



Michael V. Drake, MD
President

Office of the President
1111 Franklin St.
Oakland, CA 94607

universityofcalifornia.edu

April 30, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St NW
Washington, DC 20520

CAMPUSES

[Berkeley](#)
[Davis](#)
[Irvine](#)
[UCLA](#)
[Merced](#)
[Riverside](#)
[San Diego](#)
[San Francisco](#)
[Santa Barbara](#)
[Santa Cruz](#)

MEDICAL CENTERS

[Davis](#)
[Irvine](#)
[UCLA](#)
[San Diego](#)
[San Francisco](#)

NATIONAL LABORATORIES

[Lawrence Berkeley](#)
[Lawrence Livermore](#)
[Los Alamos](#)

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Ave NW
Washington, DC 20016

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Mayorkas:

On behalf of the ten campuses of the University of California (UC), which represent more than 285,000 students, 216,000 faculty, staff, and other academics, and more than two million living alumni, we write to express the urgent need for immediate action to allow international students and scholars to travel to higher education institutions in the United States for the fall 2021 academic term.

UC is proud to be the university of choice for over 43,000 international students and scholars that contribute to the vitality of U.S. education, research, culture, and innovation. As our nation rounds a historic corner in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and universities safely plan for the much-anticipated return to in-person instruction for fall 2021, UC is concerned for the thousands of UC international students and scholars that remain abroad, unable to enter the United States due to suspended or reduced services at many U.S. embassies and consulates, and existing travel restrictions put in place at the start of the pandemic.

International students, who typically begin arranging travel plans for fall instruction in spring, are particularly affected by delayed visa interviews and processing. We understand that services have improved in some parts of the world. We are grateful for these improvements and for new initiatives to resolve challenges, such as the recent agreement to prioritize Indian students on F-1 visas. Unfortunately, acute problems remain, including in China and other countries that are home to UC's largest number of international students. Interview delays also create difficulties for international scholars who provide research expertise and instruction on UC campuses. In addition to visa challenges, restrictions on travel from specific countries and regions continue to limit the ability of international students and scholars to travel to the United States. The student exception for the UK, Ireland and Schengen Area provides some relief, but remaining restrictions preclude travel for the majority of international students and many scholars. We greatly appreciate the exception for these students, but believe it should be expanded responsibly.

The potential impact of not remedying these concerns promptly is profound, with lingering effects. International students and scholars bring unique and valuable contributions and perspectives that diversify our universities and contribute to work that is often of crucial, national, and international importance. Their ideas, insights, and energies are essential to discovery, innovation, and creative expression, providing benefits not only to our campuses but to all aspects of American society. Additionally, they are significant contributors to local, state, and national economies. According to NAFSA: The Association of International Educators, international students alone contributed \$38.7 billion to the U.S. economy and supported 415,996 jobs nationwide during the 2019-2020 academic year. In California, international students contributed \$6.6 billion to the state economy, and supported 69,154 jobs.

Due to COVID-19-related factors, international student numbers declined six percent between fall 2019 and fall 2020, a decrease partially due to students' inability to arrive for the academic year and their preference not to pursue remote education. Unless corrective measures are applied soon, we anticipate an even steeper decline in international student enrollment numbers, as those students who postponed their 2020-21 enrollment are joined by students admitted for fall 2021. Additionally, given that UC campuses plan to return to in-person instruction in the fall, we anticipate far fewer remote learning options for students who cannot arrive on campus, further exacerbating international student enrollment decline. Across UC, we currently have 1,300 fewer international scholars pursuing research opportunities as a result of the pandemic and related travel restrictions. Because these scholars face visa and travel challenges similar to those of international students, we expect a continuation of this low level of academic participation unless these challenges are addressed.

Among our student population, we have nearly 16,000 current international students who either departed the United States at the start of the pandemic or were never able to enter the country to begin courses during the fall 2020 academic year. Our international students have struggled in the remote environment due to time zone differences, insufficient access to high-speed broadband, and in some cases, in-country censorship of course materials. Furthermore, we anticipate the enrollment of over 14,000 new international students for fall 2021; however, this number is likely to decrease if the issues identified in this letter are not addressed.

Institutions of higher education are at a decisive point-in-time for fall 2021 academic planning and related visa processing. We appreciate and thank you both for the recent announcements regarding the extension of SEVIS guidance and national interest waiver exceptions for China, Iran, Brazil, South Africa, Schengen Area, UK, and Ireland. We respectfully urge the U.S. Departments of State and Homeland Security to coordinate and to consider the following measures to address the urgent situation:

- Resume normal visa services in locations where they have been suspended or limited, including F-1 appointments and processing in China. We understand that, in addition to COVID-19-related factors, reduced services may be related to reductions in funding for embassies and consulates, and request that additional resources be made available to address any shortfalls.
- Expand the waiver of in-person visa interviews, or allow for online interviews, for new F student and J exchange visitors to address potential processing backlogs. In addition, encourage consular officers to increase the use of interview waivers for those visa holders already made eligible per earlier U.S. Department of State policy revisions.

- Expand the travel restrictions exemption for international students beyond the recently expanded lists of countries and consider a similar exemption for international scholars. Such exemptions could accommodate those countries, which are subject to travel restrictions but where COVID-19 rates are low relative to countries where restrictions are currently not in place.
- Issue guidance for fall 2021 for initial and initial transfer students so that universities can provide appropriate guidance for those students.

We appreciate your consideration of our requests and continued support for international students and scholars that further strengthen institutions of higher education in the United States. If you have questions regarding UC's requests, please contact Chris Harrington, Associate Vice President in UC's Office of Federal Governmental Relations, at Chris.Harrington@ucdc.edu or 202-997-3150. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Michael V. Drake, MD
President, University of California System



Chancellor Carol T. Christ
University of California, Berkeley



Chancellor Gary S. May
University of California, Davis



Chancellor Howard Gillman
University of California, Irvine



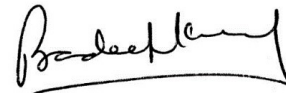
Chancellor Gene D. Block
University of California, Los Angeles



Chancellor Juan Sánchez Muñoz
University of California, Merced



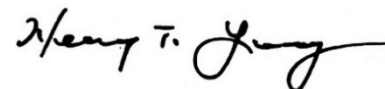
Chancellor Kim A. Wilcox
University of California, Riverside



Chancellor Pradeep Khosla
University of California, San Diego



Chancellor Sam Hawgood
University of California, San Francisco



Chancellor Henry T. Yang
University of California, Santa Barbara



Chancellor Cynthia K. Larive
University of California, Santa Cruz

cc: California Congressional Delegation
Provost Michael Brown
Senior VP for External Relations and Communications Claire Holmes
Associate VP for Federal Governmental Relations Chris Harrington