

# Getting a Student Visa 101

Obtaining a student visa can be a daunting task and needs careful preparation on the part of the student, the parents, and/or whoever will be financially sponsoring the student's education. To make sure that the visa you apply for is accepted you will need to make sure you are **well prepared** for the interview with the Consular Officer. Be over prepared!

Also, **PLAN AHEAD!** Embassies and Consulates are very busy during the summer months due to many people trying to get student visas. Schedule an appointment as soon as possible.

Below is the outline of what steps need to be taken to obtain your student visa. Take some time to read everything.

## **I-20 Document**

First, you must have your I-20 document. This is the document that the college sends to you after your application has been accepted for admission and after you have sent in the Certificate of Finances which explains how you intend to pay for your college education. If you have been accepted but have not received an I-20 contact the college immediately to find out what, if anything, is still needed.

Once you have your I-20 you are ready to apply for the student visa.

### **A few things to check on your I-20 before the interview:**

-Make sure all the information on your I-20 is correct and matches all the information on your passport (name, country of birth and birth date, address)

-Are the reporting and completion dates correct? These are the dates that you intend to begin and finish your college degree. Make sure the reporting date has not passed. Your I-20 expires after the reporting date.

-Is the financial information on the I-20 correct?

-Is the I-20 signed by a college official?

## **Meeting with the Consular Officer**

The interview with Consular Officer is very important and requires you to be well prepared for the questions they will ask you. Know that most, if not all interviews, will be conducted in English. It would be best for you to brush up on your conversational English speaking abilities before the interview. Due to the volume of applicants for student visas, the interview will be quick, roughly 2-3 minutes, so it is important to be concise about your educational plans and career goals after you earn your degree. Usually the interview will include you and the Consular Officer. No other family members will be allowed in the room with you.

They will want to know the following:

**-Are you a real student?** Make sure you bring every piece of official documentation that proves you are a real student seeking an education in America. Bring your high school transcripts, test scores (SAT, ACT, and/or TOEFL), national examination results, and anything else that will prove your authenticity as a student and your commitment to earning a college degree. To prove your commitment it will be helpful if you sufficient information

on the college you are entering, the degree program itself (example: computer engineering, health sciences, business) and what you plan to do with your degree. Bring your acceptance letter from the admission office to prove you have been accepted for admission.

**-Can you pay for college?** The Officer will want to know exactly how you intend to pay for your college degree. He or she will want to see documents that prove you, your parents, or your sponsor is financially stable enough to send you to college in the United States. Know that you have better chances of being approved if your parents are paying for your education. If someone other than your parents is sponsoring your education be prepared to discuss your relationship with this person(s). Make sure you have clear evidence showing where the money is coming from. If money is coming from multiple sources, be prepared with a detailed list written out by your sponsor that documents each source of funding.

**-Will you be returning to your home country with your new college degree?** During the interview you will be asked about your economic, family, and social ties with your home country. The Officer will try to assess how close you are to your country of residence in order to be sure that your stay in America will be temporary. You will be asked questions such as: How many family members live in the United States or in your home country? What assets do you have at home that you may inherit once you've earned your degree (i.e. land, house, family business)? What is your plan after you've earned your degree? Will you be coming home to contribute your new skills to your community?

*A review of helpful information to bring to the interview:*

- ✓ **Financial information:**
  - Original tax returns from the past 3 years
  - Original bank records and/or fixed deposit statements from your parents or sponsor from the past 3 years
  - Proof of all assets you or your sponsor will use to pay for your education including living expenses
  - If applicable, business licenses or registrations
- ✓ **Educational documents:**
  - High school diploma
  - Official test scores (SAT, ACT, TOEFL)
- ✓ **College/University information:**
  - I-20 document signed by you and a representative from the college
  - Letter of acceptance from the admission office
  - Programs & majors including the major you intend to complete
  - Courses and exact timeline for completion of the degree
  - Know everything about the school you're trying to attend (size, location, athletic teams, clubs and student organizations that might interest you, names of admission counselors, etc.)

### **If you are refused a visa..**

There are times when a student visa is not approved. It is not a guaranteed deal. However, if your application and interview for a visa is not approved don't feel like this is the end of the road for you. The Officer will make a decision at the end of the interview. Ask the Consular Officer to send you a letter explaining why you were refused. You do have the opportunity to apply again. But if you do apply again, make sure you are more prepared for than you were the first time. You may be asked to present new evidence of everything that was explained above.

