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### Comment by Rosemary Gillett-Karam

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**Prof. Rosemary Gillett-Karam** is frequently honored by national educational bodies as one of the foremost academic experts on the significance of a great American innovation: community college. She has served as university president and held other positions as an administrator and a scholar. She also is an editor of this journal.

Here she reports on the effect of the pandemic, and precipitous action by the US government, on international students attending higher education institutions in the United States:

The Department of Homeland Security, with its Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVIS) arms, announced unexpectedly on July 6 of this year that international students studying in the United States at universities and colleges which were converting to all-online instruction because of the pandemic would become immediately ineligible to continue their enrollment in their college or university courses if their own countries had similar programs available.

They would have to return home precipitously.

Fortunately, following lawsuits that were filed quickly by Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, then joined by Princeton, Columbia, and many other universities, this order was rescinded. The new policy had also been opposed by a coalition of seventeen states and the District of Columbia; these jurisdictions insisted that the government revert to rules that had been issued in March and on which the universities and students had already based planning for the coming year. The earlier edict had given current students in higher education institutions the flexibility to take classes online for the duration of the Covid-19 pandemic. Apparently, this will now be the case once again.

Nevertheless, the painful nature of the combination of this change in regulations along with the seriousness of the Covid-19 pandemic and the concomitant need for students and their universities to proceed with enrollment as the fall semester approached, could not be gainsaid. When the sudden switch in ICE and SEVIS regulations happened, international students found themselves confused, forced to deal with the vagaries of university and college life, especially with a range of variable and inexact strictures relating to reentry now being made on the fly.

Such dilemmas have led to compelling, but unresolved, discussions for higher education researchers and for higher education administrators over recent months.

International students constitute roughly six percent of the student body in American higher education today. They come to these shores from China, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Vietnam, Germany, Canada, and elsewhere for both undergraduate and graduate studies. These students bring to their institutions payments that are at least three to eight times higher than the tuitions paid by American students.

After the new rules were announced (and before they were rescinded) some US institutions had already proposed moving foreign nationals to other nearby compatible academic institutions with on-site courses.

There are two paths to understanding the many complexities of the role of foreign nationals in the student bodies of contemporary American higher education — institutional concerns and student concerns. For institutions, there are budgetary considerations to weigh principally but not exclusively; for students, there are personal planning and academic concerns. The impact is national.

Just as faculty and staff are being re-gearred for online and remote teaching and learning in the face of the continuing pandemic, they find themselves confronted with frequent and usually unhelpful surveys, the purpose of which is to determine the future sustainability of institutions and to measure the impact of foreign nationals on the support of their programs.

Student concerns, on the other hand, range from the mechanics of transferring to how to undertake online coursework. Students often report that they are being shattered physiologically and physically by the anomie being precipitated by these changes of government, and thus school, policies. Additionally, housing is now uncertain, food is not always easy to come by, critical medical, dental, nursing, and science labs are closed, and coursework itself is in question.

Moreover, most foreign students express their own disfavor with the conversions to online courses, and not just because of language issues. Typical complaints center on technological inadequacy. Further, almost none of these students indicate that they have had any input into critical decisions being considered by institutional administrators as government regulations shift. Efforts by university administrators to respond to student concerns have been limited and vague.

This bleak situation since the arrival of Covid-19 does not confront the United States alone. Great Britain expects a three-billion-dollar reduction in revenues and predicts a two- to three-year disruption of services. Germany has issued through DAAD (<https://ww.daad.de/en/coronavirus>) a comprehensive guide to Covid-19 research and international higher education.

Thus, the financial and service delivery disruptions caused by the virus are widespread. In part, they flow from unpredictable edicts from the government. But, additionally, those institutions substantially serving low-income students already often do so via frequently unreliable technologies; they find that the changing situation, plus limited student use of technology, impedes the full delivery of curricula.

In conclusion, the pandemic and its ancillary problems restrict the ability of higher education to serve national and international students effectively as the new semester commences.