

Dear Members of the UB Community,

The following press release from the U.S. Department of State concerns Visa Mantis, which is one type of background check to which U.S. visa applicants may be subject. Visa Mantis clearances have caused delays in visa application processing for F-1 students, J-1 Exchange Visitors and H-1B temporary workers at UB.

The U.S. Department of State's decision to extend the validity of Visa Mantis clearances is most welcome. As stated below, these clearances will now be in effect for: 1) the duration of the F-1 student's academic program (up to 4 years), 2) the duration of the J-1 Exchange Visitor's approved program of activity (up to 2 years) and 3) the duration of the H-1B temporary worker's work authorization (up to 2 years).

Although U.S. visa applicants may still be subject to other types of background checks and visa processing delays will certainly not be eliminated, F-1 students, J-1 Exchange Visitors and H-1B temporary workers should experience fewer delays in U.S. visa processing that has been the case in the past few years as a result of this change in Visa Mantis policy.

Sincerely,
Ellen Dussourd

Media Note
Office of the Spokesman
Washington, DC
February 11, 2005

Extension of Validity for Science Related Interagency Visa Clearances

Visa applications for persons to study or work in certain sensitive scientific and technical fields are subject to an interagency clearance in Washington, DC, called Visas Mantis. Since 1998, the Visas Mantis clearance process has been used to screen against the illegal transfer of technology. Once the clearance process is complete and a visa is issued, the individual may apply for admission at a U.S. port of entry.

Visas Mantis clearance and visa validity are different than the period of admission determined by a Department of Homeland Security officer at the port of entry.

The U.S. Department of State, in consultation with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, has extended the validity of Visas Mantis clearances for the F (student), J (exchange visitors), H (temporary workers), L (intracompany transferees) and B (tourist and business) categories of visas. This means that, if the original visa has expired and a new visa application is filed to return to the previous study or work program in the United States, another Visas Mantis clearance may not be required. Consular officers have the discretion, if warranted, to request a Visas Mantis clearance during any visa adjudication.

International students (F visas) who have received a Visas Mantis clearance and been issued a visa will benefit from having that clearance be valid for up to the length of the approved academic program, to a maximum of four years. If a student changes academic programs, the clearance will no longer be valid and a Visas Mantis review would be required should the applicant reapply for a new visa.

Temporary workers (H visas), exchange visitors (J visas) and intracompany transferees (L visas) can receive a Visas Mantis clearance valid for the duration of their approved activity to a maximum of two years. If the nature of the visa holder's activity in the United States changes, the clearance will cease to be valid and a new Visas Mantis review would be required should the applicant reapply for a new visa.

Business visitors (B-1 visas) and visitors for pleasure (B-2 visas) can receive a Visas Mantis clearance valid for one year, provided that the original purpose for travel, as stated in the visa application, has not changed on subsequent trips.

In addition to the extension of validity for Visas Mantis clearances, the Department of State has made several other improvements in the Visas Mantis process in the past year. By increasing staffing, improving systems and working with our interagency partners, the Department has been able to decrease the average time to obtain Visas Mantis clearance to less than 14 days.

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See <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/> for all press statements