

**A Study of the Impact of Changes to International  
Student Visa Policy and Procedures since the 9/11 Attacks**

by

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## Abstract

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, U.S. international student visa policy and procedures underwent drastic changes having an obvious and immediate impact on foreign students, higher education institutions, international education administrators, and U.S. visa services. This phenomenological study intends to analyze the long-term impact of the changes to the international student visa policy and procedures through describing the lived experiences and perceptions of six international education administrators. Major visa-related areas this survey research focuses on are (1) procedures regarding international student visa policy, (2) the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS), and implementation of Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). Results indicate that although it has been a decade since many of the changes took place, they had an enduring impact on American higher education at the local, national, and global level. As one of the research participants stated “No one should expect that things will be the same as they were before the 9/11 attacks.”

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## List of Abbreviations

AAIEP	American Association of Intensive English Programs
AAU	The Association of American Universities
ACDP	The U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy
Alliance	Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange
A.P.L.U.	The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
CIPRIS	Coordinated Interagency Partnership Regulating International Students
CIT	Contextual Interaction Theory
DREAM Act	The Development, Relief and Education of Alien Minors Act
DHS	The Department of Homeland Security
ESL	English as a Second Language
IEP	Intensive English Program
IIE	Institute of International Education
INS	Immigration and Naturalization Service
NAFSA	Association of International Educators
NSEERS	National Security Entry-Exit Registration System
OPT	Optional Practical Training
SEVIS	Student and Exchange Visitor Information System
SEVP	Student and Exchange Visitor Program

USA Patriot Act: Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools

Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act

VWP      Visa Waiver Program

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Background to the International Students in the US and Road Blocks

The United States has been an attractive destination for foreign students for a century. The quality of education, a wide variety of programs, the prestige of the American post-secondary system are a few of the reasons why many international students choose American colleges to pursue their higher education dreams. While, traditionally, many of the international students are enrolled in undergraduate programs, graduate programs – master’s, specialist, and doctorate degree programs - have also attracted many students from abroad. Many students who complete undergraduate programs in their own country choose to further their education in American universities, which offer a wide variety of programs.

As English is the *lingua franca* of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is critical for international college graduates to learn English language to compete in the global job market. Therefore, besides degree programs, English language training programs have been another area from which international students benefit. Additionally, some international students are in post-doctoral studies. This all results in an economic boost for the US as well as improving America’s image abroad.

As a result, these 671,000 international students bring along several benefits (Institute of International Education, Open Doors, 2008; Institute of International Education, Open Doors, 2009). Short-term and long-term economic advantages and

promoting the positive image of the United States through these international ambassadors are just two of those benefits.

International students, numbering 671,000 in 2009 (Institute of International Education, Open Doors, 2009). make great contributions to American economy every year. They spend over 15 billion dollars every year, of which some is education-related and some is not. Most international students pay out-of-state tuition, which is typically two or three times more than in-state tuition rates. Considering that colleges have budget cuts due to less state and federal funding every year, this economic boost, driven by high international tuition rates, is a sorely needed windfall for American higher education. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, only 2% of families could afford higher education in the US (Bowen, Kurzweil & Tobin, 2005). This problem still exists today. Tuition hikes are inevitable due to regular budget cuts. Therefore, high out-of-state tuition rates help American higher education compensate the budget-cuts they have faced. Besides tuition support, international students add to local economies. These students spend their funds on groceries, clothing, housing, transportation, etc. The source of their funds typically originates overseas, from their families or from students' themselves. The financial support international students supply to colleges and local communities is significant; however, ambassadorial effect is equally important.

Many international students return to their countries and promote a positive image of the United States. Many international students receive their post-secondary education in the US eventually hold important positions in government or business in their own country. These leaders build strong relations between the US and these countries. They have lived in America, have observed and experienced the culture and the language, and

understand the American way of life. This long-term benefit can help America keep the international relations strong. Nevertheless, an absence of this special bond has implications for jeopardizing America's image and security in the world.

America has been the leading nation for training and creating the world's leaders (Vestal, 1994). As a part of its efforts to remain a super power in the world and to bolster national security, the U.S. government should make international education a priority. As Ambassador Kenton W. Keith, Chair of the Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange indicated, terrorism cannot be eliminated just with military power, and international education plays a part in that. For example, cultural misunderstanding exists between the US and Muslim countries, and this issue needs to be taken care of (2002).

One of the trends in American higher education reveals that doctoral programs, especially engineering programs, are graduating significant numbers of international students, in some cases more than American students. There are fewer white American males graduating from these programs (Aslanbeugui & Montecinos, 1998; Vestal, 1994), but many international students earn doctoral degrees in math, science and engineering, and choose to stay in the US and join the American work force. Today, half the workers with doctoral degrees in the fields of science and engineering are foreigners (Vestal, 1994; Thomas, 2008). The Engineering, mathematics, and computer science are important for global competition and homeland security. The priority now is to keep the country safe and attract highly qualified international students at the same time.

Bowen et al (2005) found the following:

Graduate and professional programs have come to depend on large numbers of exceptionally talented foreign students, and this resource

cannot be taken for granted. Other countries are strengthening their own universities, and foreign students have an ever wider set of choices for graduate study. This is not a development to be decried, but it is a reality that must be taken into account in fashioning policies in this country. We can easily make our problems worse than they have to be, and many observers have noted that changes in visa policies growing out of security concerns, if not administered carefully and sensibly, can discourage attendance at U.S. universities by highly talented students from abroad who are important to the quality of this country's higher education system.

(p. 250)

The bad news is that the number of doctorate degrees awarded in the US has been declining (Bowen et al, 2005). Therefore, retaining the current numbers seems even more vital than increasing the numbers.

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 spurred the U.S. government to take immediate action regarding visas. One of the areas the government focused on was the international student visa policy because some of the attackers made their initial entry to the country on student visas. Therefore, a series of changes in the policy were made to attempt to stop foreigners with bad intentions from entering the country. These changes delayed foreign students' attendance to U.S. colleges, and some of the students whose visa applications were delayed or denied ultimately chose not to come at all. The effects of these changes are not clear (Gilman, 2003), and the purpose of this study is to gauge the effects.

This study aims to investigate the impact of three major changes in the student visa policy:

- Procedures regarding international student visa policy
- The National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS); and
- Implementation of Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS).

The Department of Homeland Security (Cornwell & Roberts, 2010) states that the visa policy changed after 9/11; however, this was not a significant change as security screening procedures were merely “standardized and intensified.” Besides these changes in the visa policy, how the policy was implemented may have impacted international students, administrators, and higher education institutions.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) implemented the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS). Using the special registration system keeps track of temporary foreign visitors. Implemented until December 1, 2003, foreign individuals, most of whom were international students, were required to re-register a month and a year after they came to United States. This mandatory re-registration applied to students from certain countries, which the national intelligence services saw as threats to national security. International students from Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Egypt, Eritrea, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Lebanon, Morocco, North Korea, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen had to participate in this application (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2003).



Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (USA Patriot) Act was introduced on October 24, 2001. This quick reaction to the terrorist attacks brought many measures to improve the government's capacity and flexibility to fight terrorist attempts more effectively. The act included the following titles:

- Enhancing Domestic Security against Terrorism;
- Enhanced Surveillance Procedures;
- International Money Laundering Abatement and Anti-Terrorist Financing Act of 2001;
- Protecting The Border;
- Removing Obstacles to Investigating Terrorism;
- Providing for Victims of Terrorism, Public Safety Officers, and Their Families;
- Increased Information Sharing for Critical Infrastructure Protection;
- Strengthening The Criminal Laws against Terrorism; and
- Improved Intelligence (HR 3162 RDS, 2001).

Of these, the Enhancing Domestic Security against Terrorism, Enhanced Surveillance Procedures, Increased Information Sharing for Critical Infrastructure Protection, and Protecting the Border titles had the most impact on international students. A tracking system for international students was mandated by this act, and the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) was the tool to meet the need.

Before the 9/11 attacks, there was a manual, paper-driven system to keep track of international students and scholars, which had been at the planning stage. After the attacks, President George W. Bush asked the DHS to start implementing an effective tracking system. The idea behind the new system was that not only the DHS but also all colleges and universities were going to have access to this new system, named the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). SEVIS was a web-based system that utilized the Internet to transmit data about foreign students and scholars. The purpose of the system was to strike a balance between openness to international students and security of the homeland. The data the system collected included the student's home address, educational background, fingerprints, and dates of entry and exit (Institute of International Education Network, 2003).

Since the attacks in 2001, the government has been trying to keep the homeland secure and the doors open to the international students through implementing new policies and making changes to the student visa policy and procedures. The changes to the student visa policy and procedures affected higher education institutions, advocacy groups, and international students in many different ways. This leads to the purpose of this study.

#### Purpose of the Study

Since the September 11 attacks, the international student visa policy and procedures have been revised, reviewed, and changed many times. The purpose of the study is to:

- (a) Analyze documents (Literature Review) – literature, statistics, governmental documents, documents published by advocacy groups, etc.- to see what the

impact of the changes to the international student visa policy and procedures is;

- (b) Explore international education administrators' perspective on the impact of these changes; and
- (c) Examine the changes in and current status of the student visa policy from the perspective of international education administrators at higher education institutions in the U.S.A.

#### Research Questions

- I. What is the impact of the changes in the international student visa policy and procedures?
- II. What is international education administrators' perspective on the impact of the changes to the international student visa policy and procedures, including those observed since the 9/11 terrorist attacks and how they see the current status of the visa policy?

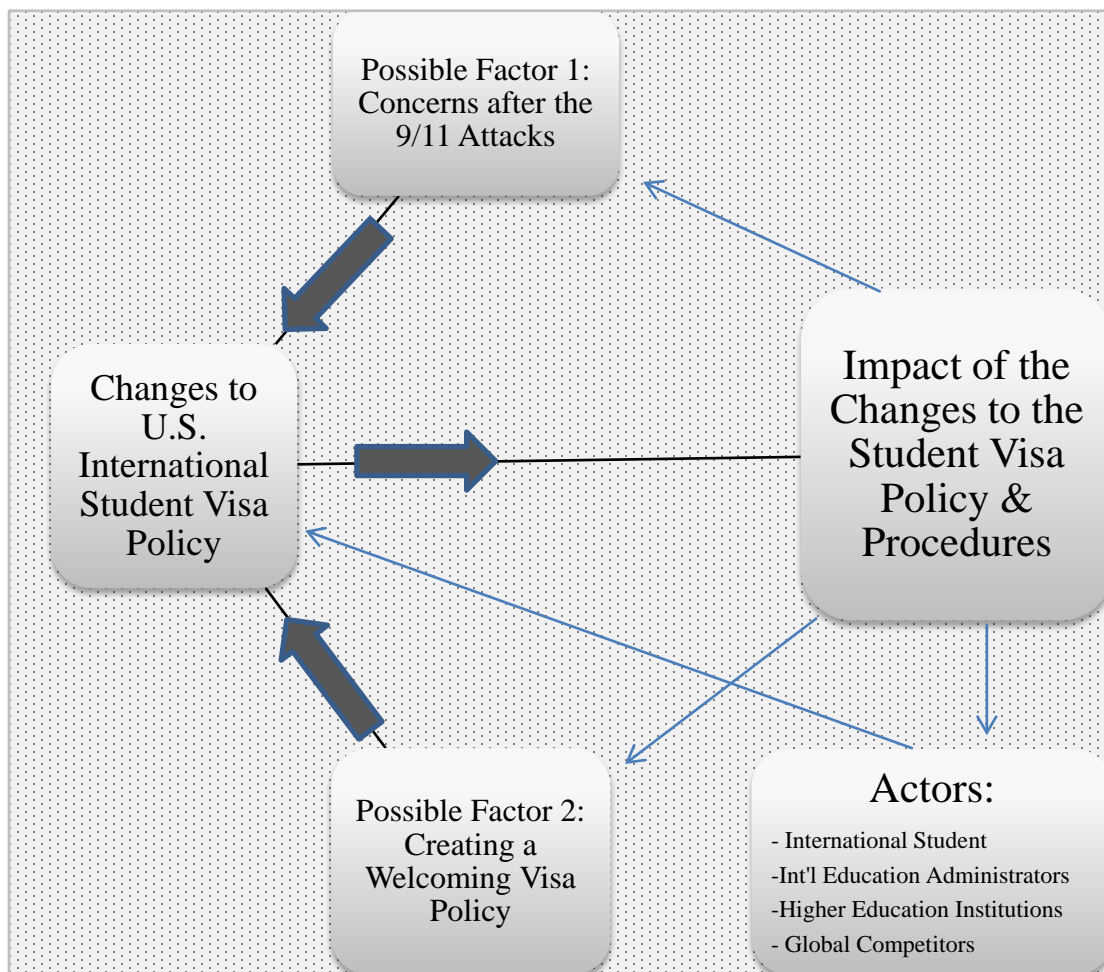
#### Conceptual Framework

This study utilizes Contextual Interaction Theory (CIT), a deductive approach. CIT suggests that in policy analysis and implementation, many variables may arise, and they should be included in the equation. These variables include not only the contents and context of the policy but also whom this policy affects-actors. The target group in this study is international students as they are for whom the international student visa policy exists. Therefore, foreign students are one of the actors of the policy. The other actors are international education administrators who practice the policy, colleges in general, advocacy groups, and the federal government, who actively contribute to the

competitiveness of U.S. colleges. CIT also suggests that the best way to understand the impact of the factors on actors is to assess those individuals' motivation, power, and information (Spratt, 2009). Dinica and Bressers (2003) indicate that "actors' motivation, the flow and quality of information, and the balance of power/resources among involved actors" (p.1) can explain outcomes of the implementation of a policy. Motivation denotes to what extent actors-those who are involved- believe in the policy and how much the policy contributes to the goals and objectives, which makes a difference in the implementation phase. This study primarily investigates international education administrators' motivation and how much the changes to the student visa policy helped with the objective-national security. Power is the measure of influence people involved in policy implementation wield. In this study, formal sources of power are the U.S. government, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the Alabama state government, and the informal sources of power are international education administrators, specifically Primary Designated School Officers (PDSO); international students; and advocacy groups that aim to promote international education. Information means that all affected actors have technical knowledge and there is no lack of communication between them. This research study intends to explore if the actors know what the changes to the student visa policy entail. The study attempts to describe the perception of international affairs professionals on the effectiveness of the changes to the policy and how the changes to and implementation of the policy and procedures benefited the actors, an effort which helps to measure the level of communication between the policy-makers and end-users. CIT also suggests that the all the actors of a policy interact in the form of cooperation or opposition. Exploring those oppositions provides an

understanding of the negative effects of a policy and why a policy does not achieve set goals and objectives. This study investigates interaction between actors through analyzing college administrators' opinions and observations. For instance, lack of interaction between formal sources of power—the government organizations- and informal sources of power—college administrators, foreign students, and advocacy groups- may keep the policy-makers from seeing the big picture. As a result, they may not be able to see where obstructions to implementation occur (Spratt, 2009).

Figure. 1 The Proposed conceptual model



## Anticipated Outcomes

International students make important contributions to diversity, the U.S. economy and work force, and diplomacy. Policies and regulations are some of the factors that influence the level of contribution that is possible. Anticipated outcomes from this study are listed below:

- a- Findings from the study will shed light on the impact of the changes to the student visa policy and procedures;
- b- The study will help international education administrators to better understand the changes to the international student visa policy and procedures and the impact of these changes;
- c- The study can help the government, higher education institutions, and advocacy groups reevaluate the value of international students in American colleges and the past and current status of the international student visa policy and collaborate to create a more welcoming visa policy for international students.

## Definition of Terms

International education has two main definitions. One is that foreign students study in American colleges, and the other one is that American students study abroad. The focus of this study is visa policy regarding the international students in the US.

According to the Department of State (Travel.state.gov, 2010), if a foreign national desires to come to United States to pursue a course of study, which is 18 hours or more per week, the individual needs to obtain a student visa. This visa type is called an

F1 student visa. EducationUSA (n/a), a web site maintained by the Institute of International Education with funding from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, U.S. Department of State, defined the F-1 student Visa as follows:

F-1 Student Visa is the most common for those who wish to engage in academic studies in the United States. It is for individuals who want to study at an accredited U.S. college or university or to study English at a university or intensive English language institute. (para.1)

#### Scope and Delimitations

This study is delimited to the perspectives of international education administrators on the changes to the student visa policy and procedures since they get involved in issues regarding international students and F1 student visa regulations on a daily basis. The study does not include the views of international students or higher education administrators who serve the needs of both domestic and international students at the same time.

