

*AAU Association of American Universities*

*ACE American Council on Education*

*NASULGC National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges*

*CGS Council of Graduate Schools*

---

June 17, 2003

The Honorable Colin Powell  
Secretary  
United States Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Powell:

On behalf of the member universities of the Association of American Universities (AAU), the American Council on Education (ACE), the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC), and Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) we write to inform you of our significant concerns related to our nation's visa system. Current policies are hampering the ability of the world's best and brightest international students, scholars, and researchers to study and work in our country and to contribute to our nation's science and technology enterprise, economy, and security.

We support the Federal government's efforts to strengthen homeland and national security through the visa issuance process. We also applaud the thrust of the Federal government's "Secure Borders. Open Doors." initiative. However, we do have three serious concerns about visa policy and implementation.

Our first concern is that many international students and scholars are now experiencing unusually long delays in receiving visa decisions. We have shared examples of such delays with Assistant Secretary Maura Harty of the Bureau of Consular Affairs and with your science advisor, Dr. Norman Neureiter. We appreciate the attention both have given to our concerns, and hope these delays can be reduced.

Secondly, we are aware of a recent policy improvement that will allow a limited number of international students and researchers who are sponsored by the U.S. government and who have received visas after going through the Mantis clearance process to be able to depart the U.S. and return without going through the Mantis clearance process again for a period of one year. We very much appreciate this step in the right direction, but we urge you to lengthen the time period and to broaden the scope of this policy to allow non-government sponsored international students and scholars to exit and reenter the country more easily – since this limited improvement will otherwise not help many of our students and scholars.

Finally, we are very concerned about the recent change to visa interview policies that requires nearly all foreign individuals seeking to visit the U.S. to be interviewed (State Department cable #136100, May 21, 2003). Specifically, we are concerned that this new policy is to be implemented by August 1, 2003, but without additional resources. As your cable to consular posts announcing this new policy clearly states "many posts will face processing backlogs for the indefinite future." We share this

pessimistic assessment, and believe that without a commensurate increase in resources to accommodate the substantial increase in workload that will result from this new requirement, there will be even more delays than there already have been for international students, scholars, and researchers who seek to study in the U.S.

As you know, in most cases international students and scholars who seek to study and work in the U.S. are already interviewed as part of the visa issuance process. Our concern is that they will not be able to be interviewed in a timely fashion due to the increased number of *other* individuals that will now need to be interviewed and the lack of additional resources to conduct these interviews. For example, we have already received a report from Purdue University that an admitted student from India has been informed in the past week that the *earliest* interview appointment he can obtain is August 21, 2003. Purdue's academic term begins on August 25, 2003. This means he will likely miss the beginning of the academic term, if not the entire term, depending on the student's application, the amount of resources consular staff have to process the application further, and whether or not a security advisory opinion will be sought. We fear that this kind of visa delay will become routine, causing international students and scholars to miss the fall academic term, classes to be cancelled, and educational and research opportunities to be lost.

*We strongly urge that implementation of the new visa interview requirement be delayed until such time as sufficient resources are available to meet the increased volume of visa interviews, and that it be phased in gradually by country and security risk rather than all at once.* The university community supports additional appropriations for consular activities of the State Department for this purpose.

Higher education and science are international activities. If the U.S. is to remain the world's leader in higher education, science, and technology, we must have a visa system that is secure, timely, efficient, transparent, and predictable; that will permit scientific exchange and collaboration; and enhances homeland security. We stand ready to work with the State Department to accomplish these goals, and thank you for your consideration of these matters.

Sincerely,



Nils Hasselmo  
President, AAU



David Ward  
President, ACE



C. Peter Magrath  
President, NASULGC



Debra Stewart  
President, CGS

cc: The Honorable Tom Ridge, Secretary, Department of Homeland Security  
The Honorable Richard L. Armitage, Deputy Secretary, Department of State  
The Honorable John Marburger, III, Director, Office of Science and Technology Policy  
Robert M. Gates, President, Texas A&M University  
Martin C. Jischke, President, Purdue University  
Hunter R. Rawlings, III, President, Cornell University and AAU Chairman  
Charles M. Vest, President, Massachusetts Institute of Technology