



### Greetings from International Student and Scholar Services!



Ellen Dussourd, Director of ISSS

Welcome to the University at Buffalo, which we call UB! We are delighted that you have chosen UB to pursue your higher degree. We are confident that UB will offer you many opportunities for personal and professional growth, and that your experience here will be enriching, challenging and rewarding.

We are glad to have the chance to acquaint you via this newsletter with the Office of International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS). ISSS serves UB's international community. We provide immigration services, and initial and on-going orientation programs to students. To all members of the community we provide assistance with daily life matters (e.g. obtaining a driver's license and Social Security Card), cultural programming and enrichment activities.

Your first contact with our office and our staff will be at International Student Orientation. During the orientation program, we will help you meet your immediate needs, and prepare for your studies and life in Buffalo. You will be able to get your UB ID card, e-mail account and immunizations, open cell

phone and bank accounts, take any required tests, and register for your classes. You will also learn about University services, such as health and recreation services, libraries and computing centers. In addition, you will learn tips for finding on-campus employment, obtaining a driver's license, using your health insurance, applying for a Social Security card, and becoming involved in the Buffalo community. Last, students who have assistantships will receive tips to help them succeed as teaching or research assistants.

After the orientation program, we will assist you through our immigration services, and workshops, e-newsletters, trips and cultural programs. We offer walk-in, phone and e-mail immigration services, and workshops and e-mail updates to help you comply with immigration regulations and apply for the immigration benefits for which you are eligible. We also offer workshops on topics such as car buying, winter driving, surviving New York winters, income tax form preparation, job search tips and cross-cultural communication.

In addition, we organize a Global CINEMAspectives Film & Discussion series, an International Student Mentoring Program, International Education Week activities, and trips to Niagara Falls, the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, New York State parks and NHL hockey games, as well as downhill and cross-country ski trips, among others.

In our weekly e-newsletters, we keep you informed about our workshops and those offered by other university departments, our trips and activities, events organized by International Student Clubs, changes in immigration regulations, and cultural programs such as International Education Week.

In this packet, there is more information about the orientation program and a registration form. You may fax the completed form to us, or register online or by e-mail.

We look forward to meeting you at International Student Orientation and helping you make the most of your UB experience!

### Visa Application Tips Inside

If you intend to apply for a student visa, enclosed in this packet is your Certificate of Visa Eligibility. In this newsletter, we offer some helpful tips for your visa application.

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## Applying for Your Student Visa

If you applied to UB as an F-1 or J-1 student, enclosed in this packet is your Certificate of Visa Eligibility (Form I-20 or DS-2019). As you are probably aware, gaining admission to a U.S. university is only the first step in the process of beginning your studies. You must now apply for your U.S. visa using a Certificate of Visa Eligibility. This article will address general requirements and provide some tips for making the visa application process a smooth one.

U.S. Consulates allow students to apply for a student visa 120 days before the “start date” indicated on their I-20 or DS-2019. While some consulates will accept visa applications more than 120 days in advance, they will not actually issue the visa until the 120-day mark. We recommend that you check with the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in your area for visa application instructions. Most consulates have very strict requirements about how you should submit your visa application form and documents. Visit [usembassy.state.gov](http://usembassy.state.gov) for an official list of U.S. Embassies and Consulates in your country.

There is no standard visa processing time. Some U.S. Consulates review and issue a student visa in one week or less while others may take two months or more. We strongly recommend that you begin the visa application process as soon as you can. May through August are the busiest months for issuing student visas. Allow enough time for visa processing in case you are called for an interview or must come back a second or third time. Some visa applicants must also undergo a background check, which can take two to eight weeks or longer. For more information on visa wait times, visit [travel.state.gov/visa/temp/wait/wait\\_4638.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/wait/wait_4638.html).

We must caution you, however, to be patient and wait to apply for your student visa until you have an I-20 or DS-2019 from your chosen university. Do not use another school’s I-20 or DS-2019 for your visa application unless you plan to attend that school.

To be eligible for a visa, U.S. Consulates require that your passport be valid for at least six months after the date you plan

to enter the U.S. Even if the Consular Officer does not enforce this requirement, the immigration officer at the Port of Entry has the right to refuse you admission to the U.S. and send you back home. So, check your passport now – better to be safe than sorry.

Please be aware that, when you apply for your student visa, nearly all U.S. Consular posts take digital fingerprints and a photograph as part of the visa application process. These fingerprints and photographs are then compared to the fingerprints and photograph that are taken when you enter the U.S.

Most U.S. Consulates do not accept letters or faxes sent to them from U.S. universities. We will not be able to honor requests for letters of support sent on your behalf. The merits of your visa application will be determined by your own efforts and your documents.

For more information about the visa application process and preparing to study in the U.S., visit [educationusa.state.gov](http://educationusa.state.gov).

## SEVIS Fee

If you will apply for an initial F-1 or J-1 Student Visa to enter the U.S., you will likely be required to pay a SEVIS fee to the U.S. government before you can appear for your visa interview at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate. Check with your local consulate for details. International students already in the U.S. and transferring or changing programs or degree level might not need to pay the fee. However, almost all new students will need to pay the SEVIS fee. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) maintains a website with detailed information about the SEVIS fee. Read the instructions and Frequently Asked Questions about who has to pay the SEVIS fee and how to pay it. The SEVIS fee can be paid through the mail or on-line with a credit card. We encourage you to use the on-line payment method as it is much faster than paying by mail. If you are not able to access the SEVIS Fee Payment website, use the paper form available below or contact UB International Admissions and a form can be faxed to you. Please note, however, that the paper form may take more than one month to process and thus will delay your visa interview. After you obtain your SEVIS Fee receipt, you will be able to appear for your visa interview.

