Advising International Students in an Age of Anxiety:
U.S. Campus Responses to the Needs and Concerns of Current and Prospective Students from the MENA Region and Beyond

IIE Green Paper
February 2017

This Green Paper from the Institute of International Education (IIE) shares initial information on steps taken by U.S. campuses and higher education associations in support of students from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) currently enrolled or hoping to study in the United States. We welcome feedback from readers on other helpful steps and recommended actions. Further information will be incorporated into a second edition, tentatively scheduled for release in late March, following a brainstorming roundtable at IIE’s Best Practices Conference on March 13th in Miami, hosted by Florida International University.
I. Introduction

This IIE Green Paper was inspired by the vigorous and wide-ranging actions taken by thousands of students, faculty and staff members on U.S. campuses in response to a January 27, 2017 Executive Order (EO) temporarily blocking entry to the U.S. by visa holders from 7 countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and indefinitely suspending entry of Syrian refugees. Hundreds of U.S. college presidents have spoken out eloquently in the days immediately following the EO on the value of international students and faculty to their campus communities and the vital part they play in the intellectual life and success of their institutions.

On U.S. campuses, and in the wider communities that host them, the Executive Order has raised awareness of the important role played by international students and scholars, and has stimulated increased efforts to make these individuals feel welcome and valued. Ongoing news coverage of students stranded overseas or family members waiting to be reunited are generating sympathy and concern in the wider U.S. public as well. Beyond this immediate impact, there has been a growing recognition of the broad contributions these students and scholars make to their academic communities and to the United States.

A recent article about the tens of thousands of doctors trained abroad but serving in rural and poor urban areas of the U.S. helped make visible the contributions to American society that visiting professionals and immigrants make every day; the same article also noted that six of America’s seven Nobel Laureates in 2016 were foreign-born.¹ Corporate CEOs and small business leaders continue to issue warnings about how the American economy may suffer from the EO and subsequent actions/reactions. They, and campus officials, are also keeping an eye on proposed changes in the H1-B program and Optional Practical Training, changes which may further discourage international students from applying to study in the United States.

Editorials and Op-eds have helped explain why hosting international students and scholars on U.S. campuses is in the national interest, not just in the interest of host campuses and communities. Colleges and universities across the U.S. are moving quickly to address concerns expressed by international students and visiting faculty members - not just those from the targeted seven countries but many others who feared they might be affected by future actions at the federal, state or local level. As further judicial review of the EO continues, U.S. campuses will need to continue reassuring current international students and faculty, reach out to prospective international students who may be reconsidering their plans to study in the U.S., and work with elected officials at every level to keep America’s academic doors open to the world, while keeping our national security strong.

IIE’s most recent Open Doors® report provides detailed data on the over one million international students on U.S. campuses in 2015-16, including their very substantial financial

² Open Doors® annual surveys are conducted by the Institute of International Education (IIE) with support from the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.
contributions. In 2015 alone, international students contributed $35.8 billion to the U.S. economy, making U.S. higher education one of our nation’s major service sector exports, according to the US Department of Commerce. More than 17,000 students enrolled at U.S. universities during 2015-16 were from the 7 countries named in the EO: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. Based on Open Doors and U.S. Department of Commerce data, these students contributed more than $550 million to the U.S. economy in 2015, including tuition, room and board and other spending in the local economy. Appendix 1 provides country-level breakdowns of student numbers and economic contributions from these seven countries.

But international students’ contributions extend far beyond the financial, as they enrich the academic dialog, expand perspectives of their American classmates, contribute to research and teaching while here, and to ongoing academic collaboration after graduating. After returning home, U.S.-trained alumni strengthen their own countries’ economies and societies and sustain ties with American companies and communities. Those who remain in the U.S. create new enterprises and drive innovation, as documented in several studies on the number of new companies and new jobs created by immigrants who first entered the U.S. as foreign students.

It is too soon to assess the long term impact of the January 27th EO and subsequent court actions. A joint survey by the Institute of International Education (IIE), American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admission Officers (AACRAO, International Association for College Admissions Counseling, National Association for College Admissions Counseling, and NAFSA: Association of International Educators is collecting feedback from campus admissions offices on emerging trends in international student applications for fall 2017. The survey findings will be released in mid-March and discussed at a roundtable at IIE’s Best Practices Conference on March 13th, hosted by Florida International University.

