Table of Contents

Director’s Article 3

General Statistics 4

Scholar and Employee Statistics 5

Student Statistics 6

Scholar Stories 8

Student Support 9

Health and Well-Being During COVID-19 10

Immigration Rule Adjustments 11

Positive Sides of SEVP Flexible Policy Guidance 12

Ramifications of Travel Restrictions 13
The 2020/2021 academic year was unlike any other in Pitt history. Students joined classes from inside their own homes all over the world, from Pittsburgh to Los Angeles to Shanghai to London. Faculty and staff learned to modify their jobs and perform as many tasks as possible from living rooms and home offices. Our campuses were eerily quiet, even midday in the middle of the work week in the middle of the semester. Along with the rest of the world, the University transitioned from crowded classrooms to empty buildings. This annual report reflects those changes and the unique challenges of the year. The Office of International Services staff not only continued to provide essential services during this period, but they went far and above expectations to respond to the needs of our international community in an exemplary fashion. This is my open letter to them.

Dear OIS Staff:

It is reported that St. Francis of Assisi once said, “Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.”

In January 2020, you, the staff of OIS, started fielding concerned inquiries from our international community: “What is Pitt doing about this virus? “Can I go home to visit my sick grandparent?” “What can I do about the stares I get or the mean things people say because I’m wearing a mask? I don’t feel comfortable not wearing it, but people treat me badly when I have it on.” “Shall I travel home for spring break?” “How can I stay at Pitt when I don’t feel safe here?”

In March 2020, when it was suddenly announced during spring break that classes were suspended and being transitioned into remote-only, you had to abruptly shift what you were doing to address the hundreds of additional questions that flowed in. You did what was necessary. You buckled down and you answered individual questions to the best of your ability. You participated in webinars and online forums in an attempt to keep our students and scholars and departmental contacts informed. You triaged and addressed the most urgent needs first. You helped students and scholars who had traveled outside the U.S. during spring break to determine whether they would be able to travel back into the U.S. immediately before everything shut down, and then discussed further whether they SHOULD travel back to the U.S. You helped people determine what they needed to do to keep studying, working, or conducting research from their own living rooms, whether they were in Beijing or Pittsburgh.

As the summer wore on and it became apparent that Fall 2020 was not going to be a normal semester, you began to do what was possible. How could you help all your students to complete their coursework on time? What should you do with the many scholars expecting to come to campus for research? How could you advocate for our international community? What steps did you need to take to make sure you were up-to-date with the latest governmental rules and various travel bans? What social and cultural programs could we offer that might help connect students and scholars with others? What was the best way to communicate with our communities? What did your students and scholars need from you in order to keep their lives as mentally, physically, and academically healthy as possible under the circumstances?

If you hold a supportive role in the office, your efforts were equally amazing. You processed updates on immigration documents, managed hundreds (thousands?) of emails, performed tedious tasks over and over and over again and did everything possible to make our work as manageable as possible through the difficulties. You did it all without complaining and without backing down. You kept plugging away, even when the volume was overwhelming.

Through these changes and challenges, you all remained absolutely committed to caring for the people you worked with and for. You probably shed a few tears on behalf of our community. You worried about the expressions of isolation and anxiety you heard from people. You knew that immigration concerns were not the only thing your constituents fretted over. At the same time, you struggled with your own concerns about your families, your health, and your own safety. In short, you did the impossible.

I cannot properly express how incredibly fortunate I feel to have been leading an office of this caliber and commitment. You all have made me extremely proud over the past year. You truly have done the impossible and carried me along for the ride. Thank you.

