



Continue to Oppose ICE Rules Threatening International Students (Updated July 18, 2020)

Support Retention of International Intellectual Capital

Columbia University Physics Graduate Council

Contribution of international students to American competitiveness¹:

\$41 billion to the U.S. economy • Half a million U.S. jobs

1 in 5 startups worth over \$1 billion • Majority of PhD Research Workforce

- [SEVP recently modified](#) the exemption made for **nonimmigrant students on F-1 and M-1** visas.
 - The order wanted to force students to take in-person classes during a pandemic solely to keep their legal visa status, **risking their lives** and the lives in their community.
 - The rule was rescinded on July 13, 2020, but [the exemption made in March suggests that new students](#) should consider deferral because they **are not allowed to come if their university offers online classes**.
- This completely **disregards** the **structure of PhD programs** and the effect on **scientific research**.
 - Students in their first years have to **pursue research and teach** while also taking courses, which are likely going to be online in the Fall of 2020.
 - The exemption has **no provisions for incoming students who'll take online courses but also teach and do research in person**, impacting the progress of science in the US.
 - **Grad students' stipends** are dependent on their research and teaching.
- It also disregards the **impact of time zones** for students taking remote online courses or teaching them as TAs, making it unsustainable and affecting their academic progress.
- It impacts students' **mental health**.
 - Students don't know what to do about **housing** with so much uncertainty.
 - They don't know what will happen to their **stipends** if they're unable to do research and teach.
 - They face a complete disruption in their **scientific careers**.
- Additionally, US visa centers and **consulates across the globe are closed** due to the pandemic.
 - Many **incoming graduate students are unable to obtain a visa** to join our research work.
 - **Students might be unable to renew their visas** once they are allowed in (after travel bans are over), so we might lose them permanently.
- Keeping international students away can cost on the order of billions of dollars and millions of jobs to the **American economy and private sector**.
- About **half of Columbia's graduate student population is on F-1 visas**, including 15 out of 19 women in physics. This is a trend in many top universities across the country.
 - Losing them would negatively impact the academic/research environment in US institutions.

¹ Further information available at [NAFSA's website](#) and from an [IHE's article](#). Also check out an [opinion piece from MIT's president](#).

Help lessen the impact of immigration policies on American universities during the pandemic. Some steps congress can take:

1. Write a **letter to DHS and ICE** requesting:
 - a. **Clarification** on the March exemption's language regarding incoming students with online classes and in-person responsibilities, such as PhD students who need to teach and do research.
 - b. That **incoming students be allowed to come in** regardless of how their classes will be delivered, given the impact of their absence on universities in the short and long term.
2. **Raise awareness** among congress members on both sides of the aisle about this issue and its unintended consequences on students' lives, American science and the American economy.
3. Send a letter to the State Department asking for:
 - a. An **alternative method to renew and emit F-1 visas**, such as mail-in or electronic option while visa processing centers are closed **during the pandemic**.
 - b. A safe way under which **students and researchers (F-1 and J-1 visas) currently stranded in countries under a travel ban** can return to the US.

How congress can help international students so future ICE rulings have less of an impact on their lives and on their community:

1. Support **domestic revalidation of F-type visas**
 - a. **Hold a hearing** to find out what the State Department would need to allow for domestic revalidation.
 - b. **Appropriate**, as necessary, resources to enable F-type visa domestic revalidation.
 - c. **Amend the 2002 Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act** to close State Department loopholes disallowing domestic F-type visa renewal.
 - d. Important in times of public health crises and travel restrictions such as the **COVID-19** outbreak.
 - e. Relieves financial burden on international students.
 - f. Prevents disruptions on their academic and research activities due to travel.
2. Encourage investigation on the increasing [F-1 student visa and OPT processing delays](#).
3. Oppose attempts to [challenge](#) the [Optional Practical Training \(OPT\)](#) and support efforts to expand this program.
4. Support an amendment to [S. 386 / H.R. 1044, the Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act of 2019](#) that would prioritize applicants who have earned advanced degrees in the US:
 - a. Annually reserve **half of all EB-2 visas** for applicants who have
 - i. **Earned advanced degrees from the United States and**
 - ii. **Have spent at least 5 years in the country.**
5. Support [S. 1744 / H.R. 4623, the Keep STEM Talent Act of 2019](#) that would support scientists who have earned advanced degrees in the US to stay in America after graduation.