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## **International Students in the Trump Era: A Narrative View**

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We've all seen the numbers—In 2016, the Institute of International Education (2020) reported a 3% decrease in first-time enrollment of international students in the United States, amounting to nearly 10,000 students. This initial dip, a first since the Institute for International Education began collecting data in 2005, has continued in both 2017 and 2018 (see Table 1). Some in the field have attributed the trend to an increase in the price of education, heightened global competitiveness, and a decrease in sponsored scholarships from key markets. However, many have also pointed to the U.S. political climate following the election of President Donald Trump (Glum, 2017; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2017; Saul, 2018; Smith, 2017).

**Table 1: Changes in New International Student Enrollment**

Year	Total new	Undergraduate	Graduate	Nondegree
2014–2015	293,766 (+8.75%)	112,765 (+2.99%)	121,637 (+12.09%)	59,364 (13.89%)
2015–2016	300,743 (2.38%)	119,262 (+5.76%)	126,516 (+4.01%)	54,965 (-7.41%)
2016–2017	290,836 (-3.29%)	115,841 (-2.87%)	124,888 (-1.29%)	50,107 (-8.84%)
2017–2018	271,738 (-6.57%)	108,589 (-6.26%)	117,960 (-5.55%)	45,239 (-9.72%)
2018–2019	269,383 (-0.87%)	106,881 (-1.57%)	119,828 (+1.58%)	42,674 (-5.67%)

While some international educators have called the impact of Trump immigration policies on international college students trivial, other institutions have noted concerns over the experiences of international students (Deruy, 2017; Pottie-

Sherman, 2018). In response to the 2016 election, a number of institutions quickly reacted with messages of support to their international community. Universities across the nation leapt to action. Most notably, the #YouAreWelcomeHere campaign swept the nation, with more than 380 institutions of higher education participating (NAFSA, 2020).

With its “America First” vision, the Trump administration has focused its efforts in three main areas of immigration: border security, interior enforcement, and employment (The White House, 2018). The President has encountered setbacks in achieving some of his goals, but many proposed changes in immigration law have succeeded (Pierce, 2019). Among his most recent actions are presidential proclamations that suspend certain employment-based visas to preserve domestic jobs and support the U.S. economic recovery amid the Coronavirus pandemic. In order to pursue its aggressive immigration agenda, the administration has crafted and adopted a powerful narrative for the American public that has been distributed through digital and news media. It can be argued that this narrative, employed as a tool for supporting policy change, has had an impact on the feelings of safety, security, and belongingness for many people, including international students and scholars in the United States.

The Narrative Policy Framework (Shanahan et al., 2018) argues that stories are integral in shaping the entire policy cycle, from agenda setting through implementation. It acknowledges a narrative’s four main structural elements: setting, characters, plot, and the moral of the story. Beyond its structure, the Narrative Policy Framework also suggests that policy actors may utilize strategies to move their audiences in one direction or another, serving as a powerful catalyst for change (Shanahan et al., 2018).

Burgeoning literature in the field of international student services hints at this connection between an increasingly unwelcoming environment for international students and their growing feelings of insecurity (Bartram, 2018; Mathies & Weimer, 2018; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2017). International student support offices across the world may vary in organizational structure and the range of services they provide, but all share the responsibility of assisting international students in their educational and cultural transition to campus (Ammigan & Perez-Encinas, 2018; Briggs & Ammigan, 2017). As international educators, it is our responsibility to reach across disciplines for tools that help us better understand and serve our communities. While some of us have institutional responsibilities to administer regulatory compliance with shifting immigration policies and procedures, we must also acknowledge that the support model for our students may need to be recalibrated so we can directly address the potential impact of other environmental factors, including political narratives.

Below, we offer a few recommendations for administrators and support staff to consider as they bolster support for their international community. Incidentally, these propositions might also be relevant to many non-U.S. institutions that are addressing similar situations and issues on their respective campuses internationally.

1. Provide access to accurate immigration advising. Amid confusion and varying perspectives on changing immigration policies, it is important

for designated university officials to remain accessible to students and scholars who seek timely and factual guidance on their visa status and employment options as per official government regulations.

2. Establish an open forum for addressing concerns. Some students, despite struggling to understand the effects of a changing political climate, may experience social withdrawal and hesitate to come forward. Institutions must consider creating a safe and supportive space for dialogue. This also includes regularly assessing the needs and challenges of their students.
3. Partner with service offices, academic units, and student organizations on campus to develop collaborative resources that can help address the overwhelming fears and anxieties among international students and scholars, and ensure their wellbeing and academic success.
4. Develop initiatives with local government and community organizations to create a welcoming home and friendly setting for international visitors. International student support offices can play a leadership role in developing supportive networks and connections with the wider community.
5. Implement culturally sensitive orientation programs and early interventions that support international students during times of high stress to help them with their academic, social, and cultural adjustment to campus.

As university administrators and staff recognize the impact of political narratives on the wellbeing of our international communities, it is critical that we remain proactive in providing support services that are intentional and inclusive in nature. Such initiatives not only enhance the student experience but can help advance diversity and internationalization efforts across the institution.

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