



Saudi Forum of America

Saudi Forum Campaign



for Following-up Visa Problems

My Visa Threatens My Studies

Campaign's report on the difficulties that Saudi students face when applying for a U.S. student visa

2009

Acknowledgments

We are thankful to God in allowing us to serve our fellow students through our work in this campaign. We are also thankful to the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia and the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission in Washington, DC for their support and encouragement. We also thank everyone who participated in the campaign's survey, as well as all of the Saudi student clubs and the journalists who cooperated with this campaign's activities in any way, shape or form.

Saudi Forum Campaign for Following-up Visa Problems

visa@saudiforum.us

Authors of the Study and Founding Members of the Campaign

Basil AsSadhan, Campaign Manager

Abdurrhman Alshubiki

Moteeb Al Moteri, Campaign Vice-Manager

Ali Alghobary

Sattam Alnomay

Nazeeh Alothmany

Sultan Altukhaim

Participating Campaign Members in Preparing the Study

Fahad Al-sogoor

Ahmed Basam

Fatemah Khawaji

Yasir Alharbi

Ahmed Almulhim

Abstract

This study addresses a number of difficulties that Saudi students face during their visit to the United States. These difficulties are, the delay of issuance or renewal of student visas, the denial of issuance or renewal of student visas, the high rate of extended stay in the U.S. of Saudi students during their course of studies, and the difficulties associated with airport procedures during students' entry into the U.S. An online survey was utilized as the method of research for this study. The survey was offered for ten weeks and had more than three-thousand participants. Additionally, the authors of this study have communicated through in person meetings with several Saudi and U.S. government officials about the results of this study along with the problems that Saudi students face while completing studies of higher education in the U.S.

According to the U.S. Department of State, 10% of Saudi student petitioners are forced to wait more than three months before they obtain a response from the U.S. embassy to their visa application. This delay in issuance or renewal of student visas leads to a higher rate of students being forced to drop at least one semester. Moreover, 40% of Saudi students wait between one to three months for a visa response. This delay (1-3 months) implies spending most of the summer break in Saudi Arabia waiting for a response. The campaign's study found no clear reason as to why the U.S. embassy imposed such a delay in visa response to petitioners. However, the study revealed that the following categories tend to have higher rates in waiting longer before they get a response, men, people with common names, and those who experienced interrogations by U.S. law enforcement agents while staying in the U.S.

According to the campaign's survey, 8% of all Saudi students' visa issuance/renewal applications were denied. The study found that a major role in Saudi student visa issuance/renewal depends greatly on the evaluation conducted by employees at the U.S. embassy to the petitioner's academic performance and to his/her ability to successfully finish his/her study in the U.S. However, according to the survey, 60% of the petitioners who were denied visa did not indicate having any academic problem. In addition, the study found that the rate of visa denial increases for men and those who were interrogated by U.S. law enforcement agents while staying in the U.S.

The study found that 23% of the participants in the survey indicated that they suffered family, social, psychological, or financial consequences because of the difficulties associated with visa processing. The study also includes qualitative data in the form of in person interviews, which reflect these consequences. The study did not find a correlation between the level of participation in student organizations on campus or Islamic centers, and facing difficulties in visa processing.

The study found that visa processing problems have led 52% of survey participants to plan after their current visa expires to stay in the U.S. until they graduate. They do so because they fear that their visas renewal might not be processed in a timely manner or might even be denied. This trend had family, social, psychological, or academic consequences on 44% of these participants because of their inability to visit their relatives during times of happiness or sadness, or during times of emergency. The study also includes qualitative data in the form of in-person interviews of such consequences.

Additionally, 8% of the participants said they waited for more than six hours during their entry into the U.S., while 80% of the participants said that they felt they were targeted because of their country of origin during airport entry procedures. Furthermore, 13% of the participants mentioned

incidents of mistreatment by the Customs and Border Protection officers. The study includes qualitative data in the form of in-person interviews of such mistreatment.

This study is concluded with recommendations to the American and Saudi governments and also includes recommendations to Saudi students in order to mitigate or eliminate the difficulties in student visa issuances.

Introduction

This study is prepared by the team members of the Saudi forum campaign for following-up visa problems. The Report, “My Visa Threatens My Studies”, is presented in order to look into the difficulties associated with visa issuances and renewals for Saudi students in the United States. The study was motivated by the negative impact that the visa problems have had on many students. These problems have often had negative effects regarding their academic performance, on their family, psychological well being, and/or financial stability.

