



September 23, 2005

The Honorable Michael Chertoff  
Secretary of Homeland Security  
Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write to thank you for the department's response to date to the needs of international students, scholars, exchange visitors, and schools affected by Hurricane Katrina, and to suggest further actions that we believe are urgent.

Because of its effective outreach to the affected community, the Student and Exchange Visitor Program Office is learning more every day about the complexities that must be addressed. It is impossible to know at this time all the forms of relief that will be necessary. For that reason, it is appropriate that the SEVP office has adopted a case-by-case approach to the resolution of the problems as they come up.

However, case-by-case decision making, while necessary, is not sufficient. The decisions must be guided by policies that only you or your senior managers can articulate authoritatively. We suggest that the policy should be that students, scholars, exchange visitors, and schools will be held harmless from the effects of the hurricane—i.e., that no student, scholar, or exchange visitor who was in status on the date of the hurricane or was lawfully admitted to the United States with the intent to enroll or begin work or program activity—can lose status solely as a result of this Act of God, nor can any school or exchange program be deemed not in compliance with reporting and record-keeping requirements for that reason.

In this spirit, and recognizing that further actions will become necessary as the realities on the ground become clearer, we urge you to provide the following forms of relief immediately:

- **Waiver of business-as-usual time deadlines, including the department's guidance that students must enroll in school or begin their programs within 30 days or depart the United States.** Reasonable grace periods, whose duration cannot be known at this time, will be necessary as the extent of student, scholar, and exchange visitor dislocations becomes clearer.
- **Waiver of employment requirements.** To survive during the emergency, affected international students and scholars will have to replace their usual

sources of income and support somehow—especially considering that they are ineligible for FEMA assistance.

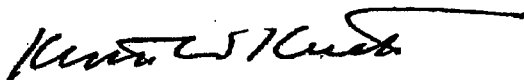
- **Waiver of full-time study requirement.** As affected students find other schools to enroll in, not all will be able to pursue full-time programs for the current semester, whether because of the options available at the school in question or because they have to work.
- **Waiver of limitations on distance education (online courses).** In response to the emergency, schools are greatly expanding their online options. Some schools whose physical plant was destroyed are offering only online options for this semester. International students must be able to avail themselves of these opportunities.
- **Waiver of reinstatement fees.** If students, scholars, and exchange visitors are held harmless from the hurricane, reinstatement should not be required. In cases where it is, the fee should be waived.
- **Re-entry requirements.** An unknown number of affected students, scholars, and exchange visitors simply returned to their home countries, with the intent to re-enter the United States when their school reopens or when they have been able to make alternate arrangements. In many cases, these individuals lack appropriate documentation for re-entry. Appropriate procedures must be put in place to ensure that they are able to re-enter for the purpose of continuing their education or exchange program.

As necessary and appropriate, we ask that you take similar steps to assist students, scholars, and exchange visitors who may be adversely affected by Hurricane Rita.

How America treats international students, scholars, and exchange visitors affected by these disasters will do more than all the public pronouncements to tell the world whether the United States truly welcomes them. The measures we suggest will help immeasurably to enable international students, scholars, and exchange visitors to survive this disaster and reap the benefits of a U.S. experience of study, research, teaching, or exchange—and at no cost to national security, as these measures would apply only to those who were here legally when the hurricane struck.

Thank you for your consideration.


Sincerely,



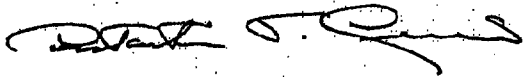
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of Community Colleges



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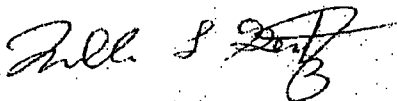
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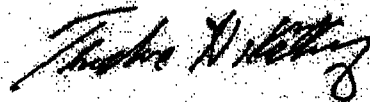
David Ward  
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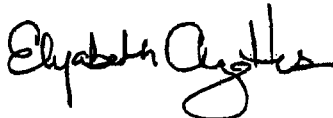
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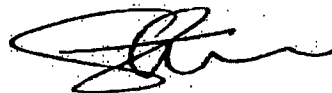
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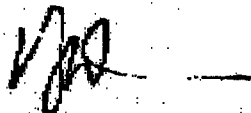
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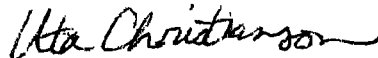
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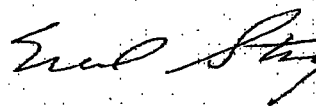
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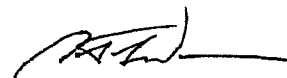
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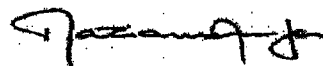
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