



United States Department of State

Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs

Washington, D.C. 20520

Miriam Feldblum
Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration
miriam@presidentsalliance.org

Dear Ms. Feldblum:

Thank you for your March 24 letter regarding the accommodating of international students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department fully understands the importance of international students to the institutions of higher education in the United States, to the U.S. economy, and its communities.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of State suspended routine visa services at our embassies and consulates from March 20 to July 15, 2020. This was an essential measure to protect the health and safety of our mission staff, applicants, and travelers to the United States. However, U.S. embassies and consulates provided emergency and mission-critical visa services throughout the suspension and will continue to do so as they are able. To help our embassies and consulates prioritize and adjudicate visa applications, the Department has identified several categories of applicants as mission critical. For example, posts worldwide are adjudicating visa applications for doctors and other medical professionals, as resources and local conditions allow, due to the urgent need for health care workers in the United States.

U.S. embassies and consulates have begun a phased resumption of routine visa services on a post-by-post basis, as staffing resources and local health and safety circumstances allow. Posts already do, and will continue to prioritize student visa applications. We recommend that all student visa applicants review the website of the closest embassy or consulate to determine which services that office can currently provide and to find information on making a visa appointment.

Despite the fundamental changes to visa operations brought about by the global pandemic and thanks to the dedication of our employees abroad, the Department provided visa services to over 130,000 students since March 2020. Student visas are a priority for the Department, and we are reviewing all possible options in our continuing efforts to issue visas to qualified applicants.

We hope this information is helpful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "I. G. Brownlee", written over a light blue horizontal line.

Ian G. Brownlee