April 13, 2005

The Honorable Norm Coleman  The Honorable Jeff Bingaman
United States Senate   United States Senate
Washington, DC  20510   Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Coleman and Bingaman:

As representatives of higher education, science, and engineering organizations, we wish to thank you for introducing S. 455, the American Competitiveness Through International Openness Now (ACTION) Act, and to congratulate you on addressing a number of critical issues that our nation and our community still face.

Our organizations are strongly committed to dedicating our combined energies and expertise to enhancing homeland and national security. Our nation's colleges and universities and scientific and technical organizations are the engines of new knowledge, discoveries, technologies, and training that power the country's research enterprise and contribute greatly to economic and national security. Moreover, they are important hubs of international scientific and technical exchanges, and they play a vital role in facilitating educational and cultural exchanges that help to spread our nation's democratic values.

The policy changes you propose would help to remedy remaining problems in the U.S. visa system that are adversely affecting international students, scholars, scientists, and engineers traveling to and from the United States, and also help to counter the misperception that the United States is not a welcoming place to study and conduct research. We regard as especially important the provisions that would encourage the State Department to renegotiate visa reciprocity agreements with other countries and that would amend the Immigration and Naturalization Act to require consular officers to make visa issuance decisions based on whether a student visa applicant has sufficient financial means and a legitimate academic intent to complete a bona fide course of study in the United States.

As the United States is in a global competition for the world's best scientific and engineering talent, we greatly appreciate your legislation and subsequent efforts to build additional support for the bill.

Thank you again for your leadership in addressing this important issue to U.S. higher education and research and American economic competitiveness.

Sincerely,

Nils Hasselmo                  Alan I. Leshner
President           Chief Executive Officer
Association of American Universities                  American Association for the Advancement of Science
On behalf of:

AAUP – American Association of University Professors
ACT
American Council on Education
American Geophysical Union
American Physical Society
American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
American Society for Microbiology
Council of Graduate Schools
FASEB – Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology
IEEE – United States of America
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges
Optical Society of America
SPIE – The International Society for Optical Engineering