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January 27, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
U.S. Department of State
Office of the Secretary
Room 7226
Harry S. Truman Building
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

On behalf of the American Council on Education (ACE) and the undersigned higher education associations, we write to congratulate you on your confirmation, as well as to bring to your attention major issues of importance for the higher education community. We believe there are several actions you can take as Secretary of State to help support our international students and restore the United States as a destination of choice for global students and scholars. Dr. Samantha Power, administrator-designate of the U.S. Agency for International Development, recently wrote in *Foreign Affairs* magazine that “one of the best ways to showcase the United States’ ingenuity and know-how is to again make its universities the most attractive in the world to foreign talent.”¹

As you are aware, international students and their enrollment in U.S. institutions have an enormous economic impact on the overall U.S. economy. Unfortunately, recent surveys have shown a 43 percent decline in new international student enrollment at U.S. institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic. A recent study from NAFSA: Association of International Educators found that the overall economic impact generated by international students had declined by \$1.8 billion during the 2019-2020 academic year, from \$40.5 billion in the prior year.² The declining enrollment numbers for 2020 will unfortunately contribute to the challenges our economy confronts as we rebuild from the global pandemic.

By taking action on these immediate issues, you can deliver a welcoming message to current and prospective international students, which can do much to restore the U.S. as a destination of choice, as well as supporting an important economic activity as the U.S. economy recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. In coordination with the Department of Homeland Security, ensure the timely and efficient processing of visa applications and work authorizations for international

¹ <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-11-20/samanth-power-can-do-power>

² <https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/nafsa-international-student-economic-value-tool-v2>

students and scholars. As you may know, both agencies have current funding issues due to the extremely low number of applications processed in 2020 and the loss of those fees, as well as cuts made to the DHS and State workforce over the past four years. Both State and DHS need additional resources to ramp up the processing of visas and authorizations post COVID-19.

2. Restore the 2005 “Rice” cable,³ and allow flexibility for consular officers in interpreting an international student’s intent provision when adjudicating student visa applications. Ideally, the Administration could push Congress to enact legislation that would allow for “dual intent” when international students apply for a non-immigrant student visa. Dual intent is already allowed on some non-immigrant visas, such as H-1Bs. Expanding dual intent to include F visas, would streamline the visa process for international students and allow students the ability to express interest in remaining in the U.S. after their studies.

We have shared a similar letter with Secretary Mayorkas regarding actions the Department of Homeland Security can take to help support international students. One of those steps is to restore the Homeland Security Academic Advisory Council (HSAAC), established during the Obama Administration, which allowed for interagency discussions of issues impacting our institutions and students. The Department of State through Consular Affairs (CA) was an active member. We hope you will support efforts to restore this important Council.

We look forward to working with you and the Biden Administration on these important issues.

Sincerely,



Ted Mitchell
President

On behalf of:

Achieving the Dream
ACPA-College Student Educators International
ACT
American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Association of University Professors
American College Health Association
American Council on Education
American Dental Education Association
APPA, “Leadership in Educational Facilities”
Association of American Colleges and Universities
Association of American Universities
Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities

³ https://www.nafsa.org/_/file/_/amresource/DOScable_20050928.htm

Association of Community College Trustees
Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges
Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
Association of Research Libraries
College and University Professional Association for Human Resources
Common App
Consortium of Universities of the Washington Metropolitan Area
Council for Advancement and Support of Education
Council for Christian Colleges & Universities
Council for Higher Education Accreditation
Council of Graduate Schools
Council of Independent Colleges
Council on Social Work Education
EDUCAUSE
ETS
Higher Education Consultants Association
Higher Learning Commission
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
Middle States Commission on Higher Education
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
National Association for College Admission Counseling
National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education
National Association of Colleges and Employers
National Association of College and University Business Officers
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators
National Collegiate Athletic Association
New England Commission of Higher Education
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
Phi Beta Kappa Society
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges
State Higher Education Executive Officers Association
UPCEA