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U.S. denies visas; UO students lose chance at school

■ Two Chinese MBA students will not attend the University because they did not receive visas from the U.S.

By John Liebhardt
Oregon Daily Emerald

University officials acknowledged that two Chinese students admitted to the Master's of Business program could not begin classes Monday because they did not receive visas from the United States.

Andrew Verner, director of the Oregon MBA program, said the two students were accepted and ready to begin at the University until they were denied visas from U.S. consular offices in China. After looking to Sen. Gordon Smith for aid, Verner said, the parties have dropped the case for now.

"The disconcerting thing is that U.S. counselor officials don't set specific rules" for entering the United States, Verner said.

The plight of the MBA program is one heard all over the U.S. University officials from around the country complain that the Immigration and Naturalization Service is denying Chinese students visas at a higher rate than ever before.

"This hits where it hurts most: Enrollment," said Kenneth Rogers, chair of a working group on consular affairs for NAFSA: Association of International Educators. Rogers said that visa denials were always high for Chinese students, but he saw a higher percentage this summer.

"We have stories of superior young scholars who have been turned down when they had been awarded full scholarships," said Rogers, also the associate dean of international programs at Indiana University. "These issues suggest a situation that needs some resolution, some change in immigration law."

There are over 500,000 international students in the United States. The Chronicle of Higher Education reported in July, during the 1999-2000 academic year, that 54,000 of those students were from China.

The INS says it must carefully screen Chinese students because of the high number of students who remain in the United States illegally after their visa expires. However, University officials claim they also carefully screen each applicant before issuing an acceptance letter.

Rogers said his group is now working with consular officers in China to rectify any issues. He says the biggest problem is that consular officers are turning more people away because they are receiving more applications than ever before.

"[The consular staff] is dealing with a difficult problem," he said. "They have the best of intentions, especially with seeing that many people every day."

Rogers also lauded officials who must work in a "deadly system" that allows them to make visa decisions in a matter of minutes.

Yongjun Wang, a graduate physics student at the University who came from China last year, agrees. He said the interview is a "critical" step in the long process to study in the United States.

Wang said applicants often wait in line for up to four hours for an interview, which only last between two and 10 minutes. He said the interviews take place in crowded rooms, and applicants answer questions to an official separated by bulletproof glass.

Wang said consular officers only want to know two things.

"They want to make sure that the Chinese students will come back to China after graduation, and they want to know if the student has enough money," he said.

Wang said that the interviews are a good step for the officer to determine the student's intentions. Nevertheless, he did point out that he has heard stories of arbitrary visa denials that have left some students shaking their heads.

"If I take two students, each with full financial support, both who will come back to China, one may be denied, and the other may get a visa," he said. "This does happen a lot."

John Liebhardt is the higher education editor for the Oregon Daily Emerald. He can be reached at johnliebhardt@dailyemerald.com

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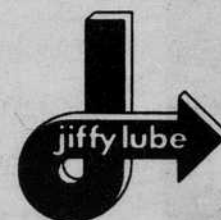
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