

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 basis<sup>1</sup>, 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.

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<sup>1</sup> <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 courses<sup>2</sup>. 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 protocols<sup>3</sup>. 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

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

<sup>3</sup> 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