



Fact Sheet
Office of the Spokesman
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Improvements to Visa Processing

The U.S. Department of State has invested in systems, staffing and worked with partners within the U.S. Government to increase the transparency, efficiency and predictability of the nonimmigrant visa process.

- To assist in facilitating legitimate travel in a timely fashion, the Department of State has continued to enhance its systems to better screen applicants. The Department invested approximately \$1 million in automation for interagency linkages to improve efficiency in the interagency process.
- The Department has also invested in staff. Since 2002, over 350 new consular Foreign Service positions have been added.
- While concerns from various groups in the business, scientific and academic communities have centered on interagency clearances in Washington, only a small percentage of visa applicants are referred for an interagency clearance - 2.2% of all visa applicants last fiscal year – and the vast majority of these are now accomplished in less than a month.
- The Department of State has placed the highest priority on expediting student visas by instructing visa-adjudicating U.S. embassies and consulates to provide expedited interviews specifically for students and exchange visitors.
- These efforts have translated into results - there are recent positive indicators about international travel to the United States. The Department of Commerce recently announced that international arrivals for June 2004 year-to-date increased 16 percent over the same period last year. Making the same comparison, January 1 through June 30, 2004, nonimmigrant visa applications increased 10.4 percent and visa issuances increased 14.6 percent over the same period last year. In the same period, student visa applications increased 9.4% and student visa issuances increased 11.2%.
- The Department continually strives to provide the best possible screening of visa applicants in an effort to combat terrorism and prevent illicit technology transfer. At the same time, the Department is doing everything it can to welcome foreign visitors for legitimate travel. The Department of State understands - and strongly believes - that travel, trade and exchange of ideas are good for America and for the world.

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