



CORRECTED UPDATE: *This message from the Gillings School's Dean's Council was updated July 10, 2020, to include a corrected list of the names of signatories.*

July 10, 2020

Dear Gillings Community,

We, leaders of UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health, want our international students to know that we welcome you, value you and stand with you. We are sad, disappointed, and, frankly, angry about the July 6 [policy](#) from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) requiring international students within the United States to be enrolled in at least one in-person class to maintain their visa status in fall 2020. It is appalling that international students in the U.S. whose courses may be online-only due to COVID-19 are being required to leave the United States or face immigration consequences.

We are opposed strongly to the new ICE policy. It is unnecessary, unreasonable, harassing and cruel, and will discourage talented international students from attending U.S. institutions of higher education. To institute the policy now, nearly at the last minute, leaves students potentially stranded in a sea of uncertainty with no life rafts. We empathize with Gillings students and all international students.

Online instruction has become an accepted mode of academic training and is a critically important option for delivering high-quality education in the time of COVID-19. All our students – including international students – should be able to continue their education remotely, if needed. It would be irresponsible *not* to provide this option if circumstances require it. In a pandemic this country has not yet controlled, it is unfair and mean-spirited to punish international students for something over which they have no control. Much like the current administration's formal withdrawal from the World Health Organization (WHO) this week, this new policy regarding international students is another piece of a strategy of self-isolation. In national periods of fear and stress, for example, the 1920s and 1930s, the country sometimes has defaulted to isolation. It has never made the U.S. stronger and it will not strengthen us now.

Public health is global health. It is difficult to imagine a 21st century nation that bars international students from college campuses, tech companies and other organizations. We are the Gillings School of *Global* Public Health. We want and need to have international students in our midst, along with international faculty and staff, to be global citizens, to solve global and local problems, to be part of global collaborations, to learn about the world with humility. Public health problems aren't limited by national borders, as we have seen with COVID-19 and many other public health challenges. Public health is local and global. We all need opportunities to work together with our global colleagues to solve these problems. We join the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health ([ASPPH](#)) in calling

for Congress and the courts “to reverse these mean and misguided policy changes, intended to marginalize those whose only crime is to seek to improve the health of everyone, everywhere.”

We stand with our international students. To our international students: we are extremely frustrated that this policy has been enacted. You are smart, enthusiastic, service-minded and enrich us and the Gillings community. You bring invaluable experience and perspectives; and you are making important contributions that will help shape the future of public health. You became part of our community in good faith, and now have become pawns in what amounts to a political battle that is mean-spirited, unfair and unjust. We empathize with you, are outraged on your behalf, and are committed to help you navigate these barriers, even as we work to overturn this unjust rule.

Support for international students. Dr. Barbara Stephenson, our university’s vice provost for global affairs and chief global officer, together with University Global Affairs leaders, are working quickly to develop pathways for international students and have organized information sessions to respond to immediate questions, including one for graduate students tomorrow morning (Friday, July 10, 8:30 am, ET; register [here](#) to receive link to join). The university’s director of International Student and Scholar Services ([ISSS](#)), Ioana Costant, JD, has written to all international students to clarify current guidance from the Department of Homeland Security’s Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) and encourages those with questions or concerns to email iss@unc.edu and use the subject line “**Fall 2020 SEVP Guidance.**” We will remain in close contact with UNC Global and ISSS and will write again with more information as soon as we have it.

We are here for you. If you need help or support, please do not hesitate to reach out to Naya Villarreal, MPH, associate director for Gillings Global Health (email naya@unc.edu), or your academic coordinator. At Gillings, we are a strong and caring community. UNC’s Counseling and Psychological Services ([CAPS](#)) is also an excellent resource to support you. You are an integral part of the Gillings School, and we will fight to keep you here.

Sincerely,

Gillings School [Dean’s Council](#)

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