

## **Before You Leave Home**

Here are some things you need to know before coming to the U.S.

### ***Passport***

As of December 31, 2007 everyone will need a passport to enter the U.S. This passport is issued by your home government and is used abroad as proof of identity. It should be valid at all times and can be renewed through your Consulate or Embassy. Make sure that your passport is valid for at least six months into the future, albeit certain countries have passport agreements with the United States.

### ***Visas***

Before entering the U.S., you must obtain a visa issued by a U.S. Embassy. The visa stamp, placed in your passport, gives you permission to apply at your port of entry for admission into the U.S. The expiration date of the visa refers only to the latest date on which you may present yourself at the border for permission to enter the U.S. and does not necessarily indicate how long you may remain in the U.S. The end date of your I-20 or DS-2019, or the completion date of your program of study (whichever is earlier) is the key indicator of the length of authorized stay.

Several categories of non-immigrant visas exist. Therefore, make sure that you apply for the appropriate type of visa. This will probably be an F-1 Student visa or a J-1 Exchange Visitor visa. In order to qualify for these categories of visas you will need to show a Certificate of Eligibility.

### ***Certificate of Eligibility***

This document is verification that you have been accepted as a student at a recognized institution in the U.S, which is required for the visa application.

- For an F-1 Student visa, the certificate is Form I-20.
- For a J-1 Exchange Visitor's visa, it is Form DS-2019.

Before issuing a Certificate of Eligibility to a prospective student, the school is required to determine that the student is qualified academically, linguistically and financially to study in the U.S.

Visa applicants seeking to study in the U.S. under the auspices of the F-1 or J-1 visa classification should not enter in tourist status or under the provisions of the visa waiver program.

### ***Port of Entry Procedures***

At the U.S. port-of-entry you must present your passport, visa and Certificate of Eligibility (Form 1-20 or Form DS-2019) to an officer. Be certain that your passport and supporting documents are with you and easily accessible since you will not be picking up your baggage until after clearing immigration inspection.

### ***I-94 Arrival/Departure Record***

The I-94 is a small, white form stapled into your passport upon arrival to the U.S. and shows that admission into the U.S. has been granted for duration of status (D/S). Those who are conditionally admitted to the U.S. (i.e. received a Form 1-515), and those not entering in "F" or "J" status, will have an end date specified instead of D/S. It also shows the date and port of entry and the visa classification.

The D/S notation on the I-94 means that you may stay in the U.S. as long as you are pursuing a full course of study in the educational program you were originally authorized to attend and for any period of authorized practical or academic training. You are allowed an additional time within which to leave the country after finishing your studies (60 days for F-1 students, 30 days for J-1 exchange visitors).

You must keep the I-94 in your passport at all times and it should not be confused with your visa.

### ***Single and Multiple Entry Visas***

If your visa is marked "single entry" it means if you leave the U.S. for a temporary visit and reenter the country you must renew it by presenting your Certificate of Eligibility to the nearest U.S. Consulate in the country you are visiting. This requirement is waived for visits of up to 30 days to Canada, Mexico, or adjacent islands (excluding Cuba). To find out whether you qualify for this exemption, check with the ISSI. Your Certificate of Eligibility will be returned to you so that you may present it to the U.S. immigration officer when you reenter the country.

If your visa is marked "multiple (or unlimited) applications" you may leave and reenter the U.S. as often as you want with a valid visa. You

will, however, need to have an I-20 or DS-2019 with a valid/updated signature/endorsement from your sponsoring institution. If you are not sure whether the signature on your document is current, please check with the ISSI.

When leaving the U.S., you must surrender your I-94 at the port of departure (except when visiting Canada, Mexico and certain islands of the Caribbean). A new I-94 will be issued when you reenter the U.S. after you present your copy of the Certificate of Eligibility with a current signature to the immigration officer at the border.

### ***Legal Aid***

Your International Student Advisor at the ISSI is your primary resource for questions about immigration, academic, cultural, and personal matters. Should you need legal assistance, the ISSI can refer you to a list of qualified lawyers who are affiliated with the American Immigration Lawyers Association.

Other Resources for Assistance or Referrals:

- The Volunteer Lawyer's Project (617.423.0648)
- The Boston Bar Referral Service (617.742.0625)
- The National Lawyer's Guild (617.227.7008)