



## In Support of Our International Communities

The recent modification to the temporary exemptions for the Student Exchange and Visitor Program (SEVP) that was announced by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) on July 6th, 2020 and subsequently rescinded on July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020 threw countless international students, scholars and their families into shock, anxiety and distress regarding their immediate future in the United States. The proposed policy failed to recognize that the United States and all our universities have benefited financially, intellectually, and culturally from international scholars and students. It also failed to follow through with the spirit of a commitment made to international communities when they first enter the U.S. to participate in educational opportunities.

At the time when the policy was initially announced, we at the Counseling Center joined in the horror, sadness, and fear of injustice and systemic racism. We acknowledge that this was not the first time international communities have faced legislative and systemic obstacles to the pursuit of academic study and meaningful contribution across professional domains by remaining in the U.S. Though the policy was rescinded, we recognize that for many, an emotional impact had already been made.

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Our international communities may be responding in several different and valid ways to the impact of this policy, before and after it was rescinded, including indifference, worry, fear, withdrawal, anger, betrayal, or defeated resignation. While the immediate risk of this policy may have abated, we recognize that it further throws our international communities into uncertainty about their status, and may add to heightened anticipation of any future policy that may put their livelihoods and future in the U.S. at risk.

We encourage all who are working with our international populations at UIC to recognize the individuality and uniqueness that comes with diversity and intersectionality. Please attend to how individuals' backgrounds, identities, and countries of origin differ and are uniquely impacted, depending on the political relationship between the U.S. government and a person's home country, among other factors.

Our international students and scholars are valuable and cherished members of our academic community, and we acknowledge the far-reaching impact of this recent legislation on the sense of belonging, collective mental health, and well-being of students and scholars. We understand that the reverberations of this rescinded policy represent another institutional voice telling you that you do not belong. We see you, we value you, and we want you here. The Counseling Center remains committed to challenging injustice, advocating, protecting, and working on bringing about change on behalf of our international students and scholars. In this newsletter, we aim to discuss in more detail ideas for coping and mitigating the impact of these systemic forces. We also aim to speak to faculty and staff who work with and support international students to consider ways they can directly support these students and to expand awareness of their unique needs. ❖

## Coping with the Unique Stress of International Student Life

It may feel like riding an intense emotional roller coaster for many international students and their families as they awaited the ruling of ICE's decision. While the rescinding of the ICE announcement is a temporary relief, it accentuates the sociopolitical environment in which international students are striving to excel and belong. The public narratives that frame non-immigrant workers as a threat to the U.S. job market, and the non-transparent, competitive and changing visa and immigration policies are a backdrop to the daily experiences of imposter syndrome, fear, discrimination and isolation for many international students. You may find yourself wondering to yourself, have I done enough? Have I lived up to the expectations of my loved ones? Where do I belong? We want to acknowledge the necessity of challenging xenophobia in this country, and we want to affirm the importance of taking care of yourself in ways that are culturally meaningful for you. As you wade through this unjust system, be gentle and kind to yourself, and nurture your strengths, gifts and value.

**Social Connectedness.** Talking to others and feeling connected keeps us physically and emotionally healthy. Cultural differences in language, communication styles, leisure activities, and social distance can make social interactions feel less natural, spontaneous and enjoyable. Assumptions, biases, indifference and discriminatory attitudes from others hurt social connections. Time difference, geographic distance, a lack of shared experience, and not wanting to worry family and friends makes it difficult to ask for help. As a result, members of international communities at times find themselves in a social vacuum in between their home country and the U.S. Invest in social connections that nurture you, give you purpose, and carry you forward, no matter if it is online, overseas, with fellow international peers, American peers, a staff or professor, or a therapist. If you have been feeling isolated, try to connect with someone regularly. If you are outside of the U.S., feel unsure about when and how to return, and are feeling disconnected from the campus, contact a friend, family member, advisor, or a professor you trust. Surround yourself with voices that believe in you and see you. Remember, social connectedness is not about the number of social ties, but a cultivated sense of belonging and community (see our Resource Guide below for ideas).

**Positive Thinking and Forbearance.** These are underrated coping strategies because they sometimes are misunderstood as denial or suppression of negative emotions. In fact, many families and cultures teach children the wisdom of endurance in the face of adversity, to forgive and cultivate gratitude, and to lessen the burden on others. These personal sacrifices

are in turn recognized and reciprocated. While these qualities are highly regarded virtues and strengths in many cultures, it can feel like a contrast to the Euro-American values of active problem-solving and self-expression. Many international students find power in positive thinking and forbearance coping, especially because many of the stressors international students experience are unpredictable or chronic. Some may remind themselves of the sacrifices their families have made. Some may recall the purpose and meaning in life. Some find contentment in daily gratitude, whether it is the summer breeze or a friendly smile. Some trust the resilience in their history and ancestry, knowing that someone has gone through similar or worse hardships and flourished. Forbearance coping is deliberate and does not equal avoidance or passivity.

