



**Homeland
Security**

July 27, 2020

Ms. Mary Sue Coleman
President
Association of American Universities
1200 New York Avenue NW, Suite 550
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Ms. Coleman:

Thank you for your April 20, 2020 letter to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Acting Secretary Wolf asked that I respond on his behalf.

The Department has no greater responsibility than ensuring the safety and security of our Nation. Responding to the pandemic requires everyone to work within rapidly changing, complex circumstances that create a variety of situations and conditions unique to individuals and communities. Our primary goal is to ensure the safety of the public and our employees as the situation evolves.

We recognize that there are immigration-related challenges that individuals, including international students, scholars, and employers face as a direct result of the public health emergency, especially as the first phases of reopening begin. We are also aware that the beginning of a new academic year gives rise to additional questions. We carefully analyze these issues and leverage our resources to effectively address these challenges within our existing authorities. DHS continues to act to protect the American people and our communities and is also considering a number of policies and procedures to improve the employment opportunities of U.S. workers during this public health emergency.

Some of your recommendations relate to the visa process for foreign students, including a request to expedite international students' applications. Regarding visa issuance and consular processing for individuals outside of the United States, we defer to our colleagues at the Department of State. For aliens within the United States, it is important for us to emphasize that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) continues to process immigration benefit requests from the foreign student population such as extension and change of status applications, as well as applications for employment authorization. USCIS will consider special circumstances and expedite requests of individual applications on a case-by-case basis and has resumed premium processing for all eligible employment-based petitions (Form I-140 and

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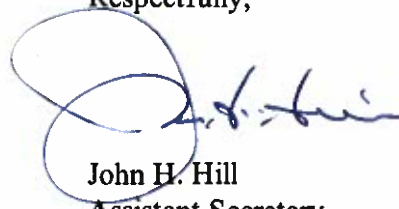
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I-129), including H-1B petitions. Further, as announced on the USCIS public-facing website, several options are available to nonimmigrants to extend their stay or change their status.¹

USCIS and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) work closely to coordinate on issues affecting international students due to the pandemic. ICE has developed and maintains a website with updated responses to frequently asked questions about the impact of COVID-19 on Student and Exchange Visitor Program certified schools and the various scenarios that F and M visa students may encounter, including issues related to Optional Practical Training. ICE has and will continue to issue guidance related to international student matters on this website. Both the USCIS and ICE websites and outreach efforts provide guidance, resources, and information to the public on the actions and policies we are implementing through these uncertain times.²

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important matter.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Hill", is written over a large, loopy circular mark.

John H. Hill
Assistant Secretary
Office of Partnership & Engagement

¹ The USCIS website provides additional information regarding special circumstances, expedite requests, and options for nonimmigrants to extend their stay or change their status at www.uscis.gov.

² For policy updates, operational changes, and COVID-19 information, please visit uscis.gov/coronavirus (USCIS) and ice.gov/coronavirus (ICE SEVP).