

Visa delay puts students in a fix

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian students waiting to begin their first semester of study in the United States are having sleepless nights because of the time taken to process their visas.

In November last year, the US Embassy announced that a 20-day waiting period is required for non-immigrant male visa applicants aged between 16 and 45.

The processing of visas used to take between three and five working days. However, several students of the January intake had to wait as long as six weeks.

Since then, additional requirements have been imposed and the waiting period is now expected to take even longer.

Beginning April, male students aged between 16 and 45 are required to fill in a supplemental application form, and as of July 23, all students have to fill in another new form stating the particulars of their family members.

Computer science student Michael Lim, who is due to register at University of Nebraska on Aug 19, submitted his application in June.

"I am getting increasingly worried as Aug 19 draws near," he said.

Most private colleges have told their students to apply for a visa as soon as they received the I-20, a certificate of eligibility issued by the colleges in the US.

A spokesman for Inti College said students, especially those who only received the I-20 in mid-July, are worried that they will not be able to make it for the fall intake scheduled for late August and early September.

The delay has also put the students in a dilemma of whether to book their flight tickets or not.

As long as there are no dates forthcoming, they cannot make flight reservations and the flights may be fully booked by the time visas are available, which means they would have to begin classes the following semester.

Malaysian-American Commission on Educational

Exchange educational advising centre coordinator Marlene Zefferys said students should constantly keep their American universities and colleges informed on the status of their visa applications.

They are advised to ask for a letter from the university allowing them late entry, stating the deadline for them to start classes.

"If their visas are still not ready by the cut-off date, the students should defer till the next semester," she said.

It is also important to submit visa applications 90 days before the date one must report for study.

Students are encouraged to apply for their visas through the commission as counsellors there will ensure that all requirements are met and forms are correctly filled to avoid unnecessary delay.

Students can check the status of their applications with the commission, which will also inform students of any new developments.

For further information, call 03-20938107 or log on to www.macee.org.my