**Mind-Body Health.** It may not be a surprise to you that many international students rate exercising as one of their top coping strategies. Regular exercising can improve low moods, recharge from academic stress, and build physical and emotional stamina. Joining sports clubs or group sports not only keeps students physically active but offer opportunities to meet new friends and build social connection. Some international students lose their favorite sports after they come to the U.S. because different sports are popular here, and it is hard to find teammates and facilities for some sports. However, it has not stopped international students from starting new exercising routines. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have limited exercising options available. How have you dealt with this loss? Did you replace the lost physical exercise with [another at-home exercise](#)? What about an [online workout](#) or dance class?

**Combatting Discrimination.** All of these coping strategies, and many others such as direct confrontation, education and advocacy, and detaching yourself, are ways people respond to experiences of discrimination ([see our most recent newsletter](#)). Sadly, discrimination is often internalized to impact how marginalized groups view their self-worth, value and capability. Have you been asked where you are REALLY from because you have an accent or because you are not White passing? Have you been made to be a cultural representative to answer questions about your culture, religion, or country? Have you been made fun or, yelled at, or assaulted because you are an international student? Have you felt fearful about how others will treat you because your country has been negatively portrayed on the news? There is so much cultural richness and differences among international student communities, and unjust systems target different groups at various times. Yet the shared experience of finding home away from home can bring the international student communities together in solidarity, to [share your stories](#) and [externalize impacts of oppression](#). ❖

## FOR FACULTY AND STAFF: SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITIES

Although the Trump administration has rescinded the policy change that would have unfairly and unjustly penalized international students studying at universities with online instruction during a worldwide pandemic, we acknowledge that this act is only the recent one in a [history](#) of attempts to limit and complicate the access to higher education and professional pathways within the United States. We urge staff and faculty to utilize this most recent incident to consider some of the following:

**The impact reverberates.** While we look towards fall semester knowing our international communities join us regardless mode of instruction (online or hybrid), our students and scholars are likely still feeling the psychological and emotional impact that comes with abrupt and shocking proclamations that threaten their educational, financial and professional livelihoods. Consider reaching out to students with whom you have build relationships. Acknowledge the history of marginalization international students have faced, and share your solidarity and commitment to making your classroom / space a welcoming one.

**Educate yourself.** As a nation, we find ourselves amidst a profound reckoning related to racial injustice and systemic racism. As you take up that exploration for yourself, we invite you to get to know more about your students' countries of origin, and the unique ramifications each of them may have faced had this most recent policy gone into effect. Which student may have faced return to a country with its own political and economic unrest? Which student would return to a community that is impoverished and without prospect for meaningful employment? What does it mean to your student to study in the U.S., and at UIC specifically?

**Consider action.** Openness, curiosity and educating ourselves are crucial in developing empathy and connection with others, including our international students and scholars. We also urge faculty/staff to consider opportunities to translate this growing awareness of injustices international students may face to actionable steps. Are there ways you can help your department to be more accountable in creating a more equitable learning environment for all students, including international students? Can you sign petitions or use whatever platform you have to express solidarity with this population and call for change? Days after the administration announced the policy change, Harvard and MIT filed a lawsuit, with many other institutions, including UIC, filing their own amicus briefs as a way to add to a collective outcry – how would this look on an individual level for you?

## UPCOMING GROUPS/EVENTS WOMEN OF COLOR INTERPERSONAL PROCESS GROUP

MONDAYS FROM 3:00-4:30PM

This ongoing interpersonal process group is for students who identify as women of color and have both an awareness of and openness to discussing in group the ways in which their minority identities impact their experiences. If you are interested, please contact the Counseling Center (312-996-3490) to schedule an initial consultation to see if this is the right group for you.

## STUDENT OF COLOR INTERPERSONAL PROCESS GROUP

THURSDAYS FROM 2:05-3:25PM

This ongoing interpersonal process group is for students who identify as a person of color and have both an awareness of and openness to discussing in group the ways in which their minority identities impact their experiences. If you are interested, please contact the Counseling Center (312-996-3490) to schedule an initial consultation to see if this is the right group for you.

### UIC Resources and Cultural Centers

[African American Academic Network](#)  
[African American Cultural Center](#)  
[Arab American Cultural Center](#)  
[Asian American Resource and Cultural Center](#)  
[CHANCE Program](#)  
[First at LAS](#)  
[Hispanic Center for Excellence](#)  
[Language and Cultural Learning Center](#)  
[LARES](#)  
[Latino Cultural Center](#)  
[Native American Support Program](#)  
[Office of Global Engagement](#)  
[Office of International Affairs](#)  
[Office of International Services](#)  
[Student Legal Services](#)  
[TRIO Program](#)  
[UIC Counseling Center](#)  
[UIC Wellness Center](#)  
[UIC Global](#)

### Additional UIC Resources

[UIC International Students Supporting Each Other Facebook Group](#)  
[Upcoming Events for Centers for Cultural Understanding and Social Change](#)  
[Click here to search for more cultural and social groups at UIC!](#)

### For Further Reading

[32 Realities for International Students Studying in the U.S.](#)  
[Creating an International Faculty Support Group](#)  
[Enhancing the Quality of the International Student Experience](#)  
[Innovative International Student Support Programming](#)  
[International Students Have Long Been a Tool for U.S. Policy Leaders](#)  
[Helping Faculty Teach International Students](#)  
[Strengthening Support for International Students](#)  
[Supporting and Mentoring International Faculty](#)  
[The Current Plight of International Students](#)