Among key concerns which early survey respondents have flagged are the devastating impact on the students and scholars from the 7 countries currently targeted, the possibility of other countries being added to the list, and the likely significant unintended consequences as students, faculty and researchers from around the globe reconsider their desire to study, teach, conduct research, and attend conferences in the U.S. The breadth of actions spelled out in the following pages demonstrate U.S. higher education’s determination to provide a welcoming environment for incoming international students and scholars, in which academic cooperation and innovation can survive and flourish in the long term. To this end, IIE is working with U.S. higher education institutions and associations, and with the new administration, to find solutions that keep our academic doors open and the United States’ borders secure. We welcome feedback from readers of this Green Paper and suggestions of further steps to advance our shared mission.
II. Actions by U.S. higher education leaders and States

In the immediate aftermath of the January 29th Executive Order, hundreds of university presidents, chancellors and provosts communicated their concern and support for students and scholars from the affected countries, and many issued public statements opposing the ban.

Along with these powerful statements, a legal case initiated by Washington State and Minnesota resulted in a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) issued by the U.S. District Court in Seattle halting implementation of the EO. The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the TRO, holding that the Government did not show a likelihood of success on the merits of its appeal or that reinstating the EO would result in irreparable harm to the Government. The February 9 ruling by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals cited among other factors the irreparable harm done to all students and their host universities by denying U.S. entry to talented faculty members, researchers and international students, recognizing their contributions to the education of U.S. students and to our nation’s research and innovation.

The ruling also referred to the possible negative effect such a temporary ban might have on future international student interest in U.S. study and to the disruption of academic research collaboration and institutional partnership, recognizing that the affected universities “have a mission of ‘global engagement’ and rely on visiting students, scholars and faculty to advance their educational goals.”

Examples of the many statements from higher education leaders can be found on several higher education media websites, including Inside Higher Education.

Included among them is the following from the University of California’s President Janet Napolitano, former Secretary of Homeland Security, joined by the Chancellors of the UC system: “This executive order is contrary to the values we hold dear ... The UC community, like universities across the country, has long been enriched by students, faculty and scholars from around the world, including the affected countries, coming to study, teach, and research. It is critical that the United States continues to welcome the best students, scholars, scientists and engineers of all backgrounds and nationalities.”

University of Oklahoma President and former U.S. Senator David Boren wrote, “Bringing international students to study in our country helps build lasting friendships with people all around the world. Those who study in our country become persuasive and articulate friends of the United States when they return to their home countries. When we reduce the opportunities for young people to come to America to take advantage of the educational opportunities here, we not only harm them, but we also damage the image and inspiration of America around the world.”

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Princeton University President Christopher L. Eisgruber wrote of his mother’s experience coming to the United States as a refugee and his father’s experience of coming as an international student, noting, “Immigration has been a source of creativity and strength for this country throughout its history. It is indispensable to the mission and the excellence of America's universities, which enhance this country's economy, security, and well-being through the students they educate and the ideas they generate. Princeton will continue supporting students, faculty, and staff of all nationalities and faiths, and we will continue making the case for policies that simultaneously respect this nation's legitimate security interests and allow for the free and vital movement of students and scholars across borders.”

Boston University’s President Robert Brown wrote in an open letter that “we believe this Executive Order is fundamentally inconsistent with the values that are the bedrock of ...our pluralistic, welcoming society. “In an Op-ed to the Boston Globe, he added that “open immigration is good for the long-term health of higher education, our country, our economy, and our society.”

Harvard University’s President Drew Faust noted that the “disruption and disorientation flowing from [the EO] are palpable and distressing.” She asked government officials to “take full account of how fundamentally our universities depend on the ability of people to travel across borders without undue constraint.”

A message from Lehigh University’s President John D. Simon, Provost Patrick V. Farrell, and Vice President for Finance and Administration, Patricia A. Johnson rejected “in the strongest terms, action that stereotypes or discriminates on the basis of religion, nationality, race, gender or any other personal characteristic or identity. We firmly believe that we are all enriched by relationships that bridge cultures and worldviews and that our community is stronger when we are bound by the principles of mutual respect, acceptance and inclusivity.”

New York University President Andrew Hamilton, noting his own immigrant background, urged NYU students to extend support to students from the banned nations: “Let us try to ease their anxieties and their burdens by making sure they know they are among friends who are committed to helping them.”

