

July 13, 2020

Student and Exchange Visitor Program
National Security Investigations Division
US Immigration and Customs Enforcement
500 12th St, SW Stop 5600
Washington, DC 20536

Dear Colleagues:

On behalf of the Association for Psychological Science, an international organization of over 30,000 members dedicated to the advancement of research psychology, I request that you reverse your planned modifications to temporary exemptions for nonimmigrant students taking online classes due to the pandemic for the fall 2020 semester, announced July 6, 2020.

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) introduced its temporary exemptions for the spring and summer semesters as a response to COVID-19. Public health data make it clear that the threat of COVID-19 has not passed; in the US, cases are again on the rise. Given that many colleges and universities around the US are moving largely to online or hybrid classes for fall 2020, the planned modifications wrongly require many students attending US schools to decide whether to risk their physical and mental health to continue or complete their educations. We urge SEVP to continue its temporary exemptions at least until a vaccine or cure for COVID-19 is discovered.

Psychological science, like all scientific disciplines, is a global enterprise. Scientific progress requires fewer barriers to research and education, not more; US and global science benefit alike from a freer flow of ideas and the people behind them. Ending this exemption sends a message to students from other countries receiving educations in the US that they are not welcome. It directly impedes the development of knowledge and the pace of discovery, including discovery of ways to better mitigate or prevent COVID-19's effects.

We write to you on this issue because we are certain that reversing these planned modifications is best for global progress in psychological science; however, the US should have a vested interest in encouraging students from outside of its borders to continue in their programs in this country. These students are not displacing US students—far from it. The National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics notes that the US scientific workforce faces a tremendous talent gap, and as many talented scientists as possible should be permitted to remain in the country to meet these needs.¹ Similar analyses show that a majority of science and engineering PhD students with temporary visas stay in the US for at least five years after

¹ National Science Board. (2019). *The Skilled Technical Workforce: Crafting America's Science & Engineering Enterprise*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nsf.gov/nsb/publications/2019/nsb201923.pdf>

obtaining their degrees, contributing their skills and expertise to the country.² The COVID-19 crisis shows the need for an educated, broad, international scientific workforce—in fact, the students who could be forced out of their programs today might have the answers to our next global catastrophe.

NSF's data show that over 4,100 individuals on temporary visas received their PhDs in psychology between 2000 and 2017.³ These scientists have gone on to make significant contributions on a global stage to our field, ranging from discoveries in molecular aspects of genetics to advances in understanding of the ways groups and communities behave and interact. A disruption in this pipeline of talent—especially at a time when so many around the world are suffering from COVID-19's impact—will halt our field's ability to advance human welfare and issues of public interest.

Again, I urge you to reverse the planned modifications to the SEVP program. Beside scientific progress, the lives and livelihoods of many students require it.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Sarah Brookhart
Executive Director

² National Science Board. (2020). *The State of U.S. Science and Engineering 2020*. Retrieved from: <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsb20201/u-s-and-global-education>

³ National Science Board. (2020). *Higher Education in Science and Engineering*. Retrieved from: <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsb20197/international-s-e-higher-education#tableCtr1554>