

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
U.S. Department of State
Office of the Secretary
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Chad Wolf
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20528

The Honorable Eugene Scalia
U.S. Department of Labor
Office of the Secretary
Room S-2018
200 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20210

April 30, 2020

Dear Secretary Pompeo, Acting Secretary Wolf, and Secretary Scalia,

On behalf of the American Council on Education (ACE) and undersigned higher education associations, we write to you today in response to the April 22 White House executive order regarding immigration during the COVID-19 outbreak, as well as pressing issues for colleges and universities concerning the upcoming fall semester.

As part of the order, “Proclamation Suspending Entry of Immigrants who Present Risk to the U.S. Labor Market during the Economic Recovery Following the COVID-19 Outbreak,” Section 6 instructs the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Homeland Security, in consultation with the Secretary of State, to review non-immigrant programs and recommend other measures to stimulate the U.S. economy and prioritize the hiring and employment of U.S. workers. We would like to be a resource as you review these programs and respond to the executive order.

International students contribute nearly \$41 billion to the U.S. economy on an annual basis¹, positively impacting surrounding communities and entire states in addition to our campuses. According to recent ACE-sponsored research, two-thirds of U.S. voters agree that American college students benefit when they have close and regular contact with students from other countries. And 60 percent of U.S. voters agree that international students should be given the opportunity, under proper legal channels, to stay in this country to work after graduation. In addition to their overall contributions to the nation’s economy, international students are vital to the education and research enterprise.

In critical emerging industries like artificial intelligence, the U.S. maintains a decisive edge over China and other countries because of our higher education system. And many of the most talented international students who study here wish to remain to use the knowledge they learned to support domestic companies. We would be happy to provide concrete examples of their positive contributions to the U.S. economy.

¹ <https://www.nafsa.org/about/about-nafsa/new-nafsa-data-despite-stagnant-enrollment>

Further, we appreciate the guidance issued to date by the departments of State and Homeland Security (DHS) concerning visa policy and processes during the COVID-19 outbreak for our international students and scholars that pertain to the transition to online courses². This has allowed our institutions to remain flexible in the delivery of education to international students, who otherwise may have had to leave the country.

Going forward, there is still uncertainty whether U.S. consulates will be open in time to complete interviews and process visa applications for international students seeking to begin their studies for the fall 2020 semester. We ask the State Department to prioritize applications for student visas once the consulates re-open. Additionally, we ask that you consider appropriate ways to speed and ease the process, such as waiving the in-person interview for F-1 or M-1 applicants with no apparent or potential ineligibility or possibly conducting remote interviews with student visa applicants, while of course maintaining needed security protocols³. As our institutions make plans for the fall, it would also be helpful if State and DHS could extend regulatory flexibility for international students to begin their studies online, if campuses are unable to open in the fall, or student visas are delayed.

During this uncertain time, we look forward to continuing to work with you to demonstrate the importance of international students to our economy and ensure clarity for international students seeking to study in the United States.

Respectfully,



Ted Mitchell
President

On behalf of:

Achieving the Dream
ACPA-College Student Educators International
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
American Association of Community Colleges
American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Council on Education
American Dental Education Association
Associated Colleges of the Midwest
Association of Advanced Rabbinical and Talmudic Schools
Association of American Colleges and Universities
Association of American Universities
Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities

² <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/bcm2003-01.pdf>

³ April 8, 2020 letter from higher education community to Secretary Pompeo requesting flexibility for F-1 and M-1 visa applicants: <https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Letter-State-international-students-040820.pdf>.

Association of Community College Trustees
Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges
Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities
Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in Massachusetts
Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Pennsylvania
Association of Independent Colleges of Art & Design
Association of International Education Administrators
Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
Association of Presbyterian Colleges and Universities
Association of Private Colleges and Universities of Puerto Rico
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
Association of Vermont Independent Colleges
College and University Professional Association for Human Resources
Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities in New York
Common App
Consortium of Universities of the Washington Metropolitan Area
Council for Advancement and Support of Education
Council for Christian Colleges & Universities
Council for Higher Education Accreditation
Council of Graduate Schools
Council of Independent Colleges
Council on Social Work Education
EDUCAUSE
ETS
Georgia Independent College Association
Great Lakes Colleges Association
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
Independent Colleges of Indiana
Kansas Independent College Association
Maine Independent Colleges Association
Maryland Independent College and University Association
Michigan Independent Colleges and Universities
Minnesota Private College Council
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
National Association for College Admission Counseling
National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education
National Association of College and Employers
National Association of College and University Business Officers
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
National Association of Schools and Colleges of The United Methodist Church
National Association of System Heads
Network of Colleges and Universities, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Phi Beta Kappa Society
South Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities
Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association
The American Association of University Professors
Yes We Must Coalition