III. Examples of campus-based actions by offices serving international students:

1) A private university in Texas took the following immediate steps in the first week of February, immediately following the Executive Order:

- A personal message from the President of the university to all students, faculty and staff, highlighting the university’s commitment to all its international students, and its efforts to assist those who might be stuck overseas and unable to return to campus;
- A legal clinic staffed by immigration lawyers, offering general advice for students and faculty;
• A dinner and discussion for Iranian students hosted by Dean of Graduate Studies (no students from the other 6 countries are currently enrolled on this campus);
• Ongoing consultations and meetings re visas and OPT issues with staff of Office of International Scholars & Students;
• Discussions with faculty planning to travel or to receive visitors from the Middle East and North Africa;
• Expanded office hours for faculty members to meet with Provost Office staff.

2) A public university in California convened an open meeting at which the Chancellor confirmed campus support for international students and scholars, and invited the international community to express its own concerns. Staff from the Office of Services for International Students and Scholars was available to respond to specific immigration/visa questions, and to make sure the international community knew about other resources on campus and in the community. Over 250 people attended. Follow-up individual meetings with appropriate campus staff were encouraged.

3) A large public research university in New York increased its outreach to all internationals on campus, hosting workshops on immigration matters and intercultural sessions with domestic students. They established a micro-website (informal bulletin board for the whole campus) which contains up to date messages from the president, expressions of support for its students, staff and faculty affected by the travel ban, and information about the latest developments in immigration and the current travel ban. All of the university’s colleges were asked organize various outreach programs to internationals and domestic students. Faculty members were especially involved and active in providing reassurance and support for international students. “Interestingly there have been considerable expressions of support from domestic students on the campus who are angry or upset at the Federal government's actions and statements and many signed on to a petition that the university become a sanctuary campus.”

Across the U.S., campuses generally responded with a mix of the following immediate actions:

• Issued campus-wide communication from the President/Chancellor pledging support for all students and scholars from the targeted countries, and reiterating the institution’s commitment to diversity and the value of international students and scholars;
• Established a hotline for students and scholars to call if they have concerns;
• Pro-actively alerted affected students about the EO and subsequent clarifications, revised guidelines and court rulings;
• Advised affected students to stay enrolled full-time, to maintain their student visa status, and not to travel outside the U.S. if possible. Those already traveling outside the U.S. were urged to keep in close touch with campus officials and, following the Seattle District Court’s Temporary Restraining Order, to re-enter the U.S. as soon as possible;
- Offered individual counseling and mental health services, along with extend advising hours by the staff in the International Student Office;
- Offered help in contacting student families abroad if needed;
- Held open information sessions on immigration law and the impact of the EO;
- Offered to connect affected students with lawyers, some of them volunteers from law school faculty or local NGOs;
- Announced or reaffirmed its commitment to safeguard personal information about all students, faculty and staff, including non-citizens, unless presented with a valid subpoena or comparably binding requirement.

U.S. universities also started a twitter campaign #YouAreWelcomeHere, to reach the global student community. The #YouAreWelcomeHere campaign encourages universities around the US and globally to create and share their own videos in which the university faculty and students share their welcoming messages for international students. Study Group’s original video includes warm messages from six different universities around the US – James Madison University, Roosevelt University, University of Vermont, Merrimack College, Long Island University in Brooklyn and the City College of New York. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61YgRD_B6FY

Since the beginning of the campaign many US universities global educational institutions and even single individuals, students, educational community advocates and others have created and shared their own welcoming videos for all international students.

IV. Actions by U.S. Higher Education Associations:

The 62 research universities comprising the Association of American Universities (AAU), released an immediate statement urging government officials to end the travel ban “as quickly as possible.” http://www.aau.edu/news/article.aspx?id=18366

