

Letter to Immigration and Customs Enforcement Concerning Its Decision to End Visa Exemptions for International Students

In July 2020, the Society of Biblical Literature and other members of the American Council of Learned Societies sent this letter to Matthew T. Albence, the deputy director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

8 July 2020

Deputy Director Matthew W. Albence
Immigration and Customs Enforcement
By email to matthew.albence@ice.gov

Dear Deputy Director Albence,

The higher education community represented by the undersigned disciplinary societies urges Immigration and Customs Enforcement to revisit its decision to end temporary visa exemptions for international students whose upcoming coursework will be entirely online. Colleges and universities alike depend on the presence, physical and online, of international visa holders, and many undergraduate and, especially, graduate students cannot complete their work without access to the archival, library, laboratory, and technical resources of their institutions, whether classes are being held entirely online or not.

International students are an important element of our institutions' vitality and diversity, and the exemptions that were in place for spring and summer under the Student Exchange and Visitor Program allowed many students to remain connected to their US institutions during this unsettled time. Revoking those exemptions now will end the possibility of US study for international students, affecting both their futures and the futures of the institutions that have depended on and benefited from their contributions. These new restrictions will affect the futures of international students and will as profoundly affect the futures of the colleges and universities that depend on and benefit from their contributions. The increased financial burdens on US universities will be significant.

Please reinstate the temporary visa exemptions for international students and faculty members while we are in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, including at least the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters. The U.S. system of higher education has long attracted students from all over the world, and for good reason. Please do not refuse access to our colleges and universities for the estimated one million international students who would be affected by this change in policy.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

African Studies Association
American Academy of Religion
American Anthropological Association
American Comparative Literature Association Executive Committee
American Folklore Society
American Historical Association

American Musicological Society
American Philosophical Association
American Political Science Association
American Schools of Oriental Research
American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies
American Society for Environmental History
American Sociological Association
American Studies Association
Archaeological Institute of America
ARNOVA
Association for Jewish Studies Executive Committee
Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies
Bibliographical Society of America
CAA
Latin American Studies Association
Medieval Academy of America
Middle East Studies Association
Modern Language Association
National Communication Association
National Council of Teachers of English
National Council on Public History
North American Conference on British Studies
Organization of American Historians
Phi Beta Kappa Society
Shakespeare Association of America
Sixteenth Century Society and Conference
Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study
Society for Ethnomusicology
Society for Classical Studies
Society for Music Theory
Society of Sinophone Studies
Society of Architectural Historians
Society of Biblical Literature
World History Association