DELO BLOUGH
DIRECTOR
GENERAL STATISTICS

TOTAL PITT INTERNATIONAL POPULATION BY CATEGORY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incoming Students</td>
<td>1,453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Students</td>
<td>2,877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alumni on Practical Training</td>
<td>662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholars and Employees</td>
<td>1,668</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Top Countries/Territories

1. China—2681
2. India—677
3. South Korea—143
4. Taiwan—104
5. Canada—94
6. Saudi Arabia—82
7. Brazil—80
8. Japan—76
9. Iran—71

TOTAL PITT INTERNATIONAL POPULATION BY PLACE OF BIRTH

[Map showing population distribution by country/region]
For reasons described elsewhere in this report, it is not surprising that the J-1 population at Pitt plummeted between 2019 and 2021. In fact, Pitt’s J-1 program was officially suspended for much of the year, and even when we were able to begin admitting scholars, they were often unable to secure visas to enter the U.S. For that reason, OIS processed more H-1B’s than normal over the same period of time. Many of the H-1B holders were already in the U.S. prior to their H-1B appointment at Pitt, and could avoid the visa quagmire. During this reporting period, OIS also referred 63 employees to outside counsel to begin the processing of their legal permanent residence (green cards.)

### INTERNATIONAL SCHOLARS AND EMPLOYEES BY SCHOOL AFFILIATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Affiliation</th>
<th>J-1s</th>
<th>H-1Bs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dietrich School of Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate School of Public &amp; International Affairs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate School of Public Health</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katz Graduate School of Business</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Computing and Information</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Dental Medicine</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Education</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Health &amp; Rehabilitation Sciences</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Law</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Medicine</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Nursing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Pharmacy</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Social Work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swanson School of Engineering</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
STUDENT STATISTICS

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT POPULATION OVER TIME

- FY 16-17: 907 (Incoming Students), 1,359 (Current Students), 1,768 (Alumni on Practical Training), 1,377 (Scholars and Employees)
- FY 17-18: 954 (Incoming Students), 1,377 (Current Students), 1,834 (Alumni on Practical Training), 1,377 (Scholars and Employees)
- FY 18-19: 948 (Incoming Students), 1,370 (Current Students), 1,819 (Alumni on Practical Training), 1,212 (Scholars and Employees)
- FY 19-20: 918 (Incoming Students), 1,717 (Current Students), 1,717 (Alumni on Practical Training), 1,370 (Scholars and Employees)
- FY 20-21: 662 (Incoming Students), 2,877 (Current Students), 1,668 (Alumni on Practical Training), 1,400 (Scholars and Employees)

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT BY PLACE OF BIRTH

- 1 - 10: [Map showing distribution]
- 11 - 20: [Map showing distribution]
- 21 - 30: [Map showing distribution]
- 31 - 40: [Map showing distribution]
- 41 - 50: [Map showing distribution]
- 61 - 70: [Map showing distribution]
- 71 - 80: [Map showing distribution]
- 91 - 100: [Map showing distribution]
- 281 - 290: [Map showing distribution]
- 1721 - 1730: [Map showing distribution]
## STUDENT STATISTICS

### INTERNATIONAL STUDENT BY SCHOOL AFFILIATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Affiliation</th>
<th>Bachelors</th>
<th>Masters</th>
<th>Doctorate</th>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School of Dental Medicine</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Medicine</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Nursing</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Pharmacy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate School of Public Health</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health Sciences Sub-Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>84</strong></td>
<td><strong>242</strong></td>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
<td><strong>385</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Business Administration</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of General Studies</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dietrich School of Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate School of Public and International Affairs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katz Graduate School of Business</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Computing and Information</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Law</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Social Work</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swanson School of Engineering</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Provost’s Office Sub-Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>997</strong></td>
<td><strong>510</strong></td>
<td><strong>975</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td><strong>2492</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>1015</strong></td>
<td><strong>594</strong></td>
<td><strong>1217</strong></td>
<td><strong>51</strong></td>
<td><strong>2877</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### NEW INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

- **1453** Number of students who confirmed acceptance for Fall 2020 who worked with OIS.
- **572** Number of incoming students who physically made it to Pittsburgh for Fall 2020.
- **417** Number of incoming students who began their studies outside the U.S. for Fall 2020.
I was born and brought up in Kerala, India, where I have completed my schooling and undergraduate education in Microbiology. I moved to the United Kingdom to pursue my Masters in Medical Microbiology from London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in 2003. In 2005, I joined as a PhD candidate at Queens University of Belfast and completed my PhD degree (Virology) in 2010. I have been working in virology research over 15 years.

