**Some Advice on US Visa Interview Preparation**

**NOTE: I AM NOT AN EXPERT ON VISA INTERVIEWS AND AM ONLY SHARING ADVICE BASED ON MY EXPERIENCE. THE ADVICE BELOW MIGHT NOT APPLY TO EVERY APPLICANT BECAUSE OF THE VARIATIONS IN OUR INDIVIDUAL CIRCUMSTANCES. I WOULD HIGHLY RECOMMEND THE READERS TO GET ADVICE FROM SEVERAL OTHER RELIABLE SOURCES AND TO NOT SOLELY DEPEND ON WHAT IS WRITTEN BELOW.**

Some sources that I consider to be reliable are:

American Center Education USA: <https://educationusa.state.gov/centers/american-center-dhaka>

EMK Center Education USA: <https://www.emkcenter.org/educationusa/studyintheusa/>

The membership fee for EMK Center is 500 Taka per year and that of American Center is 800 Taka for 2 years (PLEASE correct me if I am wrong). You can schedule an appointment with an advisor in both centers if you are a member and schedule a mock interview and get authentic answers to your questions. From what I know, EMK center had the rule that people had to attend at least activities A and B to be able to schedule an appointment with the advisor. Go to their website and call on their number to know how to schedule an interview.

With enrollment decisions beginning to be given out, many of you will be giving the visa interview soon. I haven’t researched on whether or not the outbreak of coronavirus will have an impact on the visa decisions. But I do have some general advice to share with the visa applicants.

From my experience I think that the 3 key aspects of the applicant evaluated in the interview are:

1) whether the applicant has a legit reason to be in the US

2) whether the applicant has satisfactory financial means to support himself/herself throughout the duration of stay

3) whether the person has sufficient ties with his/her home country that would make the person come back

Some suggestions regarding key aspect #1

From my personal experience, I think that consular officers approach key aspect #1 by asking ‘Why do you want to study in the US? Why do you want to study in X university? What’s your major? Why did you pick this major? In my opinion, the expectation is for you to demonstrate your knowledge, express your passion and enthusiasm in studying in the US/X university/Y major. You can talk about how the US education system is world class/universities here have high ranking/reputation/innovation/technology/specific strengths of your university/amazing things about the department/any professor who are interested in working with/being taught by/engaging campus, etc etc. If asked ‘why this university?’ I encourage you to mention at least 3 reasons why you chose this university. Try to communicate your interests and the enthusiasm while answering these questions. It can also be beneficial to end your sentences with …..I want to gain the knowledge from X department and apply it here in Bangladesh in Y field to develop Z…. This can give your interviewer the cue that you are about to talk about your future plans after graduation and can make him/her ask you that question. This nice logical flow of information can be beneficial in cases when the interviewer is trying to keep the interview short due to time constraints.

Some suggestions regarding key aspect #3

I personally think that this aspect is most commonly addressed through questions such as ‘what are your plans after graduation?’ Give them a solid plan of what you are going to do with the degree when you come back to Bangladesh. I personally think that it works out nice if you can indirectly show through the plan that you will be using the acquired knowledge to benefit the Bangladeshi community and also possess a job that financially benefits you in a way that makes your expenditure studying abroad financially worthwhile. As long as you mention something along the lines of the nature of the job/ field you wish to work in, it should be fine. Just make sure that it is logical and practical.

Some suggestions regarding key aspect #2

After you get your enrollment decisions with your scholarship notifications and have decided on a college, make a careful analysis of the expected cost of attendance for the university. Add the tuition fees, living expenses, flight fares, miscellaneous expenses (phone plan, etc.) per year and subtract the scholarships and aids from that value to determine the family contribution.

Identify who is going to pay the family contribution calculated above. For most of us, it’s probably going to be our parents. If it is your parents, sit down with your parents and have an open discussion with them about their income, liquid assets, fixed assets, etc and know those values. Find out their TOTAL income/ TOTAL cash flow into the family. This could be from sources such as salaries/ interest from investments (like fixed deposits) /rental income/agricultural income/business. Have a candid conversation with your parents and find the TOTAL income from one or more of these sources. Also, know the income breakdown from each of the sources your parents have.

