



*Office of International Programs*

## Applying for a US Visa

### What is a visa?

A visa allows a foreign citizen to travel to a US port-of entry and request permission from the US immigration officer to enter the United States, though it does not guarantee entry. For more information, please visit the US State Department Visa homepage: <http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english.html>

### What is SEVP and SEVIS?

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) is designed to help the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Department of State better monitor school and exchange programs and F, M and J category visitors. Exchange visitor and student information is maintained in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). SEVIS is an Internet-based system that maintains accurate and current information on non-immigrant students (F and M visa), exchange visitors (J visa), and their dependents (F-2, M-2, and J-2). SEVIS enables schools and program sponsors to transmit mandatory information and event notifications via the Internet, to the DHS and Department of State (DOS) throughout a student or exchange visitor's stay in the United States.

### Applying for a Visa:

You must schedule an interview at the US Embassy or Consulate to obtain a US visa. The waiting time for an interview varies; check the website for the US Embassy or Consulate in your country to learn more. Your student visa cannot be processed more than 120 days before your program start date, but you should still prepare well in advance.

### Documents to Bring to Your Visa Interview:

- **Form I-20 (F-1) or DS-2019 (J-1)**
- **Online Nonimmigrant Visa Electronic Application, Form DS-160** (Google "DS-160")
- **Passport** (must be valid at least 6 months beyond program end date, unless your country is exempt)
- **SEVIS I-901 fee receipt** (Pay online at [www.FMJfee.com](http://www.FMJfee.com))
- **Proof of visa application fee payment** (see below)
- **Proof of compelling ties** (ex. family and property in your home country, previous US travel)
- **Admission letter from Fairfield University**
- **Academic transcripts or diplomas, test scores** (if you're a scholar, bring your resume)
- **Financial evidence from you or your sponsor** (ex. income tax documents, original bank statements)
- **GRE waiver letter** (Indian students only)

### What are the Required Visa Fees?

- **Nonimmigrant visa application processing fee:** Check the US Department of State's website <http://travel.state.gov/visa/> for current fees. You will need to provide a receipt proving you paid.
- **Visa issuance fee:** If the visa is issued, there may be an additional visa issuance reciprocity fee. Consult the Visa Reciprocity Tables on the US Department of State's website to learn more.

## Tips for Applying for a US Nonimmigrant Visa

- 1) **Ties to Home Country:** Under US law, all applicants for nonimmigrant visas are viewed as intending immigrants until they can convince the consular officer otherwise; therefore, you must 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. If you are a prospective undergraduate, the interviewing officer may ask you 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, and there is no magic explanation or single document, certificate, or letter that can guarantee visa issuance.
  - 2) **English:** Anticipate that the interview will be conducted in English. Practice English conversation with a native speaker before the interview to better prepare yourself.
  - 3) **Speak for Yourself:** Do not bring 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 for studying in a particular program in the US, 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 US will relate to your future professional career when you return home.
  - 5) **Be Concise:** Because of the volume of applications received, all consular officers are under considerable time pressure to conduct a quick and efficient interview. They might make a decision based on the impressions they form during the first few minutes 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.
  - 6) **Supplemental Documentation:** It should be clear at a glance 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 students have remained in the US as immigrants will have more difficulty getting visas. They are also more likely to be asked about job opportunities at home after their study in the US.
  - 8) **Employment:** Your main purpose of coming to the US should be to study, not for the chance to work before or after graduation. While many students do work off-campus during their studies, this should not be portrayed as your main goal. 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 members will need you to remit money from the United States in order to support themselves, 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 a student visa, ask the officer for a list of documents he/she would suggest you bring in order to overcome the refusal, and try to get the reason you were denied in writing.
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