In my current position at the University of Pittsburgh, I work as a Research Scientist within the Center for Vaccine Research (CVR) Regional Biocontainment Laboratory (RBL). CVR facilitates and conducts research focused on the development of diagnostics, therapeutics, and vaccines for infectious agents that pose a public health risk. RBL is a unique facility containing Biosafety Level 3 (BSL-3) and Animal Biosafety Level 3 (ABSL-3) laboratories. The facility houses a dedicated environment for virology, animal studies, aerobiology, imaging, immunopathology and vaccine studies. The CVR and RBL are part of a national network of secure facilities studying BSL-3 level infectious diseases that are, or have the potential to become, major public health concerns (e.g. Tuberculosis, SARS-CoV-2, Rift Valley Fever Virus [RVFV]).

I have trained to work in the highest level of biosafety containment, BSL-4. The BSL4 suite is a positive pressure, fully encapsulating suit laboratory and specialist training is required to work there. I also enrolled in Security Risk Assessment (SRA) cleared by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Criminal Justice Information Service and Bioterrorism Risk Assessment Group (BRAG).

I now train new candidates to the BSL-3 lab and animal facility access. I worked extensively in the global pandemic SARS-CoV-2 research and published high-impact well renowned journals, which were well cited all over the world. I have published three Science magazine paper in less than a year time, Science magazine is one the most impacted journal in the world (two Science and one Science Advances paper). I also published in Journal of General Virology, PLOS Pathogens, Clinical Infectious Diseases, mSphere.

I was involved in a project in collaboration with department of Critical Care Medicine, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine (UPMC), and I isolated SARS-CoV-2 from clinical sample from a persistent infected patient. This was one of the first cases reported on persistent infection of SARS-CoV-2. We published the data in Journal of Clinical Infectious Diseases (2020). I sequenced the isolated virus and identified that there are aminoacid deletions in the S gene of the SARS-CoV-2 and we studied further on it. In the S glycoprotein, my colleagues and I identified a pattern of deletions in the S glycoprotein of SARS-CoV-2 that can prevent neutralizing antibody binding and showed the need to monitor viral evolution carefully and continually. This is one of the first reported of such a kind of SARS-CoV-2 variant. This data was published in one of the top impact journal called Science. This article getting cited in a very fast rate globally and discussed and featured worldwide and well-covered by media. I am also currently working on variants (isolating them from clinical samples) and studying its property in neutralizing antibodies in convalescent patients. I am also currently working on the possibility of Nbs in treating for SARS-CoV-2 variants.
STUDENT SUPPORT

In the Spring of 2020, it became clear that many international students would be unable to leave the U.S. for the summer months, and jobs would not be readily available. Many students lost promised or potential internships, either in the U.S. or in their home countries. On-campus jobs were also severely limited. At the same time, U.S. citizens were receiving stimulus payments from our government and the University received CARES funding from the federal government, in part to be distributed to U.S. students. Many of those resources available to U.S. students were not available to international students, who were arguably facing even more financial strains than their U.S. counterparts.

For all these reasons, the University convened a committee, including staff from OIS, to create a fund for international students facing severe economic need over the summer months. OIS managed the distribution of that fund, which distributed more than $300,000 to struggling students over the summer months, to assist in their rent, food, and utility payments. The most commonly cited reasons for the need were lack of expected summer employment/internship and the inability to travel back home and stay with family over the summer.

Many of the students receiving the funds expressed gratitude to Pitt for the assistance, such as:

- “I feel really thankful to the International Student Emergency Assistance Fund Committee. I feel really blessed and encouraged to stay healthy and positive while experiencing the pandemic and social issues. Again, thank you so much for selecting me. I will use the fund wisely and return my knowledge and skills to this community when I complete my education!”
- “Thank you very much for the approving the emergency assistance fund. I really appreciate the assistance and the help during these tough times. Stay safe and healthy!”
- “Thank you so much. I can’t even explain how helpful the whole organization have been. I really feel blessed to be part of it. Please let me know how can I be useful in any form after the pandemic is over…It means a lot.”
- “Thank you very much, really appreciate your help. Couldn’t be more proud of how the institution is helping students in this situation…Hail to Pitt!”

