FOSTERING SCIENTIFIC PROGRESS: U.S. VISAS FOR ACADEMIC STUDY & CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE

The American Chemical Society (ACS) supports visa policies to facilitate scientific education and exchange and welcome foreign scholars, students, scientists, and engineers. This includes timely and reasonable screening processes for visits, greater transparency of the application process, and the issuance and management of visas that are more aligned with the purpose of academic study and scientific 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 in U.S. universities. The technological achievements of these visitors contribute immensely to our nation’s economy, national security, public health, higher education, and scientific enterprises.

Despite continuing improvements to the U.S. visa system, barriers and inefficiencies remain, and ACS recommends the following improvements to the approval process:

1. Improve the flexibility of U.S. visas and the application process
   - Continue to improve the predictability and reduce time required 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. Additionally, visa processing fees should be reasonable and additional resources should be dedicated to the worldwide improvement of consular processing.
   - Recognize scientific mobility is in the national interest for U.S. economic development and competitiveness. The ability of scientists and students to move freely and easily to the U.S., particularly if they have been previously approved for visas, is imperative for the global competitiveness for the United States.
   - 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 scientist and student visa holders valid for the length of their program. When this is not possible, mechanisms should be created to apply for and receive a timely decision concerning re-entry before traveling from the United States.

2. Improve the transparency of the U.S. visa process.
   - Release information from the Department of State on the status of visa applications 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.
• 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 fairly common to receive education in multiple different countries in the course of study. Participating in international conferences and travelling to collaborate with international colleagues is vital to the sciences.

3. Develop a national strategy.

• A national strategy should be developed to promote academic and scientific exchange and encourage international students, scholars, scientists, and engineers to pursue higher education and research opportunities in the United States. Such a system would foster American scientific and economic competitiveness. The visa system should encourage 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.

• Diversity strengthens scientific progress. The ACS is committed to diversity in all forms, and supports non-discrimination of visa applicants based on race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, country of origin, and other factors.

• Government officials at consulates and the ports of entry involved in the process of granting visas should be trained to assure the best possible understanding and respectful treatment of visa applicants/travelers and their purposes for scientific travel and study in the U.S.