



# INDIANA UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL SERVICES

Bloomington

## SELECTING AN IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY

Per University policy, employees of Indiana University are prohibited from referring legal matters of any nature to a particular attorney or legal firm. Such referrals can be made only by University Counsel, and are made only for matters directly related to University business. The University will not in any way become involved in personal legal matters of individual students and scholars.

While staff in the Office of International Services provide a wide range of visa and immigration advising and assistance to individual international students and scholars, the assistance provided is directly related to the University's responsibilities as host or employer during the student or scholar's stay in the U.S. When a student or scholar is in need of legal assistance outside of the realm of University business, it is up to the individual to identify an attorney to provide the appropriate guidance.

The following information is provided as a convenience to assist you in identifying lawyers who may have expertise in immigration matters. Attached is a list of attorneys in the state of Indiana who are members of the Indiana American Immigration Lawyers Association.

### **Select an attorney early in the process**

Immigration procedures can be very slow and time consuming. Therefore, we recommend that you select your legal advisor early in the process. Do not wait until a few weeks before your deadline. In order to present your application in the best possible manner, you should allow sufficient time for your lawyer to do a thorough job of researching your case.

### **Consult others concerning the immigration process**

Before you contact an attorney on the attached list, consult family members, friends or associates who have been involved with the immigration process. They may be able to share with you their experiences with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), their legal costs, and recommendations concerning attorneys they have worked with.

### **Begin your evaluation of the attorney when you make your initial call**

Once you have selected a prospective attorney, you should call to make an appointment to discuss your case. This call should be an important part of your evaluation of the attorney. Begin the call with a short description of your situation and the immigration problem you wish to address. You do not have to give all the details at this time. You should merely describe in general terms the nature of the issue and include deadlines you are facing.

### **Ask the following questions:**

- Do you handle these types of cases?
- How long have you been doing this type of work? (It is best to hire a lawyer who has a lot of experience).
- How many cases similar to mine have you handled?

- What percentage of your practice is devoted to immigration law? (Some attorneys have a general practice and immigration is only a small part of their work. It is best to hire a specialist who devotes a major percentage of his or her time to this area).
- Do you charge an initial consultation fee? (Some lawyers will charge a fee for your first meeting).
- How do you set your fees for these types of cases?

You may wish to contact several attorneys to compare their answers to these questions. Once you have identified a lawyer you wish to hire, you should schedule a meeting to discuss your case in greater detail.

### **The first meeting**

It is important to remember that at this meeting, you are still evaluating the lawyer. If you are not confident that this person can do the best job for you, you may decide to seek another legal advisor.

Be prepared to give a concise statement of your situation and the goals you would like to achieve. You may save time by writing a short chronology of your experiences and contacts with the Department of Homeland Security. Be sure to bring your passport, Form 1-94, Form 1-20 or DS-2019, and copies of correspondence with government agencies and other immigration documents.

### **Ask the following questions during the initial meeting:**

- What are the options and procedures for handling my case?
- How long might it take to resolve my case? (Every case is different and more complex cases will take longer to resolve. The attorney should be able to give you an approximate amount of time it may take to get a decision in cases such as yours).
- What are my prospects for success? (The lawyer cannot guarantee a successful outcome. However, based on his or her experience, the attorney should be able to give you a preliminary evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of your case).
- What is the fee that you will charge for my case? (It is important that you understand how you will be charged for the attorney's services and when you will be required to make payments).

### **Questions you should ask yourself during the initial meeting:**

- Does the lawyer demonstrate an understanding of immigration law and procedures?
- Does the lawyer communicate ideas to you in a clear and effective manner?
- Does he or she seem to care about your problem?
- Are you confident that this person has the ability to handle your case competently and honestly?
- Do you understand the fee arrangement, and can you afford it?

As the case proceeds, you should remember that you are paying the lawyer to provide a service to you. You should feel free to give explicit instructions on the way you would like your case to be handled. If, at any time, you have concerns about the level of service you are receiving, you should be comfortable discussing this with the attorney.