

Contact Your High School: If your high school is in the same country where you are applying for a student visa, you should contact your headmaster to see if they can call the embassy or consulate to discuss your situation or fax documents to them in support of your application. Some of the students who are currently enrolled at COA were able to obtain their visa with the help of their high school when their visa applications had been refused.

Be Polite: Remaining composed in front of consular staff is valuable, even if you are very upset or frustrated. Bear in mind that people at the embassy can be pleasant and very helpful. Ask the officer for a list of documents he or she would suggest you bring in order to overcome the refusal, and try to get the reason you were denied in writing.

Contact COA: It is important that you communicate with COA staff (preferably with the International Student Services team) via telephone or email. The more we know about your situation, the more we can do to assist you. In the event that you need a new I-20 or a letter of support, it is most important that we have your current contact information, including your address and email.

Be Flexible: If you do not have your visa in hand by the end of August, the college must defer your admission until Winter Term. We feel that it is important that you begin the term with your classmates, and that it is crucial to your academic success that you not arrive late in the term. This does not mean that you cannot graduate on time, or that your admission to COA has been revoked. It simply gives you more time to get all of your documents in order.

Travel and Arrival Information

When to arrive

International students must arrive on campus in time to participate in the mandatory International Student Orientation. We will begin on the evening of Thursday, August 27 with a welcome dinner and activities and continue orientation through Saturday.

Due to federal immigration regulations, the earliest you may arrive in the United States in F-1 status is 30 days before the program start date that is listed on your **SEVIS Form I-20**. For COA students this means you may arrive in the US no earlier than 30 days before the first day of classes. Please contact International Student Services with any questions about this.

Arriving at the airport in the US: customs and immigration

CARRY THESE DOCUMENTS IN YOUR HAND LUGGAGE:

- » Your passport (U.S. Visa inside)
- » **SEVIS Form I-20**
- » **SEVIS** fee payment receipt (referred to as **I-901**)
- » Evidence of financial resources (financial statements or awards)
- » Letter of Admission
- » COA contact information, including after-hour numbers

When you arrive at the Port of Entry (POE or Customs)

Proceed to the terminal area for inspection. Before you approach the inspection station, ensure that you have the following available for presentation to the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Officer:

- » Passport
- » **SEVIS Form I-20**
- » **cf-6059** Customs Declaration Form (you will receive this on the airplane and should complete it before landing).

The CBP officer will take your **cf-6059** Customs Declaration Form. You will be asked about your intentions for coming to the United States. Tell them you are here as a student, be prepared to give them the name and address of College of the Atlantic (105 Eden Street, Bar Harbor, Maine).

Your passport will be returned to you (make sure it is stamped with **F-1** D/S or date). Your **SEVIS Form I-20** might also be stamped and returned to you. You will need these documents while you stay in the United States. Please do not lose them.

Certain items are prohibited to bring into the US from foreign countries. Hence, you are required to declare any meats, fruits, vegetables, plants, seeds, animals, and plant or animal products in your possession. The CBP at the ports of entry will determine whether

the items meet the basic requirement of what can be brought into the United States.

Helpful websites:

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE): www.ice.gov/sevis/students

EducationUSA Pre-departure Information: <https://educationusa.state.gov/your-5-steps-us-study/prepare-your-departure>

US-Visit Program

In 2004 the Department of Homeland Security implemented the US-Visit program. You should be aware that when you enter the US you will be electronically fingerprinted, your photograph will be taken and you will be asked to have your documents (passport, Form **I-20**) scanned and entered into a national database. The process is supposed to take no longer than 10 minutes, but long lines have caused travel delays in the past. Be prepared! In most airports, the screening areas for US-Visit registration are clearly marked and are located near US Customs.

NSEERS

Some individuals may be asked to provide additional information under the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS), a process referred to as Special Registration. If you are asked to do so, you will be given a packet of information at your POE to explain the registration procedure. If you have been identified as someone who needs to go through Special Registration, please notify International Student Services when you get here.

