

Statement for the Record

Senate Foreign Relations Committee

**Addressing the New Reality of Current Visa Policy on
International Students and Researchers**

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By

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee.

Introduction.

I am Allan Goodman, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Institute of International Education. Thank you for providing me this opportunity to discuss an issue of critical import to the field of education. America needs a visa policy that supports and encourages international students to seek an education here in the United States and that keeps our borders secure.

It is a particular honor to appear before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which was once chaired by Senator J. William Fulbright. He created the nation's flagship educational exchange program, which the Institute administers on behalf of the Department of State. Through the years, this committee has strongly endorsed the importance of all the programs funded under the Fulbright-Hays Act. They are the best investments the country can make towards a less dangerous world.

International Education by the Numbers.

The United States is the destination of choice for most foreign students seeking to study abroad. The education available at our 4,000 accredited colleges and universities is recognized and envied around the world. While other countries are actively competing to increase their share of internationally mobile students, none match America's diversity and capacity. There are more seats in higher education in California, for example than in all of China. Only nine countries in the entire world have more institutions of higher education than the states of California and New York. To retain our leadership position, however, it is vital that the U.S. continue to be recognized as a welcoming host to all those legitimately seeking education and training abroad.

To assist the Committee in understanding trends in the flow of international students, as well as such things as their countries of origin, states where they are studying, fields of study and data about the international student market share, I am attaching **Fast Facts: Open Doors 2003** to these remarks. They demonstrate, in summary:

Total International Student Enrollment

- In 2002/2003, there were 586,323 international students studying in the U.S., which represents a 0.6% increase, following the previous two years' 6.4% increases.
- While the 0.6% increase is the smallest increase since 1995, there have been periods of strong growth followed by periods of slow growth throughout the history of the International Student Census of the *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*.

Leading Places of Origin

- International students from Asia, particularly from India, China, and Korea, represent a growing concentration in international student enrollments in U.S. higher education.
- Students from the leading four places of origin (India, China, Korea, Japan) comprise 40% of all international students in the U.S.

Fields of Study

- Nearly half of all international students in the U.S. are studying in just three fields of study: business and management, engineering, and math and computer sciences.
- Business continues to be the top field of study, but engineering has increased steadily, with a nearly 10% increase from the previous year, reflecting substantial growth in Indian and Chinese graduate student enrollments over the past five years.

International Student Market Share

- U.S. market share of international students has declined since 1997; Australia and the United Kingdom are the biggest competitor countries, and have formulated and articulated national strategies for recruiting international students, unlike the U.S.
- International students are a large percentage of the overall higher education enrollments in Australia and the United Kingdom, but the international student total in those two nations is not even half of the U.S. international student total.

The trends we have noted lead us to believe that there is a leveling off of foreign students seeking to study in the U.S. Based on early feedback from campuses we anticipate enrollments continuing to soften – and perhaps show slight declines overall. Individual campuses and academic disciplines may also show steep declines. Initial data indicates that enrollment in mathematics and computer sciences will be down this year. This will have a particularly serious effect for the country's major research universities.

The Institute's History.

IIE's commitment to this goal began in 1919, as America was turning inward after the devastation of World War I. IIE was created by Stephen P. Duggan, a distinguished professor of diplomatic history, and two Nobel Laureates, Elihu Root, who served in this body on your Committee on Expenditures in the Department of State, and Nicholas Murray Butler, the President of Columbia University, who believed that America needed to stay engaged in the world community and that international educational exchange could lead to a more peaceful future.

Eighty years ago, the Institute led a national effort to insure that international students would not be turned away as America's doors were closing to many kinds of foreign immigrants. At that time, many students and scholars were being detained at Ellis Island because U.S. law classified them as immigrants subject to highly restrictive quotas, which had been imposed in 1917. The Institute took the position that academics were really temporary visitors and succeeded in having them so classified in 1921. The Institute then developed a standard application form for foreign students so they could be easily identified and processed by university officials as well as by U.S. consular officers, a process that led to creation of the non-immigrant "student visa". We also published for many years a *Guide Book for Foreign Students in the United States* that explained U.S. immigration laws and advised students on these and other issues to be considered in planning for academic studies here.

