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## Speeches and Remarks

### **Students: The Heart and Future of U.S.-India Relations** **By Ambassador David C. Mulford**

November 17, 2004

(This signed article appeared in the November 17, 2004 edition of The Indian Express)

As we observe International Education Week November 15-19, I am extremely proud of the fact that for the third consecutive year more Indian students than ever before and more than from any other nation are studying in the United States. They are excelling at U.S. universities and colleges where they are a vital part of academic life in America today.

From the outset of my term as Ambassador to India, I have made it a priority to help move the U.S.-India relationship from a strategic partnership to a comprehensive relationship. Great national partnerships are driven by people and ideas, not governments. Accordingly, there is no better way to build a future of people-to-people engagement than by encouraging young Indians to study in the United States, and Americans to study in India.

The United States is home to the world's best educational institutions and always ready to accept qualified students from abroad. The growth of the Indian student population in the U. S. has been phenomenal - doubling in just five years. This augurs well for the future of U.S.-India relations because it will help form strong foundations for building our comprehensive relationship.

According to the Open Doors 2004 report released on November 10 by the Institute of International Education (IIE), an independent non-profit exchange organization based in New York, Indian student enrollments in the United States continue to steadily rise. In 2003-04, 79,736 students from India studied in the United States, an increase of 6.9% from the previous year.

The growth of the international student population in the United States over the years has been a source of pride and benefit to our institutions of higher education. The number of international students in the United States grew from about 34,000 in the 1954-55 academic year to nearly 600,000 today.

Here in India, we are working hard to maintain this success, to be helpful to the universities and colleges that welcome qualified Indian students and to assist the thousands of Indian students who seek the opportunity to study in the United States. We are making our visa process smoother and more secure; we are meeting with more U.S. universities to help guide them in the large Indian market; and we are providing advice and information to Indian students at our Educational Advising Centers throughout India.

As United States Ambassador, I have met the leaders of a number of American colleges and universities, visiting India independently or as members of recruitment tour groups. All have stressed the importance they attach to encouraging foreign students in their respective academic environments. And in India, I have also had the privilege of meeting the Indian alumni of American institutions of higher education and hearing first hand of their experiences in the United States.

EducationUSA advising centers throughout India assist students interested in studying in the U.S. Our objective is to provide individual Indian students with sound and practical information and advice. Operating under the U.S. Educational Foundation in India (USEFI), their up-to-date library resources and professionally trained staff guide students through the processes of short-listing universities, application and admissions, financial planning, and pre-departure preparations.

We welcome and encourage international students to come to the United States to study. Although we have been implementing new measures to make our borders and the traveling public more secure, we have not changed the basic criteria for visa eligibility to visit or study in the United States. In fact, our visa issuance rates are now higher than in 2000 or in any year since. Our Consular officers work hard to get this word out, speaking to over 50 student groups the last 18 months as well through radio and web chats.

We are also working to make the process of acquiring a student visa to study in the United States easier and quicker. The new SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) program electronically links the college and university admission process directly to our consular offices around the world, ensuring that this key information about student admission flows smoothly and quickly. Now, thanks to a special program developed specifically for international students, U.S. embassies and consulates make special arrangements to ensure that all applicants for student visas receive expedited processing for an interview. In that way they can arrive in the U.S. in time to participate in international student orientation programs at their institution and, of course, to attend the first day of class.

The bottom line of my message is this: We want students from India and throughout the world to take advantage of the exceptional educational opportunities in the United States. Among these are universities and colleges of all descriptions and types, from small town institutions to urban campuses, from small two- and four-year colleges, and women's colleges, to large research universities. Although U.S. colleges and universities are diverse, they share many common attributes -- flexibility, individual attention, close collaboration between students and professors, hands-on learning and access to the best facilities in the world. International students who enroll in a U.S. educational institution will also have the opportunity to live in and learn about our open and culturally diverse country.

If you are thinking about your own educational future, I strongly recommend that you consider higher education in the United States. With over 3,600 fully accredited institutions of higher education, America offers numerous options from which to choose. U.S. academic institutions promote academic

freedom, enhance career potential, impart quality education, focus on skill-orientation, possess excellent library and research facilities, provide multi-cultural learning opportunities, and offer a variety of sports and extra-curricular activities.

Please visit [www.fulbright-india.org](http://www.fulbright-india.org) to locate an EducationUSA advising center closest to you for more information. When you do, you will find that the United States is not only a welcoming, safe place to visit, but a great place to study.

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