Commonly used airports for arrival

Students arriving by air usually fly into (listed from closest to Bar Harbor)*:

- » Bar Harbor Airport (BHB)
- » Bangor International Airport (BGR)
- » Portland International Jetport (PWM)
- » Boston's Logan Airport (BOS)
- » Manchester Boston Regional Airport (MHT)

*flight refunds for Davis UWC Scholars will only be issued to students flying from their home country to airports in Boston or New York.

Transportation from the airport to COA

COA will pick you up from the following locations providing that you inform us of your travel plans and your scheduled arrival time at one of the following pick-up locations by submitting an International Student Travel and Arrival Form. This form is included in your pre-arrival packet and is on the website under International Student Services.

- » Bar Harbor Airport
- » Bangor International Airport
- » Bangor Greyhound/Vermont Transit Bus Terminal
- » Bangor Concord Coach Lines Bus Terminal

Travel tips

If you fly into Boston (BOS) you can take a Concord Coach Lines bus directly from the airport. Note the bus schedule before you leave. concordcoachlines.com
At the airport, follow signs for the Concord Trailways bus service out of the airport terminal. Usually there is one spot outside where all buses pick up: keep an eye out for your bus, as many come and go. Look for the Concord Coach Lines bus going to Maine; the sign on its front windshield may say Portland, Bangor, or Maine. You may need to give it a wave when you see it so they know to stop and pick you up.

You can board the bus at that time without a ticket. At the next stop, in Portland, ME, the driver will tell everyone to go inside and purchase tickets at the Concord Coach Lines counter. Purchase a ticket to Bangor (it costs about \$54 one-way, a 5-hour trip from Boston).

If you fly into New York (JFK): You can take a shuttle from JFK Airport to the Port Authority Bus Terminal (around \$15). From Port Authority, take a Greyhound bus to Bangor, Maine (about \$60, 10 hours). You will most likely change buses in Boston.

Packing for College of the Atlantic

During your first few weeks at COA, shopping trips will be arranged for international students to Ellsworth or Bangor, the closest large towns.

Clothing: Temperatures in Bar Harbor vary widely depending on the season of the year: summer, fall, winter, or spring. Because we are in a coastal setting, August nights are cool and often require sweaters or jackets. Many international students at COA buy their winter clothes in the US, instead of bringing their apparel from home where it might be more expensive or unavailable. We do have a closet with some winter clothes to lend to students.

Outdoor Orientation clothing: You will receive information about the outdoor orientation program. We recognize that some gear may be difficult to obtain. During preparation for the trips, leaders will assess any needs you might have (wool socks or other layers) and find the necessary gear for your safety and comfort.

Food: It is difficult to find a wide variety of international foods and spices on Mount Desert Island or in Ellsworth. Our recommendation would be to bring a small amount of spices or other packaged and sealed foods from home that you enjoy. (Please refer to the US Customs guidelines and your airline guidelines to see what you can and cannot bring into the United States.) Bar Harbor has one large and one small grocery store with limited selection of international foods.

Bedding: First-year international students who live on-campus will be provided with a sheet set, pillow and comforter/duvet upon arrival.

Some international students do bring their bedding from home. If you choose to do so, basic measurements for standard sized twin mattress are 200cm x 100cm x 15cm.

Electronics: Line voltage in the US is 110/120 Volt ac, 60Hz. If you intend to bring your own devices or small appliances, consider two things: you must be able to switch to this voltage and you will need an adapter to plug your device into the sockets. Some devices, like laptops, can be switched to 110/120v. You can easily find out whether you can change the voltage. You also need to purchase a power adapter, so that your device can plug into American sockets. Usually you can buy them as a worldwide variety pack. Try to buy it in your home country because you need all the adapters to fit on your original plug.

While some international students do bring laptops or personal computers to COA, there are some computers available on-campus for use by the general student body. All COA computers come equipped with Internet access and the Microsoft Office package.

What College of the Atlantic provides

Each room is furnished for you with a bed, mattress, desk, and chair. Rooms also provide some sort of clothing storage, either a dresser (clothing chest) or a closet. All rooms are equipped for a wireless Internet connection.

