

VISAS FOR SCIENTIFIC COLLABORATION AND ACADEMIC STUDY

It is in the national interest of U.S. economic development and global competitiveness for international scientists and students to have the ability to travel freely and easily to the United States, particularly if they have been approved for visas. The American Chemical Society (ACS) supports visa policies that welcome foreign scholars, students, scientists, and engineers to the U.S. and facilitate scientific education and exchange.

International scientists and engineers are essential to the research enterprise and prosperity of the United States. Half of all physical sciences and engineering graduate students come from other nations; international students comprise 53% of chemical engineering and 40% of chemistry graduate students at U.S. universities. Similarly, international scientists and engineers are critical contributors to research and manufacturing sites in the U.S. Their technological achievements contribute immensely to our nation's economy, national security, public health, higher education, and scientific enterprises.

The ACS recognizes concerns regarding the security of research funded by the U.S. government, but emphasizes the importance of involving the scientific community in the development of policies to address this issue. Security concerns can be more effectively resolved through improved and transparent guidelines from granting agencies rather than by restricting visa access, which could have a potentially disastrous impact on innovation and the competitiveness of the U.S. research enterprise.

A robust national strategy for granting scientific visas must promote and facilitate the entry of the brightest and most qualified international students, scholars, scientists, and engineers to participate fully in the U.S. higher education and research enterprises. Otherwise, these scientists will seek opportunities in countries where access is obtainable with fewer barriers. ACS strongly supports non-discrimination in the visa process. Diversity strengthens the scientific enterprise, and the inclusion of diverse people, experiences, and ideas leads to superior solutions to global challenges.

ACS recommends the following improvements to the U.S. visa system:

- Ensure predictability, transparency and reduced time for processing visa applications. Students, conference attendees, and other scientific visitors rely on timely visa decisions to make arrangements for travel to the United States.
- Assess reasonable visa processing fees that do not create unnecessary burdens for applicants.
- Release information from the Department of State on the status of visa applications to applicants openly and promptly.
- Give applicants whose visas are denied a timely opportunity to appeal the decision and correct any deficiencies in their application. Visa denials should be issued with an explanation of the reason for the denial and information on options, next steps and implications for future travel to the U.S.

The American Chemical Society (ACS) Board of Directors Committee on Public Affairs and Public Relations adopted this statement on behalf of the Society at the Recommendation of the Society Committee on Education, the International Activities Committee, the Committee on Science, and Corporation Associates. ACS is a non-profit scientific and educational organization, chartered by Congress, with more than 158,000 chemical scientists and engineers as members. The world's largest scientific society, ACS advances the chemical enterprise, increases public awareness of chemistry, and brings its expertise to state and national matters.

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- Develop mechanisms to facilitate routine re-entry by foreign students and scientists who travel outside of the United States. The ACS supports multiple entry visas for visiting scientists and student visa holders valid for the length of their program. When this is not possible, mechanisms should be created for travelers to apply for and receive a timely decision concerning re-entry before traveling from the United States.
- Afford special attention and additional consular resources to the processing of visa applications of third-country nationals. Scientists are a highly globalized workforce; it is common to receive education in multiple different countries in the course of study.
- Create consistency and equity in the visa system and facilitate the entry of the best and brightest scientists by allocating sufficient resources in terms of software, funding, and personnel to the system. Government officials at consulates and the ports of entry involved in the process of granting visas should also have access to technical expertise and resources to facilitate the responsible and informed evaluation of applications from scientists.