



GWC-UAW LOCAL 2110

THE UNION FOR RESEARCH AND TEACHING ASSISTANTS AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



May 22, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
U.S. Department of State
Office of the Secretary
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Chad Wolf
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20528

The Honorable Eugene Scalia
U.S. Department of Labor
Office of the Secretary
Room S-2018 200
Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20210

Dear Secretary Pompeo, Acting Secretary Wolf, Secretary Scalia, and New York State Congressional Delegation:

We write in response to the White House Executive Proclamation of April 22, 2020, which asked your offices to “review nonimmigrant programs and ... recommend other measures appropriate to stimulate the United States economy.”

International students have become an integral part of United States universities and look to Optional Practical Training (OPT) as the one of the few reliable options available to them to work in the United States after graduation. Their work, before and after graduation, plays an essential role in driving U.S. leadership in innovative technology, breakthroughs in cures to our most threatening diseases including COVID-19, efforts to address major challenges like climate change and infrastructure problems, teaching our next generation of leaders, and contributing their knowledge and skills to solving some of our most pressing problems. The Graduate Workers of Columbia-UAW, representing over 3,000 research and teaching assistants at Columbia University, write to call on the Executive to reverse any limitation or suspension of immigration programs; and urge preservation and expansion of current programs critical for non-immigrant visas holders at universities, such as Optional Practical Training (OPT) and Curricular Practical Training (CPT), the J-1 exchange visitor program, the H-1 specialty worker program, and the O-1 program for individuals with extraordinary ability/achievement.

Recent [data](#) shows that international students routinely stay in the U.S. to contribute to the U.S. economy with their expertise that they acquire studying in U.S. universities. Another study points out that unemployment would actually [increase](#) if immigration were restricted. Thus assertions such as those expressed by the May 7, 2020 letter sent to President Trump by Senators Cotton, Cruz, Grassley, and Hawley are not borne out by evidence.

COVID-19 has affected all workers and sectors in the U.S. and scapegoating international students and scholars is not a solution. Besides protecting these programs, we further call on our government to provide the following resources to support international students and scholars:

- Extend the time international students can study abroad due to delays in returning or entering the United States;
- Work to expedite delays in visa processing caused by the pandemic and its aftermath;
- Allowing international students to apply for OPT while outside of the country;
- Support the extension of grace periods of international student visas.

Sincerely,

Graduate Workers of Columbia
GWC-UAW Local 2110