Washers and dryers for laundry are available to use in Blair Tyson, Seafox, and the Kathryn W. Davis Residence Village. It costs four quarters (\$1) to wash a load of clothes and three quarters (\$.75) to dry.

The kitchen in every dorm is equipped with utensils, a refrigerator, an oven, an electric stove, and other items necessary for cooking. Some students also bring their own kitchen equipment. There is cupboard space for students to store their food for the weekends.

Students often purchase desk lamps for their rooms, as many rooms are only equipped with one overhead light. These can be purchased in Ellsworth or at ACE Hardware in Bar Harbor.

Packing

Remember to carry the following items with you, and keep copies in a separate location from the originals:

- » Flight ticket
- » Valid passport with an **F-1** student visa
- » Form **I-20**
- » Proof of payment of the **SEVIS** fee (**I-901**)
- » Your acceptance letter from COA
- » Proof of financial support
- » Contact information for COA

Travel money

It is preferable that you arrive in the US with some spending money. Remember that you may need to eat or arrange additional transportation or an overnight stay—especially if your flight has been delayed or if you miss a connection.

If possible we recommend travelling with \$150 to \$200 in cash so that you can deal with any unexpected costs along the way. You might want to exchange some foreign currency at the airport, unless you can find a bank that is open (usually from 8:00 am until 4:30 pm).

Immunization records

Immunization forms, provided by the Registrar, need to be turned into the Registrar Office before classes start. Please email the forms along with any questions to Krystal Meservey, registrar@coa.edu or faxed to +1 (207) 288-2947

Maine state law requires that all students provide certification by a doctor, nurse, or other health care professional of your immunity to:

- » Rubella (German measles)
- » Rubeola (measles)
- » Diphtheria
- » Tetanus

Evidence of immunity may be a record of immunization with dates and dosages or a report of laboratory results of tests for immunity. In the United States, these required immunizations are usually grouped as the MMR and DTaP. Both are available in Bar Harbor after you arrive, and are covered by your health insurance through College of the Atlantic. However, many international students find it easier to receive the vaccination shots in their own countries rather than in the United States. The requirements are described online at coa.edu/registrar

Exceptions: You may provide a doctor's statement that one or more of these inoculations would be medically inadvisable. You may file a signed statement that you have a religious or moral objection to such immunization. (In this case, in the event of an outbreak, you would not be able to attend classes.)

Glossary of some immigration terminology

It is the responsibility of the student to maintain the validity and security of relevant immigration documents. If anything should happen to your documents (loss or damage) or your documents expire, please consult with the Coordinator of International Student Services as soon as possible. Without valid documents, you are not legally “in-status,” which can carry serious consequences including deportation and exclusion from the United States.

Passport—Convention Travel Document

Your passport proves your identity and citizenship. It is usually required that your passport be valid for 6 months beyond the date of your anticipated entry into the United States. It is often possible to renew your passport while in the United States without returning to your home country. So if your passport is nearing its expiration date we can plan ahead so that it does not expire. It is much easier and safer to renew your passport while it is still valid, than it is to wait until it expires.

SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System)

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) is designed to help the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Department of State to better monitor school and exchange programs and **F, M, and J** category visitors. **SEVIS** is an Internet-based system that maintains accurate and current information on non-immigrant students (F and M visa), exchange visitors (J visa) and their dependents (**F-2, M-2 and J-2**). **SEVIS** enables schools and program sponsors to transmit electronic information and event notifications via the Internet to the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Department of State (DOS) throughout a student or exchange visitor’s stay in the United States. The college first enters information about the student into **SEVIS**. At this time, a **SEVIS** record and **SEVIS** ID number is also created for each individual whose information is entered into the system. The system reflects certain international student or exchange visitor activities, such as admission at the Port of Entry (POE), change in address, change in program of study, and other relevant details. **SEVIS** also provides system alerts, event notifications, and basic reports to the end-user schools, programs, and immigration-related field offices.

