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[www.suny.edu](http://www.suny.edu)

April 21, 2021

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

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas  
Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Nebraska Avenue Complex  
3801 Nebraska Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20395

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Mayorkas,

On behalf of the nearly 400,000 students – including 17,546 international students – who study at one of the State University of New York's 64 colleges and universities, we congratulate you on confirmation, and thank you for your public service.

Your leadership at the departments of State and Homeland Security could not have come at a more crucial time in our country. As you know, in recent years national policies caused a chilling effect on the ability of U.S. colleges and universities to attract international students. While the U.S. has experienced double-digit international enrollment declines since 2016, Canada has increased its study permits by 250,000 over that same time. This dynamic has negatively impacted our standing on the global stage by arbitrarily hindering research and academic study, and restricting cross-cultural understanding, which had been to our collective benefit for many decades. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic caused even greater instability as U.S. consulates worldwide were closed due to legitimate public health restrictions.

We are grateful that the Biden Administration has begun the rollback of policies that unfairly target international students. As we see a light at the end of the tunnel on this pandemic, we also write to offer our voice in support of efforts to:

- 1) Reopen consulates in the safest way possible, consistent with State Department procedures throughout the world;
- 2) Develop – where needed – alternative processes for international students to acquire their visa to join us on campus for the Fall 2021 semester. This may include waiving the requirement for in-person interviews (as has already occurred for H-2 visas) or allowing online interviews where appropriate. This could also include creation of a limited student exemption for restricted countries; and

- 3) Provide guidance to public and private institutions nationally on vaccination and related requirements for international students so that we can prepare for a safe and successful reopening for all students and communities.

At this time, embassies and consulates in many of the countries of origin that send the lion's share of SUNY's international enrollment remain closed, including: India, Singapore, South Korea, China, Canada, and Turkey. F-1 visas issued for students from India between October 2019 and September 2020 declined 64% to the lowest levels in a generation. Furthermore, we note that an Executive Order remains in place restricting travel from Brazil, China, South Africa, and Iran. Processing times for student visas often take more than a month under the best of circumstances, with significant planning and coordinating then required before the student ever sets foot on U.S. soil. We are quickly approaching a point in the calendar when the door to international study in the U.S. will shut for many of our students. We respectfully request consideration of an exemption for students from these countries, similar to the one in place for students traveling from the European Schengen Area, United Kingdom, and Ireland.

International students at SUNY institutions represent 5% of our total enrollment; however, through tuition and other resources, these students provide 20% of campus revenue, which keeps faculty and staff employed, and support programs in place for all students. Beyond tuition, these students contribute nearly \$750 million in economic activity and support 7,685 jobs in New York alone. In addition to these students' contributions to their campus, they have a widespread positive impact in their communities and regions. Losing them for yet another semester will be needlessly devastating for all involved, whereas welcoming them to campus for Fall 2021 will be an important step in our social and economic recovery.

SUNY campuses recognize the many challenges that your departments face, and we have immeasurable respect for the balance that must be struck as we all work to safely reemerge from this pandemic. Thank you for all of your efforts and your consideration of our concerns and suggestions. As always, please know that the SUNY community stands with you and our offices are ready to support your efforts wherever we can be of assistance.

Sincerely,



Jim Malatras  
Chancellor  
State University of New York



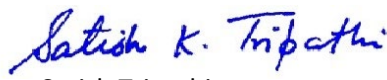
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