Talking Points for Faculty and Staff: Responding to Concerns from International Students

This document is intended to support faculty and staff in addressing questions or concerns from current or aspiring international students regarding the current U.S. climate and recent developments at the federal level.

This guide is designed to help you respond with empathy and accuracy, and to direct students to appropriate resources. If you're unsure how to respond to a particular question, please reach out to Lehigh's Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS) or the Office of International Affairs for support. E-mail (intnl@lehigh.edu) is the best way to ensure that your inquiry gets to the right person quickly.

Topics regarding questions from **admitted international students** (not yet in the U.S.):

1. Visa Denials
2. Potential Cancellation of OPT (Optional Practical Training), media reports
3. Potential Cancellation of Visas for Students from China, media reports
4. Potential Travel Restrictions, media reports
5. Safety and Well-Being of International Students in the U.S.

Topics regarding **current international students** (enrolled and in the U.S.):

6. Revocation of Student Visas and Termination of SEVIS Records
7. Mental Health Resources for Enrolled Students
8. International Travel and Reentry Concerns
9. Political Participation, Free Speech, and Social Media
10. Federal Agents and ICE on Campus

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1. Visa Denials

Summary of the Issue: There have been reports of potentially increasing visa denial rates in some regions, especially affecting students from African countries and India.

Key Messages:

- Students should be well prepared for their visa interviews. The purpose of the interview is to confirm eligibility for the visa type and assess intent to return home after studies.
- Typical interview questions may relate to a student's academic plans, funding sources, ties to their home country, and their reasons for choosing the specific University/program they are attending.
- General tips for the interview for the student:
    - Be honest and concise in answers.

    - Understand and clearly articulate their reasons for choosing Lehigh, their academic plans and how they will fund their education. They must be able to show they have funds available for the first year of study, and they may be asked how they will fund subsequent years of study. Their funding source(s) are listed on their I-20, and documentation they bring to their visa appointment should match this.
    - Be prepared to discuss family, employment, and other ties to their home country.
- Visa appointment wait times and processing timelines may be longer than in previous years. Lehigh is aware of these challenges and will work with students as needed and as feasible.
- Students should notify OISS if they are denied a visa so staff can gather information about the denial and track appropriately. If faculty learn of a denial, they should ask the student to notify OISS right away.

Helpful Resources:
- OISS – Coming to Lehigh
- OISS - Applying for your visa
- U.S. Department of State – Student Visa Information

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2. Potential Cancellation of Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Summary of the Issue: A bill (H.R. 2315) recently introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives seeks to eliminate Optional Practical Training (OPT) as a benefit available to F-1 students. Though widely reported in international media, the proposal is still in early legislative stages.

Key Messages:
- This is a proposed bill that has *not* become law. The U.S. legislative process is complex and lengthy, requiring approval by both houses of Congress and the President—and many proposed bills never advance beyond the committee stage.
- Lehigh is monitoring developments. While we understand and share your concern, there are currently no changes to F-1 students' ability to apply for OPT.

Helpful Resources:
- OISS – OPT Overview
- How laws are made
- Study in the States – OPT Overview
- H.R. 2315

3. Potential Cancellation of Visas for Students from China

Summary of the Issue: A bill (H.R. 2147) recently introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives seeks to prohibit student visas for Chinese nationals. (One of the bill's sponsors, Scott Perry, is a congressional representative from Pennsylvania, though his district does not include the Lehigh Valley; it consists of parts of Dauphin, York, and Cumberland counties.) This proposed legislation has generated concern in international news, particularly among Chinese students.

Key Messages:

- This is a proposed bill that has *not* become law. The U.S. legislative process is complex and lengthy, requiring approval by both houses of Congress and the President—and many proposed bills never advance beyond the committee stage.
- Lehigh is monitoring the situation, and there have been no legislative changes that affect the ability of Chinese students to be issued a visa.
- Students applying for a visa may experience delays in scheduling a visa appointment, and many students from China, especially in STEM or sensitive fields, go through additional "administrative processing." Most students placed in administrative processing receive visas within 4 - 12 weeks, but processing time is unique to each applicant.
- It is true that certain federally funded research areas, particularly those related to sensitive technologies, are subject to additional regulations. Lehigh's Research Integrity Office assists students and faculty with how to navigate restrictions on sensitive technologies and maintain compliance with federal laws and regulations relating to research, export control, and sanctions.
- Lehigh has a strong and vibrant community of Chinese students and scholars, and we remain committed to supporting them fully. Lehigh has 172 undergraduate students and 263 graduate students from China as of the 2024-25 academic year.