Methodology

A survey about the study’s subject was prepared and posted online. It was announced at several student-based websites and was sent to Saudi students through the Saudi forum mailing list, which has approximately 30,000 members.

The survey was announced on November 23, 2008 and was closed on February 1, 2009. There were 3,177 participants, which give a reliable source for a better understanding of the problem and its consequences on Saudi students in the U.S.

Since some participants have applied for visas more than once, the questions pertaining to U.S. embassy/consulate interviews have been repeated based on the number of times the student was interviewed. Therefore, the number of interviews reported in the survey is 3,598. It was not required from participants to state their names or the names of the schools they are attending. This was done in order to maintain confidentiality. The survey consists of both required and optional questions.

In addition, the authors of this study have communicated through in person meetings with several U.S. and Saudi government officials about problems that Saudi students face while completing studies of higher education in the U.S.

Aspects of the Study

The study focuses on three aspects which are divided into three sections as follows:

1. U.S. embassy interviews, in which general statistics relating to U.S. embassy interviews are given, followed by an analysis of the cases that have been delayed for more than three months, the cases that have been denied, and lastly a listing of sample stories of the suffering that the visa problems had on students.
2. The impact of the problem on students living in the U.S., with sample stories of their suffering because of their fear to leave the U.S. due to fear of difficulties in renewing their visas.
3. The difficulties associated with airport procedures during entry to the U.S. and while traveling inside the U.S. along with a list of samples of the mistreatment by officers from airport security and Customs and Border Protection.

Each section ends with a conclusion, and a number of recommendations are listed at the end of the report.

1 First Aspect: American Embassy Interviews

There were 3589 interviews; several questions were asked for each interview. We list the following:

Which year did you have the interview?

18% 2005
23% 2006
26% 2007
33% 2008

Was the visa issued for you? (There were 3322 responses, since some participants were still waiting to hear back from the embassy)

92% Yes
8% No

How long did you wait before receiving a request to send the passports to the embassy? If you are still waiting, how long have you been waiting so far? (Note: This waiting period does not include the waiting time for getting a reply after sending the passports to the embassy)

65% Less than 2 weeks
21% 2-8 weeks
6% 8-12 weeks
8% More than 12 weeks

Were you nervous during the interview?

10% Yes
36 % Sort of nervous
54% No

1.1 Analyzing delayed cases

1.1.1 Delay reasons given by the embassy

When participants were asked whether the embassy provided the reasons for the delay, the following were the common answers:

- No reason given by the embassy
- Incomplete application
- Requesting additional information from the petitioner
- Security concerns
- Name mix-ups

The last two answers (security concerns and name mix-ups) were further analyzed. The responses of the participants who were interrogated by law enforcement agents were analyzed independently, as well as those who had common names.

Those who were interrogated by law enforcement agents

Among the questions given to participants is the number of times they were interrogated by American law enforcement agents. Participants were requested not to count the ones that took place in U.S. airports. There were 159 participants (includes 9 females) who were interrogated at

least once. Those who were interrogated constitute 7% of those who responded to this question. The approximate number of Saudi students in the U.S. is 19000; therefore, if we apply this percentage, we will have about 1330 students interrogated by law enforcement agents. The number of embassy interviews that these 159 participants had was 228 interviews. The waiting time it took the embassy to request their passports to be sent after the interview was:

- 61% Less than two weeks
- 19% 2-8 weeks
- 9% 8-12 weeks
- 11% More than 12 weeks

The results indicate that the delay time rates for those who were interrogated by law enforcement agents were longer than the overall rates of visa processing time.

Students with common names

Participants were asked if they thought their names were common. We looked to the waiting times of:

- Those who said their **full name** (first, middle and last) is either “common” or “common to some extent.
- Those who said their first and last name is either “common” or “common to some extent.

