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Support International and Immigrant Student Workers A Petition to Universities

In the last few years we have seen an intensification of attacks upon minority, immigrant, and international student workers. We recognize these developments as evidence of further institutionalization of a climate of virulent xenophobia and racism. In particular, the Department of Homeland Security now sees all “non-citizens” as enemies of the state that must be surveilled, controlled, and sometimes expelled.

[Policies have been created to terrorize immigrants](#), including the dismantling of the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) program, immigration raids by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), attacks on asylum-seekers, continued separation of families at the border, and the entrapment of international students through [fake universities set up by ICE](#).

At the same time, the 2017 [travel ban](#), affecting citizens of seven countries (Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Syrian, Sudan, and Yemen) travelling to the USA, has now been [extended to enforce travel restrictions upon six more countries](#): Nigeria, Myanmar, Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Sudan, and Tanzania. The travel ban affects both immigrant and non-immigrant visas; for example, [according to NAFSA](#), under the travel ban, student visa holders from Iran and Venezuela are explicitly subject to extra vetting and screening, while nonimmigrant visas for Syrian nationals are still suspended. These same restrictions make the lives of non-citizens significantly worse during this pandemic, including international and immigrant student workers.

These discriminatory processes have tended to affect students in STEM and STEM-adjacent fields severely. For instance, Chinese students in STEM fields are, [in the name of national security](#), often restricted to one-year visas, whose renewal is difficult and prone to delay. This precarious condition has only been worsened by COVID-19-[related](#) travel restrictions and related discrimination against some Asians and Asian Americans.

With increasing frequency, student workers face harassment at embassies or consulates abroad (in applying for or renewing visas), at the border (denial of entry, detention), and within the United States (in applying for or processing immigration or citizenship status; raids and deportation). The toll of these policies is severe. As a coalition of international and immigrant graduate student workers from campuses across the United States, we call on our universities to take concrete steps without delay.

Our demands are particularly important at the time of a pandemic like this, which will exacerbate existing forms of precarity. Based on our experience with ongoing sanctuary movements and union negotiations, we demand our universities adopt this non-exhaustive list of measures to support and protect all student workers:

- **Condemn xenophobic immigration legislation, including the travel bans, in the strongest possible terms.** Its vetting procedures, suspension of rights, and sowing of a culture of fear is in clear violation of the non-discrimination policies and commitment to student and scholar mobility that our universities claim to celebrate.
- **Establish an emergency relief fund to mitigate expenses** (travel, visa application, housing) encountered by international and immigrant students as a consequence of discriminatory policies, including but not limited to the current travel bans and changes to TPS and DACA policies.
- **Provide legal support** by covering all legal costs incurred by international and immigrant students when they need to seek independent legal counsel, and setting up a well-staffed resource center and legal clinic with dedicated, free-of-cost immigration legal representation and advice. It is outrageous [that students are crowdsourcing legal expertise](#).
- **Provide guaranteed paid leave for student workers** who must set aside time for immigration interviews and hearings, apply for and renew visas or work authorization, both for themselves and their families.

- **Commit to re-hiring student workers after reinstatement of their work authorization**, in cases where suspension or termination of work authorization were due to reasons outside of the student-worker's control.
- **Create and publicize protocols for responding to sudden changes in immigration policy and practices.** These protocols should, at a minimum, include a plan to provide support in the form of continuing enrollment, fellowships, stipends, access to housing and health-insurance, and where possible allow for continuing fulfillment of work and school responsibilities offsite. In particular, they should account for future pandemics and new restrictions on OPT.
- **Commit to a sanctuary policy in relation to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Department of Homeland Security.** These measures should include a protocol that will specify practices for collecting and protecting data related to citizenship and immigration status or intent; denying requests to share information with government agencies such as ICE or CBP unless mandated by law as well as enforcing the distinction between public and employee spaces, the latter of which ICE/CBP are not allowed to access without a warrant signed by a judge. Student workers should be informed of such requests, and administration and staff should be trained on how to respond to them.
- **Waive international student fees for all student workers.** Fees that only a portion of the student body pays for, which are outside of the control of the students, are blatantly discriminatory.
- **Avoid referring student workers to law enforcement agencies** and instead establish new protocols regarding law enforcement in cases of minor criminal citations and misdemeanors by providing better counseling and mediation.
- **Advocate actively and transparently for international and immigrant students** at the municipal, state, and federal levels through participation in organizations such as the President's Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, including for proposals such as an extension on grace periods for student visa-holders, the waiving of proof of finances documentation requirements, cancellation of the new public charge rule, and revocation of racist immigration-related Executive Orders.
- **Form on-campus committees** consisting of students, faculty, unions and staff in cooperation with existing on-campus immigrant rights groups to assess and address the evolving needs of all those affected.
- **Listen** to groups that represent affected student workers. In particular, recognize and bargain with student-worker unions, and support and cooperate with undocumented student groups. In addition, allow these groups to participate in all student and worker orientation events for incoming students.

Signed,

Organizing Committee, Graduate Workers of Columbia

International Students Working Group, GWC-UAW 2110

International and Immigrant Students' Working Group, GSOC

GSOC-UAW Local 2110

International Scholars Working Group, Harvard Graduate Students Union UAW 5118

UMass Amherst, GEO-UAW 2322

International Students Committee, UC Student Workers' Union, UAW 2865

International Students and Workers Caucus-GEO UAW 2322

SENS-UAW Local 7902, Academic Student Workers at The New School

Graduate Rackham International, University of Michigan

Princeton Graduate Students United (PGSU)

University of Chicago Graduate Students Union

Graduate Student Employees Union (GSEU) Stony Brook

About International and Immigrant Student Workers Alliance:

We are a group of international and immigrant student workers across the United States committed to fighting for the rights and advocating for the interests of student workers who do not have the protections afforded by US citizenship, including those holding student visas, refugee or asylum status, or DACA/TPS status. We aim to secure improved work conditions and protections from discrimination by establishing networks of solidarity across campuses and student worker unions. Go to facebook.com/iiswalliance for more information.