



Five Secrets of Applying for a U.S. Student Visa

- **Consul General David Hopper at Peking University (Part One)**
- (Excerpted and Used With The Permission Of Beijing Youth Daily)

(March 14, 2000) Last Tuesday afternoon Consul General David Hopper, the head of visa operations at the American Embassy, came to Peking University with three other visa officers to explain the "secrets" of applying for a US student visa, and was welcomed by the students.

In the past, visa officers have seemed rather mysterious and cold. They hold the power to grant or deny you a visa -- they say yes and you get a visa, they say no and you are rejected. There is nothing you can do about it; separated from them by a glass window, you cannot make busy officials stop and listen to your explanation. This time the Americans came out from behind their glass wall to talk to students face to face, and the officials' friendliness was immediately apparent.

What questions do visa officers have in mind when they face a student applying for a visa? Here is the gist of what Mr. Hopper explained:

1. Are you a genuine student, headed to the US for the purpose of studying? Some applicants use fake documents, or have no real intention of attending school in America -- the whole project is just a ruse to get to the US. The officers look closely at I-20 forms, diplomas and school records for evidence of fraud.
2. Can you pay for your studies? Make sure you have financial records with you, including family bank statements and evidence of liquid assets of at least \$40,000.
3. U.S. visa law states that if you give a person a student visa, you must be convinced that he intends to leave the US when his studies are finished.
How do we assure ourselves that the applicant has such an "intention"? First of all, we listen to what you say. The visa officer will try to move you away from prepared speeches. We need to know what your answers are, not what someone else advised you to say. What is your career

plan? Why are you going to America? What do you plan to study there? What plans do you have for after graduation?

We know how difficult it is for a student to have a clear idea of what he means to do after receiving his US diploma. If you are not sure, just tell us you are not sure. The admission officer will give greater credibility to your other answers. We are not looking for certainty, but for evidence that you've given serious thought to the matter: Do you have a plan or ambition of some sort? Is it believable in the Chinese context? If you tell us that you mean to study a subject that appears of no use in China, then what are we to think? But if you can explain how what you learn will be useful in China in the years to come that will help you to qualify for a visa.

Another thing we look at is your current situation in China. What family do you have here -- and abroad? What do your parents do for a living? Do they occupy positions in government, industry, commerce or education from which they can assist you when you return from America?

We are also interested in your family's financial situation. If your family can afford to send you to the U.S. to study and are doing well in China, we are likely to believe that you too will prosper after you come back. On the other hand, if your family has no money and you are borrowing thousands of dollars to finance your U.S. education, it will be more difficult to persuade us that you intend to come right back to China after finishing your studies. Where are you going to get the money to repay those loans?

There is no one thing that determines whether we grant a visa or not. We consider all the factors in coming to what we hope is a sound decision. We don't claim that our decisions are perfect. We work fast because we have to: interview time is necessarily short. But we always try to make the best decision we can.

If you are denied a visa, please listen carefully to what the visa officer tells you. For example, if he says, "I'm not sure of your finances," then the next time you come, bring new information that shows where your money is from. If the officer says, "I'm sorry but I'm not convinced that you intend to come back," think about your plan again and figure out how to explain it more clearly and persuasively; then reapply. If you come back a second time and say similar things, you will probably get the same response.

➤ **Consul General David Hopper at Peking University (Part Two)**

(March 21, 2000) On March 7, U.S. Consul General David Hopper and three other officials from the visa section of the American Embassy met with students at Peking University. One of the officials presented:

"FIVE SECRETS" FOR GETTING A STUDENT VISA

Secret One: Get free, accurate information on applying for a student visa. Visit the U.S. Embassy web site (www.usembassy-china.org.cn). There is no charge for using these resources. Why pay to get the same information from other sources?

Secret Two: Be thoroughly prepared. Make sure you bring:

- * Your I-20 form
- * Your diploma (s)
- * Your standardized test score reports (TOEFL, SSAT, SLEP etc.)
- * All letters and e-mail from the school.
- * Evidence of funding for your studies (bank documents, etc.)
- * Any other documents that you think might be important

Secret Three: Answer that questions that are asked. Don't give the visa officer a prepared speech!

Here's an example of what to avoid:

Visa officer: Hi, how are you today?

Applicant: I'm going to study chemical engineering at X University.

VO: X University? I've been to the campus many times.

Applicant: I will surely return to China and find a good job with a major multinational company.

VO: (Recognizing the disconnection and robotic tone) So tell me, what color is the sky?

Applicant: I was given a teaching assistantship because the school believes my test scores and credentials are excellent.

These people are not communicating, and the applicant is not advancing his cause!

Secret Four: Tell the truth, if the visa officer thinks you're lying, you won't get a visa.

Secret Five: Come back to China. We mean that in two ways:

1) Come back to see your family and maintain your ties to China. Keep up your friendships and professional contacts here. Students returning on vacation don't even need to come in for an interview; they can simply use the drop-box service offered at many CITIC Bank locations.

2) Come back to China after you graduate. Use those advanced skills and theories that you learn in the US to make China a better place. Study in France had a great impact on the lives of leaders like Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping. Will study in the US have a similar impact on the lives of China's future leaders?

After the speech by the visa officer, the four officials asked the students for any questions they had. Unprepared for the switch to question-and-answer format, the students were slow to come up with questions. Consul General Hopper interjected, with a touch of humor, "All questions are welcome. If you ask a question we don't like, we won't remember you and refuse you a visa because of it, so really -- don't worry." The students laughed and began to open up.

One question was "Do we need to wear formal clothes to the interview?"

Answer: No. Another student said he'd been in the U.S. for a month, so he wondered if he could use the drop-box. The answer was in the negative, because he'd gone to America on a different type of visa.

After getting through all the questions, Mr. Hopper pointed out that people seeking student visas should apply no earlier than 90 days before the date when they must report to their new university in the U.S. Visa rules do not allow officers to issue visas more than 90 days before the start of the academic program for the applicant.