

10 Points to Remember When Applying for a Student Visa

Updated July 2019 by members of the NAFSA International Student and Scholar Regulatory Practice (ISS RP) Travel Subcommittee.

1. Ties to Your Home Country and Residence Abroad

Under U.S. law, people who apply for nonimmigrant visas, such as F-1 or J-1 student visas, are viewed as "intending immigrants" (who want to live permanently in the U.S.) 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 "residence abroad" (usually in your home country) that are stronger than reasons for remaining in the United States and that you intend to depart the United States at the conclusion of your studies.

"Ties" to your home country are the things that connect you to your hometown, homeland, or current place of residence: job, family, owning a house or apartment, financial prospects that you own or will inherit, investments, etc. If you are a prospective student, the interviewing officer may ask about your specific plans 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. Diversity (green card) Lottery, you may be asked if you intend to immigrate. If you applied for the Diversity Visa Lottery but do not intend to immigrate, be prepared to clarify that, for instance, by explaining that you applied for the lottery since it was available but not with a specific intent to immigrate.

the consulate's waiting area and any special rules or procedures for non-applicant family members to accompany a visa applicant.

4. Know the Program and How It Fits Your Career Plans

If you are not able to explain the reasons why 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 work or stay in the United States. You should also be able to explain h

Several U.S. consulates around the globe have created YouTube videos which explain the visa process at their specific posts. Always check your specific U.S. embassy or consulate to see if a new YouTube video is available. A select list of consular YouTube videos is located at the end of this resource.

Also be sure to check the [U.S. State Department's Visa Appointment and Processing Wait Times](#) web page, to find average visa appointment and processing wait times at the consulate where you will be applying for your visa.

8. Employment

Your main purpose in coming to the United States should be to study, rather than for the chance to work before or after graduation. While many students work on- or off-campus during their studies, such employment is incidental (secondary/optional) to their main purpose of completing their U.S. education. You must be able to clearly explain your plan to return home at the end of your program. If your spouse or children are also applying for an accompanying F-2 visa, be aware that F-2 dependents cannot, under any circumstances, be employed in the United States. If asked, be prepared to address what your spouse

platforms that they have used during the five years preceding their visa application, and to provide any identifiers or handles they used on those platforms. DOS also added a similar item to the Form DS-260 immigrant visa application. See [NAFSA's page on the DS-160 social media question](#) for additional information.

Administrative processing delays

Some students may experience delays in obtaining a visa because of "administrative processing." This commonly occurs if your name is similar to another individual and the consulate needs to check with other government agencies about your status or background. It may also happen when your area of study is thought to be in a field of sensitive or critical technology, or your faculty adviser is working with sensitive research materials. Some consular officers may even require additional letters from program directors or academic advisers explaining the specific type of research the student will be involved in and what kind of access to sensitive technology the student will have. If you are unsure whether this applies to your situation, [check with your specific U.S. embassy or consulate](#). For more information, visit the [U.S. Department of State's Administrative Processing Information web page](#).

Past visits to the United States

You may be asked to explain past visits and stays in the United States and/or any prior visa statuses held by you or your family members. Also, students who formerly held an employment-based immigration status or had Optional Practical Training (OPT) or STEM OPT might also need to explain the reasons for additional study in the United States instead of working at home.

If you stayed beyond your authorized stay in the United States or violated an immigration status in the past, be prepared to explain what happened and if available, provide supporting documentation regarding the circumstances. You should consider consulting an experienced immigration lawyer for guidance on whether the Overstay or Unlawful Presence provisions impact your eligibility to return to the United States. See [NAFSA's page on Unlawful Presence](#).

Third country nationals

If you are not a citizen or permanent resident of the country in which you currently live or the country where you plan to apply for a visa (i.e., you are a "third country national"), you may also wish to explain your intent to return to that country upon completion of your studies in the United States.

Arrests and convictions

Documentation should accompany any arrests or convictions within the U.S. or abroad, including any arrests or convictions for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Always check with an experienced immigration attorney if you have any current or past legal issues.

A select list of videos available through U.S. Embassy websites. (Alphabetical by City)

[Amman, Jordan](#) (3:52)

A step-by-step tutorial on how to navigate the online system for applying for a U.S. visa in Jordan.

Ankara, Turkey (2:35)