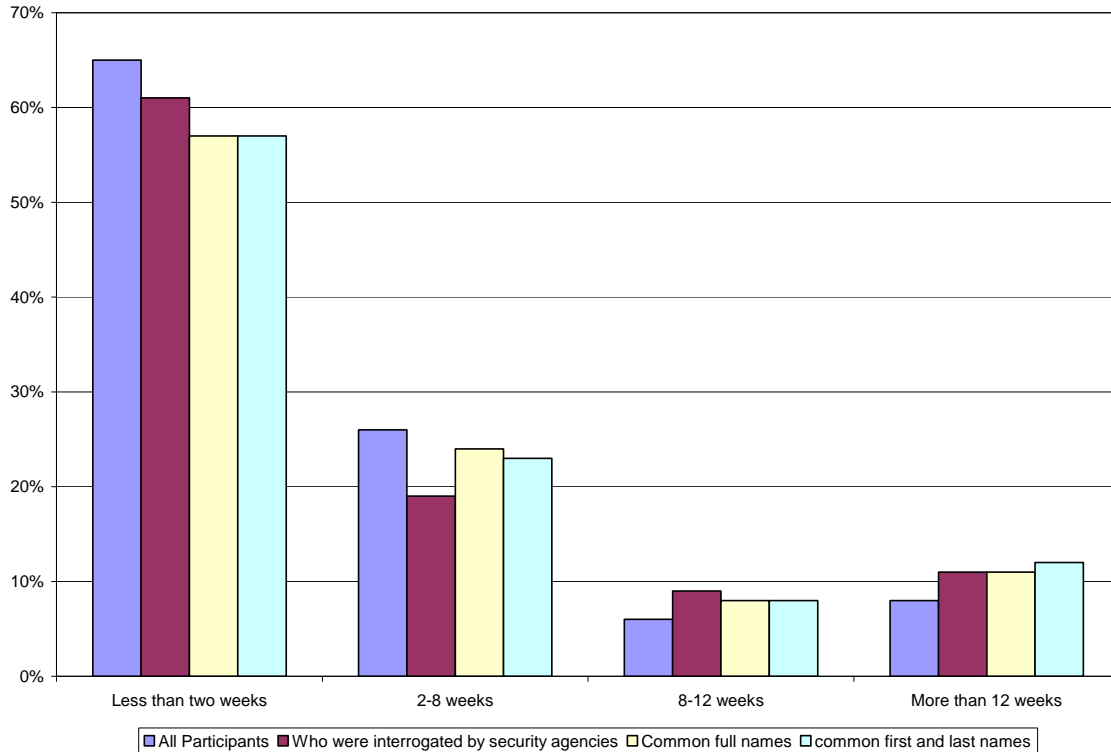
The waiting time it took the embassy to request participants with common full names to send their passports after the interview was (number of interviews: 849):

- 57% Less than two weeks
- 24% 2-8 weeks
- 8% 8 to 12 weeks
- 11% More than 12 weeks

The waiting time it took the embassy to request participants with common first and last names to send their passports after the interview was (number of interviews: 998):

- 57% Less than two weeks
- 23 2-8 weeks
- 8% 8 to 12 weeks
- 12% More than 12 weeks

These results indicate that the delay time for people with common names was longer than the overall visa processing time reported in the survey.



Comparing waiting time until getting a response from the day of the embassy's interview for different categories

1.1.2 Other possible factors for delays in visa processing time

Survey responses were further analyzed by comparing the rates of visa processing time based on different possible factors with the overall rates of visa processing time.

We looked to the waiting time for females based on their material status.

Waiting time for married females (number of interviews: 236)

- 79% Less than two weeks
- 14% 2-8 weeks
- 2% 8-12 weeks
- 5% More than 12 weeks

Waiting time for single females (number of interviews: 148)

- 90% Less than two weeks
- 6% 2-8 weeks
- 3% 8-12 weeks
- 1% More than 12 weeks

These results indicate that the delay time from females is less than males, especially for singles. Married females visas might be delayed merely to be delivered along with their husbands' visas since they usually undergo the procedure together.

In addition, we looked at the answers of the survey participants concerning the following factors, however, survey results did not indicate a correlation between them and delays in visa processing time:

- Age.
- Marital status for males.
- Education level.
- Transferring from one school to another.
- Academic problems.
- Level of activity in university student organizations.
- Level of activity in Islamic centers.
- Criminal offences.
- Traffic violations.
- Nervousness during the interview.

1.1.3 Relation between processing delays and denial of visa

To see whether there is a relation between processing delays and visa denial, we looked at interviews for petitioners who got a response from the embassy after more than 12 weeks. There were 194 interviews. The embassy's response for whether they obtained visas or not were as follows:

- 87% visa was issued
- 13% visa was not issued

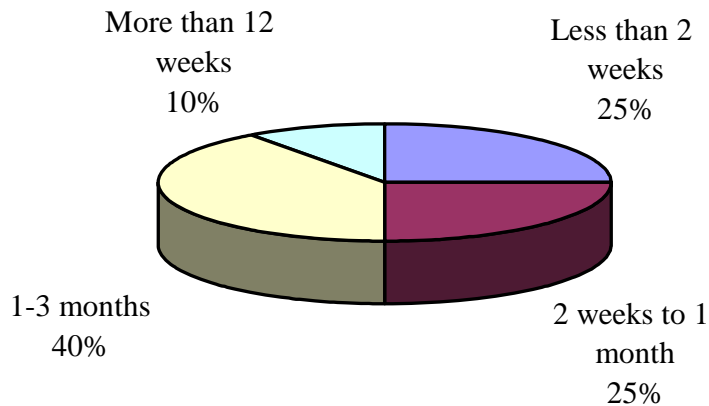
The denial percentage rose from 8% for the overall number of participants to 13% for those who waited more than 12 weeks to get a response. This indicates that waiting longer to hear back from the embassy does not imply that the chance of issuing a visa will increase, rather it decreases.

1.1.4 Waiting time according to U.S. Department of State

The following are the delay statistics obtained from the U.S. Department of State¹:

- 25% Less than 2 weeks
- 25% 2 weeks - 1 month
- 40% 1-3 months
- 10% More than 3 months

¹ Nahayat Al Usbou (End of the week) program at Al Arabiya News Channel, March 5, 2009.



**Actual waiting time -based on U.S. Department of State-
until getting a response from the day of the embassy’s interview**

It is hard to make an accurate comparison between the numbers obtained from the state department with the ones from the survey. This is because the delay time in the survey only includes the time the petitioner waited until the embassy requested his/her passport, and did not include the time when the passport was held at the embassy until he/she got a response. However, we can observe the closeness in the percentage of waiting for more than 12 weeks between the numbers of the state of department (10%) and at the results of the survey (8%).

Based on the numbers obtained from the state department, 50% get a response within a month, 40% may end up waiting for 3 months, which means that they have to plan to spend most of summer in Saudi Arabia so that they do not risk losing a term of their studies, and 10% of students end up waiting for more than 3 months, which means wasting a semester or more of their school work. Since students do not know how long would they would end up waiting, this causes great deal of stress when making their travel plans.

1.1.5 Conclusions

- Based on the numbers obtained from the state department, 50% of Saudi Students are suffering from the delay in visa processing time. 10% end up waiting for more than 3 months, which means that they would end up missing a semester of their school work. 40% of students end up waiting between one to three months, which means they would need to spend most of the summer vacation waiting for issuing their visas.
- Survey did not show clear reasons for delayed processing time, however, the following categories seem to have longer waiting times:
 1. Males.
 2. Petitioners with common names.
 3. Petitioners who were interrogated by law enforcement agents.

The common factor between these categories is security concerns. In many cases, such concerns might be based on suspicion, or guilt of association, without violations.

1.2 Analyzing visa denial cases

When participants were asked whether the embassy provided the reasons for denial, the following were the common answers they gave:

- Not qualified to study in the U.S.
- Have academic problems in the U.S.
- No specific reason given by the embassy.

The first two reasons indicate that having an academic admission from a school in the U.S. or being currently enrolled in a school in the U.S. are not enough to prove the ability of the petitioner to study in the U.S. The employees conducting interviews at the U.S. embassy attempt to have their own evaluation of the petitioner's ability to study in the U.S. The survey did not include questions to help distinguish between petitioners who were applying for a student visa for the first time and those who were renewing their visa.

The campaign team attempted to explore the factors used by the embassy in evaluating the ability of an petitioner to study in the U.S. and found that continuous decline in the GPA of a student, or dropping an entire semester are indications that the student is not taking his/her school work seriously and he/she might be staying in the U.S. for other reasons.

We also observe that in many cases, the embassy did not give reasons for denying an application. This means that academic performance is not the only factors involved.

Students with academic problems

Participants were asked to state if they had any academic problems. There were 809 interviews where the petitioners stated they had academic problems. Their responses for whether they obtained visas or not were as follows:

- 84% received visa
- 16% denied visa

But when looking only at the interviews of petitioners who were denied visas (259 interviews), the percentage of petitioners having academic problems was as follows:

- 60% did not had any academic problems
- 40% had academic problems

The results indicate that students with academic problems have a higher rate (16%) of visa denial than other students (8%). This indicates that academic performance is a major factor in visa denial, which goes along with the reasons stated by survey participants for the denial of their visa requests. However, it is not the only one, since among those who were denied visas, 60% of them did not have academic problems. This means that the majority of those who were denied have no academic problems.

