

Excerpts from the Visa Counseling session held at the American Center, New Delhi

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Introduction

This document contains excerpts from the VISA counseling session held on 10th May 2002 at the American Center, Barakhamba Road, New Delhi. The purpose of the session was to familiarize student visa seekers with the VISA process and answer their queries. This document looks at the VISA process from both Interviewer's and Applicant's perspective.

Interviewer's perspective

A VISA counselor or interviewer looks for following things in an applicant

- Seriousness for studies
- Applicant's family background
- Ability to cover first year expenses
- Reason for coming back to home country.

Seriousness for studies – The VISA counselor wants to assure that the applicant is a serious student. It should not happen that the applicant goes to the United States on a student VISA, gives up his studies and ends up working at a gas station.

Family Background – By looking at your family background, the visa officer figures out where you are coming from. It helps her decide whether you are a potential immigrant or not. If you have a family business or a lot of property in the home country then it gives you a reason to come back. On the other hand if your family is not deeply rooted to your home country and your parents don't have a steady source of income then you may be viewed as a potential immigrant.

Ability to cover first year expenses – The VISA counselor wants to assure that you have enough liquid funds to support yourself during the first year of your studies. For this purpose the VISA counselor might want to take a look at your sponsor's bankbooks etc.

Reason for coming back to the home country – The VISA counselor would like to ensure that you have a solid reason for coming back to your home country after completion of your studies. The VISA authority understands that human thinking is volatile and may change in future. The authority however, wants to ensure that at least in present, you have a reason for returning to your home country once your studies are over.

Applicant's Perspective

Finances

- **What all is counted in liquid assets?** – Liquid cash in bank accounts of your sponsors. Money invested by your sponsor in PF, PPF, LIC, Security Bonds such as RBI and ICICI bonds. Stocks and gold are not considered liquid, as there is no surety of their value. A stock may be worth million dollars today and fifty cents tomorrow.
- **My I-20 Says Education funded through family sources. Can I show combined funding from both my parents?** – Yes you can.
- **Can my uncle sponsor me instead of my father, whose name is on I-20?** – Yes. You may change your sponsor. However, you need to justify the change. Moreover, in case of a parent sponsoring his child, the motive is pretty clear – All parents want to provide the best education to their children. However in case of your uncle, it is not clear. Why would he spend thousands of dollars on your education? You need to justify this
- **What all documents do I need in order to prove my financial sanity?** – Bank Statements for last six months. PF passbook or balance sheet for the previous financial year (Required only if you are using PF as one of your liquid assets component). Similarly in case of LIC, RBI bonds, original certificates are required.
- **I have my money scattered in various accounts. What do I do?** – Bring bank books/statements for all accounts. Also, if you have done any manipulations like transferring money from one account to other etc then be prepared to justify them. Basically whatever your case may be, there should be a reason behind it and you should be able to justify it.
- **What is value of CA statement?** – None per se. You can use it if your money is spread over various accounts and you would like to present a summary report of your assets. However, it should be complimented with original bank statements and certificates.
- **Can I get a simple letter from my bank stating that I have so much money?** – No. Original bankbooks are required.
- **Can I fund my education through loan?** – Yes. However, be prepared to justify the repayment plan

Switching Visas / Visa Application

- **I am currently on H1-B VISA. If my F-1 VISA is rejected, will my H1-B stand cancelled?** – Most probably it won't be cancelled. However, it depends on the counselor officer.
- **I have been to the U.S. on a tourist visa. Will it be counted as an advantage?** – Yes. Since it shows that you performed your VISA related duties righteously. You were expected to come back to your home country after your stay and you did.
- **My Passport was issued in Mumbai but I want to apply from Delhi since I have been working in Delhi for last six months. Is this possible?** – Yes you may apply. However the decision may vary from one counselor officer to another. We would prefer that you apply from a place where your home ties are strongest. In any case, if your VISA

is rejected then the counselor officer will put a small 'G' on your passport. When you reapply from your native place, the 'G' on your passport will tell the counselor officer over there that your VISA was rejected because you applied from wrong place and not because of some problem in your application.

- **If I am admitted to some other university after getting a VISA and wish to re-apply, what do I do?** – You will have to reappear for the interview and apply with the new I-20. If the VISA officer is satisfied with your application (as per the new I-20 requirements) then your old VISA will be cancelled and new VISA will be issued.
- **When asked about relatives in U.S. What should I say?** – Be honest. If you have relatives in U.S., brothers, sisters, parents then don't hide it.
- **Does it help to have many I 20s?** - Yes. It helps if you have many I20s or had applied to many schools. It gives the impression that you are serious student. You went through the pain of selecting schools. However, at the same time, it is understood that certain programs are very specialized and are offered by selected schools. In such a case, if you applied to just one school and were selected, you'll be fine.
- **If I want to switch my university during Masters/PhD, whom should I contact?** - Once in the U.S. all VISA related issues should be addressed to INS. However, INS is in the process of modifying VISA rules. Although these modifications are still under public consideration, in future, on switching schools, you may have to come back to your home country and reapply for VISA.
- **My Spouse would be accompanying me to U.S. when should she apply for F2 VISA?** – It is better if both of you apply together.
- **What is the duration of F2 Visa?** – Same as the corresponding F1
- **Form DS157: what does "Full Name (In Native Alphabet)" mean?** – Write your name in your native language. For e.g. if you are Indian then write your name in Hindi
- **Form DS157: In 8, it is written, "Full Name and Address of Contact Person or Organization in the United States (Include Telephone Number)." What does that mean?** – Give Name, address and phone number of the University you'll be attending