The International Association for Dental Research (IADR) and its U.S. division, the American Association for Dental Research (AADR), appreciate the opportunity to respond to the Department of State’s notice regarding changes in information collection for individuals applying for nonimmigrant visas. Given the myriad discussions currently surrounding foreign citizens’ entry into the United States and IADR/AADR’s commitment to international scientific collaboration, we are pleased to have the opportunity to weigh in on whether the proposed changes are necessary and how they may affect those applying for nonimmigrant visas.

IADR and AADR respect the U.S. State Department’s cooperative role in keeping the United States safe and secure. Therefore, we understand the Department’s desire to change the visa application collection method from paper to electronic (DS-160) to improve efficiencies as well as its impetus for adding questions to application forms.

However, we are concerned that this proposal to request details of the applicants’ social media history as well as five years of their telephone, email address and international travel history is onerous and will deter individuals, including international students and scientists, from wanting to study and work in the United States or even attend conferences. The United States has always been committed to scientific advancement and progress and cannot afford to dissuade bright, capable individuals from bringing their talents to the U.S. research enterprise. The ramifications would be far-reaching and long-lasting.

In its report *The Next Generation of Biomedical and Behavioral Sciences Researchers: Breaking Through*, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine reveals the significant presence of international scientists working in the United States:

“A substantial proportion of biomedical postdoctoral researchers are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents. Of the biomedical postdoctoral researchers included in the 2015 [National Science Foundation Survey of Graduate Students and Postdoctorates in Science and Engineering], 53 percent held temporary visas and 31 percent reported earning their degrees in a foreign country…These percentages reflect both the openness of U.S. biomedical training and labor markets and the attractiveness of U.S. research careers to international scholars.”

To risk the loss of these researchers by creating a burdensome visa application process is to risk the makeup of America’s scientific workforce and the important and diverse perspectives that compose it.

At IADR, our more than 10,500 members from over 90 countries empower us to fulfill our mission of advancing research and increasing knowledge for the improvement of oral health worldwide. Engagement
between our members is made possible through robust partnerships built through scientific research, publications, meetings and events, including the IADR General Session, the largest scientific conference in the world for dental, oral and craniofacial research, which is held in the United States every other year. In addition, we host the AADR Annual Meeting, which also attracts a large number of international delegates. For our delegates requiring nonimmigrant visas to attend these conferences, the proposed information collection process may serve as a deterrent.

To ensure continued collaboration and robust scientific capacity, IADR and AADR ask the State Department to consider how this policy may affect nonimmigrant visa applicants, including those coming into the United States for conferences and/or short visits, and the impact it could have on how the United States is perceived abroad. We are concerned that this policy will be off-putting to our colleagues outside of the United States, many of whom may interpret it as a method to discourage scientists and students from coming to the United States.

IADR and AADR request that as the State Department moves forward in this revision process that it carefully weigh how the changes to information collection for nonimmigrant visa applicants may affect scientific exchange, including its role in attracting the best talent to the United States research workforce and providing critical opportunities for knowledge interchange at meetings.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments. If you have any questions, please contact IADR/AADR Executive Director Dr. Christopher H. Fox at cfox@iadr.org.

About the International Association for Dental Research
The International Association for Dental Research (IADR) is a nonprofit organization with over 10,000 individual members worldwide, dedicated to: (1) advancing research and increasing knowledge for the improvement of oral health worldwide, (2) supporting and representing the oral health research community, and (3) facilitating the communication and application of research findings. To learn more, visit www.iadr.org.

About the American Association for Dental Research
The American Association for Dental Research (AADR), headquartered in Alexandria, Va., is a nonprofit organization with over 3,400 members in the United States. Its mission is: (1) to advance research and increase knowledge for the improvement of oral health; (2) to support and represent the oral health research community; and (3) to facilitate the communication and application of research findings. AADR is the largest Division of the International Association for Dental Research (IADR). To learn more about the AADR, visit www.aadr.org.