Policy Guidance for EducationUSA Centers on Commercial Recruitment Agents

The following policy guidance for EducationUSA Advising Centers receiving ECA support has been approved by the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Academic Programs, the Office of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs of the Office of the Legal Adviser, and the Public Diplomacy Offices for each regional bureau. Advisers at all Centers must adhere to the following ethical standards as a condition of their Centers' voluntary association with, and continued support from, ECA. We understand that many Advisers have been approached by commercial recruiters who have requested their assistance and support. We believe it is important to establish a uniform, worldwide policy to ensure that agents receive a consistent message from all EducationUSA Centers.

The ethical standards to which all EducationUSA Centers agree to adhere as a condition for their voluntary association with and/or support from ECA include offering objective, unbiased information about the full range of higher education opportunities in the United States. To ensure that all EducationUSA Centers consistently apply the same standards, we require all Center Advisers to refrain from partnering with commercial recruitment agents who have contracts to represent specific U.S. universities, as a condition for receiving ECA support. Center Advisers may provide information on the U.S. higher education system and on the application process to a wide variety of audiences including prospective students and their families, institutions of higher education, and host country government officials; however, EducationUSA Centers may not provide advising services to or with commercial agents who in turn charge to provide these services to others.

ECA's Office of Academic Programs does not permit Advising Centers that receive support from ECA to become involved with commercial recruitment agents for the following reasons:

A. Commercial recruitment agents represent only those universities that pay them a fee, and commercial agents recruit exclusively for those universities. These commercial agents do not represent the breadth of the U.S. higher education system, nor can they represent U.S. universities equitably.

B. Commercial recruitment agents restrict the options available to foreign students in the U.S., a restriction that may lead students to choose a college or university that will not meet their needs. As a result, these students may have a less than satis factory experience in the U.S., with lifelong ramifications for their educational and professional activities and views of the United States.

C. Commercial recruitment agents understandably direct their services to students with the ability to pay. EducationUSA Center association with commercial agents would undermine our public diplomacy message of outreach to well-qualified students from throughout society, including underserved sectors.

D. Since EducationUSA Centers benefit from U.S. taxpayer funds, they should avoid activities that may favor, or create perceptions of favoring, one U.S. institution over another. We can offer specific services either free or for a reasonable fee, but these services must lead to access to the full range of accredited institutions. Partnering with commercial agents would limit us to representing only those institutions with which the agents have a commercial arrangement.

E. By adhering strictly to the ethical standards of providing information that is unbiased, objective, and comprehensive, EducationUSA Centers equip foreign students to find the U.S. institutions that are right for them while enabling the full range of U.S. institutions to enroll qualified foreign students. Our goal is to invest in long-term relationships with students and institutional partners.

At each U.S. embassy, the Public Affairs Office is charged with ensuring that all EducationUSA Centers comply with this policy.