AAU SUMMARIZES 2003 VISA SURVEY RESULTS FOR AAU UNIVERSITIES, MAKES RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING PROCESS

Following is a summary of responses by member campuses of the Association of American Universities (AAU) to a national survey on fall 2003 enrollment, application, and visa delay trends for international students and scholars. The survey was conducted jointly by AAU; NAFSA: Association of American Educators; and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC). A joint press release on the survey and additional information can be found on the AAU Web site at www.aau.edu.

Also contained in this document is a list of recommendations that AAU has made to address continuing visa-delay problems, as well as a brief history of the issue.

Survey Background

The Association of American Universities (AAU), NAFSA: Association of American Educators; and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) conducted a joint survey in October on fall 2003 applications, enrollments, and visa delays for international students and scholars. A total of nearly 2,000 U.S. colleges and universities were surveyed, including all 60 AAU member universities in the United States. (For a list of all AAU institutions, see http://www.aau.edu/aau/members.html. A total of 331 institutions submitted responses, including 40 AAU universities. The results described here are from the 40 AAU universities that submitted responses - these results do NOT include responses from non-AAU institutions. Note: Not all universities responded to every survey question.

International Students

- 58% of AAU respondents reported an increase in the number of applications from international students for fall 2003 over the fall of 2002. 18% of AAU respondents reported no change in applications, and another 18% showed a decrease in the number of applications.

- 48% of AAU respondents reported an increase in international student enrollments for the fall 2003 over the fall of 2002. 20% of AAU respondents experienced enrollment decreases and another 20% saw no change in enrollments.
• AAU respondents collectively reported that 555 international graduate students and 224 undergraduate students experienced visa delays in fall 2003, compared to 354 and 199 respectively in fall 2002. The percentage increase for graduates was 57 percent; it was 13 percent for undergraduates.

• For cases in which responding universities had information about the international students who were delayed, 33 of 40 AAU respondents collectively reported a total of 621 international students who missed their academic start dates. Of these, 476 were new students and 145 were continuing students. Here are some of the characteristics of these new and continuing international students who missed their start dates:

  Country of Origin
  o 57% of these students were from China
  o 30% were from Muslim or Arab countries
  o 15% were from India
  o 4% were from Russia
  o 3% were from other European countries

  Academic Discipline
  o 29% of these students are pursuing studies in the Physical Sciences
  o 17% in the Biological Sciences
  o 28% in Engineering
  o 10% in the Social Sciences
  o 10% in the Humanities

• AAU respondents reported the following consequences of international students’ missing their academic start dates:

  o 49% of respondents reported delays to scientific research
  o 67% reported increased time to degree for students
  o 28% reported classes left without instructors
  o 44% reported international students lost fellowship support
  o 13% reported students missing a major conference or important meeting
  o 74% reported a financial cost to the institution
  o 44% reported international student applicants chose to go to another country

Scholars/Researchers

• 35% of AAU respondents reported an increase in international scholars for the fall 2003 over the fall of 2002. 28% of AAU respondents reported decreases and another 30% saw no change.

• AAU respondents reported the following consequences of international scholars’ missing their academic start dates:
69% of respondents reported delays to scientific research
18% reported classes left without instructors
46% reported other campus jobs left unstaffed
46% reported students missing a major conference or important meeting
51% reported a financial cost to the institution
31% reported international student applicants chose to go to another country
18% reported damage to university linkages abroad

AAU respondents collectively reported that 357 international scholars experienced visa delays in fall 2003, compared to 165 in fall 2002, an increase of 116 percent.

For cases in which responding universities had information about the international scholars who were delayed, 30 of 40 AAU respondents collectively reported a total of 418 international scholars who missed their academic start dates. Of these, 320 were new scholars and 98 were continuing scholars. Here are some of the characteristics of these new and continuing international scholars who missed their start dates:

Country of Origin
- 41% of these students were from China
- 14% were from Muslim or Arab countries
- 6% were from India
- 14% were from Russia
- 8% were from other European countries

Academic Discipline
- 35% of these students are pursuing studies in the Physical Sciences
- 33% in the Biological Sciences
- 13% in Engineering
- 4% in the Social Sciences
- 1% in the Humanities

**Recommendations**

AAU continues to call for a visa issuance process that is secure, timely, efficient, transparent, and predictable; that enhances homeland security; and that will permit full scientific exchange and collaboration.

Specifically, AAU recommends the following:

- AAU supports an efficient and practical exit and reentry process for international students and scholars who have been issued a visa so they can exit and re-enter the U.S. without having to be completely re-screened. AAU commends the State
Department for revising its Visas Mantis procedure to allow most international students and scholars who have received a Visas Mantis clearance to exit and reenter the U.S. for one year without having to undergo additional Visas Mantis reviews. **AAU recommends that federal government revisit the one-year limit in the future and consider extending it to make it more compatible with the time it takes students to complete their degrees or scholars to complete their scholarship or research.**

- **AAU recommends a process by which current student and scholar visa holders can revalidate their visas before leaving the U.S. for academic, health, or other personal reasons.** This would significantly reduce the impact of visa processing delays because students and scholars could continue their work while their visas are being processed.

- **AAU recommends a fee collection system for the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) that allows international students and scholars to pay the SEVIS fee at the same time and manner that they pay their visa application fee.** This would simplify the payment process.

- **AAU recommends that Congress and the Administration provide adequate resources to the State Department, the Department of Homeland Security, and other federal agencies involved in the visa applicant screening and visa issuance processes to ensure that the requisite personnel, communications, and technology are in place.**

**AAU Communications on Visa Issues**

AAU and other higher education organizations have communicated their concerns about international student and scholar entry issues in the following communications:

- June 17, 2003 letter to Secretary of State Colin Powell on visa issues: [http://www.aau.edu/resources/PowellLtr.pdf](http://www.aau.edu/resources/PowellLtr.pdf)

- July 23, 2003 letter to Chairman Tom Davis of the House Committee on Government Reform on visa issues: [http://www.aau.edu/resources/HigherEd7.23.03.pdf](http://www.aau.edu/resources/HigherEd7.23.03.pdf)


- July 2, 2003 letter to Congressional appropriators on providing adequate resources to implement new visa policies: [http://www.aau.edu/budget/Wolf7.2.03.pdf](http://www.aau.edu/budget/Wolf7.2.03.pdf)

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