International Student Visa and Entry Process

November 18, 2020
Today’s Agenda

1. Meet your Global Ambassadors
2. Overview of student visa and entry process
3. Scheduling the visa interview appointment
4. The visa interview appointment
   a. What to expect and how to prepare
   b. Advice and tips
   c. Possible outcomes
5. Traveling to and arriving in the U.S.
   a. What to expect
   b. How to prepare
6. Resources
7. Q & A

Ask a question in the Q&A box or email ies@umbc.edu
Today’s Global Ambassadors

Sampada B.
M.S. Information Systems
Mumbai, India

Nastaran A.
B.S. Biology
Tabriz, Iran

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The Student Visa Process

1. Issues I-20 required to apply for F-1 Visa
2. Issues F-1 Visa
3. Permission to enter U.S. Assigns F-1 status

U.S. Department of State

U.S. Customs and Border Protection

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Form I-20

- Issued by UMBC after admission
  - Program dates, level, study
  - Estimated cost of attendance
  - Permission to apply for F-1 visa
- Required at U.S. embassy and U.S. border
- Most important document for maintaining immigration status in future, not visa
- DO NOT LOSE
Scheduling visa appointment

1. Pay I-901 SEVIS fee - [www.fmjfee.com](http://www.fmjfee.com)
   a. Must have Form I-20 to pay the fee
   b. Current F-1 SEVIS fee $350

2. Complete DS-160: Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application - [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)
   a. Must have Form I-20 to pay the fee
   b. Current DS-160 fee $160

3. Schedule a visa interview appointment at local U.S. Embassy or Consulate
   a. Each U.S. embassy or consulate process differs slightly
   b. Refer to website of specific embassy or consulate for detailed instructions at that post

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The visa interview appointment

Required documents:

- Form I-20 (signed)
- I-901 SEVIS fee receipt
- DS-160 receipt and barcode page
- Valid passport
- Transcripts from previous study (secondary school, undergraduate degree)
- Test results (TOEFL/iELTS, GRE, SAT etc.)
- Financial documents

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How far in advance did you schedule your visa appointment?

What documents did you bring with you to your appointment?

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The visa interview appointment

- U.S. law assumes all applicants intend to immigrate
  - Burden of proof is on you to overcome that assumption
- Must establish strong ties to home country
  - 9 FAM 402.5(E)(1) “Possess residence in a foreign country he or she has no intention of abandoning”
  - “Intends to depart upon completion of the approved activity”
- Consular officers are under pressure to act quickly
  - Conducted in less than three minutes
  - Usually conducted in English

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Describe the day of your visa appointment?

What was the embassy like where you had your interview?

How long did your interview last?

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The visa interview appointment

Consular officer may ask:

- What do you intend to do after completing your degree?
- About your family’s business in your home country or in the U.S.
- Why UMBC and why this particular program and degree?
- What are your long term career and academic goals?
- Where is UMBC?
- How will you support yourself while in the U.S.?
- How will you support your family in the U.S. or at home if they stay?

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What questions did the consular officer ask you?

When did you learn if you were approved?

What documents did the officer ask for?

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Tips for a Successful Visa Interview Appointment

● Be prepared to establish ties to home country and nonimmigrant intent
  ○ Do you or your family own property?
  ○ Investments or inheritance in home country?
  ○ Did you apply to the visa lottery in the past?
  ○ Do you have close relatives who are U.S. citizens or permanent residence?

● Do your research
  ○ What is UMBC? Where is UMBC? Why UMBC?
  ○ What do you know about Maryland? Baltimore? Baltimore County?
  ○ Be prepared to explain your academic program/field of study in layman’s terms
  ○ Why did you choose UMBC and not a different university?
  ○ What are your career plans and how does this program help you achieve them?

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Tips for a successful visa interview appointment

● Practice, Practice, Practice
  ○ Most interviews conducted in English
  ○ Speak for yourself
  ○ Be brief and be positive

● Be honest
  ○ A lie (however imaterial) will likely result in denial
  ○ Social media question on DS-160

● Be concise and prepared
  ○ Organize supporting documents in advance
  ○ Remember, you have 2-3 minutes (if you are lucky)

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What tips and advice do you have for visa applicants?

What is one thing you know now that you wish you knew before your interview?

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Visa interview outcomes

1. Approval  
   a. The vast majority of visa applications are approved

2. Failure to demonstrate nonimmigrant intent - INA 214 (b)  
   a. Burden of proof is on applicant  
   b. Credibility and evidence - does your plan make sense?  
   c. May apply again

3. Administrative Processing - INA 221 (g)  
   a. Consular processing - clerical or security (sensitive technology, terror, clearance)  
   b. “Washington-related”

4. Serious Ineligibilities - INA 212 (a)  
   a. Health, previous overstay, security concerns, previous criminal charge, etc..

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Traveling to the U.S.

- A visa is not a guarantee of entry to the U.S., it is only permission to apply.
- F-1 Visa holders can request entry to the U.S. 30 days prior to I-20 start date.
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection CBP has broad authority at U.S. Ports of Entry.
  - All arriving “applicants for admission” are inspected by CBP to determine admissibility.

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Inspection at Port of Entry

Primary inspection

Required documents:
- Passport with at least six months future validity
- Form I-20

Suggested documents:
- Admission letter/academic transcripts
- Evidence of financial support

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Inspection at Port of Entry

Secondary inspection

- Not a cause for alarm
- Applicants to taken to secondary:
  - SEVIS technical issues
  - Efficiency
  - Extra screening
  - Review documents
  - Officer training issue

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Tell us about your experience(s) at U.S. Ports of Entry

What kind of questions have you been asked?

Have you ever been taken to secondary inspection?

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Admission to the U.S.

Assigns I-94 number and admission status:

- F-1
- D/S
- May or may not stamp your passport

I-515A

- Temporary admission
- Must contact a DSO (IES staff) to comply

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Port of Entry Tips

● Remain calm
● Keep your documents in your carry on luggage
● Ensure your passport has six months of future validity
  ○ Present F-1 visa foil, not B-1/B-2
● Do not lie to a CBP officer
● Know how to contact UMBC
  ○ After hours: 410-455-5555 ask to speak to “IES”
● Check your I-94 record

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What tips do you have for students traveling to the U.S.?
Questions?

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Resources

- NAFSA Ten Points to Remember When Applying for a Student Visa
  https://www.nafsa.org/professional-resources/browse-by-interest/10-points-remember-when-applying-student-visa
  ○ Be sure to checkout the videos at the bottom!
- International Education Services - “F-1 Visa Process” www.ies.umbc.edu
- U.S. Department of State Student Visa Page
  https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study/student-visa.html
- Your local embassy or consulate is always the best source of information

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Thank You!

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