The international education administrators who will participate in this study will be from higher education institutions that are located in the Southeast region of the US.

#### Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 of the study introduced the problem statement and described the specific problem addressed in the study as well as design elements.

Chapter 2 includes a review of literature in regards to the problem addressed in this study.

Chapter 3 encompasses the methodology and procedures utilized for data collection and analysis.

Chapter 4 offers an analysis of the data and presentation of the findings.

Chapter 5 presents a summary and discussion of the research results, and recommendations for future research.



## Chapter 2: Review of Literature

I have reviewed five types of documents: government documents, mass media reports, statements from advocacy groups, scholarly articles, and books. Government documents include rules, regulations, laws, and presidential speeches. Mass media reports consist of newspaper and magazine articles regarding international student visa policy. Statements from advocacy groups were retrieved from advocacy groups' Web sites, online forums, discussion boards, press releases, and letters to the government. Association of International Educators (NAFSA), the Alliance for Educational and Cultural Exchange (The Alliance), and Association of Intensive English Programs (AIEP) are a few of these non-profit organizations. Scholarly articles and books discussing global education, international students, and student visa policy also contributed to the review of the literature.

### History of International Education in the USA

Justin Morrill, a Representative from Vermont, emphasized the importance of understanding the world in 1866. At that time, global competition had been affecting the U.S. economy and its financial and leadership position in the world. His vision of higher education which is available to more people did not come true until 1921. International students had been considered immigrants and had been detained at Ellis Island due to the U.S. government quota restrictions until the Institute of International Education (IIE) worked actively to change the U.S. immigration policy. In 1921, IIE pushed a definition

of international students as temporary visitors, and; therefore, not subject to the rules and regulations of current U.S. immigration policy. IIE also developed a student visa application form and created a process to simplify and standardize visa procedure (Institute of International Education Network, 2003).

Vestal (1994) states that “Historically, public concern for international affairs has never been widespread in the United States. Americans considered themselves geographically isolated, and domestic affairs dominated the nation’s agenda until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (p. 21). This attitude changed after the World War II when the U.S. government created the Fulbright Act of 1946, allowing scholar and student exchange between American colleges and universities abroad. The goal of the Fulbright scholarship program was to enhance a mutual understanding of fellowship between nations. The Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961 has helped keep the Fulbright Exchange Program active and effective through congressional appropriations of money. In 1948, Congress established the U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy (ACPD). One of the missions of the commission was to promote international educational and cultural exchange programs (Vestal, 1994).

After the Cold War thawed a little, in 1966, President Lyndon Johnson proposed a series of programs promoting mutual international education and took them into legislation, which, he thought, would cultivate mutual understanding between the United States and the rest of the world. He indicated that investment in education would facilitate a lasting peace in the world (Vestal, 1994). One of his initiatives was the International Education Act of 1966 (IEA), a major initiative of the federal government. The International Education Act mandated funding for the establishment of new

programs re-energizing international education through enhanced curricula and larger faculties. The eighty-ninth Congress passed the IEA, and the president signed the act into law on October 29, 1966. The law did not yield the expected results; nevertheless, the goal of the act has remained very important (Vestal, 1994). Foreign students' presences at American universities permit them to learn about American culture and values, and it gives domestic students an opportunity to better understand other cultures. In the 1960s the federal aid for international education increased from \$1.8 billion to \$12 billion annually. However, after the new congress came to power in 1969, the IEA failed due to lack of federal funding. During this time, the Vietnam War diminished the importance of international education: it was important only when the domestic welfare of the US was at stake (Vestal, 1994). A policy regarding foreign students was not seen in the government's agenda again until the 1990s.

During the early 1990s, the US government gave special attention to funding international education and exchange programs and creating new international education programs that would enhance the mutual understanding of cultures and values between the U.S. and the world. Senator David Boren and Senator Claiborne Pell sponsored the Educational Exchanges Enhancement Act (EEEEA) of 1990, which aimed to expand student exchange programs between the US and countries which did not have close relations with the U.S.A. Soviet Union, and other western countries were in the target of this act. In this way, the senators hoped to put the US in a leadership position by cultural exchange in addition to military might (Vestal, 1994).

One third of foreign exchange students chose American universities in the 1990s. Every year of the decade, almost half a million international students brought in cultural,

academic, and linguistic diversity in addition to \$5 billion. During this inception of American-global exchange, a typical student was an Asian and majoring in Business Administration. Besides students, as many as 62 thousand foreign scholars taught, collaborated, and researched at American colleges (Vestal, 1994). This steady increase in the number of international students and scholars compelled the government to establish a system to keep track of this new non-immigrant group.

The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA) included a clause that mandated for a computerized system to monitor foreign students and academics. As a result, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) established the Coordinated Interagency Partnership Regulating International Students (CIPRIS). The INS spent three years developing the system by 2001, which yielded little progress. Until the September 11 attacks, it was not urgent to have a tracking system up and running across the country, and only twenty pilot colleges had participated in the program (Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, 1996; Nonimmigrant, 2003).

On August 7, 2001, almost a month before the terrorist attacks, Secretary of State Colin Powell (2001) issued the following statement regarding the international education week:

“During International Education Week, November 12-16, the Department of State recognizes the role that international education and exchange play in strengthening our nation and our relations with other countries. Among the State Department's best-known activities is the Fulbright scholarship program, which since its inception has given nearly a quarter of a million

Americans and foreign citizens the opportunity to study and teach abroad. We are proud that the high quality of American colleges and universities attracts students and scholars from around the world. These individuals enrich our communities with their academic abilities and cultural diversity, and they return home with an increased understanding and often a lasting affection for the United States. I can think of no more valuable asset to our country than the friendship of future world leaders who have been educated here. At the same time, it is important for American students to learn other languages, experience foreign cultures, and develop a broad understanding of global issues. I am pleased that our new Gilman International Scholarship program will open study abroad opportunities to students with financial need, thus increasing both the number and diversity of participants in international exchanges. International education prepares our citizens to live, work, and compete in the global economy, and promotes tolerance and the reduction of conflict. In November 2001 U.S. embassies around the world will carry out activities in support of International Education Week. I encourage schools, businesses and communities to join with us in commemorating International Education Week.” (p. 1)

#### Advocacy Groups

The following non-profit organizations advocate the value and benefits of international education. They were actively involved in international student visa policy after the September 11 attacks.

The Institute of International Education (IIE), an international education and training organization founded in 1919, administers the Fulbright Program. The group aims to build relations between the US and other countries through providing education, increasing communication between American universities and foreign universities, promoting academic freedom, and helping individuals build leadership skills to make the world a better place (Institute of International Education, 2009).

The American Association of Intensive English Programs (AAIEP) was founded by 65 directors of intensive English programs in 1988. The association advocates the value of English language programs in the US and searches for solutions which can help with visa issues and other policy-related difficulties. The association was very effective during the post-September 11 policy changes. They kept their members up-to-date on student visa policy changes and the implementation of the Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) (American Association of Intensive English Programs, 2009a, 2009b).

The Association of American Universities (AAU) was founded in 1900 and is comprised of research universities, which award 55% of the doctoral degrees in sciences and engineering. The 62 member institutions advocate research-related issues such as funding for research and improving research policies. The AAU also disseminates the government's educational policies and public affairs (Association of American Universities, 2009).

The Association of International Educators (NAFSA), founded in 1948, advocates international education, and provides education and sets standards for its members. Its original name, National Association of Foreign Student Advisors, was initially changed

to National Association of Foreign Student Affairs in 1964 and then Association of International Educators in 1990 as the group grew in scope and size (Association of International Educators, 2009a, 2009b).

The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) was initially called National Association of State Universities and Land-grant Colleges (NASULGC) before March 30, 2009. The association, which seeks to promote research, learning, and engagement, was founded in 1887. The 218 institution group engages in activities related to higher education policies like internationalization of university campuses and global competitiveness (Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, 2009).

Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange (Alliance), in their letter to House Committee on Appropriations, describes the group as below:

The Alliance comprises 77 nongovernmental organizations, with nearly 8000 staff and 1.25 million volunteers throughout the US. Through its members, the Alliance supports the international interests of 3300 American institutions of higher education. The alliance is the leading policy voice of the U.S. exchange community. (Alliance for International Education and Cultural Exchange, 2008, p.1).

#### International Education and Policy Changes after the 9/11 Attacks

Quantitative data can help the researcher to better understand the past and current status of international students in the US and answer the research questions. The quantitative data also helped to determine the focus of the study. The statistics shown below indicates the correlation between quantitative data and the qualitative data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Table 1

The Number of International Students in the United States before and after the 9/11

Terrorist Attacks

Year	Number of Int'l Students	Annual % Change	Total Enrollment	Ratio of Int'l Students to Domestic Students
1990/91	407,529	5.3	13,819,000	2.9
1991/92	419,585	3.0	14,359,000	2.9
1992/93	438,618	4.5	14,487,000	3.0
1993/94	449,749	2.5	14,305,000	3.1
1994/95	452,635	0.6	14,279,000	3.2
1995/96	453,787	0.3	14,262,000	3.2
1996/97	457,984	0.9	14,368,000	3.2
1997/98	481,280	5.1	14,502,000	3.3
1998/99	490,933	2.0	14,507,000	3.4
1999/00	514,723	4.8	14,791,000	3.5
2000/01	547,867	6.4	15,312,000	3.6
2001/02	582,996	6.4	15,928,000	3.7
2002/03	586,323	0.6	16,612,000	3.5
2003/04	572,509	-2.4	16,911,000	3.4
2004/05	565,039	-1.3	17,272,000	3.3
2005/06	564,766	-0.05	17,487,000	3.2
2006/07	582,984	3.2	17,672,000	3.3



2007/08	623,805	7.0	17,958,000	3.5
2008/09	671,616	7.7	18,264,000	3.7

(Institute of International Education, Open Doors, 2009)

As it is observed in the data above, the annual increase in the number of international students slowed a year after the September 11 attacks, and the total international student population began to decline until 2005/2006 education year. In 2009, the ratio of international students to domestic students reached the level it was at right before the terrorist attacks.

Immediately after the September 11 attacks, Allan Goodman, President and CEO of the Institute of International Education, indicated the importance of acting responsibly and in an organized manner. He sought to emphasize the pivotal role of international education in keeping the homeland secure and promoting global peace and suggested that international education administrators deliver this message to their local communities. Additionally, he stressed the significance of a standardized visa process from which both international students and American colleges could benefit (2001a).

On October 17, 2001, right after the terrorist attacks, before International Education Week (November 12-16), Secretary of Education Rod Paige issued a statement regarding International Education Week, and importance of international education.

During International Education Week, November 12 to 16, 2001, the U.S. Department of Education recognizes the importance of educating students about people and nations throughout the world in preparing our students to live in a diverse and tolerant society and succeed in a global economy. Knowledge about the culture and language of our neighbors throughout

the world is becoming increasingly important in the daily lives of all Americans. The events surrounding the terrorist attacks of September 11 underscore that point. For our students, international education means learning about the history, geography, literature and arts of other countries, acquiring proficiency in a second language, and understanding complex global issues. It means having opportunities to experience other cultures, whether through study abroad, exposure to diversity in their own communities, or through classroom-to-classroom Internet connections with students in schools in other nations. (Paige, 2001, p.1).

However, the fact that some of the 9/11 terrorists enter the United States with student visas evinced that there were gaps in the international student visa policy.

On October 26, 2001, the president signed Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act (the USA Patriot Act), which included titles that had important impact on visa policy. In the act, the government provided funding for electronic data collection systems and intelligence services. Furthermore, the act permitted the State Department and the INS to collect extensive information about visa applicants. A secure visa process and foreign student monitoring system were two of the items which would directly affect student visa policy (USA Patriot, 2001). The act also called for a system which would regularly collect comprehensive information about international students and scholars. Therefore, the CIPRIS system, implemented during the late 1990s, was converted to a new automated system called Student and Exchange Visitor System (Nonimmigrant, 2003).

On November 30, 2001, Senators Edward Kennedy and Dianne Feinstein introduced a bill that suggested more changes to the student visa policy. The changes included strict tracking of international students' entry to and exit from the country, collecting more personal information from international students, and compliance with record keeping and reporting requirements by colleges (Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2002, 2002). In response to this bill, many international education advocacy groups indicated that security was important; nevertheless, the government had to draw a fine line where both homeland security and a welcoming student visa policy existed. In December 2001, Allan E. Goodman, acknowledged that America needed a compromise that would keep those with bad intentions from abusing the student visa but encourage international students study in American higher education institutions. He also said that the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) would act as an effective tool to keep track of international students since it would enhance coordination and communication between the U.S. government and colleges (Goodman, 2001b; Goodman, 2003).

The president ordered Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to have the SEVIS ready as soon as possible, and, in January 2002, INS announced that the tracking system would be up and running in July 2002. Congress drafted the "Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2002", which required a transitional tracking system to be in use until SEVIS became fully operational. This act required the temporary system to be in place within 120 days after the bill was signed (Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act, 2002). The act was passed and signed on May 14, 2002, and the transitional system, the Interim Student and Exchange

Authentication System (ISEAS), was initiated in September 2002, two months after a trial version of SEVIS was launched. The interim tracking system had limitations, and the SEVIS was in its trial period. Thus, the government had created two systems to track international students, and neither of the systems was satisfactory. Worse, there was no data-sharing capability between the two and because this was a new requirement for schools, U.S. consular officers, and international students, the initial launch of the programs generated a lot of confusion and frustration (Gilman, 2003). For example, if the consular officer did not see the records of the prospective student in this newly-implemented system, the student's application would be denied. As a result, the student had to contact the school and ask them to enter his or her data in the ISEAS. Then the student had to return to the U.S. consulate to reapply for a visa. ISEAS was in use until January 30, 2003, when SEVIS became mandatory for all schools who wanted to enroll international students (IIE Network, 2002b). However, Congress gave colleges six additional months to prepare to use the required SEVIS system. Universities had extended time to get adjusted to a new system which still needed a lot of improvements (Gilman, 2003).

The efficacy of SEVIS was an issue after its rushed implementation. Over 70000 schools and other organizations used SEVIS and were certified to issue I-20 international student acceptance certificates, but these institutions did not receive clear guidance on proper implementation of the program. Moreover, the amount of the fee for students and its payment was an issue because not all prospective students from third world countries were able pay due to the high rate and a complicated payment process (Hartle, 2002; Danley, 2010). The goal of SEVIS was to keep the country secure; however, colleges,

advocacy groups, and students did not find the program either effective or efficient. The system was new to college administrators, and its bugs caused delays in the international student visa process (Gilman, 2003).

The new laws and regulations right after the attacks and President George W. Bush's call for action against terrorism received high approval ratings not only from the Senate and the House but also the American nation. In addition to identifying the culprits, the government's agenda was to stop future attacks. Because the intense feelings and the pressure from the public forced the government to take immediate action, SEVIS, one of those preventive actions, was planned and implemented without extensive review and consideration (Jacobson, 2006).

On May 10, 2002, the Department of Justice proposed a new rule that suggested major changes in SEVIS. The rule required higher education institutions to collect and report data about international students to Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). The required data included the following details:

The start date of the student's next term or session, a student's failure to enroll, a student dropping below a full course of study without prior authorization, any other failure to maintain status or complete the program, a change of the student's or dependent's legal name or address, any disciplinary action taken by the school against the student as a result of the student being convicted of a crime, and a student's graduation prior to the program end date listed on the form. (Department of Justice, 2002, p.1)

SEVIS incurred criticism. Michael Brzezinski, Director of International Students at Purdue University, (Gilman, 2003, p.1) comments "SEVIS created a great deal of administrative burden and cost us thousands of dollars to comply. We had to begin a special fee for processing international students to cover the cost." The system replaced the paper records, but there were issues in implementation. The government had to focus not only on creating a more secure visa process but also on building a more welcoming student visa policy.

On March 14, 2002, the chairman of the House International Relations Committee introduced a bill to improve the U.S. public diplomacy. A section of the bill was devoted to new exchange programs with Muslim countries. The described programs aimed at improving relations with the Muslim people rather than the governments of those countries. Youth Ambassadors Program, English Language Teaching Program in the middle schools of these Muslim countries, and Sister Cities Initiative were some of the exchange programs (The Freedom Promotion Act of 2002). On the same day, President Bush announced additional funding for foreign aid. The goal of foreign aid was to help poor African, Asian, and Muslim countries, where poverty and lack of opportunity drive people to hopelessness and perhaps to terrorism (Institute of International Education Network, 2002a).