1.2.2 Other possible factors for visa denial

Survey responses were further analyzed by comparing the rate of denied applications based on different possible factors with the overall rate of denied applications.

We looked into the visa application responses for females, and they were as follows (362 interviews):

96% received visa
4% denied visa

The denial rate for females is half of the overall denial rate reported in the survey. Taking into consideration that males constitute the majority of survey participants with a percentage of 88%, we conclude that males have a higher denial rate.

We looked into the visa application responses for those who were previously interrogated by law enforcement agents and they were as follows (223 interviews):

89% received visa
11% denied visa

This shows that being interrogated previously by law enforcement agents increases the risks of denied application.

In addition, we looked at the answers of the survey participants concerning the following factors, however, survey results did not indicate a correlation between them and visa denial:

- Age.
- Marital status.
- Having a common name.
- Education level
- Transferring from one school to another
- Level of activity in university student organizations.
- Level of activity in Islamic centers.
- Criminal offences.
- Traffic violations.
- Nervousness during the interview.

1.2.3 Conclusions

- According to the survey's results, 8% of Saudi students' visa petitioners are denied.
- The personal evaluation of the employee conducting the interview at the U.S. embassy or consulate of the petitioner's academic performance and ability to study in the U.S. has a major role on the decision to grant or deny the visa application.
- The visa denial rate doubles for people with academic problems. However, 60% of those who were denied visa did not have academic problems.
- In addition to petitioners with academic problems, the visa denial rate increases for these two categories:
 1. Males
 2. Those were interrogated with law enforcement agents

1.3 Saudi student's suffering due to visa issuance problems

When the participants were asked about the consequences and effects of having their visa issuance application denied or delayed, 830 participants stated that there were family, social, psychological, or financial consequences. Here are some examples:

- A student, along with his wife and four children, visited their family in Saudi Arabia at the beginning of the summer. After they had their visa interviews, they had to wait for 10 months to have the visas issued. During that long waiting time, the student had to skip two academic semesters, interrupt his children's education by transferring them to a local Saudi school instead of the one they go to in the US, pay the rent and utility bills for their vacant house, and finally stay unemployed as he was unable to know how long the visa will take to be issued.
- A student finished his Master's Degree and got a Doctoral Degree acceptance in the same university in the US. He decided to go for a visit to Saudi Arabia, and apply to renew his visa over there. In order to avoid what happened to the previous student above, he evacuated his house, sold his furniture, and had his car shipped home. Unexpectedly, he got the visa in time. However, he had to do a lot of arrangements to settle down again, which cost him money and time as if he was a new student starting up. He could have avoided that entire burden if there had not been such issues with the visa renewal process.
- Another student decided to stay in the US until graduation. But his wife went to Saudi Arabia with their children to attend her sister's wedding. The wife, along with the children, applied to reissue their visas, which took them 14 months! Because of that long time of family separation, both spouses faced hard time missing each other, which affected the student's academic performance and social life. Additionally, the children were under emotional distress being away from their father.
- A student went to Saudi Arabia to get married to his fiancé and bring her back with him to the US. Unfortunately, it took them 11 months to have the visas issued. While the newly married couple was waiting, they did not know what to do in terms of housing and studying. Feeling unsettled was strong worrisome. Also, the student lost a full academic year besides having to pay the rent and bills while away.
- Similarly, another student wanted to get married to his fiancée who lived in Saudi Arabia. But this time the bride-to-be flew with her parents all the way from Saudi Arabia to Pittsburgh, PA because the student did not want to take the risk of visa renewal. It was unusual and imperfect wedding party as no one from the groom's parents and relatives was there to share the joy with the marrying couple.
- A Ph.D. student went back home for a visit. He applied for a visa, however his request got rejected. He was about to finish his Doctoral program and to defend his dissertation. Because his university's policies required students to register in their last semester, hence psychically be present at the university. He couldn't defend his dissertation via a phone conference. The student was unable to complete his degree. His effort and time trying to pursue his dream was all gone uncompensated.
- An ESL student was very terrified from the widely spread visa renewal nightmare. So he decided to go to Saudi Arabia during his English learning program to see his mother and siblings before his visa expires. Consequently, his starting academic semester in the university got postponed due to that visit.

