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Thank you, Chairman Delahunt, and Chairman Hinojosa, for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of Under Secretary Karen Hughes before your Subcommittees about the importance of international education to the national interest.

The Department of State is deeply committed to aggressively promoting the benefits of U.S. higher education and to ensuring that America remains the destination of choice for talented international students and researchers. We agree that success in recruiting international students to our campuses is vital to maintaining the strength of our educational system, competitiveness of our economy, and ensuring that we secure mutual understanding between the people of the United States and peoples in nations around the globe.

This commitment benefits the students and scholars who come here for their education, benefits their countries when they return home, and most significantly, benefits the United States -- international educational exchange enriches our university and college campuses, builds collaboration in all spheres of endeavor, and advances our foreign policy and public diplomacy goals. Study in the United States provides diverse sectors of international students with first hand exposure to Americans and direct knowledge of our society, our culture and our values. And it establishes lifelong ties between communities across our nation and future world leaders in all fields of activity.

[SEE CHART] All of us are encouraged by recent reports from both government and non-government sources showing that the small but significant decline in the number of international students coming to the United States after the tragedy of September 11 has been stabilized, and the current trend lines for international students are all up -- graduate applications and admissions to U.S. higher education programs grew 12% this past academic year over the previous one, new international student enrollments rose by 8% this year over last, and in FY 2006, the U.S. government issued more student and exchange visitor visas than ever before, 591,050, up 15% over the previous year. But we know that there is still plenty of work to do -- to sustain and build on these encouraging gains.

Our strategy for international higher education cannot be the effort of government alone. The federal government, representing the people of the United States, is a major stakeholder; but other actors, including the higher education sector, the business sector and the non-profit sector are major stakeholders as well. In order to launch a comprehensive and sustained partnership serving government's and higher education's goals, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Education Margaret

Spellings convened the first-ever U.S. University Presidents Summit on International Education in January 2006. The Departments of Commerce and Homeland Security joined the Departments of State and Education as we engaged more than 120 of the nation's higher education leaders from all 50 states and the District of Columbia in a strategic dialogue to forge a common vision. The fundamental goal of the Summit was to invigorate the partnership between the U.S. government and higher education community and to emphasize its importance to the national interest – the importance of continuing to attract outstanding foreign students and scholars to the U.S. and of ensuring that American students are prepared to compete in a global economy.

Through the Summit dialogue, its follow-up initiatives (including the Public Relations Summit with the private sector where the importance of international education was a central theme), and our ongoing interagency and private sector interactions, we have identified four persistent challenges that the U.S. needs to address, in order to remain the destination of choice for talented international students and researchers: rising costs and other access issues, increasing competition from other nations, misinformed perceptions about our interest in welcoming foreign students, and regulatory issues. We are meeting these challenges directly and vigorously in partnership with the higher education community and our colleagues in other agencies of government. I would like to address each of these challenges in turn.

The Challenge of Rising Costs and other Access issues

An important strategic priority, especially as we work to promote a deep understanding around the world about America and our core values, is to provide educational opportunities to a broad and diverse segment of young people overseas, including women, minorities and those from financially disadvantaged backgrounds, who have the motivation to come to the United States and the talent to succeed, but who may lack the resources and perhaps additional preparation needed to undertake academic study on our campuses. We will continue to work to attract the best and brightest students who have had the advantages in their home countries of excellent preparation and the development of good language skills, but we must reach beyond those privileged sectors of society to make the transformative benefits of a U.S. higher education a reality for the widest group of potential future leaders. We are committed to helping provide more opportunities to students from these groups, and to partnering with the private sector to find creative ways to lower the cost barrier that too often prevents talented and promising young people from experiencing the United States through academic study here.

We believe that cost of U.S. higher education is the most significant barrier to building back our higher education international student numbers. We see a continuing growth in scholars coming here for post-doctoral research and collaborative academic work. These numbers are at historic highs and took only a slight dip for a year after the security adjustments we made in visa processing several years ago. And the number of college age students from abroad here for summer work-travel is at all time high as well, growing by more than 400 percent since 1996 and by more than 50 percent since 2001. Both of these categories are low cost and do not carry the burden of high tuition fees or living expenses. We need to find ways to capitalize

on this demonstrated interest to study in the United States ease the cost burden for other categories of international students as well.

