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FAQ on the Tourist Visa Application for Parents/Other Visitors

ISS frequently writes letters of invitation for students at the University who wish to invite their parents (as well as friends and non-dependent family members) to visit them in St. Louis. Below are some things you and your visitors should know about the visa application process and the visa interview.

Note: U.S. law and regulations do not require these "invitation letters" from applicants for visitor visas. However, some consular officers in some countries seem to expect or require them. Having a letter does not guarantee that a visa will be issued.

Q: What **Kind of visa** will my parents apply for?

A: A "**B-2 tourist visa**."

Q: Why can't my parents apply for an **F-2 (or J-2) dependent visa**?

A: Your parents are not eligible for F-2 (or J-2) visas. **Only spouses and children** under age 21 are eligible for those classifications.

Q: What documents do **I need to send** to my parents?

A: Send your parents the following items:

- An **invitation letter** from the ISS.
- **Financial verification** (bank statement, letter from your department if you have a graduate assistantship, or whatever document reflects your financial situation) showing you can support your parents during their visit, unless your parents have documentation showing they can meet their own expenses.
- An **official transcript** (available from the Registrar's Office, Transcripts Window, 232 Woods Hall)

Q: Should I **send my parents my I-20** (or IAP-66)?

A: **No.** See the first question above. However, you may want to send them a *copy* of your I-20 – but your parents should *not* submit it unless they are asked for it.

Q: What **other documents** should my parents take with them when they go to apply for their visas?

A: A **letter from their employer**, if possible, and any other documents relating to the concerns described in the next question.

Q: What are the **main reasons that visas are denied**?

A: The two main reasons visas are denied are (1) **inadequate financial support** and (2) failure to prove "**nonimmigrant intent**."

If the consul believes you or your parents **don't have enough money** to support your parents during their visit, the consul will not issue the a visa. The consul will suspect that your parents will need to work illegally to support themselves, or use the U.S. welfare system. That's why it's important to take proof of your ability to support your parents (unless they can show that they have their own support). Usually a bank statement (indicating an average monthly balance) or a letter from your department (if you have a graduate assistantship) will be sufficient.

Proving “**nonimmigrant intent**” means that your parents need to be prepared to convince the consul that they **intend to return home** after they have visited you in the U.S. The law **requires** a consul to deny a nonimmigrant visa to anyone the consul believes intends to remain in the U.S. permanently. Your parents will be in a good position to prove “nonimmigrant intent” if they have a job which they are expected to return to after their visit, or if they are retired and living on a pension through your government, or if they have close family members there (parents, children, or grandchildren), or if they own property there.

Q: What is the **visa interview** going to be like?

A: Keep in mind that 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 those impressions they form during the **first minute or two** of the interview. Consequently, what your parents say first and the **initial impression** they create are critical to their success. They should **keep their answers to the consul’s questions short, to the point, and truthful.**

Q: What if my parents’ visas are **denied**?

A: Your parents should maintain a positive attitude. They should **not engage the consular officer in an argument.** If they are denied a tourist visa, they should **ask the officer for a written explanation** for the denial, and for a **list of documents** he or she would suggest they bring in order to overcome the refusal.

The law concerning temporary visas gives consular officers very wide latitude, so their decisions can seem arbitrary. In most cases, ISS is unable to help your parents overcome a visa denial.

A Word About Health Insurance For Visitors

Because the cost of medical care in the United States is so high, the Office of International Student Services strongly advises that your guests have health insurance for the duration of their visit. It is important to realize that nonimmigrants are not eligible for state-and federally-subsidized health care—that is, the U.S. government will not pay for your guests’ treatment if they become ill or are injured during their visit.

Your guests can purchase insurance either in their home country or after arrival in the United States. You might want to check on local insurance companies to see if they offer short term health insurance policies. You can use one of those policies if your friends and relatives cannot purchase health insurance before departing for the U.S.

Most guests will require “major medical coverage,” which is health insurance that goes into effect if your guest is unexpectedly hospitalized as a result of an accident or an illness.

Without such coverage, your guest could experience financial devastation if hospitalization becomes necessary.