My experience last year was very hard: uncertainty over immigration and increasing social rifts that I would have never imagined in a mature democracy as the United States, increasing anti-semitism from both left and right wing parties cloaking their discourse in elements of self-declared virtuosity, and escalating social violence. However, in the midst of these hardships, Hashem blessed me with three equally important blessings: I am Jewish, I married my wife Tzivia, and I remained healthy. My dissertation has moved forward in spite of covid challenges. Baruch HaShem!

Rui Hu, ’19 (STEM OPT)
Electrical and Electronics Engineering

Cesar Cedeno, ’21
Public Administration and Social Service Professions
It is no secret that the pandemic has widely exacerbated mental health concerns. The international students, scholars, and employees whom OIS serves are no exception. In addition to the more common stressors of a pandemic, they often have additional immigration burdens and obstacles which add layers upon layers to their stress. These burdens range widely and include the difficulty of travel, unpredictable governmental regulations, integration into a predominantly virtual community environment, anti-Asian racism, and navigating U.S. systems to access mental healthcare.

Themes of uncertainty were strong throughout the year where travel was made all but impossible. Many folks had family members and friends in their home countries whom they could not visit due to travel restrictions. And even when travel was physically possible, there were often immigration issues that made it much more difficult. Expired visas became a problem when embassies shut down and visa appointments could not be guaranteed. Re-entry into the U.S. became impossible. Trapped between a rock and a hard place, those on pending work visa applications, for example, risked their immigration petitions in order to go home and be with family and friends, sometimes due to critical periods of illness or to attend funerals. Even those community members who did not travel still experienced the stress of waiting for something bad to happen and eventually being faced with their own impossible decisions. Many of our community members experienced the isolation of watching from afar the tragic effects of COVID-19 in their home countries without being able to be with their loved ones at all.

The stress of changing governmental regulations also affected our community’s mental well-being by adding the stress of whether they would be able to study virtually and stay in the country. Even after some of the earliest policy guidance for international students was rolled back to allow virtual study inside the U.S., the precarity of major rules changing at any point added considerable pressure on international students. On the employee side, those seeking H-1B visas faced a ban, in effect for much of 2020, which caused every H-1B individual outside the U.S. to try and prove a need for a National Interest Exception in order to bypass the ban. Some international employees have preemptively applied for green cards to avoid future problems, which is an expensive process, particularly for those with dependent family members.

Seeking out community as a salve during this time was especially difficult for international community members as they are often newer to Pittsburgh and may not have had the opportunity to build up or rely on existing social networks of support. Like everyone else, Zoom fatigue was real for the international community, and the difficulty of accessing help in the form of office hours or meeting with mentors, colleagues, or supervisors, proved to make integrating even more challenging. Not being able to explore the city as easily or connect in-person made adjusting to life in a new place even more challenging than it would have been otherwise.

Early in the pandemic, the Asian and Asian-American community broadly were targeted in racist attacks by those as high up as our country’s former President, who infamously dubbed COVID-19 the “China virus.” Even while doing daily activities such as running errands in Pittsburgh presented unfortunate opportunities for racist comments and behavior directed at our community from unexpected sources, such as bus drivers. The number of racist incidents that our Asian community has faced is unfortunately likely under-reported. More broadly, a terrorist shooting spree targeting Asian women in Atlanta in March 2021 bought into sharp relief that Anti-Asian racism in the U.S. is still present and active. Navigating the complex immigration system while managing the wide-ranging health and personal impacts of a global pandemic and hearing news of anti-Asian racism formed a particularly difficult terrain for our international community to navigate.

In seeking out mental health resources to help cope with some of these issues, there are yet other obstacles that may present themselves. Like many in the U.S., international community members may struggle with stigma around desiring mental healthcare, and it can often be difficult to truly connect with providers outside of one’s native language and cultural background. Attempting to navigate U.S.-based health insurance and determining if coverage is available to you for mental healthcare is a challenge; international scholars and employees can’t simply utilize the student health center for counseling appointments like students can. Some of the resources that exist on campus for scholars and employees for example are limited in scope and provide shorter term help. Navigating online systems for providers and trying to estimate the cost prior to receiving care is an additional challenge that is new to many community members as they navigate U.S. culture and systems for the first time.

