



Inviting Parents, Other Non-Dependent Relatives, and Friends to Visit the United States

What kind of visa should my relatives obtain?

Your relatives will need a B-2 visitor visa.

Parents and siblings of people in F-1 or J-1 status are not eligible for F-2 or J-2 status. Forms I-20 and DS-2019 are *not* issued to invite parents, parents-in-law, or siblings. If you wish, you may send your relatives a copy of your I-20 or DS-2019 form, but they should *not* submit it to the consular officer unless asked for it. **Do not** send your original I-20 or DS-2019 to your parents, other non-dependent relatives, or friends. You should retain the form yourself.

What documents do my relatives need to obtain a B-2 visa?

1. **An invitation from you:** Write a letter in English to your relative, stating:

- whom you are inviting
- the purpose of the visit (for example, vacation, attend graduation, meet a new baby)
- the dates (even approximate dates) of the visit
- what financial support you are offering (for example, cost of travel, room and board)

2. **Evidence of financial support:** If you are going to provide any financial support for the visit, you need to furnish your relatives with appropriate documentation. This could be a letter verifying employment and/or a bank statement showing not just your current balance(s), but also the *history* of the account, making clear that the current balance is not the result of a recent, large deposit. Include information about the date the account was opened and the average monthly balance.

3. **Visa application form, along with photographs:** Your relatives will need to complete the same visa application forms you completed to obtain your own visa. They will obtain these forms from the consulate. The forms, called DS-156 and DS-158, are also available at the Department of State website http://travel.state.gov/visa_services.html#apps. All male relatives between 16 and 45 years of age will also be required to complete form DS-157.

4. **Evidence of ties to the home country:** The reason U.S. consular officers **most frequently deny** B-2 visa applications is lack of evidence of strong ties to the visitor's home country. Under U.S. law, consular officers are not supposed to issue a B (or F or J) visa if they do not believe the applicant has ties that will bring him or her back home. For more information on this matter, go to <http://www.usembassy.org> and find the name of your country. Chinese students, in particular, may want to go to <http://www.usembassy-china.org.cn/english/visa/index.html>.

5. **Support letter:** U.S. consular officers sometimes ask B-2 visa applicants for a letter certifying that the people inviting them are in fact students or scholars in the United States. **If you need such a letter, you may write your own letter by using the "Invitation Letter Template" form attached to this information.** You can send the letter to your relatives.

6. How long can people in B-2 status stay in the United States?

The length of a visitor's initial permission to stay in B-2 status is determined by the officer at the port of entry. The maximum initial period is six months. People who want to remain longer need to apply for an extension later. There is no specified limit on the number of extensions allowed. Be aware that the USCIS requires at least four months to process an

application for extension in B-2 status. That does not mean your visitors need to apply for an extension four months in advance. Their obligation is to make sure the USCIS *receives the extension application before their current stay expires.*

Note:

Biometric Data and the US-VISIT Program

In 2004, visa officers at U.S. consulates will be gathering "biometric" data on all persons who apply for both non-immigrant and immigrant visas. Biometric data, in this case, simply refers to the photographs that are already required as part of the visa application process, along with the addition of digital "inkless" fingerprints. The fingerprints will be taken when the applicant appears in person to obtain the visa. Reportedly this is expected to add only seconds to the visa application process. U.S. consulates will begin gathering biometric data gradually over the next several months. By October 2004, all U.S. consulates are required to gather biometric data.

Over the course of 2004, immigration officers at U.S. Ports of Entry will also begin gathering biometric data as required by a new program called US-VISIT. Air and seaports are expected to begin gathering the information in early 2004, and land ports later in the year. Again, non-U.S. citizens will be required to be photographed and fingerprinted upon entering the U.S. This information will be kept electronically by the U.S. government, and will eventually be included in the SEVIS tracking system. In 2004 or 2005, the biometric data will also be gathered each time non-citizens exit the U.S. The intent of the U.S. government is to have an electronic tracking system of non-citizen's entries and exits to and from the U.S., as mandated by certain laws passed in 1996, 2000 and 2002. Reportedly this will be integrated into the current entry and exit procedures, and should add only "seconds" to the process.

Since it is not clear exactly when these new procedures will begin, the OISS simply wishes to alert students and scholars and their visitors, so they are not surprised if they do happen to encounter the new biometric processes. Aside from the usual travel documentation they are currently required to provide, there will be no new documentation or procedures, nor will there be anything they need to prepare in advance.

One thing the OISS wishes to point out to students and scholars and their visitors is that precise entry and exit information will be kept electronically. This means that anyone who "overstays" his or her visit to the U.S. will have that information immediately available to immigration officers. If you have visitors come in B-1 or B-2 status, or who may come on the Visa Waiver program, remember that they are allowed to be in the U.S. only until a specific date (usually 6 months, but sometimes less), which is stamped on the I-94 card and in the passport upon entering the U.S. If the B visitor does not leave the U.S. by that date, they will be considered to have "overstayed" the visit to the U.S. (unless steps were taken to extend their visit before that date). Consequences of overstaying a visit to the U.S. may vary from a "review with immigration officials to removal from the United States or even a bar from future entry, depending on the individual circumstances."

B-2 Visitors who wish to enroll in a degree program

As of April 12, 2002, all visitors in B status who entered the U.S. on or after that date are restricted from enrolling in a degree program until they have been admitted to F-1 status. Such enrollment will constitute a violation of status and could result in serious consequences. It is also becoming increasingly difficult for visitors in B status to change to F-1 status while in the U.S. If you have a relative who is considering even the possibility of applying for a degree program in the U.S., please contact the International Student Adviser for information on the best course of action to be taken.

Invitation Letter Template

Please type out the form completely. Do not use abbreviations and hand writing.

To: Visa Office, United States Consulate General

Student's Last Name: _____ First Name: _____
Student's Visa Type: _____ Major: _____
Student's Current U.S. Address: _____
Student's UMD Email Address: _____

Myself, name above, in good academic standing would like to invite family members/friends to visit the United States to share in various activities/event, such as, sightseeing, graduation ceremonies, or personal time together. The visitor(s) will request a B-2 visa.

Person(s) I wish to invite.

First Name	Last Name	Relationship to You	Date of Birth (month/day/year)	Country of Citizenship

Reason(s) for the invitation:

Estimated Dates of Visit: From _____ to _____
Month/Year Month/Year