Another serious barrier to attracting a wider pool of applicants for study at U.S. colleges and universities is lack of English language ability, particularly among underserved populations. The Department of State is committed to strengthening English learning overseas through an expansion of our Regional English Language Officers corps of foreign service professionals, our English Language Fellows Program that sends American experts on English language instruction abroad to serve as resources, the new English ACCESS Microscholarship program (which since its inception a few years ago, has reached 20,000 teenage students drawn from non-elite sectors in 44 countries), and by providing more teaching materials for English teachers and classrooms. **[SEE CHART]** Through our English language programs, we are able to grow the pool of talented students interested and qualified to apply for study in the United States, and to identify exceptionally promising students from diverse sectors of society who would make strong candidates for our exchanges. In just a few years, we have seen English Access graduates constituting up to 10 percent of finalists in the applications for the next level of our exchange programs.

We are also looking at using the full breadth of educational options available in our system to offer lower-cost alternatives to international students, especially those coming from underserved communities in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. One such endeavor is our work with the nation's community colleges, through new scholarship initiatives that are increasing the number of international students studying at these institutions, especially from underserved populations. Based on discussions at the University Presidents Summit and consultations Under Secretary Hughes held with U.S. community colleges leaders last year, ECA launched a major initiative to bring international students from six key nations worldwide for study at U.S. community colleges. We have also launched a major new community college program for Egypt, with funds transferred to us by the Agency for International Development. Through these programs, we will not only increase the number of international students in U.S. community colleges, but also bring international recognition to the important roles in education and human capital development that community colleges play in our country.

And this year we have piloted a new program, the Opportunity Grants Initiative, to invest in talented students who otherwise might have thought study in the United States was out of their reach. Our EducationUSA advising centers in select countries around the world identify promising individuals from non-elite populations abroad, and provide these young students with awards that are small in financial terms but are significant in their capacity to help overcome the prohibitive opportunity costs that keep disadvantaged students from applying to study in the United States. The awards cover fees for standardized tests and U.S. college applications, and will pay for the international travel of students who could not otherwise afford to accept merit-based scholarships offered by American colleges and universities. In this way, we are committed to identifying and investing early to expand the pool of promising students motivated to seek a U.S. education. We plan on expanding the program into additional locations following the assessment of our pilot efforts.

The Challenge of Increasing Competition

As students around the globe have become more mobile, competition for international students has increased. Countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom are developing robust recruitment strategies, while other countries that have traditionally sent large numbers of students to the United States, like China and India, are now working to build domestic educational institutions that seek to keep their students at home.

To meet this challenge, we have strengthened the U.S. government and higher education partnership to improve marketing of education overseas. The Department of State is sending delegations of university presidents and high-level U.S. government officials to key world regions to spread the word that we welcome and value international students. Secretary of Education Spellings and former Assistant Secretary of State Dina Powell led the first delegation to East Asia in November 2006, and Under Secretary of State Hughes led the second delegation to South Asia in March 2007. These two delegations visited four countries which together send 42% of all international students to the United States. A third delegation to South America is being planned for August.

Under Secretary of State Hughes also invited the higher education community to join the Departments of State and Commerce to form a new partnership to better market U.S. higher education overseas using multimedia platforms. One of the fruits of this effort was the production and broadcast of informational video spots to Chinese television viewers showing student life in America and directing them to sources where they could learn more about study in the United States. A similar project is underway now for South Asia, with plans to extend the initiative to Latin America in 2008.

The Department of State oversees EducationUSA advising centers around the world. These centers provide objective information about study opportunities in the United States to more than 3 million direct contacts and close to 50 million online contacts with potential students every year. This is an enormous effort that significantly influences international students' choices and provides the individual interaction that we feel is one of the best ways to address increasing competition for talented students.

The Challenge of Misperceptions

Through our public diplomacy efforts, we are working hard to counter misperceptions about this country. We are reaching out through our exchange programs to key influencers in young people's lives, including teachers, religious educators, media and others who engage students, to help inform them about the United States, including the warm welcome Americans give to international students and other visitors.

Under the President's National Security Language Initiative, for example, we are bringing more classroom teachers from countries around the world to the U.S. for professional development, enriching the language learning of American students while providing the foreign teachers with first hand knowledge of what America is really about. This is knowledge they will share with their students when they return home.