Required SEVIS Data

SEVIS works with the same data that is required by law and regulation from foreign and exchange visitors. The college must report each academic term on all **F-1** students, and on individuals who take certain actions that require notification in SEVIS (like applying for work authorization, requesting a reduced course load, etc.). The information is entered into the **SEVIS** system by the school’s Designated School Official (Coordinator of International Student Services) and can be accessed only by these individuals. However, we are required to release information to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) officials when asked to do so.

Information required by SEVIS and/or to be kept on file include:

- » Name
- » Place and date of birth
- » Country of citizenship
- » Current address of student
- » Address in country of permanent residence
- » Current academic status
- » Date of start of studies
- » Degree program and field of study
- » Practical training, beginning and ending dates
- » Termination date and known reasons
- » Documents relating to admission
- » Number of credits completed each term
- » **SEVIS Form I-20**
- » Academic disciplinary actions taken against the student due to criminal conviction
- » Failure to maintain status

Receipt of SEVIS Fee (I-901) Payment

The receipt of proof of payment of the **SEVIS** fee. When you enter the United States, immigration officials may request to see proof that you have either paid or do not need to pay the **SEVIS** fee prior to admitting you. Please keep this form with your other immigration documents and carry it with you when you travel.

SEVIS I-20

Your I-20 is the document issued by COA that contains information relevant to your acceptance and enrollment as a student. This document proves that you are eligible to obtain an **F-1** student visa. Your **I-20** is also the document that has to be authorized before you travel outside of the United States to go home, or for study abroad. Work authorization is also shown on your **I-20**. Your **I-20** should be valid for the full 4 years required for your COA degree. If it is not, consult with the Coordinator of International Student Services.

I-94 Electronic Form

Your **I-94** number proves that you legally entered the United States and indicates the period of time for which you can remain here. You will need to print out your own electronic **I-94** form with your number on it. You should print one to keep with your own records, and one to give to the Designated School Official to keep with her files. If you leave the country, you do not need to present this form at the border, but it is a good idea to file it away, as the number becomes invalid upon departure. Once you re-enter the United States again after having left while on your **F-1** student status, you will need to print out a new **I-94** number. To print your **I-94** once you have entered the United States, go to: i94.cbp.dhs.gov, but this can only be done after having passed through a Port of Entry and entered the United States as an **F-1** student.

United States Visa

The visa that you obtained through the US Embassy or Consulate is a document that tells the immigration official at the US border that you are eligible for entry to the United States and the terms of that eligibility. This is the key component to get you into the country. The visa is only important when you are attempting to enter the United States. If your visa expires while you are present within the United States, you do not need to worry. An expired visa will only be a problem if you leave the United States and need to return. To do so, you will be required to apply for a new visa. If you need to apply for a new visa, please consult with Jason Ford, Coordinator of International Student Services.

F-1 Visa

International students who pursue a full program of study in the United States are here in a legal status called **F-1**. This is a non-immigrant status, meaning that your intent to stay is temporary and connected with your studies. In order to enter the US in **F-1** status, you will need to obtain an **F-1** student visa. Think of your F-1 Visa as your key to enter the US. Once you are in the US, it does not matter if your visa expires, so long as your other documents are valid (passport, Form **I-20**, etc.).

However, if you leave the US with an expired F-1 Visa, you will need to apply for a new United States visa. Consulate in your home country in order to re-enter. Even if you do not need a visa to enter the US as a visitor, you do need to apply for a visa to enter in **F-1** status. If you do not enter the US in **F-1** status, you must go through a lengthy process to correct this, which may include going home and reentering in the correct status. Therefore, it is very important to contact the Coordinator of International Student Services if you are planning on entering the US to travel before you begin your studies at COA.

Duration of Status (D/S)

When you enter the US in **F-1** status, your Form **I-20** and your passport should be stamped and marked with the notation D/S, which stands for **F-1** Visa Duration of Status. This term refers to the period for which you are pursuing your program of study; when marked on your immigration documents it means that you are being granted permission to be in the US in **F-1** status for the length of your program of study, providing you take care to maintain this status by complying with the federal regulations. If your Form **I-20** or passport does not say **F-1** D/S, please see the Coordinator of International Student Services as soon as possible.

