

March 16, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Acting Secretary Wolf,

On behalf of the undersigned higher education associations, we write to you today to seek guidance for over 1 million international students currently studying on our campuses as well as for international scholars teaching and completing research on our campuses.

We appreciate the Department of State and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) guidance to date regarding visa policy and processes for our international students and scholars, specifically the guidance regarding J-1 visas¹, as well as Student Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) guidance regarding the transition to online courses².

As we look forward, additional questions have arisen and we would appreciate clarification, especially in light of the new travel restriction for immigrants and nonimmigrants under the recent Presidential Proclamation limiting travel from dozens of European countries. The specific questions include:

- Can students maintain their F-1 status if an institution of higher education has to completely close for a period of time during the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak? Is there any flexibility to extend their immigration status in this situation?
- If a student in F-1 status is graduating in spring 2020, but their home country is under a Level Two or Level Three Travel Health Notice, is there flexibility to extend their status if the student is unable to return to their home country? Would Optional Practical Training (OPT) be considered?
- Similarly, if a student in F-1 status is reaching the end of their OPT period, but their home country is under a Level Two or Level Three Travel Health Notice, is there flexibility to extend immigration status and work authorization if the student is unable to return to their home country?
- We expect many F-1 international students may seek to extend their stay by applying for and completing OPT. Is DHS prepared for an influx of applications for work authorization? Have the issues, which arose in summer 2019 that extended the processing time to over five months in some cases, been resolved?

¹ <https://www.nafsa.org/sites/default/files/media/document/EVP%20Sponsor%20Email%20-%20Coronavirus%20Guidance.pdf>

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

- How does State plan to process F-1, M-1, and J-1 visa applications if U.S. consular offices are closed for an extended period in affected countries?

During this uncertain time, we hope State and DHS will ensure efficient visa and immigration processing, continue to work with higher education associations to attract and retain international students, and work to ensure clarity for international students seeking to study in the U.S. We look forward to continuing to work with you on these important issues.

Respectfully,



Ted Mitchell
President

On behalf of:

American Association of Community Colleges
American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Council on Education
Association of American Universities
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities