



**Northeastern**  
ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

# Pre-Arrival Guide For International Students



## Office of International Programs

5500 N. St. Louis Avenue, Room LWH 0008

Chicago, IL 60625 USA

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[www.neiu.edu/international](http://www.neiu.edu/international)

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# Welcome to NEIU!

Dear International Student,

*It's a pleasure to welcome you to Northeastern Illinois University and Chicago! My staff and I are very happy that you chose to study at NEIU. The following pages contain information that I hope will be of help to you as you prepare to attend Northeastern Illinois University.*

*As explained in the acceptance letter, it is very important that you attend the International Student Orientation. Many topics will be discussed that will be helpful to you. You'll learn about the university and its policies and procedures. We'll talk in depth about what you need to do to maintain your international student status. A current international student will share some helpful information and you'll get to meet other international students.*

*NEIU has a lot to offer you! Our students, faculty, and staff are richly diverse in ethnicity, culture, age, and language. In fact, we have been praised by U.S. News & World Reports as being **the most ethnically diverse institution in the Midwest!** The university offers many student clubs and activities, including the popular International Student Club. We also have resources to help you with your academics, such as the Writing Lab and Tutoring Center.*

*If you have any questions prior to the orientation, please contact the Office of International Programs at 1(773)442-4796 or email me at the office.*

*We'll see you soon!*

*Sincerely,*

*Cris Toffolo Ph.D.  
Interim Director  
International Programs*

Now that you have been admitted and have received your I-20/DS-2019, please read carefully to know how to obtain your Visa.

If you have not received your I-20 please contact the PDSO immediately at [c-gonzalez2@neiu.edu](mailto:c-gonzalez2@neiu.edu).

if you haven't received your DS-2019 please contact the RO immediately at [maprieto@neiu.edu](mailto:maprieto@neiu.edu)

## Visa Application Process

You should contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate to apply for your visa. Every U.S. Embassy or Consulate works from the same set of regulations and laws, but may adapt procedures for their location.

For a list of websites of U.S. Embassies and Consulates worldwide and for comprehensive information about visa procedures and policies, please visit: [www.UnitedStatesVisas.gov](http://www.UnitedStatesVisas.gov).

## When to Apply for your Student Visa

The general rule is to apply as early as possible when you have obtained your I-20/DS-2019. Visa processing times vary widely by consulate, and by whether or not a security clearance must be requested.

You may **apply** for the visa earlier than 120 days before the start date indicated on your Form I-20/DS-2019. However, the consulate will not **issue** the visa earlier than 120 days before the start date.

Also, please remember that you may not enter the U.S. earlier than 30 days prior to the start date indicated on your

# Documents and Evidence Checklist

Before you can apply for a U.S. student visa, you will need to gather the following documents and evidence. If you have questions regarding any of these items, please consult the U.S. Embassy or Consulate to receive the most up to date information.

- Properly completed Form I-20/ DS-2019** (This is issued by Northeastern Illinois University).
- For F-1 Students with Form I-20 visit [Study in the States](#) for more information
- For J-1 Students with a DS-2019 visit [J1 Visa Exchange Visitor Program](#) for more information.
- SEVIS fee payment receipt.** As explained in your acceptance letter from the Office of International Programs, you must complete the Form I-901 and pay the SEVIS fee either online or by mail (online payment is strongly recommended). To make the payment or for more information visit: <https://www.fmjfee.com/i901fee/>
- Evidence of financial ability to meet expenses.** This should be the same financial documents that you submitted to NEIU for admission. Please note that the original financial documents that were submitted to NEIU will not be returned to you under any circumstances.
- Evidence of intent to depart the U.S. after completion of studies.**
- Passport valid for at least six months.** International students are required to maintain a valid passport at all times. If you do not already have a valid passport, or if your passport needs to be renewed, then you must apply for it and obtain one through the appropriate office of your country's government immediately.
- Photograph(s)** ([Requirements](#))
- Proof of payment of Machine Readable Visa (MRV) fee**
- Visa reciprocity fee** (if applicable)
- Come prepared with the additional documents you may be asked for: **NEIU Letter of Admission; Transcripts** from previously attended institutions; and **Test Scores** from standardized tests required by NEIU, such as TOEFL, SAT, GRE, GMAT, etc.