It has been a challenging year for us all — to say the very least — and our international community members have been uniquely impacted. Despite these formidable obstacles and mental health stressors, our office has seen students, scholars, and employees continue to rise to the occasion and even excel. A comment frequently repeated throughout this past year is that those who pivoted to working from home are not just working from home; instead, they are working from home during a pandemic. In the same way, any success and even maintenance of effort over the course of the past year should be seen not just as a matter of course, but a genuine accomplishment in these conditions. Even during normal, non-pandemic times, there are significant challenges our international community faces to be here, succeed, and even simply maintain their lives over time. We at OIS tip our hats to the international community and celebrate their efforts over this past year, as we simultaneously acknowledge and respect the immense obstacles and struggles many have gone through to continue their journey here.

As for many people, the height of the pandemic was a period of deep uncertainty for me. I was on a leave of absence when the pandemic hit, and I was scheduled to return to Pitt by Fall 2020. However, my visa was about expire and I needed to renew it in order to come back to the states. Since embassies were closed around the world, I had to stay in my home country longer than expected. Not knowing what would really happen (let’s remember that the previous executive administration threatened to cancel visas for international students) I went through a period of deep anxiety. Fortunately, after a few months, I managed to get an emergency appointment at the embassy, and then secured my return for the Spring 2021. This experience, however, was a game changer for me. It made me aware of how fragile one’s career path can be. It also made appreciate the great opportunity I have at Pitt, where I have grown both academically and personally.

Manuel Garzón, ’22
PhD, Hispanic and Latin American Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics
## IMMIGRATION RULE ADJUSTMENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 31</td>
<td>Proclamation on Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Nonimmigrants of Person who Pose a Risk of Transmitting 2019 Novel Coronavirus (Ban on entries from China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 29</td>
<td>Proclamation on the Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Nonimmigrants of Certain Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting Coronavirus (No entries from Iran)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 11</td>
<td>Proclamation on the Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Nonimmigrants of Certain Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting 2019 Novel Coronavirus (No entries from Schengen Area)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 12</td>
<td>Template for reporting school COVID-19 procedural changes to SEVP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 13</td>
<td>Follow-up to March 9 SEVP Guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 14</td>
<td>Proclamation on the Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Nonimmigrants of Certain Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting Coronavirus (No entries from U.K. and Ireland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 22</td>
<td>Proclamation: Suspension of Entry of Immigrants Who Present Risk to the U.S. Labor Market During the Economic Recovery Following the COVID-19 Outbreak (No new immigrants can enter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 24</td>
<td>Proclamation: Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Nonimmigrants of Certain Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting Novel Coronavirus (No entries from Brazil)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 29</td>
<td>Proclamation: Suspension of Entry as Nonimmigrants of Certain Students and Researchers from the People’s Republic of China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 22</td>
<td>Proclamation Suspending Entry of Aliens Who Present a Risk to the U.S. Labor Market Following the Coronavirus Outbreak (Suspension of certain J-1 and H-1B new visas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 6</td>
<td>SEVP Broadcast Message: COVID-19 and Fall 2020 (Students may not be fully online and remain in active SEVIS status)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 7</td>
<td>SEVP Frequently Asked Questions (Students may not be fully online and remain in active SEVIS status)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 8</td>
<td>Harvard/MIT Court file a Complaint for Declaratory and Injunctive Relief against July 6 Message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 13</td>
<td>University of Pittsburgh filed an Amicus Brief in support of the Harvard/MIT lawsuit (many other institutions also filed briefs or brought separate lawsuits)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 14</td>
<td>SEVP Frequently Asked Questions for SEVP Stakeholders about COVID-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 15</td>
<td>Settlement reached in the Harvard/MIT case, rescinding the July 6 &amp; 7 Guidance and reinstating the March SEVP Guidance. (Did not address guidance for new students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 17</td>
<td>SEVP Broadcast Message: Follow-up: ICE Continues March Guidance for Fall School Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 24</td>
<td>SEVP: Clarifying Questions for Fall 2020 Based on March 9 Spring Guidance Broadcast (New students may not enter the U.S. for 100% online study)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 7</td>
<td>SEVP Frequently Asked Questions for SEVP Stakeholders about COVID-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 29</td>
<td>Proposed Immigration Rule Published which would eliminate Duration of Status for F-1 and J-1 visa holders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 29</td>
<td>Court injunction against planned October 2nd fee increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 8</td>
<td>DOL Published Interim Final Rule changing way that prevailing wages are determined, causing an immediate significant increase affecting H-1B and PERM green card filings</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 8</td>
<td>DHS Rule changing the definition of “specialty occupation”</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 1</td>
<td>Court set aside the October 8 DOL rule on a summary judgment motion</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>44210</td>
<td>DOL published final rule: Strengthening Wage Protections for the Temporary and Permanent Employment of Certain Aliens in the U.S., effectively reinstating the October interim rule; The Biden Administration subsequently delayed the rule’s effective date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 20</td>
<td>Proclamation: Ending Discriminatory Bans on Entry to the United States (rescinded the 2017 and 2020 bans against nationals of Iran, Libya, North Korea, Somalis, Syria, Venezuela, Yemen, Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Nigeria, Sudan, and Tanzania)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 25</td>
<td>Proclamation on the Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Non-Immigrants of Certain Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting Coronavirus Disease (No entries from South Africa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 24</td>
<td>Proclamation Revoking Proclamation 10014 (rescinded the April 22, 2020 Proclamation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 26</td>
<td>DOS Guidelines: F-1/certain J-1 visa holders subject to COVID travel restrictions were granted National Interest Exemptions</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 30</td>
<td>Proclamation on the Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Non-Immigrants of Certain Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting Coronavirus Disease (No entries from India)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 23</td>
<td>Court vacated the January 14 final DOL rule and remanded back to DOL</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 29</td>
<td>DOS Extended NIE validity to 12 months and multiple entries</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 29</td>
<td>DOL announced that the “operative version” of the prevailing wage rules “continues to be the version in place on October 7, 2020, prior to the Interim Final Rule.”</td>
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</table>

