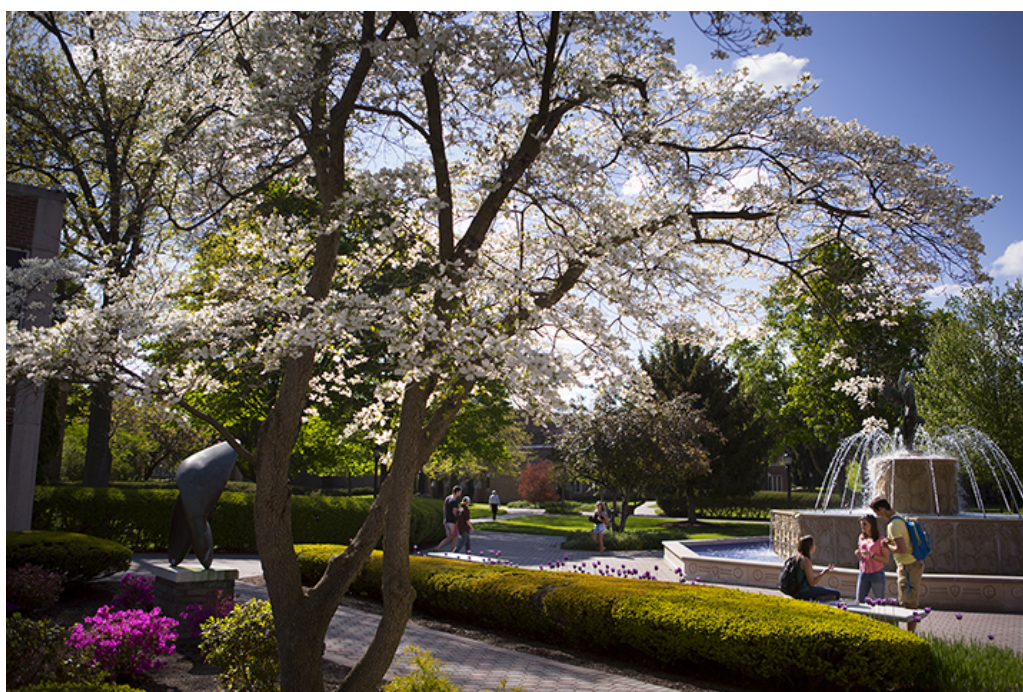


# Pre-Arrival Guide for International Students



**Office of Admissions**



**ELMIRA COLLEGE**

Dear New International Student,

The Office of Admissions is here to assist you in understanding the regulations pertaining to your immigration status, including maintenance of your status, as well as help you transition to life at Elmira College.

Whether you have already been living in the United States, or are coming from abroad, this Pre-Arrival Guide is designed to provide you with helpful information about the College and its resources, learning about the surrounding communities, and preparing you to begin your academic program as quickly as possible.

Please read this guide carefully before you begin your visa application process (if you need a visa), and prior to arriving at Elmira. We hope that you have safe and easy travels to Elmira.

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# I. HOW TO APPLY FOR A VISA

## A. F-1 Student Visa

The visa is a stamp in your passport which allows you to enter the United States. The expiration date is the date up to which you are permitted to enter or re-enter the U.S. using that particular stamp.

*\*Canadians do not have to apply for a visa but must still pay the SEVIS fee and enter the U.S. on F-1 status.*

### 1) Check all information is correct on your I-20

Review all the information on your I-20 to make sure there are no misspellings or other mistakes on your documents. If everything is correct and accurate, you may use the I-20 to apply for a visa at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate nearest you. If corrections need to be made, please contact the Office of Admissions.

### 2) Pay the \$350 I-901 SEVIS Fee after receiving your I-20

- a) Go to the I-901 Fee website [here](#) and click "Pay I-901 FEE"
- b) Fill out the next page on personal information. The form requires the SEVIS identification number located on the upper right-hand corner of the I-20 Form with an N and has 10 digits.
- c) The "School Code" on your I-20 is: BUF214F0101000
- d) Check that the information is correct on the following pages
- e) Print at least two copies of the receipt. You must bring the receipt with you to the visa interview AND when you travel to the U.S.

**\*NOTE FOR STUDENTS FROM NIGERIA, GHANA, KENYA OR CAMEROON:**  
Currently, the SEVP system is unable to accept credit card payments from persons of *Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, or Kenya*. If you are from one of these countries, you can pay the SEVIS fee by Western Union Quickpay or by regular mail. Instructions are provided on the ICE website [here](#).

