

Statement on International Education Week

by Assistant Secretary Janice L. Jacobs

Bureau of Consular Affairs

As we celebrate International Education Week, we recognize the positive and invaluable impact that studying abroad can have on a student's life. In today's global economy, it is essential that professionals in all fields have a knowledge and understanding not just of facts and figures, but also of foreign cultures and societies. When students from different countries and cultural backgrounds sit together in classrooms, whether in the United States or abroad, they exchange new ideas, break down stereotypes, gain knowledge of each other and their differing cultures, and make connections that last a lifetime. This is a wonderful way to bridge the differences between people, encourage peace and understanding, and build a stronger world economy.

The Bureau of Consular Affairs actively supports international education. We provide information and assistance to American students overseas, and carefully adjudicate visa applications for students from other countries coming here to study. We protect both our citizens and our borders while facilitating study in the United States for qualified foreign students.

Through new advances in electronic communication, it is now easier than ever for American students overseas to receive assistance from the Department of State, on everything from email warnings about security to country information accessible with smart phone apps. We encourage all students who will travel abroad to enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, or STEP. This program allows them to be notified of emergency situations from the nearest Embassy or Consulate in the country where they are traveling. The Smart Traveler app, readily available for free download from the iTunes store, gives students the ability to look up country information "on-the-go," and is highly recommended for anyone traveling overseas. We stand ready to respond to students who require assistance with challenges ranging from replacing a lost passport to voting from overseas.

Consular officers around the world reach out to local schools and universities to share the benefits of studying in the United States, while at the same time demystifying the visa process. Student visa applications are given priority so students arrive on time for the opening of classes. Foreign students may apply for their visas up to 120 days before their academic program is scheduled to begin. In

the last fiscal year, the Department of State issued over 450,000 student visas and the numbers continue to rise.

We also recognize that community colleges play an important role in our higher education system by increasing access to career-relevant skills, providing intensive English language instruction, and preparing students for further study. Diversity is one of the strengths of the U.S. educational system, where students can choose from over 4,000 accredited higher education institutions. We strongly support legitimate, qualified students who wish to study at a community college.

International exchange thrives on U.S. university and college campuses making them centers of excellence. American students overseas and foreign students in the United States contribute each day to a global community that becomes increasingly closer through interaction at the most personal level. We are proud to be a part of these exchanges.