Imigration work, by nature, is ever changing. OIS is required to review regulatory changes and new rules on an ongoing basis. Typically, those changes are a result of updated regulations or legal rulings. What makes 2020/2021 stand out is the sheer volume of these changes and the speed at which they were enacted. In a typical year, we might expect to see 1—5 rule changes or regulatory adjustments. And those changes almost always come with months of advance notice, and often with input from the international education community. The changes during the 2020/2021 fiscal year, on the other hand, were often a result of presidential executive orders or guidance from SEVP, which were enacted with no more than a day or two lead time. This chart is a summary of the rule changes our international population was forced to adjust to over the course of the year.
The Student and Exchange Visitors Program (SEVP) is the U.S. agency that manages F-1 international student programs and immigration records. International students must follow strict rules regarding their studies while in the United States or face severe immigration consequences. Unfortunately, many of the specific rules were made impossible due to institutional adjustments to mitigate the threat of COVID-19 on campuses. Fortunately, SEVP issued some flexible policy guidance that assisted students and schools in maintaining compliance during the pandemic. Some examples of that ease in guidance follows.

Current students can take all online courses inside or outside the US without losing their visa status.
Under normal circumstances, it is the expectation that an international student is coming into the U.S. in order to participate in person in a full-time U.S. educational program. Only one online course per semester will count toward their full-time coursework. International students who enroll in too many online courses have violated their status and must depart the United States immediately. Fortunately, during the pandemic the US government allowed current international students to keep their immigration records in “active” status even while studying in all online courses if that was the method of instruction for the student’s school.

SEVIS records could be kept active while students were outside the U.S.
Typically when international students leave the U.S., unless they are participating in an established study abroad program through their school, their SEVIS record is terminated. When they decide to return to the U.S. the record needs to be reactivated, or a brand new record has to be established. During the special pandemic rules, however, the SEVIS record could be kept active as long as they continued to study full-time, whether they participated full-time in Flex@Pitt classes or in Pitt on Location. This flexibility has been very important as it has allowed some students to retain their eligibility for immigration benefits such as off-campus U.S. work authorizations after they graduate.

