

November 1, 2021

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

Dear Secretary Blinken,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we write to ask for flexibility in the F-1 and J-1 visa process for students and scholars who have been displaced by the current crisis in Afghanistan. Many of these students and scholars are currently located in third countries, some in U.S.-supported “lily pads,” and are eager to begin the next stage of their lives along with their families. Many of our institutions are offering full-time employment or scholarships and students and scholars are looking to travel to the United States to take these positions. However, F-1 and J-1 visas are being denied because the students and scholars cannot prove “non-immigrant” intent to the satisfaction of the consular officers. In addition, they continue to face serious issues with getting appointments to interview for these visas.

We know U.S. consulates around the world are dealing with a backlog of applications due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, many of these student and scholars face safety issues because they are being targeted by the Taliban and others. Those in third countries are faced with resource issues because they are unable to work and had to leave Afghanistan with very few belongings. They are eager to start jobs or studies and begin the next part of their lives following the upheaval of evacuating from Afghanistan amidst a political and military crisis.

Even if these Afghan students and scholars receive an appointment, we have seen a high number of denials for F-1 and J-1 visas because the consulates determine that the applicants are unable to prove non-immigrant intent. These are students and scholars who are invested in their home country and wish to return to Afghanistan in the future but, given the political upheaval, are unable to provide sufficient evidence that they will return. We urge you to allow for flexibility in determining non-immigrant intent for Afghans during this emergency, as was done in the 2005 Department of State cable on evaluating residence abroad for F-1 students, by focusing only on present, not future, intent.¹

Bright and talented students and scholars, including many women, who were engaged in academic pursuits before the Taliban retook Afghanistan now face a variety of challenges. Our institutions are working to provide a future for these displaced students and scholars, and to

¹ https://www.nafsa.org/_/file/_/amresource/DOScable_20050928.htm

get them to safe places following their evacuations from Afghanistan. Colleges and universities are offering legitimate jobs and seats in classrooms. We hope the State Department can help bring employees, students, and scholars to the United States by prioritizing visa appointments for Afghan students and scholars, as well as by providing flexibility in determining temporary intent for the purposes of F-1 and J-1 visas for these displaced Afghans.

Sincerely,



Ted Mitchell
President

On behalf of:

ACPA-College Student Educators International
American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
American Association of Community Colleges
American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Council on Education
American Dental Education Association
Association of American Universities
Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities
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
Consortium of Universities of the Washington Metropolitan Area
Council for Christian Colleges and Universities
Council for Higher Education Accreditation
Council of Graduate Schools
EDUCAUSE
ETS
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
National Association for College Admission Counseling
National Association of College and University Business Officers
National Association of Colleges and Employers
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
National Association of System Heads
Phi Beta Kappa Society
Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration
State Higher Education Executive Officers Association
UPCEA