# Visa Interview

Most U.S. Embassies/Consulates require that F-1/J-1 visa applicants appear for a personal interview with a consulate officer. Under U.S. law, all applicants for nonimmigrant visas, such as student visas, are viewed as intending immigrants until they can convince the consular officer that they are not. This is a very important part of the visa application process. The following are “10 Points to Remember When Applying for a Nonimmigrant Visa”:

**1. Ties to Your Home Country**

You must be able to show that you have reasons for returning to your home country that are stronger than those for remaining in the U.S. Ties to your home country are the things that bind you to your hometown, homeland, or current place of residence such as a job or future employment, family or other relationships, financial prospects that you own or will inherit, and/or investments. -If you have applied for the U.S. Green Card Lottery, then you may be asked if you are intending to immigrate. A simple answer would be that you applied for the lottery since it was available but not with a specific intent to immigrate.

-If you overstayed your authorized stay in the U.S. previously, be prepared to explain what happened clearly and concisely, with documentation if available.

**2. English**

Anticipate that the interview will be conducted in English and not in your native language. It is suggested to practice English in conversation with a native speaker before the interview, but do NOT prepare speeches!

**3. Speak for Yourself**

Do not bring parents or family members with you to the interview. A negative impression is created if you are not prepared to speak on your own behalf. If you are a minor your parents should wait in the waiting room.

**4. Know the Program and How It Fits Your Career Plans**

You should be able to articulate the reasons you will study in a particular program in the U.S. and how it relates to your future professional career when you return home.

**5. Be Brief**

Keep your answers to the officer's questions short and to the point. For the most part, officers must make a decision based on the impressions they form during the first minute of the interview. Consequently, what you say first and the

initial impression you create are critical to your success.

6. **Additional Documentation**

Keep in mind that most interviews are 2-3 minutes long. It should be immediately clear to the consular officer what written documents you are presenting and what they signify. Aim for quick and to the point written explanations.

7. **Not All Countries Are Equal**

Applicants from countries suffering economic problems or from countries where many students have remained in the U.S. as immigrants will have more difficulty getting visas. They are also more likely to be asked about job opportunities at home after their study in the U.S.

8. **Employment**

Your **main purpose** in coming to the U.S. should be to **study**, not for the chance to work before or after graduation. You must be able to clearly articulate your plan to return home at the end of your program.

**F-2 Dependents:** 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 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 incidental study are permitted activities.

9. **Dependents Remaining at Home**

If your spouse and children will not accompany you in the U.S., 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 will need you to remit money from the U.S. in order to support themselves, 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.

10. **Maintain a Positive Attitude**

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 try to get the reason you were denied in writing. Do not engage the consular officer in an argument.

# Visa Results

## Visa Approval

If the visa is **APPROVED**, you will be issued an F-1/J-1 visa in your passport. Check your VISA for accuracy (name, date of birth, and visa type) before you leave the consulate and request a correction immediately if you see any errors. The visa will indicate:

- Where the visa was issued;
- The date the visa was issued;
- The date the visa will expire;
- The number of entries;
- The type of visa;
- The name of the university that you are authorized to attend;
- The visa number.

The visa has nothing to do with how long you are allowed to stay in the U.S. It is only the permit to allow for entry into the U.S. You must enter the U.S. before the visa expiration date, and you may stay in the U.S. after the visa has expired as long as you have a valid I-20.

## Visa Denial or Delay

If your visa is **DENIED**, try to find out the reason for the denial and if there are any other documents that would have improved your chances of receiving the visa. Also inquire if and how soon you may reapply for a visa.