- A student holding a valid visa visited his family with intent to come back before it expires without any uncertainties. Unfortunately, he was not allowed to re-enter the states and got returned by the US authorities at the airport only because he happened to casually “know” a person who happens to be of interest.

- This student decided to stay in the US working towards his PhD degree to avoid any surprises that his fellow students had when they tried to renew their visas. He did not see his family for five years. Sadly, three major tragedies happened to his family in Saudi Arabia while he was away: his ailing father passed away and he couldn't give his farewell and see him for last time, his ailing mother in law passed away before his wife could give her farewell and see her for last time, and his brother in law also passed away, and his wife couldn't see him and give her farewell. The student could not attend his brother wedding either, as well as the wife could not attend the weddings of two of her nephews. In addition, they are facing some difficulties regarding their Saudi bank account and Saudi ID expiration and other issues that require personal presence.

2 Second Aspect: Students with Expired Visas in the U.S.

Many Saudi students with already expired visas (or visas that are going to expire before they graduate) plan to stay in the U.S. and not visit Saudi Arabia until they graduate because of the fear they might not be able to renew their visas on time. This section addresses the effect of staying in the U.S. on students; we present the results for 2324 participants

Do you intend to stay until graduation without visiting Saudi Arabia (after your visa expires) because of the hardship associated with visa renewal procedures?

52% Yes

48% No

The following questions were addressed to the participants who answered “Yes” to the previous question.

Is there a specific reason that made you decide not to visit until graduation?

94% Fearing that the visa will not be renewed

5% Academic reasons

How much time do you expect to stay in the States (calculated from your last visit to Saudi Arabia until your anticipated graduation date)?

38% 1-2 years

42% 3-4 years

10% 5-6 years

10% Other

2.1 The suffering of Saudi students with expired visas in the U.S. who fear that their visas renewal applications might be denied or delayed.

When the participants who intend to stay in the U.S. were asked about the consequences and effects of not going back to visit, 531 participant stated that there were family, social, psychological, or financial consequences. Here are some examples:

- “After what I heard about students facing significant visa delays, I decided to stay until I finish my studies and get my degree. It has been two years now since I visited my county. During these two years, my parents got a baby boy, whom I never saw except in photos. If I saw him now, I would not recognize him. Just imagine what a 6-years old boy would say when he sees me after four year from now? How would he react to brother he never saw except that he knew he was studying abroad?”
- “I lost my best friend, my cousin, while I was in the US. I had to spend that distressing time myself apart from my family. I could not say goodbye to him nor see him for the last time.”
- “I have been in USA for a year and 7 months, in which I could not go back home because I am afraid of being stuck without a visa. Because of that, my health and psyche tumbled and I suffered from a sever headache and psychological stress which negatively affected my academic performance. I have been checked by many physicians, but got no effective result. I am still suffering from some of these, but thank God I am getting better.”
- “I am in a situation that only God knows. I am only seven months away from graduation and getting my Master’s. I have a 45-day holiday, but I cannot go back home because of

everyone's nightmare, visa renewal. My dad is very ailing now, and I cannot see him. My supplication in every prayer is to bring us together in this life for the life after. Moreover, my mom has passed away and I am the youngest among my siblings whom I am deprived from seeing as well."

- "My brother-in-law is very ill, so my husband, who is the elder and only brother to him, is in a very frustrating situation because he cannot go to see his brother and support him. Our family's atmosphere is deteriorating due to our uncertainty that we will be able to reissue our visas."
- "More than five of my relatives have passed away while I was in the US. My mother got diagnosed with cancer and she is currently in chemotherapy, which is a main cause of me getting a low GPA."
- "I lost the woman whom I waited for 18 years to get married to. The situation broke my heart and it made me desperate though I am close now to get a high academic degree. We were in agreement in getting married, but her long wait changed the plan negatively. America gave me a degree, but took my dream and life away."

