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UAW Academic Workers React to the Trump Administration's New Xenophobic Visa Restrictions

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In reaction to the Trump administration's new [Executive Proclamation](#) that suspends crucial visa programs for international workers, UAW members, many of whom perform cutting-edge research at the nation's most prestigious universities, including the University of California, the University of Washington, Columbia University, and others, are fighting back.

"This Executive Proclamation is part of an ongoing effort by the Trump administration to scapegoat non-US citizens," said Anke Schennink, Ph.D., an international scholar who is also the President of UAW Local 5810, which represents more than 11,000 Postdocs and Academic Researchers at the University of California. "UAW Academic Workers form the backbone of America's innovation enterprise, conducting cutting-edge research that includes developing new cures for cancer, modeling strategies for fighting climate change, and other projects that push society forward. Nearly half of us are international, and our work contributes billions in grants and economic stimulus to our local communities. Shutting down these programs will do nothing for the economy and could diminish the quality of research in the US for years to come."

The world's leading research is produced in US labs and is frequently accomplished by international workers. Since 2000, nearly [40 percent](#) of America's Nobel prizes in chemistry, physics and medicine have been awarded to individuals who were not born here (Albert Einstein himself became a U.S. citizen in 1940).

Schennink, along with UAW 2865 President Kavitha Iyengar, J.D., their members, and members of UAW 4121 and GWC-UAW 2110 sent the following in a [letter](#) to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Secretary of Homeland Security Chad Wolf, and Secretary of Labor Eugene Scalia in May:

"...these workforces help our University secure over \$6 billion in federal research grants, which in turn multiply our community's growth in jobs and revenue. They also are key to instructing tens of thousands of undergraduate students. Removing these individuals from campuses or preventing them from entering the country would severely disrupt our strong collaborative working relationships that are vital to our ability to overcome the pandemic. Any policy that reverses or limits visas and related programs would undermine decades of collaborative work between the United States and our international partners in fields that contribute to health and economic security for all."

“As international students and workers, we play a critical role in keeping U.S. universities running, provide the scholarship that drives innovation, and teach the next generation of leaders,” said Yash Amonkar, a Research Assistant at Columbia, and a member of GWC-UAW 2110. “These visa programs are absolutely necessary to the groundbreaking research we do. Together with our union siblings, we call on the Executive branch and on Congress to reverse the suspension of these programs.”

Kim Meier, an international scholar in Psychology at the University of Washington, agrees: “Counter to the claims made by the administration, the presence of non-immigrant visa holders in the workforce positively impacts the U.S. economy. A November 2019 report from the [Congressional Research Service](#) shows that international students routinely remain in the US after graduation, playing an instrumental role in our business, technology, resource, and healthcare sectors. A study by the [National Foundation for American Policy](#) recently found that the presence of workers on H-1B visas can reduce unemployment, increase worker pay, and stabilize employment opportunities for US citizens.”

UAW Academic Workers have a long record of civic and political engagement. They were instrumental in turning back the Grad Tax, securing an Optional Practical Training extension for international researchers in STEM fields, and the inclusion of Postdocs in the federal overtime regulations. They are also vocal critics of the Trump Administration’s immigration policies, and Education Secretary DeVos’s misguided Title IX regulations.

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