

Your Immigration Documents

Visa

A visa stamp placed inside your passport by the U.S. consul abroad is needed to enter the U.S. Your visa shows the latest date on which you can apply to enter this country (the expiration date) and indicates the kind of visa you have (usually F-1).

Should you need to renew your visa in order to re-enter the U.S. you will need to visit the U.S. consulate in your home country or another country where you are traveling. It is not possible to renew an F-1 while you are within the borders of the U.S.. (Note: As long as you maintain student status, have a valid passport, and have an I-94 stamped D/S, you may remain in the U.S. with an expired visa). Visit your international student advisor well before you leave the U.S. to make certain your travel documents are in order.

Preparing for the Visa Interview

F or J Visa

All students receiving the I-20 will request the F-1 visa for self and F-2 for spouse and children if appropriate. If you have received a DS-2019 then you will request a J-1 visa for self and J-2 for spouse/children if appropriate.

When you apply for a visa at an American embassy or consulate, a consular official will interview you. The interview usually lasts only two or three minutes. It is good to understand that the main purpose of the visa interview is for you to "prove" to the consular officials that you **WILL RETURN** to your home country after finishing your academic program. Of course, it is impossible to actually prove or know that a person will or will not do something in the future. Thus, the consular official must believe that you will return to your home country, or the visa will not be issued.

You can reassure the consular officials by talking about the things that tie you to your home: family, property, employment.

Here are some specific suggestions to help you prepare for your visa interview:

* Anticipate that the interview will be conducted in English and not in your native language.

1. You need to know and show what you will do with your degree from a U.S. institution (or, if you want to attend an English language program, with your better English) when you return home. You need to have good (plausible) future plans in your own country.

2. It is often very helpful to have a job offer--in writing-- from an employer in your home country promising you a good job or a higher position in the company **WHEN YOU RETURN FROM THE U.S.**
3. You should know what the job situation is in your field in your home country. With a little research you can find out what the job prospects are. The U.S. consular officials will know about these things, too. It's usually better for you if you can show that you will have good job prospects in your home country after finishing your program in the U.S.
4. You should practice for the interview with friends. The practice interviews should be no more than three minutes long and very unfriendly. While the consular officer will probably be cordial in the real interview, it is best to be prepared for the worst. You should be ready to answer questions such as "Where did you hear about this school?" etc. If you don't know very much about your chosen school, the consular official will often refuse to give you a visa. Consular officials may think that you are not really planning to go to school but are simply trying to enter the U.S. to work.
5. You should write a "statement of purpose" explaining why you want to go to this particular school and what you hope to do with the knowledge later on **IN YOUR HOME COUNTRY.**
6. If your financial status is an issue, you may want to pay tuition to the school in advance and present the receipt to the consular official. The official will almost certainly respect this gesture. Bank loans are **NOT** good evidence of financial support for students. Consular officials think that people with loans are more likely to seek employment in the U.S. so they can pay back the loan.
7. You should be honest with consular officials at all times. For example, applicants in some countries might not want to show their true financial status because they may be trying to "shield" income from taxes. Thus, their financial statements may not show this "black money" and so may not show enough money for education in the U.S.

But, U.S. consular officials actually don't care at all if your family is hiding income from your own government. They will, however, appreciate your honesty and be much more likely to grant the visa if they know your true financial status.

Conversely, if the consular officials believe that you are lying or have lied in a previous interview--about anything--they will probably not issue the visa.

8. Do not bring family members with you to the interview. The officer wants to interview you, not your family. A negative impression is created if you are not

prepared to speak on your own behalf.

9. 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.
10. Do not concede, under any circumstance, that you intend to work in the U.S. after completing your studies. While many students do work off-campus during their studies, this work is incidental to their main purpose of completing their education.
11. If your spouse is also applying for an accompanying F-2 visa, be aware that F-2 dependents cannot, under any circumstance, 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 are permitted activities.
12. If your spouse is applying for a J-2 visa, be aware that your dependent can work to support himself or herself, but not to support you, the J-1. Authorization must be first acquired from the USCIS after arriving in the U.S.
13. 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 themselves, your student visa application will almost certainly be denied.

Tips compiled by John Whitney, edited by Pratt Office of International Affairs.