In response, Ambassador Kenton W. Keith, Chair of Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange, stated that allowing international students to come study in American colleges will give both foreign students and domestic students an opportunity to truly understand each other's perspective, culture, and way of life, the key to amiable, long-term good relations with other nations. Arguing the need for the US to

create opportunities allowing person-to-person interaction and communication, he said that government-to-government relations cannot sufficiently promote a mutual understanding among cultures. He suggested student exchange programs as a long-term solution to divisive cultural misunderstandings (2002). Many international-education advocacy groups agreed that a “human touch” could make the world a safer place.

Designed to prevent terrorist attacks, the National Security Entry/Exit Registration System (NSEERS) was implemented by the Department of Homeland Security in 2002. The system required international students – mostly from Muslim countries – to report to the closest immigration office for re-registration. However, the system was for a small group of non-citizens, male students from Middle Eastern countries. The immigration offices collected from students such personal information as fingerprints, photos, nationality, and family affiliations. The affected students considered this application unfair. Those who failed to report to the nearest immigration office faced criminal and civil charges. Other consequences foreign students, scholars, and tourists who did not fulfill special registration requirements during a visit included a loss of legal status, arrest, detention, or deportation (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2008). NSEERS, which categorized students based on their nationality and religion was ended by the Department of Homeland Security in December 2003. However, the long-term, negative impact of the program remains (The Center for Immigrants’ Rights at the Pennsylvania State University’s Dickinson School of Law, 2009). According to Branch-Brioso (2009), this discriminative application was one of the reasons for decline in the number of international students, and while some of those Muslim countries have recently started sending more students, the number from many of those countries is still

decreasing. Regarding NSEERS, the Center for Immigrants' Rights (2009) made the following recommendations to President Obama:

1. The Administration should terminate the NSEERS program and repeal related regulations.
2. Individuals who did not comply with NSEERS due to lack of knowledge or fear should not lose eligibility for or be denied a specific relief or benefit, to which they are otherwise eligible for such a benefit. Similarly, the Administration should provide relief to individuals who were placed in removal proceedings because of their participation in NSEERS.
3. The Administration should allow individuals impacted by NSEERS, who have been removed, to return to the United States, should they have a basis for re-entering the United States. Special consideration should be given to individuals with immediate family members living in the United States and/or those with pending benefits applications.
4. The Administration should eliminate programs that target people based on ethnic origin, race, nationality, religion and/or gender. The Administration should insure that agencies adhere to a standard of individualized suspicion.
5. Upon termination of the NSEERS program, the Administration should issue a formal apology to foreign visitors subject to the NSEERS program, in order to rectify the impression left on many affected communities impacted by the special registration program. The apology should be



issued through a press release and a formal letter posted on the website of the Department of Homeland Security. The government should clarify that ethnic origin, race, nationality, religion and/or gender alone are not a sufficient basis of criteria for identifying terrorists.

6. With transparency being a pillar of the current Administration, DHS should release the number of terrorists identified through the NSEERS program and related data, in order to assess the government's professed success of the program. (p. 38-39)

NSEERS was not the only issue. In August 2003, all non-immigrant visa applications had to be made in person at a U.S. embassy or consulate and involved an oral interview as well. Again, this inconvenient, time-intensive process was meant to promote a secure homeland; however, the embassies and consulates did not have enough staff to offset the extra workload. Students, especially those who were admitted to a science or engineering program had to wait longer for an interview because training in these fields, according to the government, had more potential for terrorism. Some of the students had to wait up to 18 months to receive their visas (Gilman, 2003).

In their letter to Department of State's Visa Services, Association of American Universities (AAU) and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) requested a "secure, timely, efficient, transparent, and predictable" visa system (Hasselmo & Magrath, 2003, p.1). They claimed that this goal was not achievable unless the government provided consulates with adequate support. Therefore, they saw the interim rule to restrict waivers of oral interviews for nonimmigrant visa applications as a problem until U.S. embassies and consulates

received sufficient support to expedite the slow visa process. The advocacy groups actively sought solutions to the issues that came along with the changes to the international student visa policy.

A series of joint surveys conducted by the advocacy groups (Association of American Universities, November 2003, 2004; Association of International Educators, The Association of American Universities, The National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, The Institute of International Education, & The Council of Graduate Schools, 2004) compared fall 2003 and 2004 with fall 2002 and 2003 in terms of applications, enrollments, and visa delays for international students and scholars. The surveys revealed that (1) the number of international student applications increased in 58% of the 480 participating member universities and colleges of Association of American Universities (AAU) in 2003, (2) international student enrollments increased 48% in 2003 and 22% in 2004, and (3) the number of students who experienced visa delays increased by 57% at the graduate level and 13% at the undergraduate level in 2003. In 2004, 40% and 29% of the schools surveyed experienced visa delays at the undergraduate and the graduate level respectively. According to the surveys, visa delays resulted in delays to scientific research, late graduation, loss of student fellowships, financial burden on member universities and colleges, and decline in the number of international student applications. Given the survey results, AAU recommended (1) a more convenient exit and reentry process for international students, (2) issuance of a student visa which does not expire before the completion of a degree program, (3) visa revalidation in the United States, (4) a simplified SEVIS and visa

application fee process, and (5) adequate funding for the visa issuance process.

Specifically:

- The federal government should change its one-year visa clearance policy.

International students need a visa that allows multiple reentries and does not expire before students complete their degree program and.

- The federal government should create a system that detects visa applications which have been pending more than a month.

- The federal government should allow international students to revalidate their visas in the U.S as opposed to sending them abroad for visa authorizations.

- Congress and the government should provide the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security with adequate funding (Association of American Universities, 2004; Goodman, 2004).

The advocacy groups' efforts, however, did not persuade the government. In his cable to all diplomatic and consular posts, Secretary of State, Colin Powell (2004, p.1) announced that "persons applying for F, J, and M visas with I-20 or DS-2019 forms with an issue date of September 1, 2004 or later must pay the SEVIS fee before applying for their visas." This one-time, non-refundable fee is \$100. Despite the requests from advocacy groups, international students were required to pay this fee and visa application fee separately, complicating the visa application process.

The International Student and Scholar Access Act of 2004 improved issues related to international students' access to the US. The bill was designed to reduce the SEVIS fee for short-term studies (90 days or less), make the fee collection more

convenient, and create an interoperable database for use by different units of government including the consular officers. The findings section of the bill states:

1. Visa Mantis, an extensive security check for students who apply for certain technology and science-related degree programs, deterred international students from coming to the United States.
2. The US government needs to protect the country by having an effective student visa screening process, but at the same time the visa policy should be fair, legitimate, and consistent so that the decline in the number of international students can be stopped.

The bill also required the government to have an international education marketing plan, present an annual report listing the number of visas issued and describe how long the visa process took. Overall, the bill aimed for a faster, fairer, and more transparent visa process. However, the bill never became a law (International Student and Scholar Access Act, 2004).

Another stakeholder in international student visa policy is higher education institutions. Catheryn Cotten (2004), Director of International Office at Duke University, drew attention to nonstandard visa issuance process. Foreign students from some Muslim countries cannot receive a visa which is valid for the full duration of the degree program but must endure the entire visa process each time their short-term visas expire. Additionally, students who apply for an F1 student visa must prove that they will go back to their home countries when they receive their degrees in the US. Yet in many cases, this young group cannot prove their intent to return because they have no job, they are not married, or they own no real estate, all of which may constitute a legitimate reason to

return to the home country. Cotten indicates that the law is old and needs to be modernized. She also pointed at an ironic situation which the current visa policy causes. The law says that foreign students whose visas expire can renew it when they are in the US and receive a new I-94 departure record card, which replaces a visa as long as the student does not leave the United States. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the student can return to the US if, for example, he or she goes to his or her country for a visit. An extended departure date does not guarantee the visa stamp. The student can stay in the US with the renewed I-94 card, but as soon as he or she leaves the US, he or she is required to apply for a visa again for reentry even if it is for the same degree program. Cotten says due to this inconvenience, international students choose to stay in the United States until they receive their degrees so that they do not risk their reentry to the US. Consequently, these students' bonds with their countries get weaker, which encourage them to stay in the US for a longer term. In summary, the policy in place works against the aims of the system. Cotten mentioned devising a new ID policy in her written testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The Department of Homeland Security should consider issuing A SEVIS ID card which international students can use to exit and reenter the US and renew their visas. This card can replace the I-20 letter and employment authorization card. The Department of Homeland Security, consulates, and customs officers can track international students with this card. The overall effect of the card's application could be immense. For instance, visa issuance and renewal processes would be simpler and shorter, which could create a welcoming visa policy. As a result, international students may see that they are valued and their contribution to the US is appreciated (Cotton, 2004). Another suggestion in her testimony was refunding the SEVIS fee if the student

was not issued a visa as students did not receive any service from SEVIS system until they actually received a visa.

Some of these concerns were heard by the government. Senators Norm Coleman and Jeff Bingaman (American Association of Intensive English Programs, 2005; American Competitiveness Through International Openness Now Act, 2008) introduced The American Competitiveness through International Openness Now (ACTION) Act of 2005. The act was composed of a strategic marketing plan in addition to policies which would ameliorate delay problems, inconsistency, and flawed interdepartmental communication related to visa issuance. They noted that the act would improve America's image in the world and allow international talents to come more easily to the US. As a result, they argued, the act would help with national security and the economy. Additionally, the two senators saw the increased presence of international students at American colleges and universities as a great opportunity for American students to get exposed to different cultures and ways of life. While the government was finally making changes to the visa policy, the advocacy groups began creating new policy proposals.

One of the proposals was prepared by Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange, The Heritage Foundation, NAFSA, and National Foreign Trade Council, Inc. The groups suggested a national-interest based visa policy and emphasized the importance of visa policies and allowing people to come to the US to strengthen educational and cultural relations with the rest of the world. In their proposal, they focused on four elements: the personal interview requirement, the visa waiver program; a clear, operational visa policy; and an efficient, transparent, and reliable visa process. Congress had required time-consuming personal interviews for all nonimmigrant visa

applications. The US has visa waiver agreements with some countries, which eliminate the interview process. The proposal also mentions that increasing the number of these waiver programs can significantly expedite the visa process for foreign students. Also, the advocacy groups stressed the importance of establishing a fair and reliable visa policy and process to ensure accountability and to create a positive image of America in the world (Association of International Educators, 2007).

In February 2007, Maura Harty (2007), Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs at the State Department, responded with a progress report that stated the progress on the advocates' proposal suggesting that America welcomes international students, and that this message should be given at all levels of the government. However, it was law that consular officers interview all nonimmigrant applicants due to the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act and the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004. Increasing the number of visa waiver programs depended on strong collaboration between the Department of Homeland Security and the related unit of other countries. Additionally, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) made some changes in the consular operations to ensure a consistent, efficient, and fair visa process. For example, DHS increased the hours of training provided with consular officers and set standards for operational procedures. Further, the government hired 570 more consular officers and utilized computer technology more effectively (Harty, 2007).

A BBC News' survey (2007) on America's world image was further evidence for the need of such a change in US visa policy. The survey, in which 26000 people from 25 countries participated, suggested that America's image was getting worse. The way the Bush administration had handled such issues as terrorism, the wars in Iraq and

Afghanistan fed anti-American sentiment worldwide. As a result, America's soft power to influence other countries had diminished. The long-term effect was that the US government could not effectively implement policies meant to strengthen global ties with the world. The survey indicated that America should evaluate its policies by considering the perspectives and opinions of other nations. Allowing more students from abroad to come to the US and experience the American way of life, the survey showed, can be an effective long-term investment.

In March 2007 and 2008, in her letter to the House Committee on Appropriations, Elizabeth Chazottes, Chair of the Board of the Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange, stressed the importance of funding State Department exchange programs. She considered these programs effective in terms of increasing the mutual understanding between the US and other countries. For instance, the Fulbright Program had been very effective in this matter. 99% of the students, many of whom hold leadership positions in their native country, in this program indicated that the program substantially increased their knowledge and understanding of American culture. As a result, she argued, these exchange programs make a considerable contribution to security of the US. In this letter, she also supported the government's increased funding for consular operations since personal interviews were required for all nonimmigrant visas. More funding led to a faster interview process. Alliance, in general, sees talented international people as aiding security in the United States (Alliance for International Education and Cultural Exchange, 2007; 2008).

In October 2007, two advocacy groups, NAFSA and Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange, (Association of International Educators & Alliance



for International Educational and Cultural Exchange, 2007) also pointed out the importance of cross-cultural exchange through education claiming that international students in the US are among the most effective agents who act as ambassadors of American people and make significant contributions to American economy and workforce, especially in high-technology industries. The advocacy groups emphasized that these students are keys to a meaningful conversation between America and the world. Also, since the decline in the number of foreign students in the US meant weaker relations with other countries, NAFSA and Alliance proposed a revised international education policy (Association of International Educators, 2007). The proposal included the following suggestions:

- Promote international, foreign-language, and area studies.
- Create a comprehensive strategy to restore America's status as a magnet for international students and scholars.
- Create a comprehensive strategy to establish study abroad as an integral component of undergraduate education.
- Strengthen citizen-and-community-based exchange programs.

(Association of International Educators, 2007, p.2)

The two advocates believed that the president should encourage collaboration within the government and the community as well as offer sufficient funding to ensure constant and consistent support for international education. Six years after the terrorist attacks, the impact of improvements in the international visa policy increased the numbers in international education in the United States.

International student enrollment in the fall of 2007 was not as poor as the previous years. Unwelcoming visa policies, inadequate consular resources, and the incompetence and competitiveness of American universities in the global marketing competition had been replaced by more predictable and fairer visa policies and EducationUSA Advising Centers, which are funded by the government to promote American higher education through 400 offices around the world (McMurtrie, 2008). These positive changes were followed by further efforts designed to help improve the student visa policy.

Senator Coleman again introduced American Competitiveness Through International Openness Now (ACTION) Act in February 2008. The bill covered how students could prove their intention to return to their countries upon completing the degree program and attempted to create a faster visa issuance process for frequently travelling international students. Although this bill did not become a law (American Competitiveness Through International Openness Now Act, 2008), the United States was preparing for change in international education at the highest level.

The election of President Barack Obama was expected to change the anti-Muslim reputation of the United States. In a speech in Istanbul, Turkey, he (Obama, 2009a) indicated that the United States and Muslim countries should mend damaged relations. He showed educational opportunities as a way to improve communication between the two world and blamed media for creating a bad image of America and Americans. To reverse this picture, the president emphasized the importance of international exchange programs and educational conversation, which he declared help reveal commonalities among the people of the world. In his speech in Cairo, Egypt, the president (Obama, 2009b) pointed out to the fact that September 11 attacks made Americans categorize all

Muslims as potential terrorists, adding that expanded opportunities for Muslim students in American schools could be effective in terms of gaining shared understanding.

The review of related literature present that the 9/11 attacks urged the government to take action in different areas including the international student visa policy. In this chapter, the impact of the changes to the policy was analyzed from the perspective of different stakeholders. The next chapter, research methods, explains how this research will be conducted. Research philosophy, strategy, and instruments will be a few of the subtitles the chapter will contain.

## Chapter 3: Method

### The Qualitative Paradigm

This study utilizes techniques traditionally used in qualitative research for the collection and interpretation of data. According to Mason (2002), the qualitative researcher does not collect data, but he or she actually generates data because data are not “an already existing stock of knowledge” (p. 51). The researcher’s background, data collection method and technique, and participants have an effect on the knowledge the researcher builds while collecting data. The researcher actively builds knowledge about the research subject he or she studies through a specific method used to generate data. Similarly, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) state that researchers are either miners or travelers. Miners believe that knowledge is there for the discovering. On the other hand, travelers build knowledge by interacting with others and assign meaning to data they collect. I consider myself a traveler. I construct knowledge by collecting data and filtering it through elements like my past experiences, current knowledge, and this study’s design. This study also utilizes an interpretivist approach, which aims to understand the world through the interpretations of individuals’ actions and situations, as well as other objects. These interpretations are translated into language, which reflects the researcher’s social reality (Mason, 2002). When the researcher makes interpretations, the end-result heavily depends upon the researcher’s craftsmanship (Kvale, 1996). Interviewing, for instance, allows the researcher to interact with the participant for a very

limited time. However, the way the participant uses spoken language and his or her body language are subject to analysis and interpretation by the researcher.

