UMass Lowell International Students: Inviting Friends and Family to Visit the US

Family, relatives, and friends that plan to visit you in the U.S. will most likely need to apply for a tourist visa (B1/B2 visa). There are no specific visa documents, e.g. Form I-20 or DS-2019, with which to apply for a B1/B2 visa. However, there are some guidelines on what a consular official expects of applicants.

Applicants should be prepared to explain the following points and provide related documents:

1. **The visit to the United States will be temporary**

   The applicant may need to provide both an Invitation Letter from you (you may want to include a Status Letter from the International Students & Scholars Office and/or a copy of your transcript with your Invitation Letter). Your invitation letter should list the purpose of the visit, i.e. to attend your Commencement, visit family, etc. Please note that the invitation is from you and it is not from the International Students & Scholars Office. US Consular Officials will only acknowledge invitation letters from the actual non-immigrant who is inviting a family or friend to visit them in the U.S.

2. **There are adequate funds to cover the cost of transportation and cost of living in the United States.**

   The Applicant may need to provide evidence of sufficient funds to support themselves while in the United States in the form of a bank statement. Alternatively, you may provide your current bank statement as evidence of adequate financial support to cover their temporary stay in the United States. There is also a form called an I-134 Affidavit of Support (can be accessed at www.uscis.gov/i-134), which could be completed by you and used in their visa applications. However, it is not a required document for a B1/B2 visa application, and many people choose not to use it.

3. **The visitors have residences outside the United States to which they intend to return.**

   The Applicant will need to prove the intent to return home. This may need to be documented by evidence of a job, immediate family members who will be left behind, property, business ownership or other strong ties to their home country. The applicants should be prepared to answer questions about their intent to return. Please refer to the guidance from the U.S. Department of State on what constitutes as strong ties.

**Two Step Process for Family and Friends**

1. **Applying for a visa**

   For many individuals a B1/B2 visa from a U.S. embassy or consulate outside the United States is needed to enter the United States. Guidance on the non-immigrant visa application process is available on the web site of the U.S. Department of State. Please note that Canadian citizens and citizens of Visa Waiver countries do not need to obtain visas for this purpose. Visa Waiver applicants, do however, need pre-clearance authorization called ESTA prior to traveling. They must present evidence of ESTA approval at the port of entry to the United States.
States. Please be sure to print out the approval when applying for ESTA as you may need to present it at the Port of Entry.

2. Enter the United States

When entering the United States, a U.S. government official at the port of entry will annotate the visitor's I-94 card (an electronic record completed prior to entry to the United States which can be accessed at cbp.gov/I94) indicating how long the visitor may remain in the United States. The length of stay that the U.S. government official grants to the visitor is discretionary, normally no longer than 6 months. Extensions may be requested at a later date from the U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS) through a formal process. Requests for extensions must be received at USCIS prior to the expiration date listed on the visitor's I-94 card. There are serious consequences to anyone overstaying their legal stay in the U.S.

What can the UMass Lowell International Students & Scholars Office (ISSO) do for me?

The International Students & Scholars Office can provide you with a Status Letter confirming your full-time status as per your F-1 or J-1 status. Since the purpose of a tourist visa does not directly involve UMass Lowell’s visa sponsorship, the invitation letter you need should not come from the ISSO. All you should need to provide your family and friends with are the above-mentioned Letter of Invitation written by you, and the Status Letter from the ISSO. Please be sure to be registered for a full course load for the current semester and the next semester as early as it is possible to do so.