


VISAS 101

What is a Visa?	Example
<p>A visa is a stamp or sticker that is placed in your passport and is used ONLY to enter a country. To come to the U.S. a visitor must obtain a visa (sometimes called an “entry visa”). The visitor applies for a visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate outside of the U.S. prior to travelling here. Similarly, U.S. citizens must obtain visas to visit other countries. For example, travel to Brazil requires a visa.</p> <p>The visa stamp or sticker allows the visitor to travel to the U.S. Upon arrival, their paperwork is examined. The Customs and Border Protection inspector decides if the person may enter the U.S. Entering the U.S. gives the visitor “visa status” to do certain things while in the U.S., such as study, work, or be a tourist.</p> <p>After entry into the U.S. the visa is no longer important until the person leaves the country and wishes to reenter the U.S. Having an expired visa stamp or sticker does NOT mean that a person is in the country illegally. It simply means that a new visa is needed to reenter the U.S.</p>	 <p>This visa was issued to Mr. Big Al Elephant at the U.S. Embassy in Bangladesh on July 10, 2007. Mr. Elephant had to use the visa and travel to the U.S. before the expiration date of the visa on August 4, 2007. Once he entered on this visa he had “student visa status” and could remain to study (sports management major?).</p>



What is Visa Status?	Example
<p>Inside the U.S., the visitor has visa status. This is the legal category under which the visitor was admitted to the U.S. There are many visa statuses (i.e. F-1, J-1, H-1B, etc). (See list on p. 2.) Each status has different circumstances under which it can be granted, along with governing regulations, responsibilities, and benefits for the visitor.</p> <p>While in the U.S., visitors must “stay in status.” They must not violate the regulations that apply to their status. For example, if a visitor enters on a tourist visa and has tourist status, they cannot work here.</p> <p>As visitors are admitted, they are given an entry stamp in their passport and an expiration date for their visa status. They are legally in the U.S. until their visa status expiration date which may be after the date on their visa stamp or sticker.</p>	 <p>This entry stamp shows a student (F1 visa) entered the U.S. on Dec. 31, 2012, and that the F1/student status lasts until D/S. D/S= “duration of status.” For students, D/S is based on a form issued to the student by the admitting school. For example, an F-1 undergraduate would likely have a D/S of 4 years—the time needed to complete a degree. Many other entry stamps would have a specific date to show the length of time for the visa status.</p>

IN SUMMARY: The **visa stamp or sticker** allows a person to travel to the U.S. and request entry. The person has a particular **visa status** while inside the U.S. based on what they came to do. This status is granted for a particular time period and during that time period the person must play by the rules of the status. If the visa stamp or sticker expires during the time period of the status, that doesn’t affect the person’s status. It just means a new visa stamp or sticker will be needed to reenter the U.S. →*Think of it this way:* A ticket to a sports event is much like a visa. It gives you the right to come to the gate and ask to go in. Once in, you have status inside the stadium as a spectator. To be allowed to stay, you must not violate the rules of being a spectator—for example, you can’t suddenly decide you want to be a player and run onto the field. If you leave the stadium, you lose your status as a spectator. In order to get back into the stadium and resume your spectator status you need to again present a valid ticket.

Portions adapted with permission from UChicago Inter’l Affairs-<https://internationalaffairs.uchicago.edu/page/visa-vs-status>

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Immigrant or Nonimmigrant: When we talk about immigration and visa types, it is important to use the terms “immigrant” and “nonimmigrant” carefully and correctly. Also, note that someone here on a visa is by definition here legally. Students are nonimmigrants who are here to study.

What is an Immigrant Visa?	What is a Nonimmigrant Visa?
<p>Someone applying for an immigrant visa has the goal of entering the U.S. in order to live here permanently. For example, immigrant visas include those for a permanent resident (“green card holder”), adopted child, or fiancé(e). A permanent resident (“green card holder”) has the right to work and live in the U.S. indefinitely.</p> <p>Permanent home:</p> 	<p>Someone applying for a nonimmigrant visa wishes to maintain permanent residence in another country. Their goal is to travel to the U.S. temporarily for a specific purpose, such as, study, tourism, business, temporary work, medical treatment, etc.</p> <p>Permanent home:</p> 

Adapted from https://help.cbp.gov/app/answers/detail/a_id/72/~immigrant-visas-vs.-nonimmigrant-visas and <https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/immigrate/immigrant-process.html>

What visa categories can study/work in the U.S.? There are many types of visa categories (from A to V), but only a few are particularly relevant to international students and employees at an institution like The University of Alabama.

Visa Category	Who is Eligible?	Can they be employed?	Notes
F-1	Students	Yes, on-campus while studying and for up to one year off-campus after graduating if they apply for Optional Practical Training. The work must be related to the field of study. Students with STEM degrees can extend OPT for up to 24 months.	Most common student visa
J-1	Students, Scholars, Temporary Workers	Yes, on-campus for students and for others in order to fulfill specific program objectives.	Most common J-1 visas for academic institutions are: J-1 Student; J-1 Student Intern J-1 Research Scholar J-1 Professor J-1 Specialist
H-1B	Skilled, educated workers	Yes, employers sponsor these workers because of their specific knowledge and skills.	The employer provides proof that this worker does not displace a qualified U.S. citizen. These workers are eligible to apply for a green card.

Adapted from <http://cen.acs.org/articles/91/i27/Understanding-Visas.html>

For a full list of visa categories see the U.S. Department of State’s directory:

<https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/general/all-visa-categories.html>