You *do not* need to pay the \$350 USD SEVIS fee if:

- You are transferring schools
- Extending your program
- You are applying for an F-2 dependent visa, or
- You have paid this fee and have been denied a visa within the last 12 months

For specific questions about the SEVIS fee, go to the FAQs on the ICE website [here](#).

### 3) Find your local U.S. Consulate [here](#) and follow instructions to schedule an interview for an F-1 student visa. Visa appointment wait times can be viewed [here](#).

Consulates will not actually issue the F-1 visa more than 120 days from your program start date. However, you may apply for the F-1 visa earlier than 120 days before the start date on your I-20. Be prepared to pay the visa application fee.

### 4) Complete the DS-160 Visa Application Process:

- a) Complete the visa application [here](#)

b) Pay the visa application fee by following instructions on the U.S. Consulate's website

**5) Prepare and take the following documents to your visa interview:**

- a) A passport valid for at least six (6) months
- b) Form I-20 (on "*Student Attestation*", signed and dated)
- c) School acceptance letter
- d) Completed Visa Application Form DS-160
- e) Two photographs, 51mm x 51mm (2in x 2in) each, in the prescribed format (see website for measurements: [travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov))
- f) A receipt for the visa application fee
- g) A receipt for proof of SEVIS fee payment
- h) Financial evidence that shows you have sufficient funds to cover your tuition and living expenses during the period you intend to study. Items such as a letter of award or scholarship, bank statement, proof of income, deposits in a U.S. bank or affidavit of support may be used to establish your funding source to the Visa Officer.
- i) Information that proves that you will return to your home country after finishing your studies in the U.S. This may include proof of property, family, or other ties to your community
- j) Any other information listed on the U.S. Consulate's website

**6) Interview for an F-1 Visa**

Remember that the purpose of the interview is to prove that your student visa is consistent with the reason why you are going. Try to obtain the full name of the officer who interviewed you, as well as her/his contact number. Additional points to remember when preparing for your interview can be found in the section [here](#).

**Important Note:** If your visa application is denied, before you leave the U.S. Embassy or Consulate, obtain a written explanation of the specific reason you are denied the visa and ask about re-application procedures. OIA might be able to advise you on next steps if you obtained the contact information of the officer and the specific reason.

**7) Traveling to the U.S.**

You are permitted into the U.S. starting 30 days before your program start date. See the "Preparing to Travel" section of this guide for more information.

**What to Expect for Customs and Border Entry**

When you land in the United States, you must go through U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) with your valid immigration documents to gain admission. For information on what to expect, please visit the Department of Homeland Security web page [here](#).

**Important Note:** Have Elmira College's Campus Safety phone number (607) 735-1777 on hand in case you have issues at the port of entry. The Campus Safety Office can connect you with the Office of Admissions. You also have a right to request that the Border Officer call the Campus Safety Office.

## **B.10 Points to Remember When Applying for a Non-Immigrant Visa<sup>1</sup>**

### **1) Ties to Your Home Country**

Under U.S. 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 that are stronger than those for remaining in the United States. "Ties" to your home country are the things that bind you to your hometown, homeland, or current place of residence: job, family, financial prospects that you own or will inherit, investments, etc.

Each person's situation is different, and there is no single document, certificate, or letter that can guarantee visa issuance. If you have applied for the U.S. Diversity Green Card Lottery, 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.

We recommend that you bring a letter from your current institution if you are currently in a degree-seeking program or employed at their institution and that after your internship/visit in the United States you will be returning to your institution to complete your program or continue your employment.

### **2) 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, but do NOT prepare speeches!

### **3) Speak for Yourself**

Do not bring parents or family members with you to the interview. The consular officer wants to interview you, not your family. A negative impression is created if you are not prepared to speak on your own behalf.

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

If you are not able to articulate the reasons you will study/research/consult/observe/teach in a particular program in the United States, you may not succeed in convincing the consular officer that you are indeed planning to engage in that program of activity rather than to immigrate. You should be able to explain how your research activity in the U.S. relates to your future professional career when you return home.

### **5) Be Brief**

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 of the interview. Consequently, what you say first and the initial impression you create are critical to your success. Keep your answers short and to the point.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: [NAFSA](#) (modified to include J-1 Exchange Visitors)

**6) Additional Documentation**

It should be immediately clear to the consular officer what written documents you are presenting and what they signify. Lengthy written explanations cannot be quickly read or evaluated. Remember that you will have 2-3 minutes of interview time if you're lucky.