We are also engaging the critical youth demographic at an earlier point in their academic careers by developing specialized summer, semester, and year-long leadership development and study programs in the United States for undergraduate students, with the aim of encouraging them to consider returning to the United States for graduate study.

We know that economic competitiveness in the 21st century will increasingly depend upon the ability of nations to attract the most promising talent to their laboratories – the innovators and entrepreneurs of the future. To advance our interests, Under Secretary of State Hughes announced at the Summit the prestigious new international Fulbright Science and Technology Award – scholarships for PhD study awarded on a worldwide basis – to signal our nation’s intention to maintain our position as the premiere study destination for pioneering scientific innovation and discovery. In its inaugural year, we received applications from more than 70 countries for these awards – the first class of 27 winners, nearly half women, from all world regions, begin their studies this fall.

We are very pleased to note as well that the scholars and researchers who enrich the academic dialogue on our campuses, in our conference halls, and in our laboratories continue to come to the United States in record numbers. Last year nearly 97,000 international scholars were in the United States, a new high, up more than 8% from the previous year’s high of 89,000. **[SEE CHART]**

As Secretary Rice has said, “America’s mission in this new century must be to welcome more foreign students and scholars to our nation... To be successful, our government and our universities must forge a new partnership for education exchange, a partnership that rests on new thinking and new action.” We will continue to reiterate this message, and we will ensure that our actions are as forward-leaning as our words.

The Challenge of Regulatory Issues

President George W. Bush vowed at the University Presidents Summit in January 2006 that “we’ll find that proper balance between security and letting people come to our universities for the good of this country.” The State Department’s Bureau of Consular Affairs reports that significant progress has been made in this area. The number of student and exchange visitor visas issued in FY 2006 rose 15% to reach an all-time high of 591,000. U.S. student visa issuance in India, the largest source country for foreign students, grew 17% in New Delhi, 44% in Mumbai and 40% in Chennai. In Seoul, Korea, another historically high student visa post, the number of student visas increased 24%.

Led by Secretaries Rice and Chertoff, the Departments of State and Homeland Security have been working hard to improve the process by which foreign students secure visas for study in the United States. For example, 570 new consular positions have been created since 2001, and our embassies have been instructed to give priority to students and exchange visitors. As part of the Rice/Chertoff Joint Vision, the window of time during which students can apply for visas has been extended (from 90 days) up to 120 days before the start of their studies to allow extra time for any needed clearances.

Significant investments have been made to automate previously paper-based systems, and to consolidate visa information into more agile databases. Now 97 percent of the people who are approved for visas are approved in less than two days. New initiatives are underway worldwide to further reduce waits and improve the visa process.

The results are clear: last year we saw, for the first time since before the tragedy of September 11, 2001, marked increases in student visa applications from across the Middle East. As I mentioned before, the Council of Graduate Schools reported a 12% increase in international graduate student applications and admissions between 2005 and 2006 and the Institute of International Education's Open Doors report showed an 8% increase in new international student enrollment during the same period. We believe we are making significant progress, and we will continue to work with all agencies of the government to get the balance right between security and open doors.

Conclusion

We believe the value of bringing more international students to the U.S. cannot be overstated. For more than 60 years, our Flagship Fulbright program has provided talented international students with the opportunity to study, teach and conduct research in the United States, to exchange ideas and to contribute to finding solutions to shared international concerns. We are continuing to make that investment in a robust and sustained way. **[SEE CHART]**.

The State Department sees the full participation of our partners in governmental, non-governmental, academic and private organizations as critically important to advancing our nation's economic and geopolitical interests through international education and exchange. Our exchanges demonstrate this society's respect and appreciation for the people of other countries and their cultures, while building the capacity of America's citizens to compete and succeed in a global world.

No other country offers the dynamism, diversity or richness of higher education opportunities for talented foreign students, or as deep a capacity to provide a quality education to a broad spectrum of students from around the world. In addressing the challenges I have outlined, together with our partners, we are committed to ensuring that America remains the destination of choice for talented international students and researchers worldwide.

We look forward to working with Congress to strengthen our programs and to widen access to an increasingly diverse population of students from overseas who can benefit from our vast networks of higher education institutions, with an absorptive capacity unmatched in quality and variety anywhere in the world. We want to educate the world's future leaders, including our own American students, so that they can take their rightful places building a better future for our global society.