

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20502

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Dr. Kazuo Kitahara  
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Science Council for Japan  
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Dr. Hidetoshi Fukuyama  
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Dear Dr. Kitahara and Dr. Fukuyama:

Thank you for your letter expressing interest in better visa and border security procedures to facilitate legitimate scientific travel. The Administration recognizes and understands that students and scientists have been affected by the visa and admission policies put in place after 9-11 in an effort to protect America.

The Office of Science and Technology Policy, Executive Office of the President, has been working closely with the relevant agencies and departments to effect change. I write to bring to your attention to recent positive developments and to ask for your assistance in correcting lingering misperceptions.

The United States is open for business, open for scientific research, open for study. The Administration's approach to visa policy is "Secure Borders, Open Doors." The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is now responsible for visa policy and immigration procedures. Through cooperative efforts by DHS, the Department of State, and other Federal agencies, the Administration has taken the following actions to enhance non-immigrant visa processing procedures and facilitate the travel of international visitors to the United States:

- (1) Providing transparency into the visa process. The waiting times for non-immigrant visa interviews at each U.S. embassy and consulate are being provided through a centralized website ([www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)).
- (2) Students and research scholars continue to have priority for interviews. The policy which gives priority processing to international students and research scholars has been extended, although we would still like to encourage visa applicants to apply in a timely manner.
- (3) Recent changes have been made to visa validities for some China and Russian applicants.
- (4) Facilitating entry/re-entry travel. International visitors who need to exit and reenter the United States, and who need to renew their visas at a U.S. embassy or consulate, will be able to schedule their overseas appointment before departing the U.S. This should help to minimize the time a scientist is away from his or her U.S. research program.
- (5) Direction from the top to seek additional improvements. Consular offices throughout the world have been asked to undertake a detailed self-assessment of local visa processing procedures in order to identify methods to further streamline and enhance visa operations.
- (6) Reforming the Security Advisory Opinion process. The Security Advisory Opinion (SAO) process impacting scientists, named “Mantis,” has already been modified with positive results. Mantis cases are now being routinely processed within 30 days. Please do not hesitate to report cases delayed longer than 30 days to the Department of Homeland Security and to the Department of State. The backlog has been reduced 93% and remaining SAO cases are actively being evaluated. An ongoing effort is considering how best to reform the Mantis process to fit with today’s dynamic scientific environment. Please continue to provide your feedback and suggestions to my office: Fax: 202-456-6027.
- (7) Professionalizing the treatment of international guests at the border. A new training program has been put in place to ensure that those international guests who are entering the United States are treated with courtesy and consideration. The new border process requires an identity verification component, through the taking of inkless fingerprints and a photograph. As of September 29, 2004, DHS had processed over 8.9 million international visitors with the biometric check (U.S.-VISIT) and has detected over 838 individuals that were the subject of a watchlist lookout. These USVISIT procedures have not impeded travel through the airports and privacy protections are in place to ensure that such information is not used inappropriately.

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The Department of Homeland Security has worked hard to assume its Congressionally-mandated leadership role in visa policy and in security advisory opinion processes. OSTP is pleased with the responsiveness and customer-service orientation of the Department and believes that travel policies are moving in the right direction.

We look forward to continuing to receive input from the scientific community about their experiences and we solicit your assistance in encouraging students and researchers to include the United States in their travel plans.

Sincerely,

John H. Marburger, III  
Director