While full-time online study (whether pursued from Pittsburgh or at a 3,000-mile, 12-hour time zone remove) brought its own unique challenges, many international students were able to breathe a sigh of relief not to lose their visa status as a result of this emergency situation. The significance of this cannot be stressed enough.

Electronic signatures are permitted on I-20s.
Usually all I-20s must be signed by hand and the original document is used for purposes such as international travel, visa application, etc. The U.S. government allowed school officials to sign I-20s using a digital signature and email the I-20 to the email address listed in the student’s SEVIS record. This drastically reduced the logistical hurdles and costs associated with both staff and students operating in a remote, work- or study-from-home environment. The OIS student team has been able to email students their I-20s that have been securely signed in DocuSign, which eliminates the mail delivery delays that have been a common hurdle during the pandemic.

Flexibility with remote work options for Curricular Practical Training, Optional Practical Training and STEM, and for J-1 Academic Training
SEVP permitted students participating in off-campus practical training opportunities to work remotely from home due to the pandemic. Additionally, SEVP did not require schools to report that CPT/OPT/STEM students were working remotely, which drastically reduced schools’ potential compliance reporting requirements.

SEVIS transfer capabilities were extended.
Typically international students must transfer their SEVIS records to start a new program of study that will begin within five months of their current program completion. The US government allowed this normal deadline to be extended until students could return to the United States, providing a mechanism by which schools could request that a student’s SEVIS record be activated and transferred after the five month period.

This not only benefits students financially, but also preserves certain immigration benefits afforded to continuing students. Specifically, it allows for more flexibility with traveling, as they are eligible to return to the US earlier than 30 days before their new program start date. In addition, since students are considered continuing students, they are eligible to request off-campus work permission (CPT, OPT) earlier than they could if the normal rules applied.

Pitt on Location and Flex@Pitt
While not directly tied to flexible SEVP policy guidance, the innovative thinking of UCIS and the Global Experiences Office enabled many Pitt international students to continue their educations in the Pitt on Location program. This program provided classes for students in their home country with educational providers that the Global Experiences Office had previously partnered with for study abroad programs. More broadly, the wide availability of Flex@Pitt courses permitted many international students to begin or continue their Pitt education regardless of their international location. Being able to offer students several options affirmed Pitt’s commitment to supporting our students’ educational goals during one of the most challenging public health crises our planet has ever seen.

Last year with the pandemic and embassies being closed I was really worried if I would be able to get my visa stamping on time or not as September 4th was the deadline. But my emergency appointment was approved so I was able to make it for fall 2020. Studying remotely was not a bad experience for me. I have liked the Canvas portal for learning and the instructors were all very helpful and friendly. But I would definitely say at the same time other campus activities social engagement is also mandatory other than classroom which of course I have missed due to remote learning, getting to know your classmates more but overall, it was a pretty good experience for me.

Somdipa Majumdar, '22
MS Information Science
TRAVEL RESTRICTION RAMIFICATIONS

When the COVID-19 pandemic started gaining momentum around the world, many governmental agencies worldwide and U.S. consulates were starting to close in February and March of 2020. This effectively restricted entry into the U.S. for everyone except U.S. Citizens, permanent residents and those who could prove a true emergency reason for a visa stamping appointment. Additionally, airlines restricted their flights, making it difficult for people worldwide to return to their home countries and/or to arrive in their intended destinations for educational or employment purposes. Anyone not from the U.S. was effectively stranded wherever they were when the restrictions were enacted, causing many problems for our international communities on campus.

The first Presidential Proclamation related to the COVID-19 pandemic – P.P. 9984 – restricted entry into the U.S. for those who had been physically present in China during the 14-day period preceding their intended travel. The Proclamation became effective February 2, 2020, amidst the Spring 2020 term. At that time, most continuing international Pitt students (especially from China) and employees/scholars hired for the Spring 2020 semester had already arrived in Pittsburgh for the semester.