They [interpretivists] see people, and their interpretations, perceptions, meanings and understandings, as the primary data sources. Interpretivism does not have to rely on “total immersion in a setting” therefore, and can happily support a study which uses interview methods for example, where the aim is to explore people’s individual and collective understandings, reasoning processes, social norms, and so on. (Mason, 2002, p.56)

Qualitative studies have certain features in common. The qualitative research setting is not a controlled lab; the researcher generates data in the natural environment of the subject. I chose to conduct qualitative research because, as Miles and Huberman (1994) stated, “they - well-collected qualitative data - focus on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, so that we have a strong handle on what real life is like” (p.10). The research is conducted in its natural context, which allows the researcher to better understand the variables that impact the phenomenon. Real life is made up of complicated and interconnected layers of events, and qualitative data helps to analyze the complexity of life through rich and thick descriptions. These descriptions are a reflection of what and how people have lived. In qualitative studies, the researcher uses purposeful sampling because he or she works with very few subjects compared to the number of participants in a quantitative study. The purpose, then, is to focus on a few subjects and collect rich, thick data (Cresswell, 2009).

Qualitative inquiry is a result of the researcher’s curiosity about a phenomenon, and he or she aims to explain, describe, or explore this situation (Marshall & Rossman,

1995). In this study, I described the progress of events that had taken place since the terrorist attacks on 9/11 and explored how international education administrators reacted to the progress of events. Qualitative research requires intensive and extensive study to gain a holistic understanding of any context. The purpose of qualitative research is to understand and interpret how the participant perceives the phenomenon (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In this study, I followed a funnel method (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The initial subject, the wide end, was international students in the US. The number of international students declined sharply after the 9/11 attacks, which funneled the topic to the effects of the changes in the student visa policy that were the attack's result. Finally, the study focused on one particular aspect of the case: how college administrators saw and described the impact of the policy changes.

As Bogdan and Biklen (2003) stated, research projects are like living organisms. They are open to change directions and can be modified as the researcher gets more involved in the subjects. Therefore, I made any necessary changes in the design as I found out more about the matter.

### Phenomenological Methodology

This study utilizes phenomenological methodology as the purpose of the study is to understand lived experiences of the participants. Marshall and Rossman (1995) define phenomenology as “the study of experiences and the way in which we put them together to develop a worldview” (p. 82). According to Creswell (2003), phenomenological research focuses on identifying the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon and perceiving the lived experiences. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) state that

phenomenology aims to understand how individuals perceive an event and what their observations mean to them. They also indicate, “Reality is socially constructed” (p. 23). The researcher who utilizes phenomenological methodology does not assume that he or she knows what the participant thinks about the event or what things mean to him or her. The researcher withholds presumptions to be able to truly understand the meaning the participants construct. The goal is “to understand the subjects from participant perspectives” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p.23). Phenomenology depends on subjectivity. The individuals who participate in a study are humans as well as the researcher. They all have their own way of perceiving a situation. However, the accuracy of a phenomenological study can be measured by comparing what the researcher claims versus actual occurrences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

According to Lichtman, “Phenomenological as a method looks at the lived experiences of those who have experienced a certain phenomenon” (2006, p.70). Lichtman (2006) mentions the three qualities of phenomenology: (1) The lived experience, (2) the essence of the experience, (3) the reductionist process. The lived experience denotes that the participants have experienced the phenomenon that is under study. The essence of experience denotes that the researcher explores a deeper level of understanding within the experience. The reductionist process denotes identifying and reducing the emerging themes to a few in the end of the data analysis by merging the related themes. The reductionist process involves bracketing and epoche. The researcher may need to put his or her thoughts in “brackets” requiring the researcher to be aware of his presumptions and expectations and ensure they do not influence him or her during data collection and analysis as the researcher is the sole research tool in qualitative

studies. “Epoche” simply means the researcher is indiscriminate in searching for all possible meanings of the data. Marshall and Ross describe epoche as an identification and elimination of all personal bias, ensuring it does not interfere with the study (1995). In this study, I put my thoughts and biases in brackets to be able to generate and analyze the data objectively.

### Qualitative Data Generation Strategy

This study utilized survey research as a data generation method. Surveys have become a commonly used data collection method, and in democratic and developed countries, policymakers have considerable respect for surveys because survey research gathers data directly from participants (Rea & Parker, 2005). This study aimed to explore the effects of the decisions which policymakers made; therefore I used survey research to collect data directly from those who practice the policies set by the government.

Fink and Kosecoff (1998) define survey as follows:

A survey is a method of collecting information from people about their ideas, feelings, health, plans, beliefs, and social, educational, and financial background. It usually takes the form of self-administered questionnaires and interviews. Self-administered questionnaires can be completed by hand (paper-and-pencil) or by computer. Interviews take place in person (face-to-face) or on the telephone. Used to help policymakers, program planners, evaluators, and researchers, surveys are most appropriate when information should come directly from people. (p.1)

Researchers utilize survey research to “describe, compare, or explain their [participants’] knowledge, attitudes, and behavior” (Fink, 2003, p.1). With this study, I



aims to expose the visa policymakers to the thoughts and perceptions of individuals who actually practice and implement and are subject to the policies set by those policymakers. Also, this study evaluates the effectiveness of visa programs like the SEVIS tracking program. Therefore, I expect that it can add to readers' knowledge and change the way they perceive the matter. The government documents and other documents published by activists and non-profit organizations provide data regarding the impact of the changes to visa policy. However, most of the data are made up of numbers. This study tried to reach more robust data by interacting with people who are professionally involved in the matter on a daily basis.

Survey research uses standardized questions to collect data. Data can be collected through a range of strategies from online questionnaires to one-on-one interviews. Survey research was initially used in social research in England and was adopted by the Chicago School in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Survey research is used when it is not possible to collect data through observation. The researcher uses a small portion of the target population to describe the phenomenon, and the members of the target population share common characteristics (Busha & Harter, 1980). Major uses of qualitative survey research are listed below:

- To learn about people's knowledge, experience, and thoughts
- To include the input of those who cannot participate in or may not want to be involved in traditional surveys such as people with certain physical handicaps or members of organized crime
- To explore the feelings, ideas, knowledge, and experience of people who can be considered a limited number of participants

- To add richness and background to a quantitative study (Fink, 2003)

This research study used survey research to learn about the knowledge, experience, and thoughts of international education administrators at universities, whose job concerns international students and student visa issues.

### Interviewing

This study employed interviewing as the only technique to generate data. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) describe interviewing as a conversation, usually between two people. Questions are open-ended so that the participants can express themselves fully and completely, which yields rich data. It was around the 1880s when researchers began to utilize interviewing to generate data. First time in United States, members of the Chicago School used interviewing in their studies in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Interviewing is one of the ways to explore people's perspectives and how they see the world (Mason, 2002). It also helps collect descriptive data and can be utilized as the ultimate strategy to generate data, or the researcher can use other strategies to support the data collected through interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Interviewing is the most common technique applied to understand how others understand a particular subject (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Mason, 2002). Mason lists the qualities of this frequently-used technique as below:

- Interviewing is an interactional process
- Interviews are conversational
- Interviewing is topic-centered

- Interviews yield situational data, an organic formation. Many social situations occur as a result of certain conditions those situations are affected by.

Situational data provide contextual knowledge

- The interviewer should be a good listener, remember what participants have said during interviews, and observe and interpret non-verbal communication
- Through interviews, the researcher and participants reconstruct knowledge together through a dialogue (Mason, 2002)

Interview protocols can be designed in different ways. How the questions are written and how the interview is conducted determines the quality of data the researcher collects (Fontana & Frey, 1994). When the researcher conducts a structured interview, it may deter the subject from telling his or her full story (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). On the other hand, Fontana and Frey (1994) encourage the use of unstructured interviewing because its goal is to understand the participant. A loosely-structured interview, a guided conversation, yields richer and thicker data. The initial interviews can be more loosely-structured so that the researcher gains a general understanding of how participants see the issue. Afterwards, the study can become more structured as the researcher comes to understand the scope of the research. Fontana and Frey (1994) describe the structured interview as “a situation in which an interviewer asks each respondent a series of pre-established questions with a limited set of response categories. There is generally little room for variation in response” (p.363). This type of interviewing prohibits the researcher from expressing his or her opinions. The pilot study I conducted included three interviews that refined the interview questions and the structure of interviews. The interviews in the pilot study were loosely-structured for me to better understand the focus

of the study. As a result, in this study, the questions of later interviews were designed in a more structured format, a semi-structured interview, which was made up of open-ended questions.

Face-to-face interviews have certain advantages and disadvantages. They allow researchers to explain unfamiliar words or clarify questions immediately. However, the researcher using this technique needs to be trained to conduct it. Designing the interview protocol, being a good listener, being able to take notes during the interview are some of the skills the researcher should gain. In addition, he or she needs to find an appropriate place to conduct the interview (Fink, 1995a; Fink, 1995b; Fink & Kosecoff, 1998).

The researcher should avoid asking yes/no questions. Instead, open-ended questions, which allow the researcher to explore how the subject perceives the situation, yield more descriptive data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). All the interview questions in this study were open-ended. They allowed the subject to tell his or her side of the story. Also, Mason (2002) suggests that the researcher ask concrete and specific–situational-questions rather than abstract questions.

Furthermore, it is important not to use complex terms during an interview. For the subject to be able to answer a question, he or she should be able to interpret what the researcher means by the question (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Therefore, I gave explanations for acronyms that are commonly used in the field. For instance, NNSSER is commonly used in the study, and one of the questions directly asks about the impact of this act. I let the participant know what the acronym stood for before he or she began answering the question.

Before I started asking questions, I told the interviewee that I hoped to learn a lot about the topic from talking with the participant. This statement, as Bogdan and Biklen (2003) say, helped to convince the subject that he or she was the expert, and I was there to learn. This technique encouraged him or her to share his or her story.

There were similar interview questions to explore the issue from different aspects, which increased the reliability of the study. Questions about the implementation of the SEVIS tracking system, the NSEERS procedure, and the government's role in the student visa policy were included in the interview protocol based on the emergent themes in the pilot study conducted in April, 2010. The final question asked the participant if he or she had anything else to say about the issue. As Oisho (2003) suggests, the researcher gives the subject an opportunity to add a comment.

#### The Researcher's Role

The researcher is the sole instrument that generates data; therefore, the researcher must be reliable and knowledgeable in the subject matter as he or she will be the only individual to communicate with participants (Creswell, 2009). As a qualitative researcher, my role was both active and reflexive when data is generated. Additionally, outside data regarding this issue had limited availability; therefore, I asked participants how they perceived the issue, talked and listened to them to have a better understanding of the impact of the changes to the student visa policy (Mason, 2002).

Additionally, the researcher himself or herself is instrument that collects the data and interprets what has been observed. The researcher's background and values may influence the way he or she interprets data. Social and historical context may also affect

the way the researcher interprets the intentions and meanings the participant delivers (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

I am a foreigner who came to the US. from Turkey to pursue a graduate degree in January 2003, 15 months after the terrorist attacks. I held a student visa for almost two years. A few weeks after I arrived in the US in 2003, the university officials took all the students from Middle Eastern countries except for Turkey to the nearest immigration office for recertification. I currently work at Auburn University at Montgomery as an English as a Second Language (ESL) coordinator. Students from all over the world apply for the ESL program. However, many students' visa applications are denied. It is these types of experiences which made me think about the past visa policies versus the current situation. In order to be objective, I collected data from multiple sources, and when I interviewed the international education administrators, I restated what they had said to confirm that I had not misinterpreted their statements.

#### Data Sources

Mason (2002) describes data sources as those from which the researcher generates data. I interviewed international education administrators and Primary Designated School Officials (PDSO) at higher education institutions in the southeastern U.S. PDSOs are the authorized personnel who issue the Form I-20 Certificate, which is a required document for international students to apply for a student visa if they want to come to the United States.

The international education administrators who participated in this study are in contact with international students on a daily basis. They process international student applications, generate Forms I-20 (Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Students),

help international students solve their academic and occasional personal problems, and ensure these students comply with immigration laws and regulations. Therefore, they have observed the various direct and indirect impacts of the changes to the student visa policy. This study intends to illustrate the impact of the changes to the student visa policy from the perspectives of the international education administrators.

Recruiting participants may not be easy. Therefore, the researcher should have a contingency plan to gain access to participants (Mason, 2002). The gatekeepers in this study were mainly the head of international education departments and associates. However, Bogdan and Biklen (2003) say that getting permission from the leader of an organization does not guarantee cooperation of interviewees. It is the interviewees who will ultimately determine how much information they want to release. However, in this study, individuals who gave permission for interviews were the same people whom I interviewed. Each was a one-on-one interview and tape-recorded. As Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest, I took additional notes in the margins during the interviews, coded and sorted collected data, and elaborated generalizations that emerged from the data.

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews, and they were triangulated through interviewing multiple subjects, which is a good way to triangulate the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

#### Sampling Method

“Sampling and selection are principles and procedures used to identify, choose, and gain access to relevant data sources” (Mason, 2002, p.120). Small sampling size, which allows the researcher to conduct an in-depth study, is common in qualitative

studies. The purposeful sampling is the traditional choice in most qualitative studies (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Because it is necessary to include individuals who worked in a certain position at certain institutions before and after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, I decided to use purposeful sampling. However, the researcher does not have to identify all the interviewees in advance in a qualitative study. Snowball sampling, recruiting more participants by asking past participants for ideal people to include in the study, can be utilized to find the participants who can contribute to the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Therefore, I initially interviewed three participants only, and asked them if they knew who could be good to interview further about this matter.

Sampling is strategic and practical because it was not possible to interview all the international education administrators in the US and also because qualitative studies are not about census-type data. They are more about depth; as a result, focusing on a particular issue, person, or a group provides deeper data (Mason, 2002). In addition, the size of sampling depends on how much time each subject requires.

The reasons why these specific participants were selected are listed below.

- This research study included such topics as international student visas, international students, and what the visa process involves. International education administrators who work at higher education institutions are exposed to all the elements listed above. Their primary job is processing international students' visa-related paperwork and communicating with those students about their concerns and problems on a daily basis
- This study required the participants to have knowledge about the SEVIS tracking system to answer some of the interview questions. The interviewees were either



the Primary Designated School Officers, who are authorized to use the SEVIS system, or administrators who had overseen the SEVIS process at their school

- This study reviewed data from 2001 to 2010. Therefore, interview questions were about this time period. The subjects had been working with international students at U.S. colleges since at least 2001. As a result, I did not recruit anyone who was not in his or her current position or an equivalent position from 2001 to present.

Table 2

Demographics of the Subjects Who Participated in This Study

1	Sally Armstrong	State University	PDSO	17 years
2	Mary Brighton	State University	PDSO	12 years
3	Cliff Taylor	State University	International Education Senior Administrator	30 years
4	John Milton	State University	International Education Senior Administrator	21 years
5	George Sutherland	State University	International Education Administrator/PDSO	14 years
6	Roger Murray	State University	PDSO	16 years

As suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2003), I did not expect to spend the same amount of time with each interviewee. Some participants had more experience, and some of them did not want to talk as much as others.

## Data Collection

I had all interviewees sign an “Interview Participant Consent Form.” All participants showed their initial consent to participate in the study by willingly agreeing to participate when I called or e-mailed them at least two weeks before the possible interview dates to ask if they were interested in participating in this study. I attached a copy of the consent form and the recruitment script in the Appendix section. By voluntarily responding to another e-mail which contained the participant’s choice of interview date and time, consent was shown. Then each participant received the consent form by e-mail, approximately one week prior to the interview. He or she was asked to take time to review the consent form and have it with him or her on the day of interview. After the participant notified me of his or her availability, I sent a friendly reminder e-mail four days prior to the interview. The interviewee was then given the option to sign the consent form on the day of the interview before I started interviewing. I had an extra copy in case the original form was lost. Each participant was given a consent form that he or she had to sign before the interview or data collection began. As Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggested, the consent form briefly explained that I was there to learn from the subject not to solicit information. Also, the form disclosed how I would use the findings and if there was any compensation for participation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Each participant then signed this written consent form prior to participation in the study, and all forms were placed in an envelope so as to maintain the confidentiality of the subjects. After each interview, the consent form was placed in a folder apart from the materials which were used to collect data from the participants.

I conducted all the interviews at the participants' workplaces. I would conduct the interview anywhere as long as it was a place that was away from distraction. However, the desired location was the interviewee's office.

How many subjects would participate in this study was indefinite. I initially scheduled three interviews and scheduled more as I had not reached data saturation at the conclusion of the third interview. Interviews were face-to-face, and there was only one participant in each interview. Therefore, some interviewees were males, and some were females as the sampling method disregarded gender. I interviewed the participants myself, and there was a series of questions that I asked. Before I began asking the questions, I had a small talk with each interview, which took approximately two minutes. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggest that the researcher have a small talk with the subject to build rapport. This talk could be about anything from sports events to leisure activities. In this study, the interviewees and I were international education administrators; therefore, there was common ground on which to conduct small talk. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) recommend that the researcher use a tape-recorder if the interviews are lengthy, and that this is the major technique the researcher utilizes. In this study, each interview took around 40 minutes and it was the only technique I used to generate data. Therefore, I tape-recorded each interview for record keeping, and all participants were aware of the presence of the voice-recorder. After each interview ended, I stopped the voice-recorder and asked the interviewee if he or she knew someone whom I could interview about the same topic: impact of the changes in student visa policy. Snowball sampling was critical in this study in order to have the right people -people who had extensive experience in

international education- to participate in the study. This final part of the conversation, unessential to data collection, was not recorded.

### Data Analysis

Language is the tool that both the researcher and the subjects ultimately use to convey messages. Qualitative research utilizes words, which are used for analysis and interpretation (Humerman & Miles, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994). I put the data I generated in units. Each interview was a separate unit to analyze. I had all the interviews transcribed verbatim, and coded each of them with Atlas.ti software. As Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest, I had a provisional list of codes before I started generating data. The following research questions helped me determine what to include in the list of codes.

1. What is the impact of the changes in the international student visa policy?
2. What are international education administrators' perspectives on the impact of the changes to the international student visa policy since the 9/11 terrorist attacks? How do they perceive the current status of the visa policy?

I also had new categories throughout the data analysis process as new themes emerged. Considering new codes allows for data that do not fit in categories set before data collection. Data analysis should not be limited by codes set before data is in (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). When new themes started to emerge, I created new categories so that data analysis was not affected by the coding technique. Coding ended when the study reached data saturation –when the coding process does not bring anything new to the set

categories. When expressions, words, thoughts, and ideas did not create any new categories, I stopped collecting and coding data.

List of Categories I set based on the research questions are listed below:

1. Immediate impact
2. Long-term impact
3. Immediate reactions
4. Feelings right after the 9/11 attacks
5. Problems with changes made to the visa policy
6. Critical events
7. Current status of the student visa policy

Miles and Huberman (1994) say that “For all approaches to coding, codes will change and develop as field experience continues (p.61). Therefore, the initial list of categories above changed. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that if too many data fall into some certain category, the researcher may need to subcategorize them. In this study, some of the categories in the provisional list did not work, so they were removed, and also the addition of subcodes became necessary.

#### Validity and Reliability

Validity means that the result of a study is accurate. To achieve validity, I explained in detail how I had coded words and phrases, and what criteria I utilized when I coded data. I utilized interview quotations extensively. For example, I added notes I had taken during interviews alongside transcripts of interviews for the reader to compare my interpretations with actual data. This process helped to verify the accuracy and

comprehensiveness of data analysis. Internal validity can be ensured by constantly asking if the interpretations the researcher makes are accurate and unbiased based on the data generated as the study proceeds. External validity means that the reader can relate the findings to his or her own life. The findings do not have to be identical with the reader's experience, though. Kvale (1996) says that constant effort to ensure validity may be counterproductive. Therefore, the best way to treat validity is checking accuracy regularly and questioning findings.

Qualitative researchers do not necessarily have to generate results that are consistent with other researchers' findings or another study they conduct at a different time because qualitative researchers may discover different data and interpret them differently due to their background and interests and external conditions that effect the researcher and participants during the time they collect data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Validity requires ontological and conceptual clarity. The researcher should explain, describe, or explore the subject matter he or she claims to be exploring (Mason, 2002). Mason (2002) continues: "If your research is valid, it means that you are observing, identifying, or measuring what you say you are" (p. 39).

To ensure that the study is exploring what I claimed it was, I used the following techniques. Triangulation, a technique used to increase validity of a research study, means verifying the data by using multiple sources to support the findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Studying the issue from different angles, triangulating, increases validity. For example, the researcher can use different data sources in the study to validate findings (Mason, 2002). I triangulated data through comparing them with the literature. For example, many interview questions asked about the impact of the changes to student

visa policy on international students. I compared relevant statistics with data I generated through interviews regarding this question. I reviewed the literature to see if it generally aligned with the data I collected. The other technique to increase the validity of this study was member check, which means revisiting participants to ask for verification of data analysis at the end of the study.

Reliability is more of an accuracy and comprehensiveness issue in qualitative data collection process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Mason, 2002). Therefore, the researcher should be as objective as possible when he or she collects data. Data should reflect how the subject actually perceives the matter (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Sherman and Webb (1988) suggest using low inference description, audio-visual instruments, and verbatim transcription to increase reliability. This study provided low inference description by carefully analyzing verbatim transcripts. In addition, I used a voice-recorder at each interview to analyze the data more accurately and comprehensively. I expected that using these techniques would disallow subjective inferences.

To increase the trustworthiness of the study, I listened to audio records multiple times to better understand each participant's perspective in general. Also, for the sake of accuracy, I had all of the interviews transcribed verbatim by two individuals and compared the transcripts for accuracy and completeness.

Further, this study was auditable. Another researcher can follow the decision path because I included raw data and the study schematic. I placed interview questions, a part of verbatim transcripts and an explanation for how I had coded that part of the transcript,

coding categories, and some government documents in the appendix. The entire Research Methods section also helped the reader to understand how the study progressed.

Doing a pilot study, according to Fink and Kosecoff (1998), increases the reliability of a study. This study was preceded by a pilot study. As a result, I was able to compare the information I had compiled from the two studies. Since reliability of a study requires consistency of information, responses in the first study should not be different from responses in the second study, or, at least, the information in the two studies should not contradict one another (Fink, 1995a; Fink & Kosecoff, 1998).

If a qualitative researcher puts too much emphasis on reliability in order to reach that of a quantitative study, he or she may lose focus on validity –what he or she is trying to measure– for the sake of reliability –precision of the research instrument (Mason, 2002). Therefore, sometimes reliability can cause problems concerning validity. For instance, structured interviews may seem to yield more reliable results because they are all standardized. However, semi-structured interviews yield better results in terms of validity because they better give the researcher the flexibility to collect relevant data. Again, this study used semi-structured interviews (Mason, 2002).

#### Ethical Considerations

Overt and covert fieldworks describe the two polarities of the ethical dilemma for qualitative interviewers. Some covert studies deceived participants and even forced the researcher to commit a criminal act. Other studies violated the subjects' privacy for the sake of collecting data otherwise inaccessible. Because the subject is a person, the interviewer should be extremely careful and honest so that the interviewees do not get hurt legally, mentally, or emotionally (Fontana & Frey, 1994).



Mason (2002) indicates that questions about private matters, traumas, regrets, and illegal activities may raise ethical issues. Is the interviewer likely to collect private information which does not relate to the study? If so, what precautions should the researcher take? To ensure the safety of participants, their identities should not be revealed, and they should stay anonymous. Furthermore, there should not be a power relation between the researcher and the participants (Mason, 2002).

As Mason (2002) suggests, each interviewee signed a informed consent form in this study before the interview was conducted. Participants in this survey research answered questions regarding the specific subject, the impact of the September 11 attacks on student visa policy. I also took notes about the participants' body language, intonation, and pauses. The interviewees were informed about this matter as well. Finally, the researcher did not collect any data when the tape recorder was deactivated. The precautions listed above were to reduce likeliness of abuse of informed consent (Mason, 2002). This study involved no harm or discomfort greater than that faced in ordinary daily life. However, participants consenting to allow themselves to be audio recorded might have felt self-conscious, and they may have encountered the risk of accidental breach of confidentiality although accidental breach of confidentiality is a minimal risk. To minimize any risks, participants were assured that their identities were protected and that, after the recordings or other written materials (e.g., interview notes) were transcribed and coded, the digital files and materials were immediately destroyed.

All consent forms were held separate from the data collected to disconnect data from the participants' names. The digital audio files recorded during the interviews were used only until they were fully transcribed and then they were destroyed so the voices of

participants could no longer be used to identify the individuals. The identities of participants were known only to the researcher. All original data were either destroyed or kept in a secure area. The data was kept on a computer that was password protected.

I did not retain any hard copy of the data. After I recorded each interview, I transcribed them. Audio files, interview notes, and transcripts were saved on a computer in 700 Library Tower at Auburn University at Montgomery. The computer was password protected. This was my own office; therefore, only I had access to this room and this computer. After I had completed the data analysis, I deleted the audio files and notes immediately after I finished transcribing them. I deleted the transcripts immediately after completing data analysis.

The Institutional Research Board (IRB)-approved and participant-signed consent documents will be kept in the Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology for three years after the study ends.

#### Pilot Study

Pilot studies are commonly employed in survey research to improve methodology, and also it may help collect thicker data (Fink & Kosecoff, 1998). I conducted a pilot study in April 2010 to better understand how college administrators perceive the long-term impact of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on international student visa policy.

During the three interviews, I asked the participants the questions listed below. Some questions were very similar on purpose because I aimed to elicit the same aspect of the study through different questions increasing the reliability of the study.

- What was the impact of the 9/11 attacks on the international student visa policy?
- How did you experience and respond to these changes?
- How did your activities and perspective change after the 9/11 attacks?
- What is your perception of the international student visa policy?
- How do you feel about the changes made to the policies following the terrorist attacks?
- What are the pros and cons of the SEVIS student tracking system?

I interviewed three Primary Designated School Officials (PDSO) at three higher education institutions in the State of Alabama. I chose to interview PDSOs because they interact with international students, issue I-20 Certificates (Student Visa Eligibility Certificate), process international student applications, and contribute to retention of international students to some extent.

This pilot study was tremendously helpful in many different ways, but one of the major benefits of the study was that it helped me to acquire other PDSOs' names, people whom I could interview on the subject matter. This became the first step of snowball sampling.

I noticed that several emergent themes in this pilot study. First, all the participants indicated that the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) was not ready to be implemented. As a result, it was confusing for international education administrators, even for consular officials. The SEVIS was a system that had been in development prior to the attacks; however, it had been delayed until the attacks occurred on September 11, 2001. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) was in charge

of student visas and international student tracking. They knew what information they wanted to collect; nevertheless, they did not plan the implementation phase of the project in detail. Also, the interviewees indicated that the visa policy became extremely restrictive after the attacks. International education administrators understood that all these policy changes were made for the sake of homeland security, but they believed that the only change it brought was to make international students' lives much harder in the US.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### Introduction

This study aims to explore international education administrators' perspective on the impact of the changes to the foreign student visa policy and procedures and examine the changes in and current status of the student visa policy from the perspective of international education administrators at higher education institutions in the U.S.A. This survey research is not designed to reveal any universal facts. It merely intends to describe how international education officers perceive the phenomenon mentioned above.

### Data Demographics

Six individuals participated in this survey research, which utilized interviews to generate data. Each participant works at a state university certified by the Department of Homeland Security to admit international students with F1 student visas. All the participants work as either a Primary Designated School Officer (PDSO) or International Education Administrator or both at a higher education institution in the Southeastern United States. Their experience in the field of international education ranges from 12 years to 20 years with an average of 18.3 years of work experience in the field. All the interviewees currently actively work with international students on daily basis. They handled or oversaw international student admissions before, during, and after the September 11 attacks.

Table 3

Demographics of the Subjects Who Participated in This Study

1	Sally Armstrong	State University	PDSO	17 years
2	Mary Brighton	State University	PDSO	12 years
3	Cliff Taylor	State University	International Education Senior Administrator	30 years
4	John Milton	State University	International Education Senior Administrator	21 years
5	George Sutherland	State University	International Education Administrator/PDSO	14 years
6	Roger Murray	State University	PDSO	16 years

### Findings

This survey research revealed several themes during the data analysis. Each of these themes appeared in most of the interviews. The narratives are included in the analysis to better reflect how international education administrators perceive the subject matter, “The Impact”.

The first two themes, “International Students are Important” and “Changes are Justifiable”, are the two “Background” themes that give background information to the reader to better understand the international affairs administrators’ viewpoints regarding the subject matter.

The last two themes, “Applications Got Better” and “Problems Exist Today but Solutions are Available”, are the two “Hope” themes that describe what the participants

believe needs to be done to lessen or even eliminate the negative impact of the changes to the international student visa policy and procedures.

### Research Questions

There were two primary research questions in this study: (1) What is the impact of the changes in the international student visa policy? (2) What are international education administrators' perspectives on the impact of the changes to the international student visa policy, including those observed since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and their perspectives on the current status of the visa policy? These two questions aimed to illustrate the impact of the changes to international student visa policy after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Direct quotes, which were extracted from the verbatim interview transcripts, served to better convey the impact that is observed by the participants.

### Background

#### International Students are Important

Although there were no direct questions regarding importance of international students, all participants discussed why attracting and retaining international students is important for academic, strategic, national security, and economic reasons. Most of them reminded the fact that international students contribute to the local and national economy and increase the revenues of higher education institutions. International students, according to the interviewees, are also important for strategic reasons. Murray explains this reason:

Politicians, especially, don't seem to understand the importance of international students to the US technologically, educationally. There are many large institutions that could not function [without foreign students].

At least, their science and technology departments could not function without the international students. They would actually have to shut down whole areas of the university if they didn't have these students.

He adds:

The US is not producing enough graduates in science, technology, engineering, and math, so we desperately need these folks.

Most of the participants indicated that another contribution international students make is the ambassadorial effect, which may help keep the United States secure. Many of them become voluntary ambassadors of the United States when they return to their countries upon completing their studies here. Most participants indicated that international students have a better understanding of U.S. culture and values after they spend a few years in the US during their college studies. Therefore, they can be peace agents who can provide balance against anti-U.S. propaganda in their countries as they have been exposed to U.S. culture. Brighton emphasized the issue:

Many world leaders, many local leaders throughout the world had been students in the United States, and this really works tremendously in favor of the U.S. national and international policy, so, you know, there is....Keeping international students coming to the United States in large numbers is so much in the interest of the United States.

Changes are Justifiable

Although all the participants indicated that there were a variety of negative impacts from the changes to the student visa policy, they all suggested that these changes were justifiable.



Armstrong referred to the 9/11 attackers:

After 9/11, there was a tremendous emphasis on security, on national security, on protecting the United States from students because unfortunately the perpetrators of 9/11 were primarily student visas or on visitor's visas and [they] were switching over to student visas, so that gave the whole student visa area a very bad reputation, but this [the 9/11 terrorists] is an extremely small minority of students or people of internationals, and of course, they could have been internationals here on tourist visas or work visas.

Brighton talked about her friends' friends who died in the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

To her, that means the changes were understandable, and necessary for the sake of security. Most participants underlined that every country has a right to monitor the people that visit their country, which becomes part of their national law. Armstrong feels that security of people is very important, so all the restrictions put in place are reasonable. She shared a story:

I don't want to say it because... the first couple of days after it happened I was scared I think everybody was. I mean this and nothing like this ever happened in my lifetime. You know, you just go like la la la la....Then something horrible like this happens, and you know... you think they are gonna start exploding bombs everywhere. I had a Palestinian student who I had known for several years, and he wanted to see me on September 12. I was scared to see him. Everybody was having a visceral response to everything.

She also mentioned that as an individual who had been involved in international education on campus for many years, even she was afraid, and having these feelings, she believed that national security became more important in people's minds.

Taylor made further comments on the reason of some of the restrictions, procedures, and policies.

To some extent, it gets to an issue we deal in the United States called profiling. And the truth is profiling is a very good security system. There is no reason to pat down 80 years old ladies in the airport. They are not a threat. There is no reason really to take off your shoes to get on the airplane. It's not what's on the airplane but who is on the airplane. So that's a logic that says you got an area that might pose danger.