**7) Not All Countries are Equal**

Applicants from countries suffering economic problems or from countries where many researchers have remained in the United States as immigrants will have more difficulty getting visas. 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 research program in the United States.

**8) Employment**

You are only allowed to be employed in the U.S. for research that relates to your main program objective on your DS-2019. You must be able to clearly articulate your plan to return home at the end of your program.

**9) 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 will need you to remit money from the United States 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.

**10) Maintain A Positive Attitude**

Do not engage the consular officer in an argument. If you are denied the 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.

Before applying for your non-immigrant visa at the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate, you are strongly advised to consult the U.S. Department of State website [here](#) to obtain the most up-to-date information about the application process.

## II. F-1 PRE-ARRIVAL REQUIREMENTS

### A. Immigration Orientation and Check-in

Pursuant to U.S. immigration regulations, the Office of Admissions at Elmira is required to validate your arrival on campus. The Office will contact you by email with the date and time of your immigration check-in and orientation. This check-in is mandatory for your immigration record to be validated. Failure to report for this immigration check-in may result in a loss of F-1 student status. Make sure you know the date and time of your orientation.

## B. Immunizations

Everyone coming to Elmira must undergo a health screening in the Clarke Health Center prior to the beginning of their program. **Please note that any incomplete or inaccurate documentation will delay your clearance.** If you have any questions about immunization clearance, contact Rachel McEvoy '14 at [rmcevoy14@elmira.edu](mailto:rmcevoy14@elmira.edu) or +1 607-735-1750.

## C. Student Health Insurance

Full-time Elmira students are automatically enrolled in the the College's Student Health Insurance Plan. If you would like to waive EC's insurance, your insurance must meet the minimum requirements to qualify for a waiver and you must go online annually to waive the plan. For information on EC's health insurance, visit the plan [website here](#).

# III. ACCOMMODATIONS

## A. On-Campus Housing

### On-campus Residence Halls

At Elmira, there are five traditional residence halls, the Twin Towers, and the Cottages. It's in the residence halls that you will forge friendships and find support systems. Each floor has a Resident Assistant, a student staff member who helps answer your questions and help you find solutions to problems. They also plan activities and events that bring the hall together, creating a home away from home.

**Elmira is a residential college and undergraduate students are required to live on campus during their time at the College.** The exception to living on campus is any undergraduate student who lives with a legal guardian within 30 miles, is 25 years of age or older, or is married or living with biological children. On-campus housing for international graduate students may be available.

Visit the [Housing Services page on elmira.edu](#) for additional information.

## B. Off-Campus Housing

**Short-term housing:** Looking for a place for family to stay while visiting you at Elmira College? [Check out the local accommodations](#) within 25 miles of the Elmira College campus. Be sure to mention that you are visiting Elmira College. Many of the properties offer a discounted rate for Elmira College students and their families.

**Long-term housing:** If searching for off-campus housing, we encourage you to begin researching as early as possible prior to your arrival in the United States. One-bedroom apartments usually house 1 to 2 people, and 2-bedroom apartments usually house 2 to 3 people. Additional expenses to consider are transportation and meals.

### Local Apartment Search Engines

Please note that these search engines are not operated by Elmira College. You are

responsible to inspect the property to determine whether it meets your needs. We also suggest you check online reviews on Google or Yelp. Use the city and zip code to search: Elmira, New York 14901

- [Zillow](#)
- [Apartmentfinder.com](#)

*Please note that Elmira College does not endorse or screen any of the off-campus housing options.*

**Utilities:** Your utilities will vary depending on your residence and landlord. The utilities you should think about are water, sewage, garbage, electric, gas, oil, heating, cable, internet, and phone. Some landlords include utilities and others do not. It is important that you ask your landlord about what is included before you sign a lease. The Chemung County Chamber of Commerce provides a list of resources for new residents (gas & electric, water, telephone, cable, internet, etc.) on page 12 of the [Chemung County Community Profile](#).

Utility costs can vary significantly. Living in an apartment versus a house can make a huge difference in cost. In most cases, you will be responsible for setting up your utilities. Contact the utility companies at least 2 weeks before your move-in date. Do not forget to budget your utilities into your monthly costs. If you have roommates, you can share these costs with each other.

You may be able to ask other tenants or the landlord what the approximate costs of utilities are for the building or house. It may be helpful in planning your budget.

## IV. TRANSPORTATION

### A. Getting to Elmira, New York

The Elmira-Corning Regional Airport (ELM) is just 10.7 miles / 17.2 km northeast of the College. You can get to the College by rental car, taxi, and car service (Lyft and/or Uber). Visit the Elmira-Corning Regional Airport [here](#).

