

Position Statement on U.S. Visa Policy

Much has been written about the increased difficulties international students and educators have faced when attempting to come to the United States to study. The numerous changes in the U.S. visa process implemented in the name of security since the events of September 11, 2001, have created an often incoherent system with many obstacles and hurdles for international students and educators.

International educational and cultural exchange has long been an important asset to the United States' security and diplomatic interests. Students and educators who come to the United States for educational conferences, short-term study, or long-term study, bring with them valuable resources and experiences, and take with them not only their academic studies, but important first-hand experience in U.S. culture and intercultural understanding. Such active cross-cultural interaction has the dual benefits of enriching the students' and educators' experiences, and those of the local communities in which they interact with. Such interaction advances mutual understanding and collaboration in a global community, necessary aspects of participating in a global economy.

Every effort should be made to minimize the barriers that have been erected to international students and scholars. To that end, TESOL calls upon the U.S. government to:

Provide a coherent visa policy

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Congress must work together with the U.S. Department of State to provide not only a coherent visa policy, but clearly articulated visa policy guidelines as well. Policies that reflect the current demands for international education and exchange and ease access for students and educators, such as use of the B-visa for short-term study, should be developed and implemented. Both the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Congress should work with the U.S. Department of State to make "Secure Borders, Open Doors" (Colin Powell, 2004) the effective policy guidance for the United States.

Create a timely and transparent visa process

While delays in visa processing have been improving, more steps can be taken to improve the process so that it is timely and, more important, transparent. Standard guidelines should be developed and implemented for all elements of the visa process. Clearly articulated visa policy guidelines should be communicated between agencies,

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consular offices, and ports of entry, and be consistently and uniformly implemented. International students and educators should be given priority, and their visa applications should be expedited.

Refine controls and procedures to efficiently focus resources on those that require special screening.

Changes in the visa process such as requiring in-person interviews for all visa applicants have created practices that are inefficient uses of limited and valuable resources. More efficient practices, such as the pre-screening of students and scholars, should be incorporated and implemented. A presumption of approval or security clearance for frequent visitors to the United States or those who temporarily leave the country should be instituted to avoid repetitive processing. Low-risk applications, such as for international students and educators, should be expedited to the greatest extent possible.

Reference

Powell, C. (2004). Secure borders, open doors. Wall Street Journal. Retrieved September 25, 2005, from <http://www.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/31634.htm>

*Approved by the Board of Directors
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