Throughout this period, we worked closely with Members of Congress and the Commissioners of what were then the Bureaus of Immigration and of Education, as well as with officials in the Department of State. We did this, as the first president of the Institute wrote, because "our experience... justifies the belief that international good-will can hardly fail to result from the coming of the foreign student" and that "upon them, to a great extent,

may depend the attitude adopted by their countrymen towards our country."

Nothing has happened over the years to change this belief -- or to make mutual understanding any less important. Indeed, our founders' concerns in 1919 seem even more urgent today, as we are again engaged in a national debate on the importance of keeping America's doors open to students, scholars, and other professionals coming here to pursue their educational goals.

How America Benefits.

With more than 50 years of experience in administering the Fulbright Program on behalf of the Department of State, we also know that educational exchange programs, and in particular, those under the Fulbright umbrella, are the best investment that America can make in reducing misunderstanding of our culture, our people and our policies. An educational experience in America pays dividends to our nation's public diplomacy over many years. More than 50 of the world leaders called by President Bush and Secretary Powell to join the coalition fighting terrorism studied in the United States or came to America early in their careers as part of the International Visitor Program which we also assist the Department of State in administering. The Department's special initiatives in the Middle East, North Africa and non-Arab Islamic countries have created opportunities for thousands more emerging leaders from those countries to have a positive experience in the U.S.

There are other benefits to having foreign students on our campuses. I was a professor at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service for 20 years before assuming my current position at the Institute. What I know from that experience is that, with foreign students in your class, you teach differently – and better. They come into the classroom with a very different worldview from American students. Raised in a different culture with a different history, they enrich the classroom discussion and share their global perspectives with American classmates, many of whom may never have the opportunity to study or travel abroad.

According to IIE's data, published annually in *Open Doors*, less than 200,000 American students study abroad for credit each year, a tiny fraction of approximately 15 million enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities. For the vast majority who will never study abroad, academic dialog with foreign

students on U.S. campuses may well be their only training opportunity before entering careers which will almost certainly be global, whether in business, government, academia, or the not-for-profit sector.

Foreign students, especially in the sciences and engineering at the graduate level, often provide the necessary pool of teaching assistants needed to serve American undergraduate students, and to support faculty teaching and research at the leading U.S. universities. American students are simply not applying in sufficient numbers at the graduate level in these disciplines to support many of the fields in which America needs manpower and brainpower to sustain its academic edge and its groundbreaking research activities.

In addition to their intellectual contributions to the U.S., international students make important financial contributions to their host institution and to the local communities in which they live during their stay. Each year, students from abroad bring some \$12 billion into the U.S. economy, making educational exchange one of the leading American service export industries, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce. About two-thirds of foreign students in the U.S. are supported primarily with personal funds from abroad; for many states, the tuition, fees and living expenses paid by international students exceed the revenues generated by professional football and basketball combined.

Open Doors Require Secure Borders.

Heated policy debate and extensive media coverage have focused on the need to eliminate the potential for abuse of student visas, while maintaining reasonable access for the many students who legitimately study here (and often become life-long friends, allies and trading partners for America when they return home.) We must balance these two goals in a way that insures that America remains the destination of choice for the best and brightest students from around the world.

We support the fundamental steps taken to increase scrutiny of candidates who are applying for student visas and the computerized record keeping that tracks their academic progress while in the United States. These improved systems help increase the certainty that the nearly 600,000 foreign students in this country, plus some 150,000 other international visitors and a like number of dependents, remain in legal visa status, fully engaged in the

studies, research or other activities they came here to pursue. The success of the system relies on the professionalism of the nationwide network of foreign student advisors who work diligently and year-round to sort out the complex visa requirements as they affect each student's unique personal circumstances. While the new requirements have increased their workload and added substantial costs at the campus level, U.S. higher education has risen to the challenge and installed the new systems as quickly as required, working closely with the U.S. government to meet statutory deadlines.

Other Obstacles.

But there are still some obstacles to be overcome.

