



INTERNATIONAL STUDENT & SCHOLAR SERVICES

The University of Alabama at Birmingham

Student Visa Interview Tips

Sourced from the Nafsa.org website, here is some important information to keep in mind before your visa interview. Preparation is important, but remember that the Consular Officer wants to hear natural answers, not a rehearsed speech. Follow this advice and you will greatly increase your chances of getting that F-1 or J-1 student visa!

Ties to Your Home Country

The primary reason many student visas are denied is due to intention to immigrate. Consular Officers are trained to view all non-immigrant visa applicants (including student visa applicants) as 'intending immigrants' until you, the applicant, prove otherwise. Therefore, it's your duty to prove ties to your home country and convince the officer that you intend to complete your degree program and then return home. Examples of home country ties are: family, owning a house or apartment, job or future job opportunities, financial prospects that you own or will inherit, investments, etc. Anything you can discuss that connects you to your homeland will be beneficial for your application. It may also be a good idea to talk about how you specifically plan to use your degree in your home country upon completion. Proving intent to return home can be difficult, and there not a single answer or document that will ensure your application is approved. Remember to always answer honestly and never try to mislead or lie to the officer.

The Department of State's Foreign Affairs Manual is a good source to get further clarification regarding what Consular Officers are looking for: [\[9 FAM 402.5-5\(E\)\]](#).

Be Prepared To List Recent Social Media Usernames

The State Department is now implementing more advanced screening procedures for student visa applicants. Come prepared with usernames from all of your social media accounts from the last five years, as well as previous addresses, and recent travel history.

English

The visa interview will most likely be done English, and you will be expected to thoroughly answer a few questions about your study plans, career goals, and ability to pay for your education in the U.S. As mentioned above, it is obviously important to prepare, but do not rehearse robotic answers☺! (The consular officer will not look



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favorably on answers that are obviously rehearsed) Although it is a stressful experience, they expect you to answer naturally, clearly and thoroughly. They are forced to make a quick judgement based on a few questions and documents, but if you address all their concerns you most likely be approved.

One other point to consider, do not let family members speak for you. The officer wants to interview you, not your family.

Be Prepared to Discuss Your Major and Career Goals

You should have a general idea about your career plans and how studying in the U.S. will help you achieve your future goals. If you plan to do research, you should be able to briefly give an overview of your research goals and why you chose UAB to do that research. A letter from your academic department may be beneficial in communicating this.

Be Brief and Stay Positive

Visa interviews are often very quick and a whirlwind experience. Consular Officers are under pressure to do a specific number of interviews per hour at busy consulates, so don't be surprised (or worried) if your interview lasts less than five minutes. Because the interview is so quick, it's important to make a good first impression. Answer each question completely, but try to stay brief and on topic. It's also recommended to dress nicely and have and maintain a positive attitude throughout. Most importantly, do not argue with the officer for any reason. They have broad discretion, so you want to stay on their good side 😊.

Supporting Documentation

Make sure you review the embassy's or consulate's website and bring all required documentation. During your interview, it is likely the officer will ask for your I-20 or DS-2019, personal financial documents, scholarship letter or assistantship letter from UAB, and possibly a letter from your academic department outlining your research goals (for PhD candidates). The financial information on your I-20 or DS-2019 should match the documents you present to the consular officer. Make sure to verify this prior to your interview.



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Different Requirements for Different Countries

Keep in mind that different embassies and consulates have different standards and concerns when interviewing student visa applicants. Intent to immigrate is a concern at every consular post, but more so in countries that have struggling economies, or countries where there is a very high rate of immigration to the US. Having close relatives that live in the US (fairly or not), may negatively impact your visa application.

Employment

Throughout the interview, always remember your primary intent is to study full time in the US, not employment. Of course, part time employment on the UAB campus is permitted, and many students will pursue off campus OPT or CPT during their course of study. However, it should be made clear to the consular officer that employment will be incidental to your studies and research. Also know that F-2 dependents cannot work in the US under any circumstances.

Children under the age of 18 may enroll in secondary school, and all dependents may enroll part-time at universities or community colleges.

Dependents Remaining in Home Country

Be prepared to address the issue of how your dependents will support themselves while you are in the US on an F-1 or J-1 visa, especially if you have been the family's major source of income. The officer may deny your application if he suspects you may attempt to earn extra income in the US and wire it to your home country. If your dependents intend to come to the US in the future, it is advised they apply at the same consulate or embassy where, you the primary visa holder, interviewed.

Other Special Considerations

Delays can occur for many different reasons. Applicants requiring additional background checks, or those planning to study or research subjects sensitive to national security, may experience administrative processing. This can delay your visa



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application by weeks and may even lead to an outright denial. If you are denied, ask the consular officer for any documents that should be submitted for future applications. You may apply again for a student visa if you can prove your situation has changed since the previous interview. Also, you may be required to discuss any previous time spent in the U.S. Overstaying a previous visa may hurt your chances when applying for future visas.

Many embassy websites post short videos to help applicants prepare for the interview (and therefore lower your anxiety level). If you cannot find any videos for your specific embassy or consulate, search online for any relevant video postings. These can be extremely helpful and will give you an idea of what to expect. Good luck!

Source: Nafsa.org

http://www.nafsa.org/Professional_Resources/Browse_by_Interest/International_Students_and_Scholars/Network_Resources/International_Student_and_Scholar_Services/10_Points_to_Remember_When_Applying_for_a_Student_Visa/