

Visa Guide for International Exchange Visitors

The purpose of this document is to help international exchange visitors through the U.S. J-1 visitor visa process. Although the process may seem tedious, it is our goal to lead you through each step to secure your J-1 visa.

Please note: Individuals applying for a U.S. J-1 exchange visitor visa must pay a ~\$200 USD nonrefundable Visitor/Exchange (SEVIS) processing fee to the U.S. government. This fee is required of visitors from all countries and must be paid before the you visit the U.S. Consulate to apply for a visa.

The fastest method of online payment is American Express, MasterCard, or Visa credit card. For more information, please visit:

<https://www.fmjfee.com/i901fee/>. To process the payment you will need your DS-2019 with the SEVIS No. and School Program code.

Meeting Consulate Officials

When applying for a first-time J-1 exchange visitor visa, a brief one to two minute personal interview will be conducted most likely in English at the U.S. embassy or consulate nearest you. The consulate official interviews hundreds of people a day and must make quick application decisions so be prepared to state your case clearly and concisely.

Interview Preparation Tips:

- Dress neatly and professionally.
- Respond directly to questions related to educational goals:
 - What is your major and why did you choose it?
 - How will your exchange experience help your future career in your home country?
 - What are your plans after the exchange experience?
- Explain where and how you learned English, and why you wish to study in the U.S. (if applicable).

Make a Good Impression

The U.S. Consular official may have pre-conceived notions about your application and your plans, especially if you are from a country where many visitors go to the U.S. and never return back home. The official may assume that you are not a legitimate exchange visitor, do not have financial resources to study in the U.S., and you plan to stay and live in the U.S. after your studies and not return back to your home. To get an exchange visitor visa, you must convince the official: (1) that you are an excellent visitor with an educational plan, (2) that you have the financial resources to study and live for the duration of proposed stay in the U.S., (3) that you have strong family, social, and career ties to your home country, and (4) that you will return home after your exchange.

U.S. J-1 Exchange Visitor Visa Checklist

Here is a comprehensive checklist to prepare and help you organize for the interview and increase your chances of a visa application approval. Not all of these documents are required but are recommended, as they will increase your chances of a successful outcome.

A. Personal Items:

- Passport, valid for at least one year into the future.
- Small (passport-size 2 x 2) full-face photograph of you (without head covering). See travel.state.gov for more details.
- Proof of relationship to your spouse and children (marriage certificate, birth certificates, identification cards, etc. if applicable).
- Visa application fee (from the U.S. Embassy nearest you).
- Receipt proving that you have paid the Visitor/Exchange processing fee.

B. Slippery Rock University Materials:

- Form DS-2019 issued by Slippery Rock University.
- Letter of admission.
- Letter of appointment for visiting professors.
- Letter of invitation for scholars.
- Letter of cost of attendance (students only): this explains all estimated costs especially if any fees may be waived as part of an official exchange agreement with your current institution.

C. Proof of Academic Achievement:

- Copies of all relevant secondary (high) school or post-secondary transcripts or mark sheets
- Copies of your TOEFL or IELTS (if applicable).
- Letters/certificates for any academic awards in secondary school.
- CV or resume for scholars and professors.

D. Financial Support Documents:

- Bank statements from the past six months and/or letter from your bank stating that you have "XXX" amount of money in the bank.
- Statements from the past six months showing
- Other letters indicating financial support.
- Tax documents from your family home or business.
- Letters from your parents' employers stating their salaries and job histories (if your parents are your financial sponsors).
- Official letters detailing any approved loans or scholarships you will receive.
- Letters from any sponsors (if applicable) who have promised to provide specific costs, such as room and board or books, etc.
- Documents that prove that a sponsor can afford the promises made.
- Other letters indicating financial support.

E. Proof of Family, Social and/or Career Ties to Home Country:

- A from your current university that you are enrolled in exchange experience with a partner university and required to return to complete your degree program.
- A letter or proof that you have been offered a job when you return home (or that your current job will be held until you return) (if applicable).
- If your family owns a business, evidence that you plan to

return to work in the family business upon completion of your U.S. education.