Helpful Resources:

- OISS - Applying for your visa
- OISS – Maintaining Your Visa Status
- Research Integrity Office
- How laws are made
- H.R. 2147

4. Potential Travel Restrictions

Summary of the Issue: Specific travel restrictions (sometimes called "travel bans") have not yet been implemented, but the Trump administration has indicated that restrictions may be coming. While reporting suggests that citizens of certain countries may be subject to restrictions, no official list has been released, and details are still evolving. It is also possible that no formal travel ban will be published, but extreme vetting may result in more difficulty with visas and travel.

Key Messages:

- None of the possible travel restrictions to the U.S. that have been reported in the media have been put in place. While Lehigh will continue to monitor information, it is not impacting decisions we are making about graduate students' admissions.
- As information becomes available, OISS will update its Immigration Updates and Travel Advisory page and use email for important updates.
- Students applying for visas and traveling to the United States should expect much greater scrutiny than in previous years. The Department of State and Department of Homeland Security are applying "extreme vetting" to visa applications and entry into the United States. We encourage students to review tips on our immigration updates website carefully and plan for additional scrutiny.
- We recognize that admissions decisions may need to change if travel restrictions are imposed. Reviewing applications quickly and encouraging admitted students to provide documentation to OISS as early as possible will be more important than ever this year.

Helpful Resources:

- OISS – Immigration Updates and Travel Advisory
- Studying in the States – Traveling as an International Student

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5. Safety and Well-Being of International Students in the U.S.

Summary of the Issue: International students may have concerns about safety in the U.S., including gun violence, and some are questioning whether they will feel welcome in the current political and social climate.

Key Messages:

- We recognize these concerns and take them seriously. Lehigh and the city of Bethlehem are welcoming, inclusive communities with a strong international presence.
- Lehigh offers a range of resources to support international students, including OISS advising, programming, peer support, and community-building events. There are many

cultural clubs on campus, and students at all levels are encouraged to get involved with offices and student clubs with which they feel connected.
- The university maintains a strong relationship with campus and local law enforcement, with a focus on community safety and mutual respect.
- We encourage students to reach out to OISS or trusted faculty with any questions or concerns—they are not alone, and that support is always available.
- In addition to university resources, we also encourage students to lean on their peer networks and cultural groups at Lehigh, which can be a source of solidarity and comfort during uncertain times.
- We understand that navigating immigration changes and maintaining your status can be stressful. If students are struggling with the emotional or mental impact of this situation, we encourage them to reach out to Lehigh's counseling services for support. They are here to help students cope with the challenges they may face.

Helpful Resources:
- University Counseling & Psychological Services
- Lehigh Graduate Life Office (for graduate students)
- Lehigh Office of Student Involvement
- Lehigh Office of Inclusive Excellence and Belonging
- Lehigh University Police Department
- OISS – Life in the U.S.

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6. Revocation of Student Visas and Termination of SEVIS Records

Summary of the Issue: There have been cases of international students in the United States having their visas revoked by the Department of State or SEVIS records terminated by the Department of Homeland Security, including at Lehigh University. These cases have understandably prompted concern and uncertainty among students.

Key Messages:
- We acknowledge that this news is unsettling, and that there have been cases both nationally and here at Lehigh University.
- The cases at Lehigh are not specific to students from any one country, nor do they appear to be connected to student participation in protests or other civic engagement activities.
- While these cases are rare and the number of reported cases at Lehigh is small, we recognize that even one case is significant. We do not take these situations lightly and are committed to supporting affected students.
- For students who have been impacted, Lehigh's priority is to determine whether the student can complete their degree in person or remotely. Because each student's

situation is unique, the plan for completing the degree—which will address scholarships, fellowships, and mode of instruction—will be developed in consultation with the student, the student's advisor, legal counsel, OISS, and university leadership.
- Lehigh is monitoring the situation very closely, including monitoring the Terminated Student List in SEVIS daily and is committed to providing timely, clear information and individualized support should any issues arise. Individual students who are impacted are contacted by OISS directly, followed by outreach to college/department contacts as needed.
- Lehigh's Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS) is well prepared and well connected to provide accurate, up-to-date guidance on maintaining immigration visa status.

Helpful Resources:
- OISS – Immigration Updates and Travel Advisory
- What is SEVIS and How is the Government Using It?

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7. Mental Health Resources for Enrolled Students

Summary of the Issue: This is an incredibly challenging time for many in our international community, and we want to acknowledge the emotional toll it may be taking. Even under normal political and social circumstances, international students often face unique pressures, including being far from home, navigating cultural adjustments, and managing visa and immigration-related stressors. It is vital that students know support is available and that they are encouraged to seek it when needed.