### The Impact

#### Schools Were Exposed to Some of the Changes before 9/11

Higher education institutions that were certified by the Immigration Naturalization Service (INS) had already practiced some of the student-tracking applications and procedures before the 9/11 attacks. According to the interviewees, having been a part of a pilot program, Coordinated Interagency Partnership Regulating International Students (CIPRIS), that was designed to keep track of international students helped them to navigate through the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), the new tracking system that was introduced right after the attacks. The schools' experience with the pre-9/11 version of the SEVIS tracking system did not solve all the problems the schools had with operating the system; however, it made their daily operations less complicated. Armstrong described her experience:

Our institution actually participated in a program that was the precursor to SEVIS. That went on since like 1997, so it was a computer program that our school participated at, so it was already coming as far as we saw, so SEVIS' implementation didn't really affect us because we were kind of already doing it that way. I mean, as far as processing things, we were already doing it as a government prototype.... We were a CIPRIS school, and I mean, we were in that early adoption, and we were one of the first set of schools in SEVIS, too.... Again, it didn't really, we didn't get as affected [by SEVIS].

The institutions were familiar with the new student tracking system and its procedures; therefore, some of the challenges that came with the changes to the international student visa policy did not affect the schools as much as other institutions that were not involved in the pilot program. However, there were other areas where schools were helpless.

#### Government Presents Challenges but Not Enough Support

The new procedures and polices instated by the federal government created challenges for both colleges and international students, and many times the federal government, the Department of Homeland Security, and the state governments did not offer any assistance or create a support system to help both institutions and students better adjust to the post-attacks system changes. Milton gave an example:

Reporting requirements for OPT (Optional Practical Training).... You know, that's an extra difficult thing because you know these are people who've already graduated. They're out of our local jurisdiction, and so

we're having to still report proper addresses and report their employer now. And if they reach the 90 days, there's not clear rules on what we are supposed to do with them if they've reached over 90 days of unemployment.

Another area that lacked support was training of visa officers. Taylor mentioned that visa officers are supposed to speak the language of the country they work in, and they must be able to conduct visa interviews in visa applicants' native language. However, the referent, who travels overseas a few times a year, finds visa officers not well-trained. For instance, a prospective international student who wants to study English in the United States may know very little English, and he or she may not clearly explain what his or her intent is, which may constitute sufficient reason for denial.

Additionally, Brighton stated that the student tracking system was never funded appropriately from the beginning, which created many structural flaws. In summary, the participants talked about several different issues; however, they all agreed that the government did not offer enough support for the challenges, changes, and paperwork they introduced.

#### Impact of SEVIS

Taylor told an anecdote that simplified the need for SEVIS and why it did not work well initially:

There is a story that the FBI director called up the head of the old INS and asked "How many students do we have students from Sudan?" The head of the INS said "I don't have a clue." The director of the FBI was not amused by that answer and it was decided at that time that the government

needed to do a better job keeping track of international students, so there were pilot programs that were going on in the 1990s already to tighten the restrictions and to keep better track of international students, and after 9/11 that only accelerated, and not only do we have SEVIS, which was already envisioned before 9/11, but also that was rushed into service in February of 2003, and it was not really ready to go, but it had to get started as quickly as possible.

All participants mentioned that SEVIS' implementation didn't affect them much because they had already used a similar tracking system as a pilot. Experience with this similar program, CIPRIS, helped them adjust to SEVIS. However, no matter how much they had known about CIPRIS, they still had major issues with the new system and its implementation. The new computerized system just increased the workload of colleges due to the additional paperwork that came with the system. The number of reports that the government asked schools for significantly increased. Using and maintaining the system were very laborious.

Yet, the participants expressed their appreciation of SEVIS as well. Sutherland claimed that SEVIS helped with security issues, and the program itself has become very functional, which makes campus authorities' jobs easier. The new system allows ports of entry (U.S. customs officers at airports) and the embassies to identify errors or note inaccuracies from the school's input. a school entered inaccurate information in the system. Therefore, it made international affairs administrators' jobs much easier.

The SEVIS system has standardized applications that every school must use, which ensures that all schools follow the procedures set by the Department of Homeland

Security. According to Brighton, some schools do not have sufficient training and knowledge of the tracking system, and as a result of incompetence, some international students' visa statuses get messed up by these institutions. Therefore, SEVIS is an improvement for the students. .

SEVIS has had positive impact in general. Two of the interviewees, Taylor and Sutherland, mentioned that in having SEVIS they had less paperwork (“no more triplicate carbon paper”), and the system increased accurate communication between American colleges and the government. Taylor elaborated:

It is creating records, so when the student shows up with a piece of paper in Chengdu China. The visa officers can see that's an authentic version of what we created here. Therefore, for the most part, the SEVIS system is a very good system.

On the other hand, Brighton stated that SEVIS was resource-intensive for universities and ineffective:

I think a lot of the SEVIS tracking is a waste of time, waste of effort. It employs a lot of people, but it's been my experience that you know the honest people who are not here to threaten themselves or anyone else. They are going to try to go by the rules regardless of where they are from, so I can't really see that the SEVIS system has benefitted the country the national-security wise in any way because the students can still transfer.... If someone is coming to this country to blow something up, they have got 30 days before they even get to school to do it, so you issue the I-20 [Certificate of Eligibility to apply for a student visa], they get their visas,

and they just enter the airport, and they may disappear, so in a sense, it is pointless, you know, it is truly pointless. It was pointless. There's no way that I feel any more secure now than I did before.

In general, though, most participants shared similar thoughts about SEVIS. As Murray said, “The SEVIS system, as it has evolved, does a pretty good job of keeping track of international students.”

#### Inconsistency and Unfairness

Many of the international affairs professionals that participated in this study claimed that the problem was more about the implementation of the policies and procedures besides the changes to them. Murray made further comment regarding these “prejudicial practices”:

I mean it was certain populations that were the access countries [the countries, according to the U.S. government, supported terrorism]... You know I think there was 15 at the time that they implemented this... That was the problem I had with it in the beginning. It was the way it was implemented. It was like it doesn't matter where you are from. It was almost like you are a criminal no matter what you say.

The administrators described the way the policies and procedures originally implemented as “discriminating,” “arbitrary,” “not fair,” “so much inconsistent,” and “absurd.”

Brighton feels that there is not much planning and coordination behind the changes in the policy and procedures regarding student visas, and that is where inconsistencies and unfair treatments occur.

They throw out a policy statement like they did it, a policy statement just a couple weeks ago, as a cable to all the student exchange programs. You know, they did an email out, and oops! That wasn't the email they were supposed to send, you know. They just throw these policy statements out saying oh do this, this, and this, and we are like...What! Without seeking enough common ground... It seems there's some very arbitrary thought going into some of the things that they implement without actually checking in on how it impacts the people that have to do with they wanted them to do.

One issue all participants indicated was inconsistency between the state and federal law. Milton said, "Alabama state law has specifically deliberately recognized the 60-day grace period eligible for an F [international student visa] or 30 for a J [exchange student visa] and not given them a driver's license." Brighton supported Milton's viewpoint: The visa policy, she believed, was not only inconsistent but also unfair.

It even goes against federal interpretations of policy on the Real ID Act [Act establishing new national standards for state-issued driver licenses and non-driver identification cards]. I mean the fact that they don't recognize the grace period to give a student enough time to get their OPT [optional practical training is a one-year work authorization given the foreign students after they complete their university studies in the US] cards to renew their driver's license, and they have to drive illegally for four five months because they can't renew it when they still have status. I



don't think it's fair and that one gets me and that is the real place that you see the biggest pile of mess as far as local state policy goes.

Further, Brighton makes a suggestion:

Pass the Real ID Act and make it federally mandated on some level for having consistency because there is so much inconsistency across state lines.... It's hard to comply when, you know, my state versus federal regulations aren't matching and my state is so ridiculous.... It's the whole DMV issue.

Another area of inconsistency and unfairness was different non-immigrant visa types. Armstrong felt that it was unfair that the government did nothing about illegal immigrants, yet they introduced many restrictions and applications to control international students. Moreover, the U.S. government does not monitor anybody very closely except students. Millions of tourists and other individuals coming to the United States on different visas do not endure the scrutiny that international students do. Taylor adds to Armstrong's viewpoint in stating that:

The 9/11 has almost nothing to do with students. There was great public pressure to do something about immigrants who were dangerous. Students who were small sector of probably around 5 or 6% of people who come to the United States were an easy group to target as if the government was really doing something. They ignored, of course, the group that caused the problem ...visitors...business [two other visa categories].... But the students became an easy target. It was easy for the government to show

action because they had the system that was being tested, so they were not changing policy, they were just changing practice.

Sutherland supported this view:

There is a belief that it [SEVIS student tracking system] addresses the terrorism, 9/11 kinds of scenarios, but in fact it really only identifies certain, very narrow group of people out of 30 million visitors coming to the US. SEVIS only identifies the only five or six hundred thousand people. If you look at it from a con-standpoint, I mean, are you really doing what you are proposing to do?

Taylor said that the visa policy had always been based on “inherent absurdity” because when international students apply for a F1 student visa, before they come to the United States, they have to prove their academic intentions including a declaration of major. On the other hand, domestic students can choose to be undecided for the first two years of their college studies. Taylor said “Truth is most 18-year-olds need to be undecided, they don’t know what life is all about.” International students also have to take a full course-load every semester except for summer. Thus, even if a student cannot adjust to school well, he or she cannot drop a course. If that happens, he or she loses the student visa, “which is just wrong, morally wrong” (Brighton). These unfair stipulations set up international students for failure.

Another inconsistent practice that many of the participants mentioned was that the state police are authorized to enforce immigration laws; however, not all of them have proper training. As a result, “Someone with a minor mess-up, it may even be our

[university officials'] fault, can be treated very harshly, erroneously treated harshly” (Milton).

#### NSEERS Unfair and Not Welcoming

A specific procedure, the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) was described as “unfair” and “not welcoming” by all of the participants. NSEERS was thus described: “If you are a male between 15 and 45 and you were from one of the 27 countries [Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Egypt, Eritrea, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Lebanon, Morocco, North Korea, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen], then you had to go and you had to be eye-scanned and fingerprinted.... Every time you went out of the country, they did this extra checking” (Sutherland).

The international education administrators all stated that they could understand the security concerns, but the way NSEERS was implemented was “disgusting,” “rude,” “prejudicial,” “crude,” “extremely political,” and “intrusive.” The students that NSEERS targeted were from certain countries, namely Middle Eastern countries.

Many of the participants expressed that NSEERS did not actually help with security. Armstrong told about how they handled NSEERS requirements:

That also was also kind of nuts because I took, myself, three busloads of 45 men each time, and on a separate trip an Iranian couple to Atlanta to be special registered... And it was just kind of crazy because it was all that effort, and yet it is not very likely that anybody who is here, who is a known terrorist, would show up to be fingerprinted.

#### Increased Awareness and Appreciation of Diversity

The 9/11 terrorist attacks were terrible. The participating administrators all catalogued a variety of negative impacts of the changes made to international student visa law. However, they all observed that on college campuses and in the local community, there was increased awareness and an appreciation of diversity. Taylor feels that “It's terrible to have these kids [International students] punished for their parents' actions.” Similarly, Milton mentioned that “I had more students telling me that people told them I don't blame you for this, or you know, I don't know, there was a weird outreach.” Taylor also told about how his institution kept their international students from being accused or victimized.

We had a really good thing happened here [regarding] 9/11. You would imagine there was an unusual tension. The Chancellor that day put out an announcement e-mail to all faculty and students that basically said “Hey look, when a few guys do something, we are not taking them out and we're not expressing hostility to our students from those countries.” And that did really made a difference here, so I do think we were worried about it some, but I don't think we ever experienced any sort of real problems in the community or on our campus.

Brighton reported that after the 9/11 attacks, her institution extended on their Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) policy a prohibition of discrimination based on race and gender to include ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion. Most background checks that came after the 9/11 attacks were required for young Muslim males from Middle Eastern countries. She continued to say “I actually saw this [change to the EEOC policy] as a more positive.... We saw more of a positive

impact than a negative one in that respect.” Brighton also said that after seeing what international students went through to be able to come to the United States, she had less tolerance for American citizens who complain about obtaining a visa to go to another country because America-bound students have always this challenge.

#### Schools Supported Students after 9/11

As part of the appreciation of diversity and awareness of international students on campuses, all participants found ways to increase the support for foreign students to help them both survive the fallout of 9/11 and adjust to the new applications and procedures set after the attacks. For example, many students were afraid that if they left the United States for their home countries for vacation or other reasons, they might not have been able to return to their schools. International affairs administrators advised students about when to travel.

Brighton exemplified the effort her school made for their international students:

We tried to provide a high-level service to our students and make clear to the students what immigration effects are on them personally. We tried to help them remember to do things that they need to do and we track things and... We checked on our students personally to make sure that they were doing ok. We did little focus groups. You know, to say “are you doing okay?”

Sutherland also described how his unit supported international students after the 9/11 terrorist attacks:

My biggest burden and my biggest goal is to make it as easy as possible for the students. It doesn't matter when I think about it. The students are

going to have to do this to comply, and so my goal was to make it as easy as possible for them and make sure that everybody knew, so we did like seminars to talk about it with our students. If they didn't come, we tracked them down and said 'Look, this has come out, you need to go do this,' you know, to make sure that they stayed in compliance, so they didn't have problems.

Besides the administrative personnel that directly worked with international students, the faculty also offered support. For instance, Murray said "My students were assured by professors that 'You're okay with me here. If you have a problem, come see me....' They had more outreaches of sympathy."

Taylor supported this view and said that they did everything they could to accommodate and support their students through the difficult transition. The school administrators even made visits to U.S. visa officers when possible to ensure international students were caught up on necessary paperwork. For instance, when foreign students needed to go to the nearest immigration office, each interviewee's school then provided free transportation and took the students to the immigration office themselves.

Sutherland also spoke on the importance of supporting international students:

Explaining the process to the students and trying to make them comfortable with the procedures, we have tried to be sensitive to the fact that international students are under all this pressure from all these regulations, which at times seem somewhat excessive, and many of us in this profession try to make the system more humane towards our students

by trying to be sensitive to the issues, by being sensitive to our students, by helping them deal with the regulatory nightmare that they have to live through, and just by trying to show, you know, the human face of the American system because a lot of students come here thinking that ‘Wow! What happened to the United States, which was so open to international students before 9/11?’”

#### Impact on Students and Scholars less Today

A majority of the participants stated that there had been many immediate changes that negatively affected international students. For instance, Brighton described the implementation of NSEERS as discriminatory and the most intrusive action that occurred directly to her students who found people that processed their security entry-exit registration (NSEERS) rude. Another example is that some people on the street were mean to the students who wore burkas or other traditional Middle Eastern garb, associating the clothing with terrorists. Fear was not only outside of the campus, though. Brighton said that she sometimes felt scared as well. For instance, when one of her Middle Eastern student wanted to see her right after the 9/11 attacks, she first hesitated, but then she decided to see the student. Before she met with him, she was shaking, which was a reaction of fear, reaction to fierce face of terrorism not to the student, and it was a temporary reaction. Another example was that unexpectedly, foreign students encountered problems at the port of entry. There were only certain airports to which they could be admitted. Armstrong shared the same thought and stated that “I know a lot of my students were scared... but I think over time it started waning as it got further and

further away from the event.” It has been 10 years since the attacks. Taylor said “You know, you forget in 11 years.”

The impact of immediate changes to the student visa policy is not as powerful as it was during the aftermath of 9/11; however, international students still experience some problems. One of the current major issues that directly affect international students is that those who have less than 180 days left on their Form I-20 (Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status) are prohibited from renewing their driver’s license. These students initially receive Form I-20 to be qualified to apply for a student visa. American embassies usually issue student visas based on the length of studies indicated on Form I-20. For instance, if the student’s driver’s license expires four months before he or she graduates, it is not possible to renew the driver’s license, because his or her Form I-20 expires in four months, and he or she cannot extend Form I-20 as the student graduates in four months. In that case, the student may have to choose to drive without a valid driver’s license for four months.

According to Murray, one of the impacts of the policy and procedures changes was delays in processing student visa applications. Even after the 9/11 attacks, the FBI was still not sharing their files with the State Department. For instance, when a student had applied for a visa, the State Department and the student’s country had to send information to the FBI, who had to find in their system, and they had to send it back to the State Department. Then, the State Department could approve the visa application. As a result, the student had to wait for the following semester or even sometimes the following year if he or she was a graduate student. Milton had similar observation. Because of the background checks, some international students would probably give up



because they were afraid that their visas would not be processed on time for them to make travel arrangements.

