

Submitted Electronically

May 14, 2018

The Honorable Carl C. Risch
Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Consular Affairs
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington DC 20520

Re: Docket No. DOS-2108-0002, 60-Day Notice of Proposed Information Collection: Application for Nonimmigrant Visa, 83 Fed. Reg. 13807 (March 30, 2018).

Dear Assistant Secretary Risch:

On behalf of the American Council on Education (ACE) and the undersigned higher education associations, I submit the following comments in response to the Notice of Proposed Information Collection, Docket No. DOS-2108-0002, issued by the Department of State in the March 30 *Federal Register*, concerning proposed changes to the application for nonimmigrant visas. Together, ACE and the undersigned higher education associations represent approximately 4,300 two- and four-year public and private non-profit colleges and universities.

We are troubled by the Department of State's proposed new requirements requiring the reporting of five years of identifiers for social media platforms for all nonimmigrant visa applicants, including student visas (F-1 and J-1), work visas (H-1B), and tourist visas. We are also concerned about the proposed new requirements to submit five years of previously used telephone numbers, email addresses, and international travel. Taken together, these new requirements send a message that we no longer welcome members of the international community who wish to enter our campus gates. This will undoubtedly hinder American higher education's mission of global engagement which would have a far-reaching, unintended adverse impact on the higher education community and our broader society.

The U.S. higher education and research communities have long enjoyed constructive partnerships with the State Department and Department of Homeland Security in support of national security. This includes thorough protocols in the SEVP program and SEVIS database system. It is unclear how the proposed additional reporting criteria and data

collection would add value to the existing security review processes, or what problem or inadequacies this additional information collection would solve.

We understand the need and wholeheartedly support efforts to ensure the safety of the American people. However, we must also remain a welcoming country to international students, scholars, scientists, and researchers who enrich our campuses and the country with their talents and skills. The roughly one million international students that attend U.S. colleges and universities add to this country's intellectual and cultural vibrancy, and they also yield an estimated economic impact of \$37 billion and support 450,000 U.S. jobs, according to recent estimates. The overwhelming majority return home as ambassadors for American values, democracy and the free market.

The collection of additional data is likely to stretch the resources of our consular officers, likely resulting in slower processing times. The Department of State and its consulates worldwide already lack the necessary resources and requisite staffing to adjudicate visa applications in a timely manner. Without sufficient increases in staffing, visa processing times would lag, creating additional backlogs. Absent the guarantee of timely visa processing, scholars attending U.S.-based conferences or professional society meetings will be delayed, classrooms will be vacant until their visiting professors can arrive, scientists may miss grant application deadlines, and transnational research collaborations will lack their international partners and may be forced to stall their research.

As proposed, the new application requirements may also result in significant unintended consequences that will hamper the United States' ability to attract the world's best students and scholars to our campuses. The proposed reporting requirements are burdensome, intrusive, and are likely to deter international students, scholars, scientists, and researchers from contributing their talents to the United States. They will simply go elsewhere. This would cause disproportionate harm to the United States' higher education system and research enterprise, suppressing our nation's ability to innovate and be both globally collaborative and competitive.

Moreover, without proper safeguards, the required disclosure of social media identifiers and username information for associated platforms raise significant privacy concerns and may discourage future visa applicants' desire to visit the United States. In light of the challenges providing sufficient privacy protections to safeguard the information of visa applicants, international students and scholars may choose to offer their talents to institutions in other countries.

Steps intended to protect national security may inadvertently deprive our nation of one of its best tools for global scientific and economic preeminence and extending democratic values and cultural understanding throughout the world, making us more susceptible to the distortions and myths of extremist organizations and movements. The goals of protecting our security while ensuring that the United States remains the destination of choice for the world's best and brightest students, faculty and scholars are not mutually exclusive.

We are eager to work with you to address any concerns and ensure the protection of our national security while upholding our nation's values and interests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ted Mitchell".

Ted Mitchell
President

On behalf of:

American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admission Officers

American Association of Community Colleges

American Association of State Colleges and Universities

American Council on Education

Association of American Universities

Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges

Association of Public and Land-grant Universities

College and University Professional Association for Human Resources

Council of Graduate Schools

EDUCAUSE

NAFEO- The National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education

NASPA- Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education

National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities