

STANFORD  
UNIVERSITY



MARC TESSIER-LAVIGNE  
*President*

March 11, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken  
Office of the Secretary  
Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas  
Office of the Secretary  
Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Mayorkas,

On behalf of the Stanford community, I write to congratulate you on your recent confirmations. I also wanted to take this opportunity to share our experiences at Stanford and provide you with my perspective on what is needed to continue to draw the best and the brightest to the United States. American scientific leadership has benefited greatly from talent from around the globe and our competitive edge depends on continuing to attract top international students and scholars.

We are grateful for the actions taken in the early days of the Biden-Harris Administration to reverse many of the discriminatory policies put in place by the previous Administration. These policies impeded our ability to educate future leaders, drive discovery and innovation, and fuel economic progress.

Ability to attract top talent would be further enhanced by strong statements from you and others at the highest levels of the new Administration that the United States welcomes all international students and scholars and supports the programs, such as Optional Practical Training (OPT), that are key to encouraging the gifted minds of the world to choose to study and work in America. In particular, I am deeply concerned about the challenges that our students and colleagues from certain countries, including those from China, have faced in their ability to learn, collaborate, and make contributions to our fundamental research enterprise. I strongly urge you to ensure that all legitimate students and scholars are still welcome to come to the United States.

I understand and appreciate the ongoing concern of the federal government in protecting intellectual property and safeguarding American economic and national security. We believe that universities, including Stanford, have a responsibility to attend to these issues diligently. Our information security practices, disclosure protocols, policies for review of new research engagements, and policies to ensure compliance with federal regulation all aim to protect the integrity of Stanford research.

Office of the President

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The Honorable Antony Blinken and the Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas

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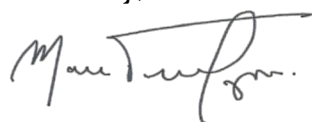
Our country must work toward policies that simultaneously advance innovation and protect national and economic security. I respectfully ask you to eliminate all the policies of the previous Administration that included blanket limitations, revocations, or eliminations of visas for international students and scholars. Any restrictions should be narrowly tailored to those individuals that pose security risks based on credible intelligence and evidence. Additionally, I urge the Department of Homeland Security to withdraw the proposed rule to limit authorized periods of admission and stay for international students and exchange visitors, as well as the interim final rules that make it harder for individuals to receive H-1B visas.

While we are all hopeful that we are nearing the end of the pandemic, COVID-19 has had a dramatic impact on our international students and scholars. The guidance provided by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program in March 2020 that allowed international students and scholars to continue their education regardless of whether it is in person or online should be extended and expanded to include new and transfer students. This continued flexibility will give colleges and universities the ability to make reasoned decisions, in line with local and state guidance, to prioritize the health and welfare of all members of our campus community as we continue to navigate the coronavirus pandemic.

To not only support the nation's scientific workforce, but also our ability to persuade international students to come to the United States, I also encourage the Departments of State and Homeland Security to work together to address delays, give international students and scholars priority in the visa appointment process, and consider ways to speed and ease the consideration of their visas and work authorization applications. We are grateful for the steps already taken to address delays in OPT application processing but encourage you to look for additional ways to provide flexibility, such as allowing students that are unable due to the pandemic to meet the requirement to be physically present in the U.S. to submit an OPT application, to be allowed to mail an application for OPT and STEM OPT from abroad.

Our mission as a university depends upon the presence and participation of people from all over the world, from all walks of life. As an immigrant myself, I know firsthand the value of bringing diverse expertise and perspectives together in our classrooms and in our research labs. I look forward to working with you to improve the ability of talented people from around the globe to contribute to the work being done to create a brighter future for our nation and our world. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if I can ever be of assistance.

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 to the right.

Marc Tessier-Lavigne