

# Universities of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

April 23, 2021

The Honorable Brendan Boyle  
1133 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-3802

Dear Representative Boyle,

On behalf of our institutions of higher education throughout Pennsylvania, we write to respectfully request your assistance in support of our institutions and the over 50,000 international students we educate annually, by asking Secretary of State Blinken and Homeland Security Secretary Mayorkas to address student visa processing delays that threaten to disrupt international education on our campuses this fall.

We are concerned with the current status of student visa processing at United States consulates abroad ahead of the Fall 2021 academic semester that threatens to adversely impact students planning to study in the U.S. With fewer than four months remaining before the semester begins, over half of the consulates worldwide remain closed. Department of State officials have said a four-month backlog for visas currently exists. Urgent action is therefore required by the Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security to ensure that international students and scholars receive necessary visas and work authorizations to travel to the U.S. and study in our communities.

In a recent [letter to Secretaries Blinken and Mayorkas](#), associations representing higher education across the nation recommended steps that would improve processing challenges and enable international students and scholars to make plans to safely travel to the United States:

- Assure international students and academic institutions that visa applications and work authorizations for international students and scholars will be processed in time for the Fall 2021 semester that begins this August.
- Commit to either a) reopening consulates for visa processing where possible, or b) if local conditions prevent reopening, waive in-person interview requirements or, where waivers are unavailable, allow visa interviews to be conducted online.
- Expand student exemptions for academic travel beyond currently exempted countries and regions to locations where restrictions remain.

Pennsylvania is ranked 6th nationally in terms of the enrollments of international students who study at U.S. colleges and universities. International students make a significant economic impact on the Commonwealth – contributing \$2 billion and supporting more than 25,000 jobs in

the 2019-20 academic year. Our international students are a critical source of talent for businesses, contributing to our national economic competitiveness in cutting-edge fields. Students who study in Pennsylvania learn about local industries and communities through internships, experiential learning opportunities, technical training programs, and collaborative research efforts.

To secure a visa in time to arrive for the Fall 2021 semester, international students must begin the visa process now. Our institutions are ready to support undergraduate and graduate students admitted for Fall 2020 (who attended virtually) and Fall 2021 in planning for their travel to our campuses. Our campuses plan to be fully open this fall, and we aim for every admitted student to be able to attend in person. International students are an important and integral part of our communities, and we need the Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security to help ensure this remains the case.

We respectfully request that you contact Secretaries Blinken and Mayorkas to urge the above actions that will support robust educational experiences at institutions in the Commonwealth and nationwide this fall. Please contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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Programs  
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Vice Provost for Global Engagement  
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