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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO ALL DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR POSTS COLLECTIVE
VISAS
E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: CVIS

SUBJECT: STUDENT VISA PROCESSING

REF: (A) STATE 31996 (B) 05 STATE 180015 (C) 05 STATE 79909 (D) 04 STATE 70079
(E) STATE 021872

1. At the onset of what promises to be a busy student visa season, we commend consular officers worldwide for your hard work in making sure that all student visa applicants have the opportunity to apply for and, when qualified, receive their visas in a timely manner. Special thanks go to the many consular officers who have been active in outreach and recruitment efforts, either on your own, or in conjunction with educational advisors and others interested in international education in the United States. Your efforts are going a long way towards demonstrating that our country is open to qualified students around the globe. This extra effort on the student visa issue has been favorably noticed both within and outside the Department.

2. Per ref B, consular officers should focus on several areas to ensure that a student visa applicant is qualified. Student visa applicants must demonstrate they are academically qualified to pursue their intended course of study and are financially able to cover its costs. Please remember, however, a U.S. academic institution has already determined that the student is qualified to enroll in school. As a general rule, you should not question the school's judgment. Students should be able to articulate their reasons for entering their field of study and choosing to study at a particular institution in the United States. When examining a student's intent to depart the United States after a course of study, focus on the applicant's immediate and near-term intent, remembering that by nature foreign students stay in the United States for extended periods of time.

3. Additionally, remember to focus on the student and not the institution during adjudication. The United States offers a wide range of educational opportunities at different levels for a wide variety of students. Student visa applicants should be afforded the opportunity to demonstrate why their choice of institution is right for them, and demonstrate that they will be able to maintain status as a student at that school. Consular officers should not second-guess an individual's choice of school, or deny a visa based solely on the student's choice of a particular academic institution. Posts should, however, bring to the Department's attention institutions they believe are improperly issuing I-20s.

4. Ref A notes prospective students should apply for their visas as early as possible. Recent guidance, Ref. E, extended the period during which student visas may be issued to 120 days before the program start date. In instances where students can anticipate delays in issuance, including delays resulting from SAO requirements, posts may accept applications for adjudication and processing even before this 120-day period, but may not issue the actual visa until 120 days before the start of studies. Although SAO delays for students have declined

significantly over the last two years, a small number of cases continue to face extended review. Please follow up with the Department on any cases experiencing a long delay in order to facilitate the timely arrival of the student.

5. CA supports the efforts of posts to make visa interviews available to students on a priority basis and posts should continue to expedite student and exchange visitor visa applications, as necessary. While schools and exchange programs have been urged to make sure that their students are able to apply for visas as early as possible, students are sometimes presented with tight timeframes and must obtain visas on short notice. Efficient processing of visas for students and exchange visitors is a high priority for the Department: every student should have the chance to make the initial start date of his/her academic or exchange program whenever possible. Information for expediting students and exchange visitors visa applications must be easily accessible on post websites.

6. Once again, we greatly appreciate the efforts posts are making to facilitate the travel of legitimate foreign students.

RICE