Preparing for Your Visa Interview

1. TIES TO YOUR HOME COUNTRY
Under U.S. law, all applicants for non-immigrant visas are considered to have the intent to immigrate permanently to the U.S. and must convince the visa officer otherwise in order to be seen as eligible for the visa. Therefore, you must be able to show that you have reasons for returning to your home country that are stronger than your interest in remaining in the U.S. Be prepared to explain what binds you to your home town, homeland, or current place of residence, such as family responsibility, employment opportunities, or financial prospects that you own, will inherit, etc. The visa officer may ask about your intentions or prospects for future employment in your home country, family or other relationships, educational objectives, grades, and long-term life plans. Since each person's situation is different there is no magical explanation or single document, certificate, or letter that can guarantee visa issuance.

2. PRACTICE IN ENGLISH
Anticipate that the interview will be conducted in English and not in your native language. One suggestion is to practice English conversation and answers to possible questions with a fluent English speaker before the interview.

3. SPEAK FOR YOUR SELF
Do not bring parents or sponsors with you to the interview. The visa officer wants to interview you, not whoever may be assisting you with your educational objectives. You will give a negative impression if you do not speak on your own behalf.

4. KNOW THE PROGRAM AND HOW IT FITS YOUR CAREER PLANS
If you are not able to explain the reasons why you wish to study in a particular academic program in the U.S., you may not succeed in convincing the visa officer that you are indeed planning to study rather than immigrate to the U.S. You should also be able to explain how studying in the U.S. relates to your professional career when you return home.

5. BE BRIEF
Due to the large number of applications received, all visa officers are under considerable time pressure to conduct a quick and efficient interview. They must make a decision, for the most part, on the impressions they form during the first minute or two of the interview. Consequently, what you say first and the initial impression you create are critical to your success. Keep your answers to the officer's questions short, polite, and to the point.

6. SUPPLEMENTAL DOCUMENTATION
The purpose of the written documents you present should be clear at a glance to the visa officer. Lengthy written explanations cannot be quickly read or evaluated. Remember that you will have only 2-3 minutes of interview time.

7. NOT ALL COUNTRIES ARE TREATED EQUALLY
Applicants from countries suffering economic problems or from countries where many past applicants have remained in the U.S. as immigrants will have more difficulty getting visas.
Statistically, applicants from those countries are more likely to be intending immigrants. They are also more likely to be asked about job opportunities after returning home.

8. EMPLOYMENT
Your main purpose in coming to the U.S. should be to study, not for the chance to work before or after graduation. While many students do work on-campus during their studies, such employment should be incidental to the main purpose of completing a U.S. education. You must be able to clearly articulate your plan to return home at the end of your program. If your spouse is also applying for an accompanying F-2 visa, be aware that F-2 dependents cannot, under any circumstances, be employed in the U.S. If asked, be prepared to address what your spouse intends to do with his or her time while in the U.S. Volunteering and taking recreational classes are permitted activities.

9. DEPENDENTS REMAINING AT HOME
If your spouse and children are remaining behind in your country, be prepared to address how they will support themselves in your absence. This can be an especially difficult question if you are the primary source of income for your family. If the visa officer gains the impression that your family members will need you to send money from the U.S. in order to support themselves, your student visa application will almost certainly be denied. If your family decides to join you at a later time, it is helpful to have them apply at the same post where you applied for your visa.

10. MAINTAIN A POSITIVE ATTITUDE
Do not engage the visa officer in an argument. If you are denied a student visa, you may apply again, so politely ask the officer for a list of documents s/he would suggest you bring next time in order to overcome the refusal. Try to get the reason you were denied in writing. Immediately after the denial, write down all you can remember of the interview—questions asked, your response, documents requested, etc.- and provide this information to Madison College's international student specialist for advice on how to approach the interview differently next time.