The U.S. Department of State, through its embassies abroad, needs to communicate regularly and clearly the requirements and time constraints confronting international students applying for visas to study in the United States. The Department has already started posting such information on its website, which is very helpful to international students in their planning for the visa process, and a number of U.S. Ambassadors have issued very helpful statements to the local press about America's commitment to international education and our readiness to accept students from abroad.

Solutions.

And, as Secretary Powell has urged, and I could not agree more wholeheartedly, **U.S. Embassy staff must find ways to expedite the visa review process so that students are not still waiting for visa approval back home as their academic program begins here in America.** Consular staff at each U.S. Embassy is thinly stretched by the new screening and interview requirements. They need to assure that their procedures facilitate the handling of visa applicants expeditiously and respectfully, despite heavy caseloads and increased screening requirements. This would send the most important signal that our doors are open to legitimate students from abroad. They need to project the impression that students from abroad are welcome in the U.S., in spite of the heavy workloads and the often-challenging review process that confronts legitimate students and scholars seeking to come here. Thankfully, my colleagues and I hear increasingly that State Department officers abroad are doing just that.

Second. **The Foreign Service Institute should review its consular training curriculum to assure that new officers are fully aware of the value of international educational exchange to America.**

Third. One way of reducing consular officers' workload would be to **reduce the number of times U.S. officials must review the records of students and scholars already approved.** Currently, students and scholars, especially those in important scientific and technical fields, face lengthy delays as they must reapply for visa approval each time they return home, even for short visits during holiday breaks. **IIE and the entire higher education community urge that visa approval be awarded for their entire study period in the United States,** freeing consular officers to spend more time on new applicants. And those already approved for U.S. study would not face unreasonable concern that their desire to attend an academic conference outside the United States, or go home to visit family or attend to personal business may jeopardize their ability to reenter the U.S. and complete their studies or research here.

Fourth. **The process by which the SEVIS fees are collected abroad also needs to be reviewed, so that students without home-country access to U.S. currency or credit cards are not excluded from access to U.S. higher education.** There are some experiments being conducted in high volume countries such as China and India, which need to be evaluated and replicated quickly if they prove successful. If not, other means need to be devised to insure that students are not deterred from even applying to study by procedural or logistical hurdles.

Accurate Information.

The American public also needs better and less sensationalized information on the visa issue. Because of inaccurate media coverage, some still believe that most of the September 11 terrorists came to the U.S. on student visas, when in fact only one of the 19 was on such a visa, which had been fraudulently obtained and had already expired. Americans need to know about the rigorous screening process now in place through which foreign students are admitted to our colleges and universities, and awarded visa approval. They also need to be better informed about the benefits that international students bring to the local communities in which they are studying, to the campuses that enroll them, and to the vast majority of American students who will not themselves have a chance to study abroad.

We urge this Committee to consider making its own annual statement on international education as a part of how America celebrates International Education Week, which this year is November 15th to 19th.

We will do our part. The Institute's annual census of international student mobility, *Open Doors*, which we publish with the support of the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, is shared with the widest possible circle of journalists and others writing about trends in higher education. Institute experts will continue to update this annual census with online surveys and periodic briefings and fact sheets to keep the public informed.

Conclusion.

U.S. leadership in support of international education remains central to the kind of world in which we are going to live. A few weeks after 9/11, I had a visit from the Director of the Ministry of Education and Research of Germany. We spoke at some length about the need to keep the educational doors of both of our countries as open as possible. After our discussion he wrote that "We learnt from the United States how enriching it is to win the interest and support of the brightest minds from all over the world and we trust in your country to remain as open as it has been in the past. If you closed your borders again ... you would set a model that others would follow all too soon."

The international educational opportunities that America stands for benefit our society and the world. In fact, 29 alumni of the Fulbright Program, as well as 15 other grantees of the Institute and four of our Trustees have won Nobel Prizes. They are listed in an attachment hereto. Some of the international students that are here today will win the Nobel prizes of the future. In the process, they may well cure cancer, discover a vaccine for HIV/AIDS, and become the leaders of the governments upon which ultimate success in all the wars we are fighting – against poverty, disease and terrorism – will depend.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have, and I look forward to working with you and your staff in the future as you address these important issues.

