



NAFSA

Association of
International Educators**MEMORANDUM**

To: The President-elect

Attn: National Security Team

From: NAFSA: Association of International Educators

Date: November 21, 2008

Re: The First 100 Days: Setting a New Tone in U.S. Foreign Relations

During the first 100 days of your administration, you will be focusing on the most urgent problems facing our nation and on the core commitments that you made in your campaign. We write with suggestions that speak to one such urgent problem and one of your core commitments: the necessity of establishing a new tone in U.S. relations with the rest of the world.

Your recognition throughout your campaign of the urgency of this matter gave heart to this association's 10,000 members nationwide and around the world, who have chosen to devote their careers to international education in the belief that international education (in the words of our mission statement) builds understanding and respect among different peoples, enhances constructive leadership in the global community, and is fundamental to fostering peace, security, and well-being. NAFSA: Association of International Educators is a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to advancing international education and exchange.

The tone that you establish for U.S. foreign relations in your first 100 days will affect international perceptions of the United States for your entire administration. This, therefore, is one of the matters that urgently demands your attention. However, unlike many of the other issues that will confront you on the day you enter the White House, establishing a new tone will not require a great commitment of your administration's time or of U.S. resources during the first 100 days; rather it will require visible commitments and signals that the United States will henceforth act as a responsible world citizen. In this memorandum, we propose concrete actions that you could take immediately that would constitute such visible commitments and signals, which would be welcomed around the world—and, we believe, would receive bipartisan acclaim in Congress.

In our recent paper, *International Education: The Neglected Dimension of Public Diplomacy: Recommendations for the Next President*, which we submitted to your campaign (and can be found on our Web site at <http://www.nafsa.org/pdpaper08>), we argue that at the heart of public diplomacy is the critical task of building, conducting and sustaining the long-term relationships through which the world most fundamentally “knows” Americans and forms its core assumptions about what America “is.” From the creation of the Fulbright Program to the founding of the Peace Corps, the post-World War II generation pursued these relationships as a



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conscious matter of national policy—a way of aligning America’s interests with those of the world and investing in a more peaceful world in which the United States could be secure. We need to embrace that vision again as we confront a new era of global connectedness and global challenges.

International education forms the foundation for addressing these challenges, and it is an indispensable component of the revived public diplomacy that must begin to rebuild America’s global reputation. Yet the United States today lacks the policy instruments to realize international education’s potential. It is time, as a nation, to be purposeful about international education—to employ it consciously, in a coordinated manner, as one of the tools in the national toolkit for engaging with the world in pursuit of the objectives that we share with the world’s people. It is through international education that we establish a lasting foundation for dialogue and partnership with the rest of the world and create the conditions for lasting global peace, security, and well-being.

We call on you to announce a major international education initiative designed explicitly to foster an America that knows, understands, and is able to communicate with the world, and to strengthen the relationships through which the American people and the world’s people can relate to, interact with, and understand each other.

Few actions that you could take in the first 100 days would be as easy to take and as welcomed internationally as this one. The world can respect and even welcome U.S. power that is used responsibly. What makes people in other countries nervous about U.S. power is America’s tendency to act without any real knowledge or understanding of how we impact the rest of the world. A Presidential initiative to increase America’s understanding of the world and the world’s understanding of America would announce loud and clear that you intend for America to deal with the world on a different basis.

We present our recommendations in detail in the aforementioned paper. We hope that the recommended actions will form part of your administration’s agenda. As a start on this agenda, and as an important signal to the world, we recommend that you announce the following in the first 100 days:

- That you look forward to signing the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act, which is sponsored in the Senate by your colleague, Senator Dick Durbin, and of which you were an original cosponsor in the 110th Congress. This legislation would create an innovative program to make study abroad for credit the norm, rather than the exception, in U.S. undergraduate education. The legislation has very strong bipartisan support in both Houses of Congress but fell victim to the Senate’s general inability to get legislation to the floor. We expect it to be re-introduced early in the 111th Congress.
- That you have designated an appropriate White House official (presumably a member of your NSC staff) to spearhead an interagency effort to draft a comprehensive strategy to make the United States more attractive to international students and scholars, in consultation with appropriate congressional committees and educators. Congress has



asked for such a strategy in report language, but the previous administration did not deliver. Suggested elements of such a strategy are spelled out in our report.

- That you have asked the secretary of state to take appropriate steps to:
 - Establish “fast-track” visa reviews for frequent visitors, such as scholars who come to the United States frequently for collaborative research and have been vetted many times, and for international students and scholars in legal status in the United States who leave the United States temporarily and require a new visa to return to the same program. This action would remove a major irritant to international students and scholars at no cost to security.
 - Review the Exchange Visitor Program to see how it could be appropriately expanded, with respect not just to the Middle East but the entire world, and to review the extensive regulations governing exchange programs that have built up over the decades in order to identify unnecessary regulations and to see how the regulations can be made more consistent, predictable, and supportive of the exchange venture.
- That you have asked the secretary of homeland security to take appropriate steps to:
 - Integrate the department’s immigration functions, and to strengthen the Office of Policy, in order to permit the department to carry out its immigration responsibilities in a more consistent and rational manner.
 - Ensure that all international visitors are treated respectfully at U.S. ports of entry.
- That you have asked the Peace Corps director for a plan to double the size of the Peace Corps by the end of your first term (which is the fastest timetable consistent with the Peace Corps’ ability to maintain its sterling reputation for recruiting, training, and appropriately placing volunteers in excellent programs and protecting volunteer health, safety, and security), and that you commit to requesting the necessary resources to make this happen.

These modest and extremely inexpensive steps—commitments, with actions to follow—would have a significant public diplomacy impact, and would signal unambiguously your administration’s intention to put our relations with the world on a different footing. We pledge our cooperation and support, and that of our membership, for the implementation of these initiatives.

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