If for any other reason you cannot receive your visa in time for NEIU's orientation, you must contact Claudia Gonzalez at [C-Gonzalez2@neiu.edu](mailto:C-Gonzalez2@neiu.edu) and defer your admission to the next available term. To defer admission you must submit the [Request for Deferral of Application or Admission](#) via email to the NEIU Admissions Office and make sure you CC Ms. Gonzalez. Otherwise, you will be considered out of status and your I-20 will be terminated. Additionally, undergraduate students must inform Mr. Nicholas Skyba at [N-Skyba@neiu.edu](mailto:N-Skyba@neiu.edu) and graduate students must inform Mrs. Verla Grays at [V-Grays@neiu.edu](mailto:V-Grays@neiu.edu).



# Pre-Arrival Checklist

The purpose of this checklist is to give you a quick review of what you will need before leaving your home. It is recommended to make electronic copies of these documents for yourself and to leave a copy with a trusted family member or friend:

- Passport** valid for at least 6 months from date of U.S. entry.
- VISA (F-1 or J-1).**
- Travel Arrangements.** Only buy your ticket once your visa is approved. You are allowed entry to the U.S. 30 days before the beginning of your Form I-20/DS-2019.
- Housing.** While studying at NEIU you can live at [The Nest Student Housing](#) (on-campus), or off-campus, or with family.
- Transportation.** You will need to secure transportation from the airport to campus. Taxi, Uber, and public transportation are available in the Chicagoland area.
- Finances.** Make sure to plan your finances while studying in the U.S. for your security. It is not recommended to carry large quantities of money while traveling. Check how to transfer money from your home country to the U.S.
- Activate Your NEIU Account.** IF you have not done so, you will need to activate your account to access your student email (to communicate with your professors) and to register for classes.
- Class Registration.** You can register for classes online via the [NEUport](#).
- Mandatory Health Requirements.** If you will be studying in the U.S. for 6 months or longer NEIU will need a copy of your immunizations or the [Immunization Form](#).

# Immunization & Health Insurance

Starting Fall 2018, all students who are attending the university will need to submit immunization history to NEIU to Student Health Services.

You must complete the following steps:

1. Immunization Form.
2. Copy of school immunization records (in English)
3. Choose upload your documents on the NEIU Student health Portal, via Fax 773-442-5808, or hand deliver to E051.
4. You will have 10 days of the start date of the semester to submit the documents.

For more information: <https://www.neiu.edu/university-life/student-health-services/immunizations>

Health Insurance is mandatory for J-1 Visa holders. You will be required to submit a copy of your health insurance during orientation.

Program participants and their dependents are required to have medical insurance coverage with the following minimum benefits:

- Medical benefits of **at least** \$100,000 per accident or illness
- Repatriation of remains in the amount of \$25,000
- Expenses associated with the medical evacuation of the exchange visitor to his or her home country in the amount of \$50,000
- A deductible not to exceed \$500 per accident or illness.

For more information: [j1visa.state.gov](http://j1visa.state.gov)

Insurance for F-1 visa holders is not required, but is **STRONGLY ENCOURAGED**. This is due to the fact that costs for insurance in the U.S. is **EXTREMELY EXPENSIVE** for U.S. residents, and is double expensive for those that are not residents.

Some insurance companies that available are:

# Housing and Meals

All students admitted to NEIU are eligible to apply for Student Housing, often referred to as The Nest. You can apply and view floor plans for The Nest [online](#).

Each unit at The Nest includes:

- ✓ Household Appliances: Full-Size Refrigerator, Electric Stove, Oven, Microwave, and Dishwasher
- ✓ Furniture: Leather-Style Sofa, Coffee Table, Kitchen Table with Chairs, Desk with Chair, Full-Sized Bed or Twin Extra-Long Bed and Dresser
- ✓ Cable and Internet
- ✓ Heating and Air-Conditioning
- ✓ On-Site Laundry Facility

Campus Dining meal plans are available to The Nest residents. Residents must submit an application to [Campus Dining](#) via their NEUport account.

# Packing List and Weather

Only pack what is necessary. You can purchase all household needs when you arrive in the U.S. The NEIU Bookstore is available on campus where you can purchase school supplies, textbooks, snacks, and general household items such as appliances and bedding and bath. The NEIU Bookstore is located near the Student Union and Information Center in Village Square, you can also visit them [online](#).