2.2 Conclusions:

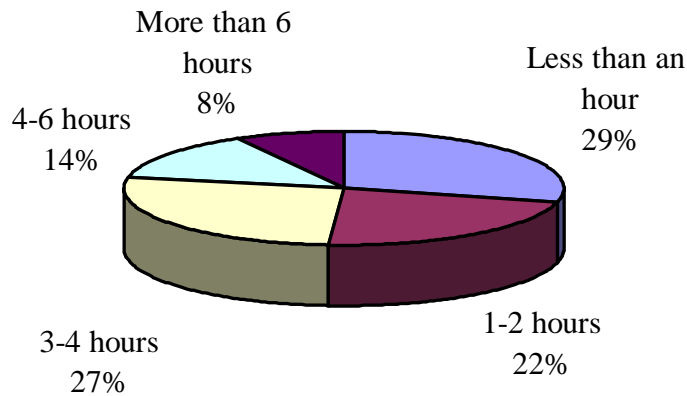
- 52% of the participants intend to stay in the United States when their visas expire until the time of their graduation. The total number of Saudi students in the United States with their dependents is around 25,000. If we applied the above percentage to them, the number of people who intend to stay will be about 13,000 Saudi.
- 44% of the students who intend to stay stated that their stay had negative family, social, psychological, or financial consequences on them.
- 94% of the students who intend to stay have no reason to do so but the fear of visa denial or delay. This is a huge burden that would have a negative impact on their academic performance.
- More than half of the students who intend to stay will likely need more than three years until they graduate. This will increase the probability that they will not be able to attend the major happy or sad occasions back home or even be there for any emergency situation.

3 Third Aspect: Airport Difficulties

This section addresses the difficulties that Saudi students face with airport procedures during entry to the U.S and while traveling inside the U.S., we present the results for 2277 participants.

What is the average time you spend to finish the CBP (Customs and Border Protection) Special Registration procedure (NSEERS)? (Please do not include the time you spend with other passengers until it is you turn to meet the officer)

- 29% Less than an hour
- 22% 1-2 Hours
- 27% 2-4 Hours
- 14% 4-6 Hours
- 8% More than 6 Hours



The average time spent by students to finish the Special Registration procedure

Have you ever been denied admission to the United States by a CBP officer in any American airport and sent back to Saudi Arabia?

- 1% Yes
- 99% No

Do you feel that you are targeted –as a Saudi- by the CBP officers?

- 39% Yes
- 41% Sometimes
- 20% No

How do you evaluate the CBP treatment and behavior?

- 23% Good
- 54% Average
- 23% Bad

3.1 Samples of the bad treatment received from CBP officers

When participants were asked to state any mistreatment they faced by airport security, and customs and border protection personnel, 291 participants listed mistreatments they faced. Here are some samples of these:

- “When I got to Washington, D.C. airport, along with my family, the immigration officer asked us to do the special registration. When we got in there, there was one Saudi family ahead of us in the line. We handed our passports and then we were asked to wait. Surprisingly, more passengers came after we got there and got processed while we were waiting! We had to wait for 4 hours until the officer interrogated us for only 10 minutes and then he let us go.”
- “The immigration officer was smiling and welcoming not until he saw my Saudi passport. He frowned as if I was a criminal.”
- “We wait for a long time. Nobody cares and asks about us. All the immigration officers disappear, and then show up again when another international flight arrives. Again, they finish registration, and then disappear to change shifts.”
- “After the officer took my Saudi passport and interrogated me and asked me where I lived, I was taken to another room, small one, and asked to wait. I have waited for 7 hours! Then they allowed me to go home. ”
- At JFK airport my passport was stamped and I finished in about 3 hours, but the officers asked me to go back to the room and I stayed 3 more hours, and when the supervisor saw my passport already done he said why is he staying here then? I missed my flight because of this.
- I was at the immigration office at JFK Airport and when the officer was done with his questions he threw my passport on the desk and then said: Go! I don't want to see you again!!
- In Washington Dulles airport, one of the security personnel was offensive and shouted in my father's face when he asked a question. My father is a major general and an old man who sacrificed everything for our future and seeing him in a situation like that made us feel horrible and we wished at this moment that we didn't come here. Moreover, I am a US citizen.
- At New York JFK airport, I wanted to have my I-94 stamped, the lady who took my passport to stamp it said "This passport shouldn't be green, it should be black!!"
- “When I finished my ESL studies in Portland, OR and got my Master's degree admission, my family and I needed to move to Missouri. In a very annoying way, we were searched thoroughly at Portland's airport, and even my son's diaper got searched! ”
- “At Dulles airport (Washington, D.C.), the officers searched my 4-month old son as if he were an adult. They made him stand on the search table, and spread his hands for inspection!”

3.2 Conclusions:

- The waiting time is split in comparable percentages between the different answers available for participants. The only exception is the last group (more than six hours) which was chosen by a lower number of participants (8%). We believe that those waiting time differences are due to coming through different ports of entry and using different airlines. Saudi Airlines flights that arrive at IAD or JFK -for example- are known to have a high number of Saudis on board. This will obviously increase the waiting time.

