



July 8, 2020

The Honorable Chad Wolf  
Acting Secretary  
United States Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf,

I write to you to express my grave concern about the July 6, 2020 modification of Student and Exchange Visa Program (SEVP) policy for nonimmigrant students taking online courses in the fall 2020 semester. I strongly urge the Department of Homeland Security to rescind this announcement, and instead extend the flexibility provided in the April 2020 guidance on this issue.

The announced policy creates uncertainty and complexity for our international students and limits their ability to continue their education in the upcoming academic year. Under the new policy, international students taking online only courses would not be able to remain in the United States.

At Stanford, we stand in full support of our international community. Our international students have come to the United States to fulfill a lifelong dream to study and learn, and once here, they become a part of the fabric of our community. We must keep the commitments we made when we first welcomed them here to study in the United States and allow them to continue to make progress toward completing their degrees. In addition, welcoming talented people from around the globe to come to America's leading research universities is not only essential to the discovery and transmission of knowledge but it also contributes to the innovative work being done to create a brighter future for our nation.

Unfortunately, this announcement forces international students and institutions to make choices they should never have to make – between students' health and safety and their education. I was grateful for the regulatory flexibility that the Administration put in place to ensure the continuity of both our academic and research missions during the early months of the pandemic. That policy decision enabled the higher education sector to quickly transition to online education as we worked to respond to the unprecedented circumstances brought on by this global pandemic.

The Honorable Chad Wolf

July 8, 2020

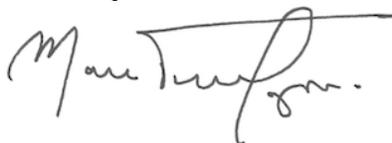
Page 2

It is abundantly clear that as we adjust to continued changes that include the growing prevalence of cases in many communities across the country, there is a need for continued flexibility to allow institutions to make reasoned decisions in line with local and state guidance that prioritize the health and welfare of all members of our campus community. For example, if circumstances change in the coming months, it is conceivable that institutions may need to quickly move from hybrid or in-person to online offerings. In such a scenario, international students would immediately be forced to leave the country creating a myriad of problems, including the fact that many countries have barred entry from the United States. Creating this circumstance for students we have welcomed into our country is not fair or just.

What is not needed are the strict regulations described in Monday's announcement that may force international students on valid visas to leave the country. The announcement does not provide the needed flexibility to resume educational activities for all our students, nor does it address the needs of the multi-faceted plans that universities like Stanford have put in place to safely resume residential education. Before a final temporary rule is published, I therefore urge you to rescind this announcement, and instead extend and expand the flexibility provided in April 2020. This would allow international students who have a valid visa or are awaiting visa processing, and are enrolled in a full-time course load for the upcoming academic year, to continue their education in the United States by the best methods that the universities can provide under difficult and changing conditions.

International students desperately need strong signals that the United States welcomes them. The proposed temporary rule does the opposite. I hope to work with you to address these concerns and improve the ability of students, educators and researchers from across the globe to come to the United States, which is essential to the long-term strength of our nation's innovation economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marc Tessier-Lavigne". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end.

Marc Tessier-Lavigne