Calculate the family contribution per month in taka. Then calculate the Total income per month in taka. If you see that the family contribution is more than half of the Total income and if you are receiving need based financial assistance from an institution that has a policy of meeting your full demonstrated need, I would strongly encourage you to ask/ negotiate with your university to see if they can avail you more funds. Have an open and frank conversation with your parents and ask them their plan on how they will manage paying the family contribution. If they are planning on paying it from their savings/college fund, then make sure you know how to explain that.

Also note that your parents can feel uncomfortable talking about all their finances with you in one sitting. Please understand that finances can be a sensitive topic for people to talk about and you should explain to your parents WHY it is important for you to know these statistics. The consular officers simply do not want your parents to struggle paying all the bills. That is why it is important to demonstrate how your parents will be able to live in Bangladesh with financial comfort while also supporting you abroad. Also, it is ‘thought’ that if it is strenuous for a student’s family to bear the expenses, the student is more likely to have a tendency to stay in the US illegally after graduating or engage in illegal means of earning the money while staying abroad.

More information can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/bangladesh.usembassy/videos/816635062028267/>

Watch the answer of the consular to the question at time (-27:41) specifically. Th expectation is that you will be able to Credibly explain how you plan to pay the deficit and come prepared with supporting documentation. Another prep video can be found here- <https://www.facebook.com/bangladesh.usembassy/videos/356432248556770/>

I hope the information on the finances given above gave you some guidance on what to say when you are asked questions like ‘I see that you have a deficit of X. How do you plan on paying for it?’ or ‘who will be paying for this amount? What does she/he do? ‘ and you have some understanding of how to demonstrate key aspect #2 on the list.

**Some other suggestions**

-I am terrible at interviews and need to practice articulating well several times with friends or family before appearing for an interview. If you are not completely sure about your interview skills, I encourage you to have a mock interview with a friend and see whether you are able to speak coherently. PLEASE take the time to practice if you think you need to improve.

-Make sure you get a good night’s sleep before the interview. Stay relaxed and don’t worry. It’ll be okay.

-If you have a shy, soft voice like mine, I encourage you to speak loudly during the interview. The interviewer has to be able to hear you clearly. It is possible to feel a bit uncomfortable saying values related to your finances out loud when you know that the people in the next line or behind you can hear you. These people are strangers you will never come across again. So please do not be afraid to speak loudly enough for the interviewer to hear you clearly. As long as you are speaking confidently and clearly, you will be fine.

-When asked a question, I encourage you to start with the strongest and most important point first (especially while answering the financial question). These interviews are usually short and not much time is given to the interviewees for answering the questions. Make sure your answers are to the point and precise. But also make sure that the answers have sufficient details and are not generic and vague (especially make sure that the ‘why this uni’ question’s answer has specific details).

-If you find that while you are answering a question, the interviewer has stopped looking at you and has started typing, please do not stop talking. You NEED to be able to say all your important points to demonstrate the key aspects. If the interviewer wants you to stop talking, she/he will make a gesture with their hand, move onto the next question, tell you that that’ll be enough, etc. The interviewer might be typing while you are speaking because they need to multitask because of the time constraint. I personally think that they do listen to the interviewee while they are typing.

(I understand that many of the suggestions I have made might be controversial. I also understand that there are many respected Apus and Bhaiyas who have gone through the interview successfully might have had a very different experience where they were not asked questions of the sort or did not need to provide answers focusing on those points. No single US visa interview is likely to be a replica of another because of the variations in our individual college’s financial aid policies, our own financial circumstances, dynamics in our families, etc. As such, I encourage Apus and Bhaiyas with a different experience to share their personal suggestions since this single set of advice is by no means applicable for all the readers. I am sure I have missed mentioning several important points. Also please do not hesitate to correct me if I have provided any incorrect or illogical information above.)