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Subject: Fw: NYT SWT piece appeared this morning

From: Ruth, Rick A
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Work Program for Foreign Students Will Not Expand During Review

By JULIA PRESTON

Published: November 8, 2011

The State Department will limit a popular cultural exchange program for foreign university students to its current size of about 100,000 students a year, a senior agency official said Tuesday.

In another measure to keep the program from growing while officials work to repair it, the State Department will not enroll any new organizations to serve as sponsors for the foreign students, said Rick Ruth, acting deputy assistant secretary of state.

State Department officials said they were preparing further changes to the Summer Work and Travel program, which gained harsh publicity in August when hundreds of international students staged a walkout to protest their work conditions at a plant packing Hershey's chocolates in Palmyra, Pa.

The program brings university students to the United States, on visas known as J-1, to work for up to four months and then travel for a month. The program is intended to allow foreign students who are not wealthy to have a brief immersion in American life at no cost to American taxpayers.

Over the past decade, what started as a cultural exchange had expanded into a vast jobs program, critics said, with little oversight from the State Department or labor authorities.

After the Hershey protest and a report last year by The Associated Press that uncovered many abuses in the program, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton ordered a full review, which Mr. Ruth said was "to ensure it fulfills its original purpose as a cultural program for foreign college students."

But for now, the department does not plan to curtail the program sharply, officials said.

The State Department relies on nonprofit sponsoring organizations to find work and lodging for the students. One sponsor, the Council for Educational Travel, USA, remains under investigation by the State Department because of the Hershey events.

The Hershey Company has continued to face protests from labor groups, led by the National Guestworker Alliance, which organized the summer walkout. They accuse Hershey of hiring foreign students to displace American workers.

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