

Call for more work visas — Yale president urges U.S. to raise quota for foreign graduates

By Jason Leow

BEIJING — The president of Yale University said the U.S. isn't issuing enough work visas to the highly trained foreigners who graduate from U.S. universities each year.

Visiting Beijing, Richard C. Levin said that raising the cap on so-called H-1B visas, especially for holders of doctorate degrees, is a way to ensure America's competitiveness. If he had his way, he said, he would staple green cards, as permanent resident cards are known, to their Ph.D. diplomas.

"The industrial demand for highly trained scientists and engineers is huge. Why are we forcing these people to go back to their home countries and then complaining about it?" he said in an interview.

The U.S. Congress permits 85,000 H-1B visas to be issued each year, of which about 20,000 are reserved for foreigners with a graduate degree from the U.S. There were so many applications this year the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services stopped accepting forms one day after it started the process.

Employers have put pressure on Congress to raise the visa quota, but last year's immigration bill failed to go through. "Companies want it. The universities favor it," Mr. Levin said.

Mr. Levin arrived in China on Wednesday with a 100-strong delegation of students and faculty for a 10-day trip. The visit is the result of an invitation China's President Hu Jintao extended last year when he gave a speech at Yale. The delegation met briefly with Mr. Hu on Wednesday.

Mr. Levin said the university selected students for the trip who had never been to China, as part of a move to get every Yale student international exposure. He said that Yale is setting up many programs so that every student has the opportunity to live and study abroad. In the future, he said, "one's career is going to require working across borders."

In particular, he described U.S.-China relations as the "most crucial bilateral relationship in the world right now."

As for China, Mr. Levin said its universities are beginning to embrace a broad American-style liberal-arts training, although that is happening only at the elite universities.

Almost all Chinese undergraduates now declare a major during their first year and then specialize in it. But at Peking University, as many as 10% of students take a broad range of subjects for 1 1/2 years before they pick a concentration. Fudan University has gone further, adopting the liberal-arts model for all its freshmen, he said.

He said those changes will eventually lead to more innovation. "The Chinese have recognized that part of the secret of America's economic success is the capacity to innovate both scientifically and technologically, and also entrepreneurially. This is tied up with the system of education that we have," Mr. Levin said.