

## **Things to Consider When You Work with International Students**

The COVID-19 pandemic is significantly affecting everyone's life, including international students in our community. We hope that this document can serve to remind us of the multiple stressors that our fellow international students may be facing.

### To go or not to go? Visa concerns & travel restrictions

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is not easy to address visa issues on time, so international students' anxiety may be further heightened. Common visa related tasks include extending their I-20 or DS-2019, applying for OPT or Academic Training, getting sponsorship for H-1B after graduation, or even re-issuing their expired visa. While websites may continue to note that these tasks are occurring on time, some students are reporting that does not match their experience. For students who have to go back to their home countries in order to re-issue their visa, limited numbers of flights and health concerns all over the world may create additional barriers and lead to increased stress and anxiety.

### Where do I belong? Pressure to not return to the home country to curb global spread.

- [Perceived as a burden](#): some students from China are urged to stay abroad by their fellow members back home. Those who want to return to be with family during this difficult time are being criticized for being "irresponsible" and burdening the home country system.
- [Flight stressors](#): there was price gouging of flight tickets, resulting in one-way economy seating costing around \$7000. Additionally, flights were canceled multiple times. One student reported being stranded in the U.S. without an apartment as the student terminated their lease to return home. Those who were lucky to get on a flight, found themselves in hours-long lines. Students had reported standing in line going without food.
- Quarantine facilities: unless there are special exceptions, most have to be quarantined at specific facilities for at least 14 days before they are allowed to return home. That is whether the student is showing COVID-19 symptoms or not.

**Concerns about family in their home country, or family's worry about the students in the United States** With long-distance and increasing numbers of confirmed cases every day, students and family might worry about each other but cannot do anything for each other, which might lead to significant feelings of helplessness and anxiety. As of April 14, 2020, [USPS is temporarily suspending most international packages from the United States until further notice](#). Even if students want to send something to their family, it is temporarily impossible at this time, which is a unique experience compared to domestic students in the United States. The uncertainty of when international package shipping will resume increases the anxiety surrounding this issue.

### **"Time zones" apart: social isolation**

Related to the above issue, international students maybe in a more vulnerable state due to multiple barriers that limit their access to support networks. Time zone difference is one of the major barriers, in which connection with friends and family requires careful planning and coordination.

### **Transportation**

International students who do not have their own transportation may experience more isolation and limited resources to get food and other life-essential products. They may have increased concerns with contracting the virus due to reliance on public transportation.

### **#IAmNotAVirus: Racial discrimination**

In the U.S. alone, [more than 1,000 hate crimes](#) have been reported in a span of two weeks. These concerns disproportionately affect students who are perceived to be Asian. Our campus is no exception. Asian students have shared being randomly targeted. Some students have expressed making tough choices of whether to wear preventive gears (e.g., masks) or risk of being targets of harassment and stigma. Words matter! Terms such as “Chinese virus” and “Wuhan Corona” are being used, and these only serve to perpetuate fear and hate than fighting the virus. If you come across such wording, please intervene and explain that naming diseases by their country of origin is outdated. Additionally, there is no justification for xenophobia and discriminative behaviors or attitudes.

When hate and bias are in our community, all students are affected! As student service providers, we need to remind ourselves of our responsibility to acknowledge and support international students during this difficult time.

### **Do's**

- Check in with your students
- Ask how they are doing and coping
- Address issues of bias, bigotry, racism, and xenophobia
- Connect them with resources to report hate crimes