



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GRADUATE-PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

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Organization: *National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (NAGPS)*

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Cutting Off Our Nose to Spite Our Face: The Administration Makes Another Decision that Harms International Students, Higher Education, and the Economy

On Monday, July 6th, 2020, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) announced that international students in the U.S. whose schools switch to online classes for the fall semester will have to leave the country or risk violating their visa status. [The decision](#) would prohibit any student on an F-1 visa from remaining in the country under the aforementioned circumstance. As more and more universities announce their plans for the upcoming Fall Semester, the number of students potentially affected by this decision grows.

The National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (NAGPS) condemns this decision in the strongest possible terms and calls on ICE and the administration to reverse it immediately. We also call upon ICE to provide universities with temporary flexibility to permit international students to participate in the range of in-person, online, and hybrid instruction that institutions are implementing in light of the pandemic and their local conditions.

The decision by ICE reflects a continuing trend of the current administration to go out of its way to attack international students and graduates, an already vulnerable population, who are extremely valuable to the quality and longevity of U.S. higher education and economic advancement. The decision itself is reckless and uninformed. Not only does it ignore and belie the realities of safely operating a university during a global pandemic, a situation that calls for social distancing measures such as moving to online instruction, but it demonstrates racism and xenophobia that goes against the ideals not only of this country but of the higher education system that it is clearly attacking. This decision will force universities to weigh their options to protect health and safety, as determined by the science of public health and infectious disease immunology, against a xenophobically motivated requirement to maintain status for a large portion of our student population. Rarely does a decision, such as this, that leads to zero positive attributes or outcomes.

This ICE policy calls for students to “depart the country or take other measures, such as transferring to a school with in-person instruction to remain in lawful status” if their



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university is forced to switch to all online classes during the semester because of COVID-19. It would be essentially impossible for an international student, or any student, to transfer programs mid-semester. Many of our international graduate-professional students have families: spouses and children. Should they pull their children out of school and temporarily move for a few months? What happens to their assistantship funding while they are gone? How does this policy affect students who are enrolled in thesis and dissertation credits? How does this affect international students who are working on federally supported research projects? What will happen to students whose countries' borders are closed? These are all questions that ICE and the administration should have considered but seemingly did not, before announcing this policy change.

We call upon the Director of ICE and of the Student Exchange and Visitor Program (SEVP) to reverse this decision in the interest of protecting students and their families, of maintaining the standards of American higher education, and of ensuring America's position as a global leader. We call upon members of the U.S. Congress to condemn this decision and to take action to reverse this decision if ICE does not. We call upon all of our colleagues in higher education to demand these changes as well, to stand with your students, and to uphold the values of their respective institutions. NAGPS commits to working with our partners and allies to ensure that international graduate students are rightly and justly supported. We want our international colleagues to know that we support you unequivocally and will do everything in our power to fight for you.

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