

FOREWORD

Welcoming Foreign Academics and Researchers *by Senator Patrick Leahy*

It says a great deal about higher education in the United States that so many scholars, researchers, and students from around the world wish to teach and study in America. The diversity of students, faculty, and researchers in American colleges and universities reflects the best of our nation's history and traditions of immigration.

As Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, I have often noted how important and meaningful it is for foreign visitors to receive a courteous and welcoming greeting. The initial adjudication and issuance of exchange visas for foreign academics and researchers must set the tone. That process must be fair and efficient. Next, our foreign visitors should receive a positive first impression of America from government officials posted at our ports of entry. Vigilance in our border security efforts and friendliness to visitors need not be mutually exclusive.

The same diversity that contributed to the development of modern America serves to augment and strengthen the American educational experience. Just as Americans' cultural lives are enriched through international participation in American athletics and performing arts, American students gain a valuable perspective when they study and exchange ideas with people from a variety of countries and cultures. Our campuses should be full of classrooms in which students and instructors from many nations exchange ideas and establish bonds.

In 2005, I wrote in an earlier edition of this publication that the participation of foreign students and faculty at colleges and universities was a benefit to these institutions. That remains true today, and it bears recognition once again that these benefits have the potential to go beyond the educational realm. They may ultimately serve America's global competitiveness as a leading innovator across many fields. By nurturing the participation of foreign students, researchers, and scholars in American higher education, we invite many opportunities to enhance and strengthen our own competitiveness in an increasingly global economy.

In 2001, former Secretary of State Colin Powell wrote that foreign scholars and students "enrich our communities with their academic abilities and cultural diversity, and they return home with an increased understanding and often a lasting affection for the United States." Since that time, the government has taken steps to improve the processes related to international exchange visas, and the rate of visa issuance has followed a generally upward trend. But policy makers must continue to help ensure that the pathways to American colleges and universities for foreign scholars and students remain free of unnecessary difficulty and delay.

Americans serving in many roles in government, the private sector, and academia recognize the immense value in the cross-cultural exchange of ideas and friendships. Our continued support and promotion of these ideals and will ultimately pay dividends for America and our standing in the world.