

How do I get an interview at a U.S. Consulate?

Once you receive your I-20, use your SEVIS ID number which begins N000, and the University of West Florida's Program Code which is MIA214F00366000, to pay the \$200 SEVIS fee. You can pay this fee online by going to <http://www.fmjfee.com>.

After you have paid the SEVIS fee you can contact the nearest embassy or consulate. Go to <http://usembassy.state.gov> to locate the U.S. embassy or consulate nearest to you and determine what obtaining a visa appointment entails. Rules and regulations regarding embassy appointments differ depending on country or city where appointment is made.

To determine what the approximate wait times are for nonimmigrant visa appointments at your nearest consulate or embassy, go to http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/wait/tempvisitors_wait.php, scroll down to the bottom, and click on the arrow. Select the city where you plan to schedule the visa appointment and follow the link to determine the wait time for F-1 nonimmigrant student visas.

Before you make travel arrangements or purchase tickets to enter the United States, it is advisable to wait until you have received an interview and have been notified that you have been approved for a visa.

Once you have been advised by the consular officer that you will receive an F-1 visa to enter the United States, contact UWF's International Student Office by e-mailing intered@uwf.edu and let us know the good news.

What can I expect during my consular interview? Which documents should I bring with me?

Section 214(b) is part of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). It states:

Every alien shall be presumed to be an immigrant until he establishes to the satisfaction of the consular officer, at the time of application for admission, that he is entitled to a nonimmigrant status...

In laymen's language, this means that the burden is on you to prove to the consular officer that you do not intend to *immigrate* to the United States, that your intention is to study here and not remain here permanently.

For the purposes of your nonimmigrant student visa interview, you must prove to the consular officer that your intention is to return to your home country upon completion of your degree program.

To that end and to avoid being denied a nonimmigrant visa based on 214(b), bear in mind that you must prove to the consular officer that your desire is to remain *temporarily* in the United States and that you ultimately want to use the degree(s) obtained in the U.S. to better your future in your home country.

It is suggested that you bring:

- Bank statements from your home country
- Letters from immediate family stating that you intend to study in the US and then return to your home country
- A letter offering you a job in the future
- Evidence of any property you own (car, land...)
- Evidence of property owned by members of your immediate family

10 Points to Remember When Applying for a Nonimmigrant Visa

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 United States 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 is 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 are 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.