Port of Entry (POE)

If traveling to the US from abroad, your POE is the first airport (or land or sea border) where you arrive in the United States. You may then fly on to another airport in the US to arrive at your final destination, but you will go through immigration and customs at your POE.

You should keep photocopies of all of these documents in a safe place. In addition, copies of these documents will be kept in your COA immigration file as required by law. If you renew any of these documents or the information on them changes, new copies will be required.

Designated School Official (DSO)

Designated School Officials are those members of the campus community who have been granted authority by the United States Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS) to access the information on international students on-campus and maintain **SEVIS** records. The Coordinator of International Student Services, Jason Ford, serves as College of the Atlantic's Principal Designated School Official (PDSO). Additionally, Sarah Luke, Dean of Student Life is a DSO. DSOs at COA are responsible for updating **SEVIS** of any changes in student information or student status. DSOs also verify your student status by signing the third page of your I-20, every six months, when you travel outside the US .

F-1 Details

COA is authorized under federal law to enroll non-immigrant students. After you have been accepted to COA and have made your decision to enroll, you will need to apply for your **F-1** student visa. During the spring term prior to your arrival we will send you a packet of information containing instructions and documents necessary to apply for your **F-1** Visa. The information below will help you understand the process and answer any questions you may have. Canadians do not need an **F-1** Visa to enter the US, however you will be issued an I-20.

International students in the United States pursuing an academic degree program like a bachelors, masters, or doctoral degree are present in a legal status called **F-1**. Before you can travel to the United States to begin your studies at COA, you will need to apply for your **F-1** Student Visa at an abroad US Consular Office. This is a non-immigrant visa category—the term, non-immigrant, refers to the fact that your intentions are to study temporarily, not to immigrate to the United States. This non-immigrant classification is very important, because if a consular official interviewing you for a visa suspects that you may have intentions to immigrate to the US they may deny your visa application.

Think of your **F-1** Visa as your key component to enter the United States. Once you are in the US, it does not matter if your visa expires, as long as your other documents are valid (passport, Form **I-20**, etc). However, if you leave the US with an expired **F-1** Visa, you will need to apply for a new visa in order to re-enter the US (certain exceptions apply when traveling to Mexico, Canada, or some adjacent islands).

Before you begin the application process for the **F-1** Visa, it is helpful to visit the website www.travel.state.gov. This site covers details of applying for the visa, list what you will need to bring to your visa appointment, and provide links to the application forms. You should also check the website of the US Embassy or Consulate where you plan to apply for your visa for instructions specific to your place of application.

You will need to apply for your **F-1** Visa at a US Embassy or Consulate Office. You will likely need to contact the embassy or consulate in advance to set up an appointment for your visa interview. It is preferable to apply at the US Embassy or Consulate in your home country, or one that has jurisdiction over your home country. This is because the consular official who interviews you will try to assess your ties to your home country (intent to return).

If you cannot apply in your home country, then it is possible to apply at a US Embassy or Consulate in a third country. Take note that this process is more challenging. A student with exceptional circumstances should speak with the Coordinator of International Student Services before beginning the application process in a third country.

Students should note that embassies and consulates are only able to issue your student visa 120 days or less in advance of the course of study registration date. If you apply for your visa more than 120 days prior to your start date or registration date as provided on the Form **I-20**, the embassy or consulate will hold your application until it is able to issue the visa. Consular officials will use that extra time for application processing.

Note: Not all US Consular offices issue **F-1** Visas. In addition, some US Consular offices do not accept visa applications from third country nationals (i.e. someone who is not a resident of the country where you apply). Therefore it is critical to begin your process by looking at the website for the closest US Embassy or Consulate to review whether or not they can issue you your visa, and if so, how to set up an appointment, which forms you need to fill out and what you will need to bring. For a list of US Embassies and Consulates abroad visit www.usembassy.state.gov. Please remember that you cannot obtain or renew an **F-1** Visa from within the United States.