



The President

June 22, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary, U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security
300 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Acting Secretary Wolf:

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges to higher education, as it has to so many other sectors of American society. Among the steps that universities took this spring to flatten the curve and reduce the risk of the disease overwhelming our health care systems was to depopulate our campuses, sending thousands of US and international students home to complete their semesters remotely. We greatly appreciated the Administration's swift decision to waive regulations to enable our international students to study online and retain their immigration status. Similarly, the Administration's decision to suspend the "5-month rule" alleviated great concern for international students who otherwise would have to return to the United States this summer to maintain active international student status.

I write today because I am deeply worried about proposed changes to regulations regarding the temporary suspension of non-immigrant visas and renewals, in particular in the H1B and J1 visa programs, and the proposed curtailment of the Optional Practical

Training (OPT) Program. Changes to these programs will do deep and long-lasting harm to our mission to attract the best talent from around the world to the United States.

The University of Pennsylvania each year sponsors close to 1,500 students to participate in the OPT program. The best students from around the world choose the United States in part because of the OPT program, which allows them to put their knowledge into action through employment. The United Kingdom, which suspended its post-graduation employment scheme for international students in 2012, [reinstated it](#) in 2019 after determining that it was not remaining competitive in bringing top talent to the UK. Changes to this program will discourage young people from studying in the United States, harm our institutions of higher education and, ultimately, weaken our nation's competitive posture.

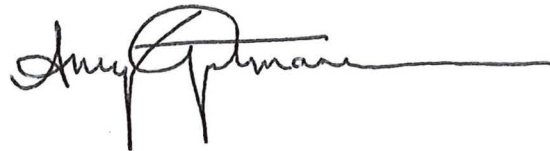
Similarly, the H1B and J1 non-immigrant visa programs are critical to our ability to attract top talent to the United States. Last year, Penn sponsored nearly 500 H1B visas and more than 1,340 J1 international scholars. These visas enabled experts in heart and lung transplants, animal behavior, pediatric genealogy, energy conversion and storage, sustainable agriculture and herd management, archeology, COVID-19 patient treatment, testing development, and research and many other fields to work in the United States at great benefit to our city, state, and country. Even a temporary, short-term suspension of this program has a negative effect on the community of scientists and scholars who cannot help but wonder if they are welcome in America.

These steps, coming on the heels of the May 29 Proclamation suspending immigration for certain students and scholars from the People's Republic of China, are taking a deep, psychological toll on our global community at Penn. They suggest that America does not value its international students and scholars for the great benefits they bring to communities around the country. I urge you to reconsider any actions to curtail or limit the OPT program and to maintain current policies for H1B, J1 and other non-immigrant visa categories.

This spring, as Penn students were logging on to remote classrooms by the thousands, tens of millions of US K-12 students were using Google Classroom to continue their education and ensure that America's talent pipeline remains intact. I am proud that Google is led by Sundar Pichai, who came to study at Penn in 2000 as an international student and who subsequently remained in the United States to work after graduation and eventually become a US citizen. There are thousands of stories like Sundar's,

thousands of international students who dedicate their talents to serve and benefit the United States by pursuing careers in the United States. **Please do not take actions that would prevent these talented young people—future inventors, entrepreneurs, and scholars—from coming to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and America.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amy Gutmann", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Amy Gutmann

c: Senator Patrick Toomey
Senator Robert Casey
Representative Brendon Boyle
Representative Matt Cartwright
Representative Madeleine Dean
Representative Michael Doyle
Representative Dwight Evans
Representative Brian Fitzpatrick
Representative Chrissy Houlahan
Representative John Joyce
Representative Fred Keller
Representative Mike Kelly
Representative Conor Lamb
Representative Daniel Meuser
Representative Scott Perry
Representative Guy Reschenthaler
Representative Mary Gay Scanlon
Representative Lloyd Smucker
Representative Glenn Thompson
Representative Susan Wild



**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

July 2, 2020

Ms. Amy Gutmann
University of Pennsylvania
1 College Hall, Room 100
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6380

Dear Ms. Gutmann:

Thank you for your June 22, 2020 letter expressing support for international students and scholars. Acting Secretary Wolf asked that I respond on his behalf.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has no greater responsibility than ensuring the safety and security of our country. Responding to the pandemic requires everyone to work within rapidly changing, complex circumstances that create a variety of situations and conditions unique to individuals and communities. Our primary goal is to ensure the safety of the public and our employees as the situation evolves.

We recognize that there are immigration-related challenges that individuals, including international students and scholars, and employers face as a direct result of the national emergency and as the first phases of reopening begin. We carefully analyze these issues and leverage our resources to effectively address these challenges within our existing authorities. DHS continues to act to protect the American people and our communities and is considering a number of policies and procedures to improve the employment opportunities of U.S. workers during this pandemic.

With regard to the visa process, we defer to our colleagues at the Department of State. For individuals within the United States, it is important for us to emphasize that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) continues to accept and process petitions and applications for immigration benefits from the foreign student population such as extension and change of status applications, as well as applications for employment authorization. We consider special circumstances and expedite requests of individual applications on a case-by case basis. Further, as we announced in our public-facing website, several options are available to nonimmigrants to extend their stay or change their status.¹

We work closely with our colleagues at U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to coordinate on issues affecting international students due to the pandemic. ICE has developed a website with responses to frequently asked questions about the impact of COVID-19 on Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) certified schools and the various scenarios that F and M students may encounter, including issues related to Optional Practical Training.

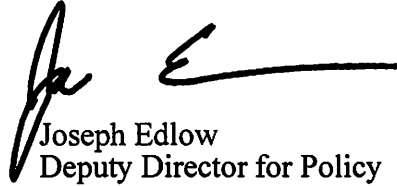
¹ Our website provides additional information regarding special circumstances, expedite requests, and options for nonimmigrants to extend or change their status.

Ms. Amy Gutmann
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Both the ICE and USCIS websites and outreach efforts provide guidance, resources, and information to the public on the actions and policies we are implementing through these uncertain times.²

Thank you again for your interest in this issue. We will consider your recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ja' followed by a long horizontal stroke with a small upward curve at the end.

Joseph Edlow
Deputy Director for Policy

² For policy updates, operational changes, and COVID-19 information, please visit uscis.gov/coronavirus (USCIS) and ice.gov/coronavirus (ICE SEVP).