American Council on Education (ACE), representing close to 1,800 colleges and universities and joined by 46 other higher education associations including IIE, sent a letter to U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary John F. Kelly in response to President Trump’s Executive Order of January 29. The letter offers assistance with challenges that the Department faces in connection with international students, faculty and scholars at U.S. institutions of higher education, saying “We support efforts to enhance the nation’s security. We also believe that it is in our collective interest to ensure that the United States remains the destination of choice for the world’s best and brightest students, faculty and scholars.” The letter affirms the significant contributions of international students and scholars to our nation’s higher education institutions, and expresses concern for the uncertainty and fear caused by the new restrictions. As the letter says: “The overwhelming majority” of international students return home as ambassadors for American values, democracy, and the free market...We fear the chilling effect this [Executive Order] will have....” [See Appendix 2 for full text of letter and list of higher education associations which co-signed the letter].
College Board President and CEO David Coleman issued this statement: "The College Board and our members are committed to delivering opportunity for every young person globally, no matter where they live or what their faith. One way we can secure this mission is to help colleges find and reach students who have aspirations for higher education.... As long as the recent Executive Order on immigration is in effect, the College Board will enable participating international colleges to connect for free through our Student Search Service with students from the seven affected countries and refugee families. Given that the path to studying in the United States may be blocked for some time, it is our duty to ensure these students have a wide set of opportunities for higher education. The College Board will also make a contribution to the International Rescue Committee to fund a college counselor to provide free advice to affected students and families so they can make the best college choices possible. Our mission calls us to do what we can to ensure that all students, everywhere, take the opportunities they have earned."

**NAFSA: Association of International Educators** posted a number of resources online (see IssueNet.nafsa.org) including a blog by Dan Berger, a Massachusetts lawyer and regulatory practice coordinator for NAFSA’s Knowledge Community for International Student and Scholar Services, which pointed members and nonmembers to a regularly updated NAFSA Travel Advisory for Nationals of Certain Countries Pursuant to Executive Order, and Practical Immigration Concepts in a Time of Change.

Five higher education associations (AACRAO, IIE, International ACAC, NACAC, and NAFSA) launched a flash survey sent to admissions officers on campuses across the U.S., asking them to provide feedback on current levels of applications for fall 2017 from international students overall, and from specific world regions. Respondents were also invited to indicate concerns expressed by applicants and steps their institution was taking to reassure applicants and to increase yields once applicants were notified of acceptance. Findings from the survey will be released before the end of March, and will be discussed at conferences and roundtables hosted by the participating associations.

### V. Actions by Legal Associations and other NGOs

A number of universities’ law schools offered to provide students and scholars from the affected countries with free legal counsel. Others referred students to local affiliate offices of the American Civil Liberties Union ([www.ACLU.org](http://www.ACLU.org)) and to networks of pro bono attorneys offering to assist people affected by the EO, including [www.immigrationlawhelp.org](http://www.immigrationlawhelp.org) and [muslimimmigrationhotline.squarespace.com](http://muslimimmigrationhotline.squarespace.com)

The National Association of College and University Attorneys (NACUA) is providing legal updates and information resources to the General Counsel’s office of member universities.

### VI. Relevant Government websites
The U.S. Department of State provides regular updates on its website at: https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/news.html

The U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs supports EducationUSA Advising Centers around the world, including in the MENA Region, which offer detailed information online about how to apply to study in the U.S. and the visa application process, along with many other topics: www.EducationUSA.State.gov

The Department of Homeland Security also provides updates at: www.dhs.gov/news

VII. Next Steps?

With legal challenges to the Executive Order still pending in a number of states, and the Administration reviewing its options, U.S. campuses continue to reassure worried international students and scholars, not just those from the seven affected countries. There are fears from students coming from other Muslim-majority countries that travel restrictions may be extended to include their home countries. Misinformation is flooding the internet about possible bans on travelers from countries throughout the MENA region, as well as from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and even some European countries from which terrorists have traveled. Campus officials have advised some international students and scholars to limit their travel outside the United States, which is having serious consequences for collaborative research, international conferences, and international fellowships/award programs. One suggested action for campus officials to consider would be emailing a letter from the campus president or provost to each international student and visiting scholar, that they can print out and carry with them, stating that they are a valued member of the institution and giving a 24/7 number that they can call in case of emergency or that can be called by local authorities or immigration officials to verify their status in case of emergency.