### B. Getting Around

#### Transportation Apps

Download a transport app onto your phone to help you navigate your way throughout the Elmira area.

- Google Maps - helps you plan the fastest routes to a specified location for traveling by foot, car, or public transportation

#### Public Transportation

##### CTRAN

CTRAN is Elmira's local public transportation system that operates buses throughout the Elmira area. [Visit their website](#) to learn more about their fares and routes.

##### Short Line Bus Service

Short Line provides transportation to/from the Elmira area, connecting you to larger metropolitan areas like New York City. For the latest schedule and ticket information, [visit Short Line online](#).

##### Trailways Bus Service

Trailways provides bus transportation to/from the Elmira area, connecting you to a multitude of other U.S. communities and cities, including metropolitan areas like New York City. For the latest schedule and ticket information, [visit Trailways online](#).

## **C. Other Modes of Transportation**

### **Driving**

Individuals who possess a valid foreign driver's license from their country are authorized to drive in New York. You do not need to apply for a New York State driver license unless you become a New York State resident. You may also use your international driving permits. Check out the DMV website for more information [here](#).

### **Taxicabs**

Taxi (or "cab") service is generally more expensive here than it is in other countries. Taxis have meters that show the fare. It is customary to pay an additional 15 percent of the fare as a "tip," or gratuity.

### **Ridesharing**

The two most common ridesharing apps that are used in Elmira are Lyft and Uber.

You will need to have a U.S. debit and credit card along with a local U.S. number to book a ride. Both companies use individual contractors to pick up passengers and have options to rideshare or be the only passenger. It is a convenient way to get around the city if it is late at night or public transportation is not near and accessible to your destination. Check the license plate and the name of the driver is correct before getting in the car.

### **Bicycles**

Bicycles are a convenient way to get around the city. Google Maps provides a feature which allows you to find a bicycle route to your destination. You can access Google Maps either by app or website [here](#).

## V. COMMUNICATION SERVICES

### A. Cell (Mobile) Phone

You can buy prepaid cell phone plans and pay monthly for the services you use as most cell phone providers offer prepaid plans. You may also apply for a cell phone plan that has a contract. There are various providers in this area (i.e., Verizon, AT&T, Sprint, Xfinity, and T-Mobile).



# VI. MONEY MANAGEMENT

## A. United States Currency

### Paper Money

All U.S. paper money is in the same size and color. Denominations include \$1 (often called “a buck”), \$5, \$10, \$20, \$50, and \$100. Paper money for amounts larger than \$100 is not usually seen in public circulation.



### Coins

American coins come in two colors and four sizes. Smaller-sized coins are not always lower in value than larger coins.



*Penny* = 1 cent = \$0.01



*Nickel* = 5 cents = \$0.05



*Dime* = 10 cents = \$0.10  
(smallest US coin)



*Quarter* = 25 cents =  
\$0.25

## B. Currency Exchange

Those traveling internationally can exchange currency at a major airport, such as JFK or LaGuardia, or at the Elmira-Corning Regional Airport. Other locations in Elmira are available as well. We suggest looking up exchange rates at different locations to get the best exchange rate.

Do not carry large amounts of cash with you or keep it at your residence. Instead, deposit it in a bank.

## C. Banks and Banking Services

Banks offer services such as savings and checking accounts, safe-deposit boxes, international currency exchanges, and loans to qualified customers and varying interest rates. In choosing a banking service, make sure that the federal government (FDIC) insures it. You can look up your bank [here](#) to confirm it is FDIC insured.

## Opening a Bank Account

To open a bank account, you will be required to show evidence of your legal immigration status and a local address in the United States. Some banks do not require a social security number to open an account but you may need two forms of identification documents (ID). There are numerous banks near Elmira. Many banks allow you to pay bills via the internet. Inquire at your bank if you are interested in this service.

## ATM

The ATM is a device through which bank customers can make deposits or withdrawals at any time of the day, any day of the week, using a plastic card and a secret PIN (personal identification number). Instructions for operating the automatic teller are given on the machine itself. If there is a fee, you will be notified and allowed to cancel the transaction. Fees range from \$1 to \$3 per transaction. Debit cards may also be used to purchase items or pay for services.



ATMs are located at banks, supermarkets, shopping centers, convenience stores, and in Elmira College's Campus Center.