- 77% of the participants believe that their treatment by the CBP officers was either good or average. In the other hand, 13% gave examples of bad experiences they had with those officers. These numbers show that the majority of CBP officers act in a good manner. Still 23% of them do not. This is regarding the treatment, but the way they look towards Saudis is much worse. 80% of the participants felt they have been targeted as Saudis by the officers.

4 Recommendations

4.1 Recommendations U.S. government

1. Reduce the time it takes to process a visa request and allow students to renew their visas while in the U.S. before going back to Saudi Arabia. This will tremendously save their school time when making short trips home for either holidays or urgent matters. Going through lengthy visa renewal process during breaks is very inconvenient and may affect the student's academic commitments.
2. Enhance the level of communication and collaboration among Department of Homeland Security, Department of State, and other governmental agencies regarding the clarity and correctness of intelligent data gathered about the visa petitioner. We request this so that for example, a spontaneous and routine FBI interrogation would not lead to a severe delay when the student in question applies for a visa renewal afterward, due to lack of information sharing among the agencies involved.
3. Overcome the problem of "common names" faced by the U.S. agencies by using additional distinguishing and identifying data such as date of birth to reduce the consequences and burden of processing petitioners' information, which will eventually expedite the visa application process. For visas renewal, it would be very helpful to utilize the data about students available on SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) while the petitioner is still in the U.S. before going back home and applying for visa renewal. This will help both the American and Saudi parties to save time and effort.
4. Open direct channels of communication for visa petitioners who have been waiting for long times with governmental agencies in the U.S. to expedite getting a response.
5. Improve Special Registration procedures imposed on foreign visitors arriving at the U.S. international airports by either increasing the number of personnel or adopting a more efficient registration process.
6. Continue improving the quality of service offered to the visitors by the Immigration Officers at the airports to meet the expected level of professionalism and respect.
7. Open a communication channel between international students and related U.S. agencies to respond to the different inquiries regarding the immigration laws, visa status, or other legal concerns. International students' offices in the universities are unable sometime to provide confirmed answers to such questions.
8. Improve the current "Visa Point" system to be more flexible and convenient. Currently, the system only allows taking appointments three months ahead, which makes the student's job hard in finding a suitable future date. Moreover, it also accepts a limited number of interviewees per day, which consequently reduce the number of available slots per day.

9. Enhance the waiting area facilities at the U.S. embassy and consulates in Saudi Arabia to be convenient and comfortable for interviewees who wait for hours i.e. by providing drinks and snacks vending machine, phone service, Internet, etc.
10. Increase the degree of responsiveness provided by the visas section at the embassy and consulates to petitioner's requests for assistance and inquiries. The current phone service provided is not as effective as it should be because the phone line is either busy or not answered by anyone.
11. Expand the extent of the interview-exempted age group to include more of the student's parents who want to visit their son/daughter in the U.S. Parents visit can lower the level of the student's homesickness and help the student develop a good academic and emotional stability.

4.2 Recommendations for Saudi government

1. Increase students' awareness about U.S. laws before and after arriving to the U.S.
2. Increase collaboration and regular meetings with related U.S. agencies.
3. Create public channels between students and U.S. agencies to answer questions, and hold open meetings with representatives from these agencies to answer students' questions and provide any updates or changes in the U.S. law.

4.3 Recommendations for students

1. Make sure that there is enough time between your international flight and your domestic connection to your final destination. Special Registration procedure imposed by American authorities might take one to six hours depending on the number of passengers who are subject to the same procedure.
2. Treat the immigration officers politely. This will usually expedite your registration and make it more comfortable for you and him or her.
3. Give notice to the Saudi Embassy or the Cultural Mission if you face any obstacle that prevents you from entering the United States.
4. Do not violate the law as this might negatively affect you record and legal status.
5. Make sure that you register the number of credit hours required by the immigration authorities on all international students to stay on status. You should also maintain a good academic performance. A good GPA gives a strong indication that the student is serious and keen to achieve his academic objective which was the main reason for his stay in the United States. Also, there is a clear relationship between low academic performance and visa denial.

6. Consult with the international students office in your university before taking any academic decisions (drop classes, change major, change university...etc.) to avoid violating the law unknowingly.
7. Keep any document that explains any academic or legal problems you have gone through during your stay in the United States.
8. Update your address and university information with the immigration authority. This is a legal obligation that must be kept. A violation might get you deported.