Key Messages:
- We encourage students who are struggling to reach out and access the mental health resources available to them.
- Lehigh Counseling & Psychological Services (UCPS) offers in-person support for all enrolled students.
- Telus Health offers 24/7 online counseling with multilingual options, allowing students to speak with someone in their native language if preferred.
- Faculty and staff concerned about a student's well-being are encouraged to contact OISS or UCPS for guidance. Student Affairs also maintains a Student of Concern reporting form that notifies Student Affairs staff that a student may be in need of support.
- Support is also available to employees through the Lehigh Employee Assistance Plan (EAP), which provides confidential mental health services.
- While we may not have answers to every question or challenge, we remain steadfast in our commitment to supporting our international students, scholars, faculty, and staff.

Helpful Resources:

- Lehigh Counseling & Psychological Services
- Telus Health
- Lehigh Employee Assistance Plan
- Student Affairs Student Support & Case Management
- OISS – Resources for Life in the U.S.

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8. International Travel and Reentry Concerns

Summary of the Issue: Current and proposed immigration enforcement policies are leading to more thorough checks and questioning of all travelers, including green card holders. Heightened scrutiny at U.S. Ports of Entry can result in significant difficulties when reentering the United States, even for individuals who are permanent residents.

Key Messages:

- Given the current climate, we are advising F-1 international students, J-1 Exchange Visitors, H-1B workers and green card holders to reconsider any non-essential travel outside the United States.
- Non-essential travel could include vacation trips or visits home if you are unsure of when you'll be able to return. Essential travel may include urgent family matters or important academic-related travel.
- We recognize that "essential" may mean different things for different people: attending a conference or going home for the summer may be essential for one person but not another.
- At this point, we urge caution when making travel plans, including for conferences, study abroad, and personal trips.
- We recommend that international students and scholars reach out to OISS before making any such travel plans. Permanent residents who are concerned about travel should contact a qualified immigration attorney for guidance.
- It is important that travelers understand travel risks and possible outcomes so that they can make informed decisions about travel based on their individual profile and tolerance for risk. Travelers should have a backup plan in case their entry is delayed and have important contact numbers memorized or written down.

Helpful Resources:

- OISS – Immigration Updates and Travel Advisory
- Harris Sliwoski – When Lawful Residents Are Denied Reentry
- Business Today – What Green Card holders need to know for heightened port-of-entry checks while travelling

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9. Political Participation,Free Speech and Social Media

Summary of the Issue: As has been reported in the media, participation in protests, demonstrations, or certain political activities, including social media engagement, may draw unwanted scrutiny from immigration authorities. This could potentially lead to negative implications for an individual's immigration status, including jeopardizing visa renewals, applications for immigration benefits or adjustment of status, or immigration status.

Talking Points:

- While the intention behind such engagement may be entirely peaceful and lawful, international students and scholars should be aware that their actions may be interpreted differently by immigration officials, especially under the current climate of heightened monitoring.
- USCIS and the Department of State have recently announced that they are considering an applicant's social media when reviewing applications/petitions for immigration benefits (USCIS) or visa applications (Dept. of State). Customs and Border Protection may also factor an individual's social media into decisions about entry to the United States.
- International students and scholars on F-1, J-1 and H-1B visas, as well as undocumented students and those in other temporary and tenuous statuses, should reconsider participating in demonstrations, protests, or other political activity.
- Our intention is not to discourage engagement, but rather to ensure that students understand their potential risks so they can make informed, thoughtful decisions.

Helpful Resources:

- Yale University – Participating in a Protest? Know Your Rights and Risks
- Stump & Associates – Could participating in a student protest affect your visa status?
- USCIS Announcement
- Tafapolsky & Smith - State Department Social Media Review

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10. Federal Agents and ICE on Campus

Summary of the Issue: Increased immigration enforcement has been reported on and near campuses across the country, with heightened activity from agencies such as U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and other federal authorities. This has raised concerns about the potential for more frequent checks of immigration status, particularly in public spaces and

areas frequented by international students. The Alien Registration Requirement, implemented on April 11, 2025, requires that all immigrants (temporary and permanent) carry proof of their registration on their person at all times.

Talking Points:

- Students should be reassured that there is a clear protocol in place at Lehigh for any interaction with federal agents, including ICE. All university employees are required to abide by this protocol.
- The protocol reflects consideration of the legal requirements regarding compliance with government subpoenas and other official government agency information requests, as well as consideration of individual rights to privacy.
- If a federal agent comes to campus, the Lehigh University Police Department is the designated point of contact and will ensure the interaction follows proper procedures.
- Lehigh University is dedicated to fostering a safe and welcoming environment for all students, and our protocol ensures that federal agent interactions are handled with the utmost care and respect for individual rights.

Helpful Resources:

- USCIS - Alien Registration Requirement
- OISS – Immigration Protocol
- Lehigh University Police Department – Protocol for Interactions with Federal Agents