- Information about family members who have traveled or studied overseas and returned.
- A deed proving that you own property in your home country (which can indicate a plan to return).
- Information about your own previous travel to the U.S. (if any), perhaps as a tourist.

F. Completed U.S. Government Forms:

One of these two nonimmigrant application forms:

- A [DS-160 Online](#) (Nonimmigrant Visa Electronic Application).
- For males, a [DS-157 form](#).
- A receipt proving that you have paid the Visitor/Exchange processing fee.

For frequently asked questions related to DS-160 please refer to: <http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/forms/ds-160--online-nonimmigrant-visa-application.html>

Organizing Materials

Below is a suggested order of how to organize your documents for the interview:

1. Slippery Rock University Form DS-2019.
2. Slippery Rock University acceptance letter, invitation, or appointment.
3. Receipt that SEVIS I-901 fee was paid.
4. Copies of your secondary (high) school certificates or post-secondary transcripts.
5. Copies of your secondary school diploma and/or national tests or post-secondary diplomas.
6. Copies of your TOEFL or IELTS (if applicable).
7. Academic Award Letters.
8. Bank statements (for the past six months) and/or letter from your bank stating that you have "XXX" amount of money in the bank.
9. Letters from your parents' employers stating their salaries and job histories (if your parents are your financial sponsors).
10. Official letters detailing any approved loans or scholarships you will receive.
11. Letters from sponsors.
12. Letters indicating financial support.
13. Evidence of any property that you own in your home country (if applicable).
14. Letter from your employer saying that you have a job to return to upon completion of your degree (if possible).
15. Evidence that you have family remaining in your country and that you plan to return.
16. Evidence that you have left your home country and returned.
17. Passport.

Application Process Tips

- Don't wait until the last minute! Apply for your J-1 exchange visitor visa as early as possible--up to four months before you plan to begin your studies, if possible.
- Allow several weeks for getting an appointment and a visa. Call the U.S. embassy or consulate nearest you, or go to the embassy website for information and instructions.
- You must complete several forms before your interview, and the embassy may want to verify the information you give.
- To attend Slippery Rock University, you must use the Slippery Rock University DS-2019 form.

Academic Preparation for English Language Studies

If you plan to take English Language classes at Slippery Rock University, be prepared to directly answer the following questions:

How will you use English after you return home?

Why is it useful or important for you to know English?

- What will you study?
- Why do you need English for that field?
- Presented here is sample dialogue that can be improvised when speaking with the official:
 - "English will help me with my career plans."
 - "In my field of study, research papers are published in English and conferences are led in English."
 - "It is faster and more efficient to learn English while living in an English-speaking culture."
 - "Language learning includes cultural education."
 - Interacting with native speakers outside the classroom is very helpful."
 - "Immersion in a language is the fastest way to learn it."
- Presented here is sample dialogue to **avoid** when speaking with the official:
 - "I want to study in the U.S. because my friends are here."
 - "I like American movies."

What If Your Visa Is Denied?

When a visa request is denied, the main reason (90 percent of denials) is that the official believes the exchange visitor actually wants to go to the U.S. to live and work permanently. Ask politely for a denial reason and if additional documentation could result in an approval. If so, what documents would be most useful?

You can re-apply, but you need to show more evidence you will return home after study and that you have sufficient funds to pay for your educational expenses. You may need to explain clearly and politely how your situation has changed since your earlier request. Use additional documents and information to prove to the official that what you say is true.

Every situation is different. Think again about your ties to your home country and your checklist. Reexamine family relationships, jobs, family ownership of homes, businesses, or land. Do you have other evidence to present? Perhaps revisit your first interview and ask for a second one.

If you are denied a visa a second time, you will have to wait for a period before you return. However, the probability of success on a third try is not very high. Each time you apply, your chances diminish. You need to provide more documentation so that you can say truthfully that there are new facts to review and more reason for approval.

Slippery Rock University believes in offering premier educational opportunities to exchange visitors worldwide. We hope this guide has proven useful to you on your academic journey.

Additional Resources:

- *U.S. embassies and consulates worldwide:* <http://usembassy.state.gov/>.
- *Visitor visa applications and information:* <http://www.travel.state.gov/>
- *Study in the States:* <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/>
- *Education USA:* <http://www.educationusa.info/>