Those working with international students and scholars may find the following checklist helpful:

- Continue sending all international students on campus messages of unwavering support for their participation on campus and in the wider community
- Encourage all students, faculty members and community groups to reach out pro-actively with messages of friendship and concern
- Redouble communication with elected officials at every level – reminding them of the likely negative consequences of restricting academic exchanges

We believe that the U.S. higher education community, working in partnership with the U.S. Department of State and Homeland Security, can address the fears and dislocation of current students while also ensuring that America’s academic doors remain open to well-qualified students from around the world, making our country more secure and better equipped to face the shared global challenges which lie ahead.
Appendix 1. IIE Open Doors data on the numbers and economic contributions of students from the 7 countries named in the January 27 Executive Order

Fact Sheet: Countries Affected by Executive Order 13769
"Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States"

In 2015/16, the United States hosted 17,354 international students and 2,307 international scholars from the seven countries (Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen) named in Executive Order 13769. These international students comprise just under 2 percent of all international students and contribute an estimated $556 million dollars to the U.S. economy each year. A majority (71 percent) of these international students are studying at the graduate level. Source: Open Doors 2016.

### Number of International students and scholars from the 7 affected countries by state, 2015/16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Int'l Scholars</th>
<th>Int'l Students</th>
<th>Total $ Contribution*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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*Estimate of 2015 contributions calculated by IIE based on information from Open Doors and the U.S. Department of Commerce.
Note: Contributions may not sum to total due to rounding
January 31, 2017

The Honorable John F. Kelly
Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Kelly,

I write on behalf of the undersigned higher education organizations to congratulate you on your confirmation as Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and to offer our assistance with challenges that the Department faces in connection with international students, faculty and scholars at U.S. institutions of higher education.

We support efforts to enhance the nation’s security. We also believe that it is in our collective interest to ensure that the United States remains the destination of choice for the world’s best and brightest students, faculty and scholars.

The roughly one million international students that attend U.S. colleges and universities add to this country’s intellectual and cultural vibrancy, and they also yield an estimated economic impact of $32.8 billion and support 400,000 U.S. jobs, according to recent estimates.

International students and scholars have served America well throughout our history. These individuals enrich our campuses and the country with their talents and skills. The overwhelming majority return home as ambassadors for American values, democracy and the free market.

Steps intended to protect national security may inadvertently hamper these exchanges. This would only deprive our nation of one of its best tools for global scientific and economic preeminence and extending democratic values and cultural understanding throughout the world, making us more susceptible to the distortions and myths of extremist organizations and movements.

Unfortunately, even temporary restrictions can be damaging. President Trump’s executive order, “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States,” has created uncertainty and fear across the country and on our campuses, particularly among students, faculty and scholars from the affected countries, as well as others who worry the restrictions may expand to other countries.

We are concerned about the problematic implementation of the 90-day freeze on visas, such as cases of people with valid visas being turned away. We fear the chilling effect this will have on the ability of international students and scholars to continue to see the U.S. as a welcoming place for study and research.
The executive order contains language indicating that DHS has some flexibility in implementing it. We thank you for exercising that authority in the case of lawful permanent residents (“green card” holders). We urge you to continue to use this discretion whenever possible for students and scholars who clearly pose no threat.

We are eager to meet with you and your staff at your earliest convenience to discuss our specific concerns and to help you and the Department as you carry out your important duties.

We are confident that it is possible to create policies that secure our nation from those who wish to harm us, while also welcoming those who seek to study, conduct research and scholarship, and contribute their knowledge and talents to our nation’s higher education institutions, economy and overall security. And that will be our goal in working with you and your team on this issue.

Sincerely,


Molly Corbett Broad
President

On behalf of:

AACRAO: American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
ACPA–College Student Educators International
ACT
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine
American Association of Community Colleges
American Association of State Colleges and Universities
American Association of University Professors
American Council on Education
American Dental Education Association
American Indian Higher Education Consortium
APPA: Leadership in Educational Facilities
Association of American Colleges & Universities
Association of American Law Schools
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of American Universities
Association of American University Presses
Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities
Association of Community College Trustees
Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges
Association of International Education Administrators
Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
Association of Research Libraries
College and University Professional Association for Human Resources
Council for Advancement and Support of Education
Council for Christian Colleges & Universities
Council for Higher Education Accreditation
Council for Opportunity in Education
Council of Independent Colleges
Council of Graduate Schools
Council on Governmental Relations
Council on Social Work Education
EDUCAUSE
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
Institute of International Education
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
National Association for College Admission Counseling
National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education
National Association of College and University Business Officers
National Association of Colleges and Employers
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
National Association of System Heads
National Collegiate Athletic Association
National Council for Community and Education Partnerships
National Council of University Research Administrators
Thurgood Marshall College Fund
UNCF
University Professional and Continuing Education Association