

11 Points to Remember When Applying for a U.S. Nonimmigrant Visa

- 1 **PLAN AHEAD.** Before you begin your visa application, get the following information to save yourself a repeat trip to the Embassy or Consulate.
 - a. Find out what fees are required and how to pay them. The current fee for the visa is approximately \$100 but there may be additional interview or service fees, including the \$100 SEVIS fee.
 - b. Acquire the necessary forms. The letter of acceptance and I-20 or DS-2019 will be sent to you from Dickinson College. Inquire at the Consulate/Embassy about which forms you will be required to complete, such as the nonimmigrant visa application (Form DS-158 and Form DS-157 [for men age 16-45] and Form DS-158). Blank forms are available without charge at all US consular offices and on the Visa Services website under Visa application Forms (<http://travel.state.gov/>).
 - c. Make sure your passport is valid for *at least* 6 months after the anticipated date of entry to the U.S. Be sure that Dickinson College has the same data on file that is listed on your passport (e.g., spelling of name, birth date, etc.). If the data on the I-20 or DS-2019 does not match *exactly* with your passport, notify Dickinson's Coordinator of International Student and Scholar Services immediately so that a corrected I-20 can be issued.
 - d. Obtain photographs. The U.S. State Department web site specifies that the photo be "1 and ½ inches square (37x37mm), showing full face, without head covering, against a light background."
 - e. Gather financial evidence that shows sufficient funds to cover tuition and living expenses during the period of intended study. These would include income tax records, bankbooks and/or statements. If your sponsor owns a business, additional business documents will be required (e.g., registrations, licenses, etc.).
 - f. Find out if an in-person interview is necessary (most likely it is) and schedule the appointment for approximately 2 months before the start of program study. Each consulate/embassy has different requirements. Students should consult Embassy web sites or call for specific application instructions (<http://travel.state.gov/>)
- 2 **TIES TO YOUR HOME COUNTRY.** Under U.S. law, all applicants for nonimmigrant visas, such as student 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. 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 that 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 the U.S. previously, be prepared to explain what happened clearly and concisely, with documentation if available. Be prepared to:
 - a. Demonstrate as many ties as possible to your home country
 - b. Describe why you wish to study at Dickinson College
 - c. Explain how the degree will lead to a future career
 - d. Discuss the possibility of finding work after returning home (letters from potential employers, lack of specialists with the U.S. degree, etc.)

- 3 **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!
- 4 **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. If you are a minor applying for a high school program and need your parents there is case there are questions, for example about funding, they should wait in the waiting room.
- 5 **KNOW THE PROGRAM AND HOW IT 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.
- 6 **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.
- 7 **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.
- 8 **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. 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.
- 9 **EMPLOYMENT.** Your main purpose in coming to the United States should be to study, not for the chance to work before or after graduation. While many students do work 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 of 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 and attending school part-time are permitted activities.
- 10 **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 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.
- 11 **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.

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