

U.S. Eager To Attract More Foreign Students, Rice Says

Outlines partnership to use education to connect America to the world

By Anthony Kujawa - Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The United States has "never been more eager" to welcome foreign students to its shores and to send more Americans to study abroad, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice says, outlining four principles to guide U.S. efforts to increase educational exchanges January 5.

"To be successful, our government and our universities must forge a new partnership for education exchange, a partnership that rests on new thinking and new action," Rice said at the U.S. University Presidents Summit on International Education.

The two-day summit, designed to strengthen international education partnerships, included participation from more than 100 college and university presidents from all 50 U.S. states, leading public and private research institutions, as well as community colleges, historically black institutions, Hispanic-serving institutions, religiously affiliated institutions and women's colleges. (See [related article](#).)

"As the global center of gravity shifts from West to East, and as regions like the Broader Middle East struggle to embrace democratic reform, American students must be at the forefront of our engagement with countries like China and India, Iraq and Afghanistan," she said.

The secretary outlined four principles to guide U.S. efforts to increase educational exchanges:

- Expand exchange efforts such as the Fulbright and Gilman International Scholarship programs;
- Cultivate new relationships for education exchange with countries playing an increasingly important international role;
- Make U.S. universities more accessible to talented but underprivileged students and to students of diverse backgrounds; and
- Continue to improve visa policies.

Rice said the United States must build on successful educational exchange programs such as the Fulbright scholarship program, which has brought more than 250,000 students from 185 countries to study in the United States since 1946, and the Gilman Scholarship Program which has enabled 2,200 U.S. students to study abroad since 2000. (For additional information see [Fulbright Program](#) and [Gilman Scholarship Program](#).)

Earlier in the day, President Bush addressed the summit, announcing the National Security Language Initiative, a program to marshal the resources of four federal agencies

to increase the numbers of Americans fluent in critical-need foreign languages. (See [related article](#).)

"To prepare young Americans to understand the peoples who will help to define the 21st century, nothing is more important than our ability to converse in their native tongues," Rice said, adding the initiative is a critical goal of the Bush administration.

U.S. IMPROVED "EVERY ASPECT" OF VISA PROCESS

Officials say new U.S. visa procedures following the September 11 terrorist attacks resulted in some delays for certain applicants when originally implemented, but that the United States since has improved its ability to efficiently process visa applications. (See [related article](#).)

"There are legitimate security concerns that must be met and we need your help in meeting them. I will make a promise to you: if you are prepared to help us to make certain that we can achieve a balance between openness and security, we are prepared to work with you to do so," she added.

She said the State Department is hiring more consular officers, training them better and sending them into foreign communities to give local students advice on how to apply for a visa. U.S. embassies and consulates also have established special, expedited visa interviews for prospective foreign students, she said.

"We are now approving 97 percent of our visas in just one or two days and we are radically shortening the amount of time that it takes to process the rest," Rice said adding that the number of visas issued in 2005 increased for the first time since the September 11, 2001, attacks.

BENEFITS OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE

As a former professor at Stanford University, Rice said, the "transformative capability" of U.S. higher education is "very clear" to her.

"I witnessed the life-changing potential of international exchange among my American students who studied abroad and among the diverse foreign students who studied at Stanford from every region of the world who regularly enriched my classrooms in ways that only they could do," she said.

As secretary of state, Rice said she and President Bush often meet leaders of other countries who have attended different kinds of schools in the United States.

"They've gone to community colleges, they've gone to small colleges, they've gone to land-grant colleges, they've gone to research universities. They've all had the common experience of being -- of studying in America. And the experience then becomes one that binds them to us in a way that can never be broken," she said.

On a recent trip to Saudi Arabia, for example, Rice said she met with leaders -- one of whom mentioned during a meeting, "I'm a Trojan," referring to the mascot of the University of Southern California, and another who said he was a "Pioneer" referring to the University of Denver, Rice's alma mater.

But Rice added, "in Saudi Arabia, it is true of my generation that these students studied in America. But with the next generation, they are not studying in America. That is something that we must correct and that we must change."

Rice said one of her "highest priorities" is to reinvigorate U.S. efforts to connect America to the people of the world through education.

"Our citizens learn from the different perspectives that foreign students bring to our classrooms. ... And when these students ultimately return to their home overseas, they have new friends that they have met and memories of America that they will never forget," Rice said.

For additional information on studying in the United States, see the State Department Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs [EducationUSA](#) Web site and the electronic journal, [*College and University Education in the United States*](#).

A [transcript](#) of Rice's remarks is available on the State Department Web site.

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