

Changes to Visa Validity for Iranian Student Applicants in F, J, and M visa categories

As of May 20, 2011, qualified Iranian applicants for visas in the F, J, and M categories for non-sensitive, non-technical fields of study and research and their dependents will be eligible to receive two-year, multiple-entry visas. This is an increase in the current visa validity of three months, single entry.

Iranians currently in the United States on a three-month, single-entry visa in one of these categories must reapply outside the United States at a consular post in order to obtain two-year, multiple-entry visas. Keep in mind that the validity of a visa refers to the time period the visa holder has to enter the U.S. It has no bearing on the length of stay permitted by U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials at the port of entry. Iranian students and exchange visitors in good standing in the United States do not need to apply for a new visa until after they depart the United States.

FAQs

Q: Why are you making these changes now?

- As President Obama noted in his Nowruz (Iranian New Year) statement, on March 20, 2011, Iran's young people carry with them the power to create a country that is responsive to their aspirations. He pledged U.S. support for Iran's young people, and this is an example of that support.
- Making these adjustments to our visa policy reaffirms the President's pledge and will help build new avenues for engagement with Iran's youth, facilitate their ability to study in the United States, and allow Iran's young people to better interact with the rest of the world.

Q: What does the change actually mean?

- In practical terms, this means that Iranian students and exchange visitors will now be able to travel during their studies without having to apply for a new visa each time they leave the United States.
- Previously, Iranians studying in the United States usually refrained from travel even for family emergencies, holidays, or vacation since they would have to apply for new visas to reenter the United States prior to their return.

Q: Does this change apply to all Iranian students? Does it affect students already in the United States?

- The change in visa validity applies to all prospective Iranian students and exchange program participants applying under the F, J, and M visa categories in non-sensitive, non-technical fields of study and research, as well as to their dependents.
- Students currently in the United States on a three-month, single-entry visa will need to reapply outside the United States at a consular post to be eligible for a visa with the longer validity period. However, the validity of a visa has no bearing on the length of stay permitted by U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials at the port of entry. Iranian students and exchange visitors in good standing under a three-month, single-entry F, J, or M visa in the United States do not need to apply for a new visa unless they depart the United States.

Q: Why only two years when a regular course of study is four years?

- At this time the U.S. government has determined that a maximum 2-year validity period is appropriate in light of U.S. national interests. However, this determination does not preclude a possible further extension of the visa validity period at a later date if it is determined to be in the U.S. national interest to do so. Note that a student may be allowed to remain in the U.S. for the duration of his studies even if the visa he or she was granted by a U.S. embassy or consulate overseas is valid for a shorter period than the length of the course of study.

Q: What about the lengthy administrative processing delays?

- Student and exchange applicants are encouraged to apply early for their visas. Students may apply for their visas as soon as they are documentarily qualified to do so. Most administrative processing is resolved within 60 days of the visa interview, but the timing can vary based on the individual circumstances of each case. The Department of State gives priority to processing student visas in time for students to attend their academic programs, regardless of the student's nationality, and the Department of State is continuously working to improve processing times.