



## Office of International Students and Scholars

# Points to Remember When Applying for a Nonimmigrant Visa

- 1. SEVIS FEE.** All F-1 students must pay a SEVIS fee (I-901) of \$200 prior to applying for a new visa. This fee must be paid before going to the U.S. consulate for the visa interview. We recommend payment at least three days in advance. Applicants must take a receipt of payment with them to the visa interview. For information about the SEVIS fee and how to pay it, please go to the following website: [www.fmjfee.com](http://www.fmjfee.com).
- 2. VISA FORMS AND FEES.** Please check the website for the U.S. embassy or consulate you will be visiting to apply for an F-1 non-immigrant visa. Additional forms and fees that you will need for your visit will be listed at the website. You may find this the website for the U.S. embassy or consulate closest to you at <http://usembassy.stats.gov/>.
- 3. TIES TO YOUR HOME COUNTRY.** Under U.S. law, all applicants for nonimmigrant visas, such as student visas, are viewed as 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 things that bind you to your home town, homeland, or current place of residence: job, family, financial prospects that you own or will inherit, investments, etc. If you are a prospective undergraduate, the interviewing officer may ask about your specific intentions or promise of future employment, family or other relationships, educational objectives, grades, long-range plans and career prospects in your home country. Each person's situation is different, of course, and there is no magic explanation or single document, certificate, or letter which can guarantee visa issuance. If you have applied for the U.S. 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 U.S. previously, be prepared to explain what happened clearly and concisely, with documentation if available.
- 4. 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! If you are coming to the United States solely to study intensive English, be prepared to explain how English will be useful for you in your home country.
- 5. SPEAK FOR YOURSELF.** Do not bring your parents or family members with you to the interview. The consular wants to interview you, not your family. A negative impression is created if you are not prepared to speak in your own behalf. If you are a minor applying for a high school program and need your parents there in case there are questions, for example, about funding, they should wait in the waiting room.
- 6. KNOW THE PROGRAM AND HOW ITS FITS YOUR CAREER PLANS.** If you are not able to articulate the reasons you will study in a particular program in the United States, you may not succeed in convincing the consular officer that you are indeed planning to study, rather than to immigrate. You should also be able to explain how studying in the U.S. relates to your future professional career when you return home.

7. **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 to the officer's questions short and to the point.
8. **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. Bring your financial support documentation with you.
9. **"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. 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 study in the U.S.
10. **EMPLOYMENT.** Your main purpose in coming to the United States should be to study, not for a chance to work before or after graduation. While many students do work off-campus during their studies, such employment is incidental to their main purpose of completing their U.S. education. You must be able to clearly articulate your plan to return home at the end your program. 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 without compensation for spouses is a permitted activity. Dependent children, kindergarten through high school, are allowed to attend school on an F-2 visa.
11. **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 will almost certainly be denied. If you 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.
12. **MAINTAIN A POSITIVE ATTITUDE.** Do not engage the consular officer in an argument. 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.