

**Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**  
**Chairman Richard G. Lugar**  
**Opening Statement for Hearing on**  
**Student Visas**  
**October 6, 2004**

Today, the Foreign Relations Committee meets to examine the impact of new visa policies on foreign students and researchers seeking to study in the United States. These temporary visitors provide enormous economic and cultural benefits to our country. Hosting foreign students also is one of the most successful elements of our public diplomacy. We have critiqued and even lamented some aspects of our public diplomacy since the end of the Cold War, but the work of our universities in establishing ties with millions of foreign students stands as an important public diplomacy achievement.

In numerous hearings and discussions on public diplomacy, this Committee has consistently heard reports of the value of foreign exchanges, particularly multi-year student exchanges. Fostering such exposure for overseas visitors is vital if we hope to counter the distorted images of the United States that so many foreigners receive through censored or biased media outlets in their home countries.

Recently, I was reminded of the foreign policy impact of hosting foreign students when I traveled to Georgia and met with its new president, Mikhail Saakashvili. President Saakashvili received his law degree from Columbia University, where he studied under the Muskie Fellowship program. In fact, almost every member of his cabinet had attended an American college or university during their academic careers. Some had come to the United States as part of the State Department's International Visitors Program or on a Fulbright or Muskie Fellowship. The result was that the leadership of an important country had a personal understanding of the core elements of American society and governance. Perhaps more importantly, they had an understanding and appreciation of Americans themselves.

Of the 12.8 million students enrolled in higher education in the United States during the last academic year, almost 600,000 – some 4.6 percent -- were foreign undergraduate and graduate students who were attending school on "F-1" visas. These students contributed almost \$12.9 billion annually to the U.S. economy. This is roughly equivalent to the amount of medical equipment and supplies exported annually by the United States. Thus, higher education functions as a major export commodity that improves our trade balance. My home state of Indiana currently is the temporary home of about 13,500 foreign students. This population pumps more than \$330 million annually into our state's economy.

We also should recognize the important role played in the United States by talented foreign scientists who work at some of our most renowned research facilities. For example, about 1,900 foreign scientists who have come to this country on J-1 visas, perform groundbreaking research in conjunction with our own scientists at the National Institutes of Health. They are contributing not only to the U.S. economy, but also to the health of Americans.

After the September 11 attacks, Congress re-examined visa policy in light of heightened security concerns. We adopted new visa requirements in the interest of national security. Today, we intend to carefully examine how the security purposes of those changes are being balanced with our goals pertaining to foreign students. In particular, we want to determine whether the changes in visa

procedures are unnecessarily limiting or deterring students, researchers, and official visitors from coming to our universities.

One new mechanism is the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System, known as “SEVIS.” This system is used to verify the location and academic status of international students. To fund the system, student visa applicants are charged a \$100 fee. In some cases, this fee has been a financial disincentive for foreign students to apply to American institutions of higher learning, in part because the fee is not refunded if the student visa is turned down.

Another recurring concern is the difficulty many students have in complying with the so-called “214(b)” statute, whereby visa applicants must demonstrate that they are not intending to immigrate. Few would argue with the intent of the statute. But prospective students -- because of their age and educational focus -- often lack employment and property in their home country. Since employment and property are primary indicators that a visa applicant will return home, student visas sometimes are delayed or denied, even when applications otherwise are in order.

In spite of the problems associated with visa restrictions, I understand that the Consular Affairs Bureau at the State Department is adjudicating student applications more efficiently than when the new security procedures first took effect. This progress is due, in part, to greater information sharing between the Department of State, the Department of Homeland Security, and other government agencies. Thanks to Secretary Powell’s Diplomatic Readiness Initiative, we also have been able to fund 350 new consular positions. In addition, the State Department has instructed embassies to give students priority when scheduling visa interviews.

The United States must achieve an effective balance on student visas. We know that Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia are aggressively recruiting many of the same students who might otherwise come to the United States. Security must not be compromised. But our government should help our universities to remain competitive by doing everything it can to reduce unnecessary delays in evaluating and processing student visas.

I am pleased to welcome two expert panels for our discussion today. On the first panel, we will hear from Dr. Martin Jishcke, president of Purdue University; Dr. Adam Herbert, president of Indiana University; and Dr. Dan Mote, president of the University of Maryland. The three universities represented here today are among the leaders in hosting foreign students. Purdue has the fourth largest number of foreign students among U.S. universities, while the University of Maryland ranks fourteenth and Indiana University ranks twentieth. These witnesses have thought a great deal about the role of foreign students at U.S. universities and about how the student visa process can be improved.

On the second panel we have Dr. Allan Goodman from the Institute of International Education, which produces “Open Doors,” an annual study on foreign students coming to the United States and U.S. students studying abroad; Ms. Catheryn Cotten, the director of the International Office at Duke University, where she has been studying the history and impact of SEVIS and its predecessor; Ambassador Ted Kattouf, President and CEO of AMIDEAST, which specializes in student exchanges from the Middle East; and Ms. Marlene Johnson, CEO of the Association of International Educators.

We look forward to learning about the insights and recommendations of our distinguished witnesses.

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