Today, because of background checks, not very often but sometimes some students may have to wait in their home countries a bit longer than routine processing time before receiving their visas. This situation causes an inconvenience according to the participating administrators. Armstrong stated that this issue sometimes affects some of those who only need to renew their visas:

Christmas renewal.... If they can't stay [in their home countries] for more than 30 days we don't recommend that they travel during winter break if they have to renew their visa, especially if they're studying certain fields...or from certain countries. You know, it's just truly....It's something they have to consider when they're traveling.

Brighton voiced similar concerns regarding the delays that background checks caused and said "The security background checks that have been implemented more and more on students.... Some of them.... It depends on what time of the year, and it varies. I mean, we've had to definitely accommodate."

According to Murray, today students from abroad know and agree to do what they are supposed to do regarding visas. However, there is much resentment among them because privileges are lost or made more difficult to obtain; additionally, state and federal requirement increases foster a similar resentment as international students meet legal standards and contribute to local and national economy. She continued:

There is a definite resentment that more and more bureaucratic and regulatory the rules get because it just seems like things used to be kind of

loosey-goosey if you know what I mean. Everything was a lot looser and it just gets a little tighter every day. It is not very welcoming. It is not very encouraging.

Brighton stated that SEVIS was necessary because there were universities incompetently processing students applications, and after SEVIS was introduced, some schools did not fully know proper procedure. As a result, she said, "It [SEVIS] might reduce people getting their status messed up by a school. I know how things were before SEVIS, so I think as far as far as that goes, I think it's better for the students' sake."

Although there are some problems today, international students are far from the immediate impact of the changes to the visa policy and the way the changes were implemented in previous years. Taylor indicated that today's college students do not know much about what happened ten years ago.

9/11 was a decade ago. Kids today, who are 20 years old.... They were ten. They don't know the difference. That's something in the past. Those of us who lived through those days.... We remember it. Students today.... I think, they are much more affected by the futility of the US in the wars where we look weaker and our economy above everything else. They perceived it as just a lot of work. Through time, it has just become another step and procedure. I think international students, more than anything, recognize that countries have different admission processes.

Sutherland perspective on the current international students paralleled Taylor's. He stated that the generation of students that experienced the immediate impact of the changes to the visa policy finished their studies. Therefore, "General impact has been

diminished to quite an extent. It is more the processes that are in place today that are either positive or negative. It is less a 9/11 concept of negativity.”

#### Impact on Global Competition in Higher Education

All of the participating administrators indicated that the changes to the international student visa policy, and the way it was implemented had an impact on the competitiveness of American universities. According to Murray, it [visa procedures] created a sense of environment where entering the US was extremely difficult or took a considerable amount of time, and it ultimately has created a perception that the US is not a welcoming place. Armstrong had similar opinions about the global competition in higher education:

They [changes to the visa policy and procedures] have made it a lot easier for the other countries. The changes in U.S. policies and the approach US took after 9/11 made it easier for other countries to recruit students and made it easier for students, in many ways, to change their direction and go to these other countries. Equally, other countries were already gearing up very heavily to market and to recruit whereas we weren't because we were not investing very heavily in that, and so I think, you know, what happened after 9/11 made it much easier for other countries to be considered by students, and especially countries at that time would not have been in the students' list to go to, and now they are, so today it is a very global market.

Murray explained the changes in perceptions. When foreign students come to the United States, they are surprised that it is not so open to international students as it was

before 9/11. “They [Changes to the visa procedures and the implementation of the policy and procedures] are coming down like a ton of bricks on international students”

(Murray).

Taylor believed that U.S. schools faced increased competition from other English-speaking countries, and these countries took advantage of the situation and absorbed resentful, frustrated, and inconvenienced students. Taylor had some prospective students who tried to come to the United States, but they could not get visas. As a result, they attended universities in New Zealand and the United Kingdom. He mentioned that in Shanghai, they had a group of about 40 Chinese students who had been admitted to Taylor’s university, but, interestingly, all 40 students’ visa applications had been denied. Taylor said they called it “The Shanghai Massacre” because losing 40 students hurt the program. He believes that there needs to be equity in visas. The people of different countries are critically important; however, application of the visa policy is individual-based and irregular. Taylor told an anecdote that summarizes how the position of American colleges has changed in the world.

A very beautiful young girl in Brazil who said last year they all wanted to come to the U.S.... Now, her voice trailed off, and well... the US is not quite so attractive, so I think, that was where things happened. The US lost some of its luster. It was seen as a more desirable place before 9/11 than it was after 9/11.

The U.S. government is attempting to reverse the trend. Sutherland indicated that the federal government has become very active and aggressive in international-student recruiting. The State Department and U.S. Commercial Services have become extremely

involved in the process. Sutherland said that “It is a very welcomed process. [These efforts are] Very similar [to], like what other countries are doing.” However, he also stated that nothing would be the same as it was before 9/11.

Anyone that believes that everything is going to go back to something like pre-9/11 is not living in reality. The world has changed. The US is no longer.... It is still premiere destination in some people’s minds, but ultimately the US is not the only nation in the world providing a high quality education and good job market and all of these different components. I don’t think it will ever return [to pre-9/11]. I think it will be a new point of stability where the US is competing with everyone else perhaps with a little bit better perception that the U.S. education is better, but generally speaking, there is an increased perception that Australian education, European education, Canadian education is moving to the same levels of quality.

According to other participants, there are other countries in the competition now; however, the US still has a chance as other English-speaking countries are adopting the strict policies and procedures that the United States government has adopted. Taylor feels that there are now strong countertrends. He gave some examples: “Australia is rift with racism. The government is taking steps to decrease immigrants significantly to Australia. U.K. is about to get tuition way up, require a higher level of English proficiency, and limit work.” He said that in a few years the US would be back to where it was before.

Murray had similar thoughts. Student visa policies in other countries are becoming very similar to what the U.S. visa policies are. He indicated that there is more commonality in other countries in establishing visa policies, and student visa policies are evolving all over the world.

Many of the participants stated that the 9/11 attacks forced the US to make changes to its visa policy and procedures, and U.S. policies has influenced that of other countries, and, gradually, a global student visa policy is developing.

Schools Have Not Recovered yet

Many of the participants expressed that, as a reaction to the recent loss of American academic competitiveness in the global market, the U.S. government has become more active and determined in international-student recruiting. They feel that the government has become more flexible in their visa policy and procedures to build a better reputation. According to Sutherland, though, the U.S. higher education institutions have not recovered yet.

It's hard to say. I mean it's in a cycle. I think it dropped for a little bit, but it's kind of planed off in the last couple of years, but, at least, locally most of our schools have seen a drop over time, just a gradual degradation in numbers. We are not replacing as many as we have had.... I mean, I think it is not just in the southern schools. I see this trend in a lot of places, so I mean it's like you know one student used to apply to two or three schools they are interested in. Now they are applying to five or six and going with the one that's giving them the best deal, so it is like a buyers' market. The students have a little bit more choices, so they are looking around and they

are being pickier, so you have to have a lot to offer for them to choose you.

Milton feels that the notoriety that came with delays in visa applications and arbitrary and irregular visa denials have not improved. Although the number of international students has been rising, it is still not at the pre-9/11 level. Prospective international students still have the perception that the US is not a welcoming place and that it is hard to obtain a student visa. Thus, the U.S. government and colleges strive to improve the conditions for international students, which make American universities more attractive for prospective foreign students.

### Hope

#### Applications Got Better

All of the participating administrators feel that the international visa policy and procedures and the way they are implemented have changed significantly since the first a few years after 9/11. Murray called it “A protocol and a pattern that are known now.” Therefore, current students are less frustrated with visa procedures as they know what is expected of them. Regularity in applications makes students feel more comfortable with the rules and procedures. For instance, Armstrong stated that NSEERS is still in use; however, it is done much more professionally now. When the student comes to the United States, he or she knows it is just a standard practice now rather than a mysterious application. Armstrong also indicated that she understood that the government reacted to what happened and wanted to implement security measures, though not professionally at first. She said, “They’ve learned. They got burned by the court cases.”

In addition, Murray believes that students still need to know the procedure at the port of entry not to be late for their flights, but there are, today, many more ports of entry they can use to enter and exit the country. As a result, the procedures international students need to complete do not seem to affect their flights as much as they did right after the 9/11 attacks.

Armstrong pointed out that Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) has been reasonably responsive. SEVP is the administrator of Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). He believes schools are the end-users of the program and they can provide plenty of feedback to SEVP, and now SEVP considers it to improve the tracking system. The other participants made similar comments. Taylor said, "A lot of improvement [occurred] within SEVIS. The communication between the databases [causing] less problems than we used to have." Sutherland adds to Taylor's viewpoint in stating that:

The upgrades really have made the system much more workable. It used to break down regularly. Sometimes we would lose 100 students in the system. Some universities have lost 1000 students overnight. That doesn't happen anymore. The system seldom breaks down. It may slow down tremendously, but it's working reasonably well.

Milton mentioned another area of improvement in SEVIS:

It's much more user-friendly than it used to be. We get alerts that let us know when students are nearing the end of their programs, so we probably have fewer students whose I-20s expire now compared to before [first few years SEVIS was implemented]. You know they would get too busy and



forget to get their I-20s renewed. Now we get alerts so we call the students and remind them, you know, to get their I-20s extended, so there have been some benefits to the students because of it.

Brighton said that she had not heard any complaints about it in years and that there were a lot of complaints during the first few years SEVIS was implemented. She believes that the policy is working better now because the government is now actually taking functionality as well as security into consideration. As a result, she concludes, international education administrators' jobs are easier, and the ports of entry and embassies have better communication thanks to SEVIS. Students' visa applications and statuses are not glitched due to systemic problems, and the tracking system has reduced fraud quite a bit as more government units have access to SEVIS. Brighton also feels that by utilizing SEVIS, education professionals are able to do a better job of ensuring that international students comply with U.S. law. Although from time to time, there are systemic problems and the system does not keep track of other foreign visitors, SEVIS is an effective and beneficial tracking tool.

Taylor characterized the irregularity and inconsistency in the early years after the terrorist attacks as "A lot of noise early on.... A lot of breakdown of the policies...." He emphasized that the negative impacts of the early years after 9/11 had a strong influence on the state department's effort to improve the image of visa standards.

I think that the government is doing a lot now to enhance the visibility of the US as a quality destination or study for students to be able to come here. Now the State Department came up with "Open Door & Secure Borders". You know, that sounds really nice. You know, because they

want to emphasize that we still have open doors. The government is also beginning to recognize the importance of the students. Two years ago, they started.... They added something to the work policy, to the Optional Practical Training (OPT) policy, for F1 students [international students]. [They added] that students who have degrees in science, technology, engineering, and math can use not only their 12 basic months of OPT, but they are eligible for an additional 17 months of OPT, and that's to attract the students in those fields that we desperately need people for.

As all the participants indicated, international student visa policy and procedures are implemented better now than they were in the early years after the 9/11 attacks. However, the interviewees also drew attention to a reality that there are still some problems that exist today.

#### Problems Exist Today but Solutions Available

One of the existing problems all the participants mentioned is that the Department of Motor Vehicles does not allow international students to renew their driver's licenses if there is less than 180 days on their Form I-20 (Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Students). Some students who have less than six months on their Form I-20 are thus forced to drive illegally.

In general, a majority of the participants feels that the government still does not have welcoming visa standards. The restrictive trend that began with the 9/11 attacks has not ended yet. Milton mentioned that "The government, the Arizona fence, and other ridiculous things are tightening up, and I don't see things loosening up." Like Milton, Brighton said that "Eight years after [the attacks and immediate policy changes]... but

they keep tightening the screws a little bit more, and that I am not really fond of. The policy has become much stricter, much more restrictive.” Murray corroborated: “Every year something is enacted either on the federal or state or both levels. They make life a little bit more difficult for students here on student visas.”

Regarding Optional Practical Training (OPT), all of the participating administrators shared similar thoughts. Sutherland complained about the delay in the OPT procedure:

You apply for OPT at the end of your studies. We may see that it is approved in the system, but the card doesn't arrive for another two weeks, so the student can't begin working anywhere even though we know it is approved, so that is time they lose.

Taylor thinks that another problem with OPT is reporting requirements: I mean, you know that's an extra difficult thing because you know these are people who've already graduated. They're out of our local jurisdiction, so we're having to still report proper addresses and report their employer now, and there's not clear rules on what we are supposed to do with them if they've reached over 90 days of unemployment.

The other major issue is with the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) and Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). Taylor believes that SEVP should be open to other organizations like Social Security Administration and Department of Motor Vehicles so that they can see the student's status and make informed-decisions in a timely fashion. He thinks that most complaints will vanish if the government is able to share SEVIS records with other units. Regarding SEVIS,

Armstrong believes that the entire SEVIS system needs to be better. She thinks that it is ironic that the government has security concerns, yet they do not think handwritten forms and applications may pose a threat.

When you do an I-765 application [Application for employment authorization for students] in SEVIS, why do I have to do all this paper when it's all electronic and they still mess up stuff and they don't read SEVIS. And I-94.... Why are they handwritten? You know [laughing], I mean, you want to improve security concerns and have consistency, yet you still have people handwrite their name, and you have people manually typing it in.

All of the participants mentioned SEVIS II, an updated, unreleased version of the current SEVIS. Some of the features the participants anticipate are paperless forms and streamlined, smoother, faster processing with fewer complications. They also indicated that with SEVIS II, students will also be able to have access to the system, which will reduce the amount of unnecessary work schools are responsible for. Also, the new system will not require schools to mail the hard copy of Form I-20 to the student. The student will have access to the document through SEVIS II. According to the administrators, these are some of the features of the new system that will make their jobs easier and create a more transparent, efficacious process.

Overall, many of the participants have some complaints about the current visa policy. Taylor spoke of the importance of a better immigration policy. He summarized the expectations of the international education administrators:

The U.S. needs a focused immigration policy, so that we know how the student visa portion of that policy fits in. It is not enough just to say every year we're going to make it tighter, tighter, tighter, harder, harder, harder. We make life difficult to get here, so we need a more coherent, reasonable, rational, and fair policy towards international students. One that, of course, protects national security and our national interest, but at the same time advances national security and national interests by, again, attracting the very best and brightest of the young people around this world.

Taylor and a few other administrators think that the Development, Relief and Education of Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act) will achieve a more coherent, reasonable, rational, and fair visa policy.

## Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

This chapter recaps and reviews the findings of the survey research. Also, I will have recommendations for further research and include conclusions from the study.

This study attempts to understand international education administrators' perception of the impact of the changes to the international student visa policy after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the current status of the student visa policy. This survey research is not designed to reveal any universal facts. It merely intends to describe how international education officers perceive the above phenomenon.

The 9/11 attacks were a decade ago, and it has been equally long since many of the changes to the student visa policy were made. Immediate effects of the changes to the visa policy were visible in the statistics. The number of international students entering the US for study decreased drastically. However, I believe that the impact of the changes to the visa policy was beyond what statistics showed. This study was based on an extended time frame of data analysis to detect delayed impact of the changes to the student visa policy and procedures. The phenomenon was deeper, more complicated, and more multi-layered than an immediate study could detect, and to be able to construct this information, I interviewed six international education administrators who illustrated the phenomenon through their own stories, stories that were based on lived experiences.

## Research Questions

There were two primary research questions in this study: (1) What is the impact of the changes to the international student visa policy and procedures? (2) What is the international education administrators' perspective on the impact of the changes to the international student visa policy and procedures, including those observed since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and how do they see the current status of the visa policy? The two questions attempt to describe the impact of the changes to international student visa policy and procedures after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

## Summary of Findings: Background, the Impact, and Hope

### Background

#### International Students Are Important

The participants mentioned academic, strategic, and economic reasons. Considering that the US is not producing enough graduates in science, technology, engineering, and math, retaining and staffing international students in these areas has economic importance. Many international students who earn their degrees in engineering, science, math, and computer science and decide to stay in the United States after they graduate (Aslanbeugui & Montecinos, 1998; Thomas, 2008; Vestal, 1994). For the 2006-2009 period, 44% of the international students in the US studied science and engineering (Institute of International Education, 2009). Fiegenger indicates that one third of the science and engineering doctorate recipients in 2009 were international students. The data also show that the need for international students in this area is critical. According to Bowen et al (2005) certain graduate and professional programs depend on great numbers

of foreign students in terms of teaching positions, and changes in visa policies due to security concerns may have encouraged these international students to go elsewhere.

International students provide an ambassadorial effect when they return to their countries if they have had a positive experience in the United States. They can be peace agents, which might help with the national security of the U.S. Ambassador Kenton W. Keith, Chair of Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange, indicated (2002) that having international students on college campuses helps both foreign students and domestic students better understand each other's culture and way of life. He also claimed that this type of interaction between the two groups is important for positive long-term good relations with other countries because government-to-government relations do not work as well.