**Clothing and Attire:** Chicago experiences four distinct seasons: winter, spring, summer, and fall. Make sure to pack warm clothing that can be worn in layers for fall and winter.

## Chicago Weather:

Month	Average High Temperature	Average Rain/Snowfall
January	-1°C	27.4 cm
April	15°C	11.6 cm
July	29°C	9.4 cm

# Documents for Travel

The following items should be with you at **ALL** times during travel. Do **NOT** place them in your luggage as you will collect your luggage after you have gone through inspection:

- Passport**
- Visa** (F-1 or J-1)
- Form I-20**
- Admission Letter**
- Copy of Class Registration**
- Original Documentation** of your financial statement and official bank letters/bank statements. You submitted copies for admission but you need to bring original documents.

## U.S. Arrival

Upon arrival in the U.S. you will need to go through U.S. Customs and Immigration and present the above mentioned travel documents. Be prepared to answer the following questions to a customs officer:

- Why are you coming to the U.S.?
- Where and what are you going to study?
- Do you have an acceptance letter from Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU)?
- Where are you going to be living?
- Do you have enough money to study in the U.S.?
- What is the Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) address?

# Getting to Campus

## Airports

There are two airports in Chicago, O'Hare International Airport (ORD) and Chicago Midway International Airport (MDW). We recommend arriving at O'Hare International Airport (ORD) as it is the closest airport to campus. It is located approximately 15 kilometers from NEIU and is around a 20-30 minute car trip.

## Transportation

Transportation options in Chicago include taxi services, ride sharing with Uber and Lyft, and public transportation. A taxi can be around \$35-\$58 USD depending on traffic conditions. Taxi stands are available at the lower level of each terminal. Requesting a taxi ride at a Taxi Stand ensures you have a licensed driver.

An Uber to campus is about \$25-\$35 USD. Uber and Lyft are two ride-sharing services that require internet access for ride requests. Unlimited free Wi-Fi internet access is available throughout all terminals at O'Hare International Airport and is offered both before and after security.

You will need to notify International Programs of your arrival.



# Campus Map

Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) has three campuses, Main Campus, El Centro, and Carruthers Center for Inner City Studies. The **map** below is your guide to the Main Campus which is where most classes are held and where International Programs is located.

The Nest is conveniently located near the library on main campus. International Programs is located near LOT A on the lower level of Lech Walesa Hall (LWH).

The address for main campus is the following:  
**5500 N. Saint Louis Ave. Chicago, IL 60625.**



# Office of Student Leadership Development

Part of the college experience in the U.S. involves student life or student activities. These activities can include anything from swimming, boxing, religious organization of your choice, or even a fraternity or sorority. The Office of Student Leadership Development (SLD) oversees student organizations on campus and you participate in leadership opportunities throughout the semester. One of the activities to be on the lookout for is Alternative Spring Break.

The Office of Student Leadership Development (SLD) is located in the Angelina Pedroso Center for Diversity and Intercultural Affairs (Office B-159). You can visit them Monday-Friday from 9am-5pm\* or you can email them at [sld@neiu.edu](mailto:sld@neiu.edu). For a list of daily on campus events, visit the Collegiate Link and login with your NEIUport information:

[neiu.campuslabs.com](http://neiu.campuslabs.com)

## Events and Activities

Besides on campus activities, you have access to Chicago-area events that occur throughout the year! Your university student U-Pass (pass for public transportation) is your access to City of Chicago events. With your student ID, you can request student pricing where available\*. Below are some annual events you can checkout:

Spring Semester: Chicago Chinese New Year Parade, Chicago Auto Show, Chicago Underground Film Festival, St. Patrick's Day.

Summer Semester: Fireworks at Navy Pier, Millennium Park Summer Music Series, Chicago Gay Pride Parade, Taste of Chicago, Lollapalooza, Chicago Air & Water Show.

Fall Semester: Chicago Jazz Festival, Chicago Marathon, Halloween, Chicago International Film Festival, Thanksgiving, Christ Kinkel market, Zoo lights, Ice Skating at Millennium Park.

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