# Information about Security Advisory Opinions
# (SAOs)

*The information below was written by Larry Bell, Chair of the Consular Affairs Working Group of NAFSA: Association of International Educators.*

**_When is a Security Advisory Opinion (SAO) requested?_** An SAO may be required of a visa applicant for a number of reasons: a "hit" during a name-check; being a "national" of certain countries; studying or researching an academic field on the Technology Alert List (TAL); or, based on the "intuition" of the interviewing officer.

NAME-CHECK… Every applicant for any visa must undergo a name-check through the Consolidated Consular Database (CCD). If the applicant's name matches a name on the database as a 'problem', an SAO is required.

NATIONALITY… Being a "national" of certain countries is all that is needed in order to require an SAO. "National" may mean that the individual has dual citizenship, once was a citizen of one of those countries, OR was born in one of those countries. The only way to avoid this is if proof of renunciation of that citizenship is in writing (whether in fact the applicant was ever a citizen of the country).

TAL… Many of the fields of study listed on the TAL are very broadly stated which results in a number of SAOs. Detailed (but not lengthy!) explanations of the specific research that the applicant is engaged in may obviate the need for an SAO, if the research is clearly not of strategic importance.

INTUITION… Consular officers are asked to use their own impressions to request an SAO if they are at all unsure of whether it is necessary or not.

**_How long does an SAO take?_** SAOs are referrals to "Washington agencies," note the use of the plural form. Several agencies check the individual's background through their own systems and pass the results back to a central point. It is not possible to find out exactly where the SAO is at any one point in time, only whether it is still in process or not.

The U.S. Department of State claims that 80% of all SAOs are cleared within two weeks. There is no prediction ever made of the length of time it will take. Some posts may tell applicants the "average for an SAO is X weeks/months", but this is anecdotal and only an AVERAGE for the recent experience of their post.