

## Foreign v. Exchange Students – What’s the Difference?

Often people get confused between foreign students and foreign exchange students. This is understandable, since both are labels for students from other countries who are here in the United States and who attend US schools. However, there are very important distinctions between them.

A **foreign** student is here in the US on an F-1 visa. They must be authorized by the school which they are attending in the US which is then responsible for ensuring that they arrive, that they attend school, etc. While recruitment of the students, making travel arrangements, finding a host family, etc. may be coordinated by an agency, the school they are attending is ultimately responsible for them. Schools wishing to authorize foreign students must apply for recognition with the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (**ICE**), part of the Department of Homeland Security. Students from other countries studying in US colleges and universities are generally here on this type of visa, although there are an increasing number of secondary and even elementary students here on this type of visa as well. However, there are few public schools which accept students on an F-1 visa. The US Government prohibits elementary schools from accepting F-1 students and only allows F-1 students to attend public secondary schools for a single year and only if they pay the full unsubsidized cost of tuition at that public school. However, approved private/parochial schools may accept an unlimited number of F-1 students and they may attend until they graduate (and then they generally go to a college/university here in the US as well).

A **foreign-exchange** student (generally called just an “**exchange** student” to avoid confusion) is here in the US on a J-1 visa. This type of visa is for cultural exchange. While there are several categories of the J-1 visa (officially called an “exchange visitor” visa), for students this visa is limited to 15 to 18-1/2 year old students. They are always represented by an agency which is responsible for recruitment, orientation, travel arrangements, finding host families, and supporting the students while they are here. Reputable agencies are accredited by CSIET (Council on Standards for International Education and Travel), and must adhere to regulations which have been established by the US State Department.

The following table lists some of the key differences between these types of students:

	F-1 Foreign Student	J-1 Exchange Student
US Government Agency	Dept. of Homeland Security (DHS)	Dept. of State (DoS)
Responsible Party	School – must be approved by DHS before accepting students	Agency – must be approved by DoS before accepting students
Authorizing Document	I-20, tracked in SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System)	DS-2019, tracked in SEVIS
Ages	Any	15-18
Purpose of Visa	Education	Cultural Exchange
Limit of Stay	Until education complete	Min. 6 months, max 1 year
Types of schools (in order of frequency)	College/university, private secondary, private elementary, public secondary (with restrictions as above)	Public secondary, private secondary (generally with tuition waived)
Host family reimbursement	At the elementary/secondary level, agencies/schools often pay a Host Family Stipend of several hundred dollars/month	Families are allowed a \$50/month deduction on their taxes