October 28, 2010

Dear Mr. President,

Academic exchanges are often seen as a critical component of U.S. engagement in the world and have historically been a successful tool in building relations between nations. They also present students with an unparalleled educational opportunity. Both of these values of academic exchange hold true regardless of where in the world a student studies abroad, whether in China, Indonesia, England, or Cuba. Unfortunately, however, opportunities for students to travel to Cuba on educational programs are almost non-existent due to restrictions placed on study abroad to Cuba in 2004. On behalf of the colleges and universities listed below, NAFSA: Association of International Educators and the Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA) write to respectfully ask that you include the removal of current restrictions on academic travel to Cuba in the package of new policies you are considering in response to the transition underway in Cuba and the recent release of political prisoners there.

The regulations implemented in 2004 all but put a stop to educational exchanges between the U.S. and Cuba. We greatly appreciate the work your administration is doing to make it easier for Cubans to come to the U.S. on educational and cultural programs, and hope that similar steps can begin to be taken to increase opportunities for American students to travel to Cuba. According to the latest data available, only about 250 U.S. students studied abroad in Cuba in the 2007-2008 academic year compared to more than 2,100 students who were able to study there only four years earlier.

By lifting the current regulations on academic travel to Cuba, our institutions could begin to offer many more opportunities for students to study abroad in Cuba, to learn about the rich culture and history of the island nation, and begin to make the personal connections that can serve as a valuable platform for developing mutual understanding between our countries.

Together, we respectfully ask you to lift the 2004 regulations placed on academic travel. Additionally, we ask that you work with the Office of Foreign Assets Control to ease current licensure protocols for faculty members at U.S. institutions so they can more easily travel to Cuba and work with Cuban counterparts in research, publication, and other scholarly activities. Action this year would enable many of our institutions to start developing programs for the 2011-2012 school year. These programs would open the door for students across the United
States to have the opportunity to study abroad in a country whose evolution will directly impact our own.

Sincerely,

American University  Penn State University  University of Kansas
Binghamton University, SUNY  SIT Study Abroad  University of Michigan
Drake University  Stony Brook University  University of Oregon
Duke University  Tulane University  University of Pittsburgh
Indiana University  University at Buffalo, SUNY  University of the District of Columbia
Kansas State University  University of California  Wesleyan University
Michigan State University  University of Delaware
New Mexico State University  University of Denver
Ohio State University  University of Illinois
Pacific Lutheran University  University of Iowa