



## 10 POINTS TO REMEMBER WHEN APPLYING FOR AN F OR J VISA

### 1. TIES TO YOUR HOME COUNTRY

Under U.S. law, all applicants for F-1 and J-1 student visas are viewed as “intending immigrants” until they convince their interviewing consular officer that they are truly planning to return home after the completion of their studies. You must therefore be able to show that your reasons for returning to your home country are stronger than your reasons for remaining in the United States. “Ties” to your home country include family members, financial assets that you own or will inherit, job prospects, etc. The interviewing officer will likely ask you about your family, 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 “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 any specific intent to immigrate. ***If you have ever been denied a U.S. visa or overstayed your authorized stay during a previous visit to the United States, please contact the Center for International Education (CIE) for advice before you apply for your visa.***

### 2. ENGLISH

Anticipate that your interview will be conducted in English and not in your native language. One suggestion for preparing for your interview is to have a conversation with a native English speaker about why you want to study in the U.S. and your plans for what you will do upon the completion of your studies. ***Do NOT under any circumstances memorize a speech***, as this would be viewed with extreme suspicion and distrust by the interviewing consular officer.

### 3. MAKE A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

Dress for your interview as you would dress for a job interview—i.e., not overly formally, as for a wedding or other formal occasion, but also not casually, as for a night out with your friends. Do not bring parents or family members with you to your interview. The consular officer wants to interview you, not your family. A negative impression will be created if you are not prepared to speak on your own behalf.

### 4. KNOW YOUR PROGRAM AND HOW IT FITS INTO YOUR CAREER PLANS

If you are not able to explain why you want to study at the University of Mary Washington, 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 in your home country.

### 5. BE BRIEF

Because of the volume of applications received, consular officers are under considerable time pressure to conduct quick and efficient interviews. 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 why. Lengthy written explanations cannot be quickly read or evaluated. Remember that you will have a maximum of 2-3 minutes of interview time.

## **7. NOT ALL COUNTRIES ARE VIEWED EQUALLY**

Applicants from countries suffering economic problems or from which many students have stayed in the United States and obtained “green cards” will have more difficulty getting visas. Statistically, applicants from those countries are more likely to become 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 the opportunity to work before or after graduation. While many students do work off-campus during their studies, such employment must be 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 will apply for an F-2 visa, be aware that F-2 dependents cannot, under any circumstances, be employed in the United States. If asked, be prepared to discuss what your spouse intends to do while in the United States. Attending school part-time for “recreational” purposes and volunteer work are permitted activities for individuals in F-2 status. Children in F-2 status are permitted to engage in full-time study at the K-12 level.

J-2 dependents can be employed, but not until they have applied for and received an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from USCIS.

## **9. DEPENDENTS REMAINING AT HOME**

If your spouse and children will not be accompanying you to the United States, 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 send them money from the United States in order to support them, your student visa application will almost certainly be denied.

## **10. MAINTAIN A POSITIVE ATTITUDE**

Do not engage the consular officer in an argument. In the event you are denied a visa, ask the officer for a list of documents he or she would suggest you bring in order to overcome the refusal, and request a written explanation for the denial.