In February and March 2020, additional Presidential Proclamations were enacted, which restricted travel for anyone physically present in Iran, Brazil, the European Schengen Zone, United Kingdom, and Ireland. South Africa and India were added to this list in January and May 2021, respectively. New students, scholars and employees were effectively barred from entry into the U.S., and those that were already in the U.S. were beginning to realize their options for international travel were severely limited. And finally, in June of 2020, the Presidential administration enacted a ban on the issuance of all H-1B nonimmigrant visas and immigrant visas issued abroad through the end of 2020 (eventually extended to the end of March 2021). This had a major impact on our recruitment of international students and employees, as it was not guaranteed that these people could obtain a visa or find flight arrangements to travel to the U.S. by the beginning of the Fall 2020 semester. These difficulties continued throughout all of the 2020/2021 school year, as many consulates continued to be in various stages of closure/phased reopening and there were huge backlogs of people trying to schedule visa appointments to arrive in the US before their work or academic start dates.

Travel restrictions soon developed throughout the world. As the U.S. pandemic became increasingly severe, students and scholars inside the U.S. found it more and more difficult to find passage back to their home countries. Those that did certainly were not able to return to the United States for Fall 2020 term. Newly admitted students and newly hired scholars were not able to begin their programs in-person in Fall 2020. Some creative solutions made it possible for certain students to continue their programs in other ways (e.g. Flex@Pitt and Pitt On Location) but the vast majority of new scholars and employees could not enter the U.S. and simply had to postpone or completely forego their opportunity at Pitt.

Isolation from other students during the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 terms made for a difficult learning environment, especially for new students. A small number of students started Master’s programs in January 2020 and finished in April 2021, having only attended in-person classes until mid-March 2020. Students outside the U.S. were able to attend classes online, via Flex@Pitt. However, because many classes were offered synchronously, international students were attending classes at all hours of the night, depending on where they were in the world. Research opportunities that typically happen on campus were cut short for those students studying from abroad.

For international faculty and staff across the country, the immigration climate was especially brutal. On top of the effects of the pandemic on visa stamping and travel, the Presidential administration in 2020 went on the attack to curtail employing foreign workers by banning the entry of all H1B nonimmigrant workers for a period of time. For those already in the U.S., many lost their jobs and could not find new ones due to the pandemic and immigration restrictions. They also could not easily leave the U.S., so they effectively lost their legal status and became stranded in the U.S. For many, this potentially jeopardized their future visa and green card eligibility.

At Pitt, OIS worked closely with all of our current international scholars and employees, and with departments, to do whatever possible to mitigate the damage caused by the pandemic. In most cases, we were able to find alternatives to satisfy the legal challenges stemming from the situation. In a few cases, where it was simply impossible to extend the current stay, scholars were referred to outside counsel to submit a request to change to a temporary visitor’s visa in order to legally protect their immigration status until they were able to depart the country.

As conditions related to the pandemic started to improve when vaccines became available in Spring 2021, individuals attempted to make visa appointments for U.S. Embassies and Consulates around the world, but with little success and much frustration. Even if an appointment was scheduled, it was routinely cancelled or postponed, sometimes until Spring 2022! Only in very late Spring and early Summer 2021 did we see more and more visas granted to new and continuing students. Students were granted a “blanket waiver” of the COVID-related travel restrictions. Employees and scholars, however, had similar issues in requesting visa appointments around the world and they were NOT granted a similar blanket waiver of the COVID-related travel restrictions. Therefore, those physically present in one of the countries affected by travel bans were also required to apply for and obtain a “National Interest Exemption” at their preferred consulate before they could fly directly to the U.S. The NIE requires the traveler to prove their presence in the U.S. is in the “national interest” for reasons like COVID-19 research and critical infrastructure support.

By the middle of Summer 2021 embassies around the world had begun to open, depending on local conditions. Many students were able to secure visas for entry into Fall 2021 classes. However, many scholars and employees continued to struggle — in addition to the fact that student visas are generally given top priority for visa appointments, the COVID travel bans continued to exist for specific countries. Visa delays continued through the 2020/2021 academic year.

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OIS Staff has continued to be open for business throughout the pandemic. However, to contain the spread of COVID-19, the University Center for International Studies has operated under a Remote Work Plan. Throughout the 2020/2021 Fiscal Year, OIS staff were accessible via Teams, Zoom, and Email.