#### Changes are Justifiable

The participants indicated that the changes to the visa policy were necessary for the sake of security because national security became more important in light of increased sensitivity to terrorism. Jacobson (2006) claims that public pressure compelled the government to make changes in the policies and procedures that relate to national security and that those preventive actions were executed without comprehensive planning. At the same time; however, half of the participants claimed that the changes made in the visa policy and procedures due to security measures did not provide for the need of security but instead made life difficult for international students. In 2009, over 32 million tourist visas and almost nine hundred thousand student visas were issued (Department of Homeland Security, 2011a). DHS did not scrutinize tourists as much as international students. According to Conceptual Interaction Theory (CIT), this failure



occurred as the involved actors cannot see the big picture. Therefore, the policy does not achieve its goals and objectives.

### The Impact

#### Schools Were Exposed to Some of the Changes before 9/11

All participants indicated that their institutions had been involved in a pilot program that was designed to keep track of international students before the 9/11 attacks, and this experience helped them navigate the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), the new tracking system that was introduced right after the attacks. According to CIT, involvement in the pilot program increased the quality of information the college administrators had, which increased the successful implementation of SEVIS.

#### Government Presents Challenges but Not Enough Support

The new procedures and policies put in place by the federal government created challenges for both colleges and international students, and many times the federal government, the Department of Homeland Security, and the state government did not offer any assistance or create a support system to help either institutions or students better adjust to post-9/11 changes. As Hartle (2002) indicates, the SEVIS tracking system was not ready for use immediately following 9/11, and the Department of Homeland Security did not provide higher education institutions with necessary training and clear guidance. Rosser, Hermsen, Mamiseishvili, and Wood (2006) conducted a survey that involved 1226 international education administrators, and the results showed that access to SEVIS training, system information, and computer skills directly affected their likelihood to leave the field. The study also revealed that the administrators felt that the government did not inform them about the changes to SEVIS in a timely fashion. Consistent with

CIT, as the government did not empower other involved actors, the implementation of the policy and procedures stuttered.

### Impact of SEVIS

Although some of the participants stated that SEVIS eliminated the burden of triplicate carbon paper, all participants stated that the new system mostly increased the workload of colleges. In the U.S. Visa Policy and SEVIS Survey (AACRAO, n.d.), 75% of the 384 participating higher education institutions corroborate that SEVIS has increased international education administrators' workload. Similarly, Gilman (2003) states that SEVIS increased administrative workload, and schools had to allocate significant amount of financial resources to be able comply with the new rules and regulations. The survey Rosser et al (2006) conducted concluded that increased workload that came with SEVIS significantly impacted international education administrators' morale, satisfaction, and likelihood of resignation.

### Inconsistency and Unfairness

Most of the participating administrators stated that the problem was due to a lack of ample planning and coordination in the policies and procedures rather than the changes themselves. They generally felt that the implementation was inconsistent and unfair. The current requirements for obtaining or renewing a driver's license are one of the examples for inconsistency at the state level. Another example is the millions of tourists and other individuals coming to the United States on different visas who do not go through the scrutiny that international students do. In 2009, the U.S. government issued 32,544,098 tourist visas, and in the same year, the number of visas issued to international students

was only 895,312 (Department of Homeland Security, 2011a). As the participants indicated, it appears that international students were easy target.

#### NSEERS Unfair and Not Welcoming

Many of the international education administrators felt that National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) did not actually help the US with security. In addition, they described NSEERS as “unfair” and “not welcoming”. The Department of Homeland Security (2003) included students from 25 predominantly Muslim countries in the blacklist. As the list suggests, NSEERS classified international students based on nationality and religious beliefs. Branch-Brioso (2009) claimed that one of the reasons why the number of international students decreased after 9/11 was NSEERS. Although NSEERS was in practice for only two years, the long-term, negative impact of the application is apparent (The Center for Immigrants’ Rights at the Pennsylvania State University’s Dickinson School of Law, 2009). For instance, the number of students from some of those predominantly Muslim countries is still decreasing (Branch-Brioso, 2009). As of April 28, 2011, the Department of Homeland Security removed all designated countries from the listing of NSEERS countries (Department of Homeland Security, 2011b).

#### Increased Awareness and Appreciation of Diversity and Support

This study revealed that not only the faculty and staff but also the local communities reached out to international students after the 9/11 attacks. All of the participants observed that there was increased awareness and appreciation of international presence with higher education institutions working with foreign students to help them adjust to the visa changes and comply with the new regulations and procedures.

### Impact on Students less Today

During the first a few years after the 9/11 attacks, the immediate impact of the policy changes was more than it is today. Previously, students had to wait longer for an interview to receive their visas (Gilman, 2003), and visa delays resulted in delays to scientific research, late graduation, loss of student fellowships, financial burdens on member universities and colleges, and a decline in the number of international student applications (Goodman, 2004). This study reveals that today international students know and agree to visa-related expectations. However, there is a lot of resentment as to the more stringent and prevalent requirements needed at the state and federal level. Overall, the changes to the visa policy and implementation of these changes do not seem to affect international students as much as they did right after the attacks.

### Impact on Global Competition in Higher Education

The survey research indicates that the changes to the international student visa policy and its implementation had an impact on the competitiveness of American universities in the global market (Labi, 2007). The U.S. Visa Policy and SEVIS Survey (AACRAO, n.d.) reveals that 57 percent of participating institutions say that SEVIS has caused a decrease in international student enrollment, and 82 percent claim that their international student population went down due to visa difficulties. Sixty-six percent stated that the decrease in the number of foreign students was, to some extent, due to the SEVIS user fee and visa application fee. In addition, according to Cornwell and Roberts (2010), nonimmigrant travelers to the US responded to the changes to the visa policy and procedures negatively, the study revealing that the number of non-immigrant visitors, including international students, went down drastically after the 9/11 attacks and did not

recover as fast as the number of visitors that came to the US through the Visa Waiver Program (VWP).

Many of the participating administrators think that the American higher education institutions have not recovered yet. The notoriety associated with delays in visa applications as well as arbitrary and irregular visa denials have not completely disappeared (Pew Research Center, 2010).

### Hope

#### Applications Got Better

All of the participating administrators feel that the international visa policy and procedures and the way they are implemented have gradually gotten better since 9/11 resulting from a known and transparent protocol. Additionally, the government is focused on repairing the damage done to the country's reputation. The government is also beginning to recognize the importance of the students, allowing those earning certain degrees to obtain extended Optional Practical Training (OPT-work authorization given to foreign students who graduate from American higher education institutions). These improvements are promising for the future of international education in the US.

#### Problems Exist Today But Solutions Available

Some problems still exist. For instance, in Alabama, the Department of Motor Vehicles does not renew international students' driver's licenses if there is less than 180 days on their Form I-20. Another example is the delays in OPT approvals and OPT reporting requirements for schools. SEVP is still not open to such organizations as Social Security Administration and Department of Motor Vehicles. According to CIT, the flow and quality of information shared between involved actors is important. Interaction and

cooperation between these units could solve problems related to renewing driver's licenses and expedite services international students receive from these organizations. Problems exist, but solutions available.

All the administrators see SEVIS II as an important update because international students will also be granted access to the tracking system, which will decrease the workload of schools. In addition, the new system will be completely paperless, which will increase system security.

Additionally, many of the participants feel that the Development, Relief and Education of Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act), a bipartisan legislation, may open new doors to international students. For instance, the act may provide a path to immigrant status for qualified foreign students (Batalova & McHugh, 2010).

In summary, this study aimed to describe the perspectives of international education administrators on the impact of the changes to the student visa policy and procedures. The major findings of the study are that (1) international students are important for academic, economic, and national security reasons, (2) changes to the visa policy and procedures that came after the 9/11 attacks have been justifiable, but the government did not provide appropriate and necessary support, (3) the SEVIS tracking system increased the workload of international affairs administrators on campuses, (4) the implementation of the changes to the policy and procedures were unfair and inconsistent and the best example for this is NSEERS, (5) the whole phenomenon increased awareness and appreciation of campuses and local communities towards international students, (6) student-visa applications have improved and the negative impact on students is less today, but the residual effects of the changes hampered U.S. colleges'

competitiveness in the global market, and (7) overall, there are still some problems with student visa policy and procedures; however, solutions for a consistent, coherent, reasonable, rational, and fair visa policy and procedures exist.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

The results of this study imply that the following areas would be beneficial for further research.

1. The study demonstrated that international students are invaluable assets for the US. Therefore, a comprehensive examination of the contribution foreign students make to American higher education can help college leaders and advocacy groups promote international education.
2. International students' perspective on the current visa policy and procedures is important as they are directly affected by the applications thereof. Analyzing how they identify the implementation of the policy and procedures can provide instrumental feedback to policy-makers
3. The SEVIS tracking system has been contributed major changes in student visa procedures, and this study indicated that it had a negative impact on campus administrators and students. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is expected to release a second generation tracking system, SEVIS II. In comparison to the first version of SEVIS, impact of the new system on colleges and international students is worth investigating.
4. As this study indicated, many of the changes to the student visa policy and procedures were due to security concerns that came with the 9/11 terrorist attacks. A study that examines the effectiveness of the changes to the student visa

standards in terms of national security may better justify the scrutiny international students have faced.

5. A study that investigates college administrators' efforts to increase awareness of and appreciation for true international diversity may give insights into college campus leaders' perception of scope of diversity.

### Conclusion

This qualitative survey research explored the impact of the changes to the international student visa policy and procedures after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The theoretical framework proposed that the changes to the visa regulations were linked to security concerns and creating a welcoming visa policy, and end-results of these changes depend on motivation, power, and information that involved actors possess.

The literature implied that foreign students are integral to American higher education, and there were several changes to the international student visa policy, procedures, and implementation. The drastic changes came after the 9/11 terrorist attacks with the literature emphasizing the immediate impact. The six participants of this study extended the time frame expressing the long-term impact of the changes. While themes varied as to individual values, the essential conclusion of the generated data is that for the sake of national security, the government created an inconsistent, incoherent, irrational, and unfair visa policy. The negative impact of the changes to the student visa policy and procedures is less today; however, there are solutions that may make life better for all actors that are affected by the implementation of the policy.



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Appendix 1

Interview Participant Consent Form

## INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

### Impact of changes in International Visa Policy Consent Form

You are being asked to take part in a research study of the long impact of the changes in the international student visa policy since the 9/11 attacks. I am asking you to take part because you have worked with international students. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

**What the study is about:** The purpose of this study is to learn what the effects of the changes in the international student visa policy after the 9/11 attacks are. You must be in a position which deals with international students in a higher education institutions (e.g. recruitment, admissions, compliance, and etc.) to take part in this study.

**What we will ask you to do:** If you agree to be in this study, I will conduct an interview with you. The interview will include questions about your perception on the international student visa policy, the changes in the policy since the 9/11 attacks, and how you see the past, present, and the future of international students and the visa policy. The interview will take about 30 minutes to complete. With your permission, I would also like to tape-record the interview because I will need to verbatim transcribe the interview.

#### **Risks and benefits:**

I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.

There are no benefits to you. The number of international students in American colleges has been fluctuating, and I hope to learn more about the role of the changes made in the international student visa policy.

**Compensation:** Your participation is voluntary and no compensation will be offered.

**Your answers will be confidential.** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I make public I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researchers will have access to the records. If I tape-record the interview, I will destroy the tape after it has been transcribed, which I anticipate will be within a month of its taping.

**Taking part is voluntary:** Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

**If you have questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Gokhan Alkanat. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Gokhan Alkanat at [alkango@auburn.edu](mailto:alkango@auburn.edu) or at 1-334-244-3182. If you have any questions or

concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 334-844-4784 or access their website at <http://www.auburn.edu/research/vpr/ohs/>.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent:** I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date  
\_\_\_\_\_

Your Name (printed)  
\_\_\_\_\_

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date  
\_\_\_\_\_

Printed name of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date  
\_\_\_\_\_

*This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study and was approved by the IRB on [date].*



## Appendix 2

### Recruitment Script (verbal, in person)

*(This is a brief version of the consent document.)*

My name is Gokhan Alkanat, a *graduate student* from the Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology at Auburn University. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study regarding the impact of the changes made in the student visa policy since the 9/11 attacks.

As a participant, you will be asked to share your perspective on the changes in and the current status of the international student visa policy and the impact of the changes in the international student visa policy, which have been observed since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes.

I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. There are no benefits to you. The number of international students in American colleges has been fluctuating, and I hope to learn more about the role of the changes made in the international student visa policy. Your participation is voluntary and no compensation will be offered.

If you would like to participate in this research study, I would like to email you the possible interview dates you can choose from.

Do you have any questions now? If you have questions later, please contact me at (334) 207 9617 or you may contact my advisor, Dr. David DiRamio, at (344) 844 3065.

## Appendix 3

### **Debriefing Form**

A Study of the Impact of Changes International

Student Visa Policy since the 9/11 Attacks

I would like to thank you for participating in this research project. Thanks for your time and generously sharing your knowledge and opinions with me.

**Whom to contact for more information:** If you have questions about this study, please contact Gokhan Alkanat at [alkango@auburn.edu](mailto:alkango@auburn.edu) or (334) 244 3182.

**Whom to contact about your rights in this experiment:**

Dr. Kathy Jo Ellison, IRB Chairperson at Auburn University, at [hsubjec@auburn.edu](mailto:hsubjec@auburn.edu) or (334) 844-5966

**If you are experiencing adverse consequences from this study:**

Please contact the Counselling Center at Auburn University, 400 Lem Morrison Dr., Suite 2086, Auburn, Alabama 36849, (334) 844.5123

**If you are interested in learning more about the topic of this research project, you may want to visit the following web sites:**

<http://www.iie.org/> <http://www.iienetwork.org/> <http://www.nafsa.org/> and <http://www.ice.gov>

Thank you again for your participation.

Gokhan Alkanat

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## Appendix 4

### Interview Protocol

Turn on voice recorder.

- 1- How do you think the 9/11 attacks impacted the international student visa policy?
- 2- How did you experience and respond to the changes in the student visa policy?
- 3- How do you feel about the changes made in the student visa policy following the 9/11 attacks?
- 4- How did your activities and perspective regarding international students change after 9/11?
- 5- In 2002, the Department of Homeland Security started to implement National Security Entry/Exit Registration System (NSEERS). The system required international students –mostly from Muslim countries – to report to the closest immigration office for re-registration. What do you think about this application?
- 6- What are the pros and cons of the SEVIS system?
- 7- How did the SEVIS system affect the way the Office of international Students operate
- 8- What do you think of the changes regarding international students at the state level? e.g. the state policy on issuance of driver's licenses.
- 9- How do you think international students perceive the changes to the visa policy?
- 10- How do you see the government's effort in the international education?

11- To what extent do you think the negative impact of the immediate changes made to the student visa policy still exists?

12- How do you think the changes to the student visa policy impacted the competition between U.S. and other English speaking countries?

13- What is your perception of the current international student visa policy?

14- What would you suggest the government do to improve the current student visa policy?

15- Is there anything else you would like to mention regarding student visa policy?

Thanks you for your time.

Turn off voice recorder

## Appendix 5

### Codebook

Administrators' perception (How they perceive the changes to the policy and procedures)

Contradictions (Contradictions in the policy and procedures. E.g. local vs. federal)

How administrators see NSEERS

How change affected (impact on their jobs, office operations)

How school responded to changes (adjustments, personnel issues, actions taken)

How schools worked w/students after 9/11 (support, guidance, assistance offered)

How SEVIS affected (impact on students, schools, administrators)

Impact in general

Impact on students

Impact today (current situation)

Importance of students

Is it still fresh in administrators' minds? (immediate impact of the changes right after 9/11)

Justification of changes (reasons behind the changes, why the changes can be considered acceptable)

Outliers

Positive applications (What worked well, what parts of the changes are effective)

Positive impact of changes

Preparedness of school before 9/11 (Schools were exposed to some of the changes before 9/11?)

Problems exist today (Any issues that still cause problems)

Schools' reactions (after the attacks, to policy changes, to decline in the number of internationals)

Schools' status before 9/11 (in terms of daily operations)

Schools' status today (in terms of daily operations)

Solutions Available (What needs to be done? What is on the horizon?)

Weakness of applications/changes (Weaknesses of policy, procedures, and implementations)