The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Margaret Spellings
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Rice and Secretary Spellings:

We write on behalf of the six national presidential higher education associations to express our deep appreciation to you for convening the University Presidents Summit on International Education, and to convey our interest in working with you to advance the important national goals discussed at the Summit. This was truly an extraordinary and unprecedented event. Your participation, as well as that of other cabinet and White House officials, and especially of President Bush, clearly demonstrated the administration’s recognition of the importance of international education to the economic and security needs of the nation.

The responses we have received from our participating colleagues and many in our community have been uniformly positive and attest to the quality and substance of the discussions carried out at the conference. Moreover, we are encouraged by some of the initiatives that the administration has undertaken since the Summit, such as the “Rice-Chertoff Joint Vision: Secure Borders and Open Doors in the Information Age,” and the announcement by the Department of Commerce that it will address some of our concerns regarding the deemed export policy. These positive steps further underscore the President’s commitment to the ideals of the Summit.

We believe that the important goals identified at the Summit complement and build upon the existing framework of federal programs supporting international education and related activities. We encourage you to work collaboratively to integrate and strengthen this array of programs into a national structure that meets the Summit’s goals. We hasten to add that we recognize that colleges and universities have their own specific responsibilities in such a collaborative effort. These higher education responsibilities include seeking ways to improve and expand our international education programs and K-12 teacher education programs, expanding our foreign student exchange and study-abroad programs, and expanding connections with K-12 schools to assist them in building strong, early programs of foreign language and international education.
The following sections of this letter describe what we see as the major components of a national program for creating the necessary language and cultural competence needed for the nation to operate effectively and securely in the global environment of the 21st century. With the President's National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) as the extremely important new addition, these programs provide a solid foundation on which to build such a national program.

I. The National Security Language Initiative Recognizes a National Need

Teaching foreign language is part of our institutions’ global mission. The NSLI will strengthen the capacity of the nation’s education system to address a very real need. We believe NSLI is important to our future economic prosperity, national security—especially the current fight against terrorism—and understanding and appreciating other cultures. The main components of the initiative as announced provide support for programs beginning in grade school and reaching through graduate school that are designed to provide paths to attainment of critical foreign language competency. NSLI also provides in-service teacher training and material resources to support this goal.

II. Study Abroad Strengthens Language Training and Global Knowledge

Preparing today’s students to operate effectively in a global environment requires strong study abroad programs. The inclusion of study abroad should be an important component of the NSLI. We were pleased that during the summit each of you mentioned the importance of study abroad. Many colleges and universities are working hard to expand this dimension of foreign language learning and cultural understanding.

We call your attention to the Congressionally-established Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program. The Commission has issued a report recommending a national fellowship program with the 10 year goal of one million students per year studying abroad for credit as part of their higher education.

The Lincoln program encourages students to study in countries with non-Western cultures and languages, and also endeavors to improve language proficiency. The Lincoln Commission found that students who study abroad are fundamentally changed. They have a much different perspective about the world and their knowledge of global affairs is increased immensely. They also are more apt to retain the foreign language skills learned through their study abroad experience, especially in the less-commonly-taught languages such as Chinese and Arabic, and their interest in studying the language deepens. The Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship program would complement and enhance the President’s NSLI.

III. Title VI and Allied Programs Provide Core Training

The programs funded under Title VI of the Higher Education Act support a national network of foreign language and area studies centers that combine federal funds with substantial university matching funds to build a critical national resource. Congress created Title VI in the National Defense Education Act of 1958 out of a sense of crisis about the lack of knowledge in the United States of other countries and cultures. Spanning more than four decades, this program remains the federal government’s most comprehensive mechanism for building the nation’s
expertise in foreign language, and in area and other international studies, including international business.

Together with Fulbright-Hays, Title VI provides a comprehensive approach to foreign language training and area studies focusing on less commonly taught languages and less well-known areas of the world. These programs support outreach activities for elementary and secondary students as well as undergraduate and graduate students. They also foster advanced research related to the language and area studies, and fund centers that consider the interests of U.S. businesses abroad.

The knowledge and capacity developed by Title VI programs and the individuals who have been trained by Title VI are priceless national resources. Title VI has served the nation well in the past and will continue to do so in the future. Its funding leverages a large amount of non-federal funding, thus producing a substantial impact on the field of international education for a small investment of taxpayer dollars.

The National Security Education Program (NSEP), housed in the Department of Defense, complements Title VI by providing foreign language and area studies training in less commonly taught languages—such as Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Korean—through intensive university-based programs and study abroad. Students who participate in the program incur a service obligation to work in a national security-related position in defense and intelligence agencies or other federal agencies.

