



International Student & Scholar Services Office

Visa Information

How do I get a student visa?

Once you have been admitted to SMU and have presented financial guarantee documents showing that you have adequate resources to support your studies at SMU for one academic year (with the understanding that resources will be available to you for each year of study thereafter), the International Office will issue the Form I-20 or the Form DS 20-19. You must take the form you have been issued together with your Letter of Acceptance, financial guarantee documents and a valid passport to the U.S. Embassy or Consulate having jurisdiction over your place of permanent residence and apply for a student visa to study at SMU. In addition, you must also pay the new SEVIS fee **before** going to the U.S. Embassy or Consulate. Information about the new **SEVIS fee** may be found by clicking on the following link:

<https://www.fmjfee.com/i901fee/index.jsp>

Only the United States Government is authorized to issue student visas. SMU is not authorized to issue a student visa or any other type of visa. SMU can only issue the documents required for applying for a student visa. Please check "10 Tips on Getting a U.S. Visa" for more information.

How do I maintain my visa status?

Maintaining your visa status allows you to be granted immigration benefits, such as Optional Practical Training (OPT). Obtaining a visa with a specific expiration date is not an assurance that you will be able to stay in the United States. Your right to stay in the United States may be forfeited at any time if you violate the regulations of your visa status.

In order to maintain your status you must:

- Maintain a valid passport at all times
- Receive written authorization to make changes to your I-20 or DS-2019 activity
- Complete **a full course of study** each fall and spring semester
- Obtain permission **before** accepting any employment in the U.S.

- Complete your course of study on or before the completion date in section 5 of your I-20 or in section 3 of your DS-2019. To request permission to extend this date, you must apply to the SMU International Office one month **before** the completion date.
- Obtain a new signature on your I-20 or DS-2019 **before** traveling out of the U.S.
- Update your U.S. Residence address and phone number in “Access.SMU” within 10 days of the change. Changes in your Home Country address must be reported to the International Office within 10 days from the change as well.
- Maintain contact with the ISSS Office by checking all e-mail correspondence at least once per week using your official SMU e-mail address
- Maintain SMU health insurance coverage for yourself and any dependents while in the U.S.
- Obey all federal and state laws
- Leave the U.S. when your I-20 or DS-2019 expires, or you graduate, or you have ended or suspended your SMU program
- Meet with an SMU International Student Advisor for an exit interview one month prior to your final day of class
- Complete the appropriate tax forms for the IRS every year

My visa has expired. What do I do?

- If your visa has expired, your legal status in the United States is not affected. Your status is linked to the validity of your passport, the I-94 card, and your I-20 or DS-2019 expiration dates. Please note that your I-94 card is marked “D/S”. This means that you were admitted to the United States for duration of status and that your status expires when you reach the expiration date on your Form I-20 (line item #5) or DS-2019 (line item #3).
- The visa (F-1 or J-1) is an entry/re-entry permit and only needs to be valid if you travel out of the United States and must return to continue your program. If this is the case, and your visa has expired, you must have your visa renewed outside of the United States at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

10 TIPS ON GETTING A U.S. VISA

Points to Remember When Applying for a Nonimmigrant Visa

(courtesy of NAFSA: Association of International Educators)

1. 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 home town, 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 which 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.

2. 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! If you are coming to the United States solely to study intensive English, be prepared to explain how English will be useful for you in your home country.

3. 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 in case there are questions, for example about funding, they should wait in the waiting room.

4. 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 United States relates to your future professional career when you return home.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. NOT ALL COUNTRIES ARE EQUAL. Applicants from countries suffering economic problems or from countries where many students have remained in the United States 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 United States.

8. 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 off-campus 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 United States. If asked, be prepared to address what your spouse intends to do with his or her time while in the United States. Volunteer work and attending school part-time are permitted activities.

9. 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.

10. 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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United States Embassies & Consulars
<http://www.usembassy.gov/>

Visa Denials
http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/denials/denials_1361.html