### UB SEVIS Fee Information

[www.buffalo.edu/intlservices/pdf\\_files/F-1FeeIncrease.pdf](http://www.buffalo.edu/intlservices/pdf_files/F-1FeeIncrease.pdf)

### U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement SEVIS Fee Instructions & Frequently Asked Questions

[www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/faq.htm](http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/faq.htm)

### On-line SEVIS Fee Payment Website

[www.fmjfee.com](http://www.fmjfee.com)

### Paper SEVIS Fee Payment Form (use only if you cannot access the above website)

[www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/I-901.pdf](http://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/I-901.pdf)

Questions? Contact the U.S. Consulate at which you will apply for your visa

[usembassy.state.gov](http://usembassy.state.gov)

## What do Consular Officers look for?

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**1** *They must be sure that you have the ability and intention to be a full-time student at the school to which you have been accepted.*

You must demonstrate this by presenting your Certificate of Visa Eligibility (I-20 Form for F-1 visas or DS-2019 Form for J-1 visas) and your official university acceptance letter. The U.S. Consulate may also require that you present documents showing scholastic preparation: academic transcripts (with above average grades), TOEFL score reports and standardized test scores (SAT, GRE, GMAT, etc.). Sometimes the Consular Officer asks to see documents that the university did not require; that's why it's always a good idea to take the typical standardized tests even if not required by UB.

**2** *They must be sure that you have adequate financial resources to pay for all of your educational and living expenses without needing to work while in the U.S.*

You must show sufficient financial resources by showing the Consular Officer your financial documents.

If you received a scholarship and/or an assistantship, be sure that your award letter is printed on official university department letterhead paper. If not, contact your academic department immediately to request it as the Consular Officer will expect these letters to be printed on university letterhead paper.

If you're providing your own finances (from your personal funds, your family's or another sponsor's), check with the U.S. Consulate in your country to see what forms of documentation they require. Some consulates require bank statements, past tax statements, company letters, employment contracts, etc. Some consulates require that you show evidence of funds for all years of study; some require evidence of only one year; others require that you actually bring a bank draft for the amount listed on the I-20. Check with the U.S. Consulate to see what you must bring.

**3** *They must be sure that you intend to go to the U.S. only to study. They must be sure that you have no intention of working illegally. They must be sure that you do not intend to immigrate to the U.S.*

Consular Officers are supposed to issue student visas only if they are convinced beyond any doubt that you do not intend to immigrate to the U.S. They must be 100% convinced at the time of your visa application that you only intend to go to the U.S. only to study, that you will not work illegally, and that you will return to your home country after completing your studies.

You must attempt to document your intentions of returning home by showing that you have "strong ties" to your home country and legitimate, self-serving reasons to return home after graduation. "Strong ties" to your home country are things that bind you to your hometown or homeland: future job, family, financial assets, property that you will inherit, investments, etc. You should explain how you will gain the education and talent to succeed in jobs that are in high demand in your country. You should show that you are a familial son or daughter and feel obligated to return home after graduation. If the Consular Officer thinks that you have the intention of staying or working in the U.S. after graduation, your student visa application may be denied.

## Advice for Your Visa Interview

### What can you expect in the interview?

- The interview will likely be conducted in English.
- The interview will be very short (probably 2–3 minutes).
- No other family members, friends or representatives can participate in the interview with you.
- The Consular Officer will render his/her decision immediately when the interview is finished.

### What does the Consular Officer expect from you?

- Honesty.
- Short and direct answers, not a memorized speech.
- Good English proving that you have the necessary language skills to succeed in a competitive university in the U.S.
- Forms and documents as specified in the consulate's instructions.

### What kinds of questions might you expect in the interview?

- What is/was your secondary school (or university) GPA (grade point average)?
- Did you apply to local universities? If not, why not? If yes, why aren't you going to a local university?
- How many U.S. schools did you apply to?
- How many U.S. schools accepted you?
- Why did you apply to UB?
- Why did you choose UB over the other universities?
- What do you want to study? OR What's your major?
- Why did you choose this major?
- What do you expect to get out of your education?
- What's the job scope (job prospects) for this major in your country?
- Do you intend to stay in the U.S. after graduation and work?
- Do you have any family in the U.S.?
- Do you have family members who studied in the U.S. and then returned to your home country?
- How do you and your family intend to finance your education in the U.S.?

You can see that most of these questions attempt to check and verify your academic intentions, how serious you are about your academic decisions, and your true intention of staying in the U.S. or returning home. Think about these questions carefully so that you can answer quickly and with confidence.

### Final Tips

- Come to the interview well groomed and dressed neatly (but a suit or formal dress is not required).
- Come to the interview prepared with the forms and documents specified in the consulate's instructions.
- Have your documents organized neatly and logically. If the Consular Officer asks for a specific academic document, test score or financial document, you should be able to pull it from your file/organizer quickly. If you have to hunt through a stack of papers, the Consular Officer may think you are disorganized and not ready to study in the U.S..
- Be prepared for quick, rapid-fire questions from the Consular Officer.
- Keep your answers short and direct.
- Don't memorize your answers. Instead, prepare well and give short, direct answers.
- Practice your conversational English. Speak clearly (enunciate) and with the appropriate volume.
- Do not argue. Maintain a positive attitude. Be friendly and courteous.

*The outcome of your interview depends on your answers, **how well prepared you are** and some luck. So prepare well and hope for some luck!*

## For More Information

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E-mail: [intlservices@buffalo.edu](mailto:intlservices@buffalo.edu)  
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International Admissions  
[www.buffalo.edu/intadmit](http://www.buffalo.edu/intadmit)