# VII. IDENTIFICATION DOCUMENTS

## A. Elmira ID Badge

Elmira College students, and staff members receive an Elmira ID card, which is required for entry into some buildings on campus, including residence halls.

## B. Driver's License or State Photo ID Card

While a passport can be used as proof of identity, most Americans use a driver's license as an ID card. You can also apply for a New York State ID card if you will not be driving. For more information click [here](#).

## C. Social Security Number (SSN)

The Social Security Number is a tax identification number that is often used for many other purposes, such as applying for a driver's license or phone services. J-1 Exchange Visitors may only apply for an SSN two weeks after arrival in the U.S., and F-1 students may only apply once they obtain work within F-1 regulations.

## VIII. SAFETY AND SECURITY

Elmira is a small city, and as with any urban area, please be aware of your surroundings and properly secure your personal property. Avoid using outside ATM machines, taking public transportation alone late at night, and walking in poorly lit areas.

In case of an emergency, **dial 911**.

This is the emergency number used across the U.S. for immediate assistance in case of a fire, medical emergency or any criminal activity.

Elmira College provides its own campus safety service:

- Dial (607) 735-1777 from a cell phone to connect with campus safety officers
- Escort Service - This service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week if you are in need of a walking escort on the Elmira College campus.
- No Eagle Left Behind - This service is provided to Elmira College students who are off campus and find themselves without a safe way back to campus. Students can call the local cab service to pick them up and Campus Safety officers will meet the cab upon arrival and provide a voucher to the cab company. Later, the bill is charged to the student account. The number for the cab company, Total Transportation, is: (607) 734-6161.

## IX. WEATHER

Elmira experiences all four seasons with temperatures ranging from 24°F (-4°C) in the winter (which may feel colder because of the wind) to 87°F (31°C) in the summer (which may feel hotter due to the humidity). To prepare for Elmira weather please look at the table below.

	<b>Summer (June-August)</b>	<b>Fall/Autumn (September-November)</b>	<b>Winter (December-February)</b>	<b>Spring (March-May)</b>
<b>Fahrenheit</b>	63°-87°	39°-77°	24°-44°	34°-73°
<b>Celsius</b>	17°-31°	1°-23°	-4°-7°	1°-23°
<b>Appropriate Clothing</b>	Short-sleeved shirts and shorts	Long-sleeved shirts, sweaters, light coat	Winter coat, sweaters, scarves, boots.	Long-sleeved shirts and pants

# X. PREPARING FOR TRAVEL

## A. When to Travel

You are permitted to enter the U.S. *30 days before the start date* on your I-20 or DS-2019.

## B. Prepare in Advance

- 1) Contact your local bank and credit card companies to inform them of your travel plans
- 2) You may want to look into downloading pertinent maps and get Wi-Fi information ahead of time if your current cellphone plan doesn't support international cellphone usage.

## C. Packing Checklist

### Carry-on Items

Make sure any liquids brought in your carry-on are less than 3.4 ounces (100 milliliters or less) per item or they will be confiscated.

- Documents (carry them with you at all times)
  - o Immigration documents (I-20 or DS-2019)
  - o SEVIS fee receipt
  - o Valid passport with a valid visa
  - o Another picture form of identification (ex. Driver's license)
  - o If you are a student:
    - Acceptance Letter
    - Proof of funding
  - o Travel Insurance
- Money
  - o Cash - as you may not be able to open a U.S. bank account immediately, you may need to bring at least two weeks' worth of cash in U.S. dollars.
  - o Debit Card - you may need to notify your bank before you travel overseas and find out about international ATM fees
  - o Credit Cards - you may need to notify your credit card company of international travel
- Address of College and details on how to get there

### For Checked Luggage

- Clothing and Shoes - prepare for the various weather conditions of Elmira by packing the appropriate clothing. See the Weather section.

### What Not to Bring

Click [here](#) to take a look at the list of items that are prohibited for both carry-on and checked baggage.

# XI. Resources for F-1 & J-1 International Students

## A. Departments and Offices

**Office of Admissions** - offers regulation specific advisings and support for applicants, accepted, and enrolled students. For more information click [here](#).

**Academic Programs**- information regarding your program, courses, and curriculum, visit the [elmira.edu website](http://elmira.edu).

**Office of Campus Life** - organize students and activities, student health insurance, and manages student organizations. For more information click [here](#).

**Housing and Residential Life** - For information regarding on-campus housing options and pricing click [here](#).

**Registrar Office** - for information regarding registration, course scheduling, and transcripts click [here](#).

**Financial Aid** - For information regarding tuition payments click [here](#).