



New Visa Vetting Rules for International Students and Scholars: What You Need to Know

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The U.S. Department of State has released new guidance to allow for processing of visa applications at U.S. overseas consular posts to resume for student (F-1), vocational (M-1), and exchange visitor (J-1) visa applicants. However, those who need visa interview appointments in these categories should expect to undergo expanded screening, including an in-depth review of social media and online presence. If you are applying for a student or exchange visa, these changes could affect the visa application process significantly.

Here's what you need to know.

What's Changing?

Following guidance issued June 18, 2025, consular officers must now conduct **comprehensive vetting** of every F-1, M-1, and J-1 (FMJ) visa applicants, including:

- **Social media profiles**
- **Online activity**, including blogs, articles, and media mentions
- **Public digital presence**

This requirement applies to both **new and renewal applicants**.

When Does This Take Effect?

Consulates around the world are implementing these procedures now. As of late June 2025:

- F, M, and J visa appointments are resuming
- **Expect slower processing times** due to the additional vetting workload
- Priority will be given to:
 - **J-1 physicians**
 - **F-1 students at U.S. schools where international students make up 15% or less of enrollment.** This is likely to more heavily impact elite, private institutions and universities with large STEM-related programs.



According to *The New York Times*, universities like Illinois Tech, Carnegie Mellon, Northeastern, and Columbia had some of the highest international student enrollment in Fall 2023.

For a full breakdown, see the chart published by *The New York Times* [here](#).

What Are Officers Looking For?

According to the new guidance, consular officers are directed to **refuse visas** where applicants show:

- **Hostile attitudes** toward U.S. citizens, government, culture, or institutions
- **Support for or association with terrorist groups**, including online expressions of sympathy
- **Unlawful antisemitic harassment or violence**
- **Inconsistencies** between representations in application materials and online presence

Applicants who fail to meet these standards may be denied a visa under various provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), even if they otherwise qualify.

What Does This Mean for You?

1. **You must expect your online activity to be reviewed:** not just recent posts, but potentially years of content.
2. **“Private” accounts are not exempt.** Applicants will be asked to make all social media profiles public for the purposes of review. For example, if your profile is on “private,” you may need to change it to public and then you can revert to a private status once the visa is issued.
3. **Applicants should be prepared to explain past posts** or activity that may raise questions, even if taken out of context.

If an officer finds potentially derogatory information, your visa may be **refused, delayed, or escalated for further review**.



Who's Affected?

At this time, the guidance applies to everyone applying for an F, M, or J visa, including:

- First-time students and exchange visitors
- Returning students who studied in the U.S. before
- Applicants at all levels, from language schools to Ph.D. programs

Even pending visa applications may be subject to retroactive review.

What Should You Do Now?

Proactive steps we recommend:

- **Review your online presence and keep records of edits.** You may be asked to explain changes to your profile.
- **Set your social media accounts to “public”** if applying soon, but only after a careful review.
- **Be honest during your visa interview.** Any discrepancy between what you say and what's online can trigger a denial.
- **Seek legal counsel before you apply** if you believe your case might be affected.

The new policy reflects a significant expansion of U.S. national security screening for students and exchange visitors. While the intent is to protect institutions and the public, it also raises serious concerns about privacy, fairness, and free expression, especially for students coming from politically sensitive regions. It also may impact the discourse on campuses as students from those regions and those with a diversity of viewpoints are excluded from studying at U.S. universities.

At GYH, we're already helping students, scholars, other exchange visitors, and institutions navigate these evolving rules. If you have questions about your visa application or are facing delays or denials, [**contact us today for a consultation.**](#)