The State Department's Title VIII Program for the Study of Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States of the Former Soviet Union supports graduate and postdoctoral research and training, intensive language training, and fellowships for overseas research and training that build expertise focused on this important part of the world.

The Department of Education’s Title VI program, complemented by DOD’s NSEP and State’s Title VIII programs, provide a core set of programs that are compatible with the President’s National Security Language Initiative. Together, these programs will build a stronger, more comprehensive national structure supporting the creation of critical foreign language expertise and world area knowledge, integrated vertically across all levels of education.

IV. Continuing to Attract International Students and Scholars

Maintaining the flow of students, scholars, and scientists between the U.S. and other countries continues to be one of the most effective ways our colleges and universities and the nation can sustain American global leadership. Let us reinforce our earlier praise for the “Rice-Chertoff Joint Vision on Secure Borders and Open Doors,” and your continuing efforts to deal effectively with immigration and visa issues.

Similarly, we commend Maura Harty for her tireless efforts to work with us. We are very grateful for the significant improvement in visa possessing. The Visas Mantis program has become much more efficient, and the delay imposed by visa procedures greatly decreased. Our nation benefits enormously when scholars from India, China and elsewhere come to U.S. institutions to pursue their doctoral degrees in the physical sciences and engineering as well as other disciplines. These scholars are, however, increasingly choosing to study at institutions in their own countries.
They are also exploring other non-U.S. institutions to do their course work. Perceptions that visa barriers still exist and inducements offered by other countries have made alternatives increasingly viable. To arrest this trend, we urge you to consider lifting off-campus employment restrictions on foreign scholars and their spouses, the issuing of green cards upon the completion of studies, and making it easier for foreign scholars to obtain Social Security Numbers.

V. A Smart Deemed Export Policy

Wise policy toward deemed export controls will prevent actions that discourage the best international talent from studying and working here. This will facilitate the productivity of the federal-university partnership on research and technology, and strengthen our international competitiveness. We are pleased that the Department of Commerce plans to drop a proposal that would have required colleges to obtain export-control licenses for researchers who were born in “countries of concern” even if they are now citizens or permanent residents of other countries. However, we remain troubled by a proposal that would, in effect, wipe out the fundamental research exemption and require researchers to obtain licenses to use even the most routine equipment. Similarly, we feel that a related proposal under consideration by the Department of Defense is too broad and could seriously stifle academic research. We urge that the final rules take into account the fluid and open nature of the scientific enterprise, in which free exchanges are not only common but also vital. We ask that the Department of Defense narrowly tailor its proposal to focus on the explicit problems it seeks to resolve, rather than taking a broader approach that creates unintended additional concerns. There should also be better interagency dialogue between the Departments of Commerce and Defense to provide for commonality of export licensing where possible. Getting this right is critical for the government to continue to benefit from the vast research reservoir of our colleges and universities.

VII. The Critical Work of the USAID Higher Education in Development (HED) Program

International development work provides another effective way for colleges and universities to partner with the federal government to strengthen foreign language capacity and global knowledge while advancing national goals of assisting underdeveloped and developing countries and building democratic societies and market economies. International development provides opportunities for faculty and students to benefit from hands-on experience and build networks abroad. In this regard, we are pleased with the new five-year cooperative agreement between USAID and the Higher Education in Development Office (formerly the Association Liaison Office for University Cooperation in Development). The six presidential higher education associations are the governing body for HED. This program has awarded funding to more than 250 institutional partnerships in more than 60 countries and sponsored significant policy roundtables between 1998 and 2005. The new agreement and change in focus for HED marks the start of a new program designed to expand the role and participation of the higher education community in global development connecting America’s colleges and universities to those in the world’s poorer countries. The international development activities of USAID and the Millennium Challenge Account are vital to the nation. We urge that the role of colleges and universities in international development work be expanded to achieve the goals of these agencies.

Finally, in the State of the Union Address, President Bush introduced the American Competitiveness Initiative (ACI). We applaud this proposal to increase federal investment in research and development to meet the economic and security challenges of the 21st century. The
President’s National Security Language Initiative and the allied programs we describe above complement and expand the president’s competitiveness initiative; together, these two bold initiatives will greatly enhance this nation’s ability to maintain its competitive edge in the global environment.

Once again we express our interest in the initiatives the administration has proposed. We look forward to working with you on these initiatives for the betterment of our nation.

Sincerely,

David Ward
President

On Behalf Of:
George Boggs
President
American Association of Community Colleges

Deno Curris
President
American Association of State Colleges and Universities

Nils Hasselmo
President
Association of American Universities

David Warren
President
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities

Peter McPherson
President
National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges

DW:phf
CC: George Boggs, Deno Curris, Nils Hasselmo, David Warren, Peter McPherson