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For Immediate Release

A Joint Statement Supporting Our International Student Community

On Monday, July 6, 2020, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) alerted colleges and universities around the country that “students attending schools operating entirely online may not take a full online course load and remain in the United States”¹. In their ruling, ICE stated that international students who attend schools with fully online course loads would not be issued new visas and are required to leave the country or transfer to another school offering in-person classes to avoid legal consequences, including deportation. Also, “students attending schools adopting a hybrid model...will be allowed to take more than one class or three credit hours online.” However, at any point during the semester, if the entirety of an international student’s schedule is shifted online, “they must leave the country.” This ruling meant that international students whose schools return to in-person classes in the fall, but then are forced to attend online classes later in their instruction, would have to be deported.

However, on Tuesday, July 14, 2020, the Trump administration had reversed that ICE regulation that made international students uncertain for what to expect for their Fall 2020 semester. We are thankful that the Trump administration recognized how this regulation would have endangered students’ paths to their degree. International students have been uncertain for the past week about the future of their studies. By reversing this policy, those students can now safely return to school without fear of deportation. What this policy did, aside from frightening current international students, was point out the flaws in current protections for international students.

Many universities, including Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, have pushed against this policy from the day it was released. Additionally, over 200 other universities had shown their support for this push-back by signing the amicus brief that accompanied Harvard and MIT’s lawsuit. The Student Senate and many students in the international student community are disappointed that Valparaiso University did not sign onto

¹U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, SEVP modifies temporary exemptions for nonimmigrant students taking online courses during fall 2020 semester § (2020).
<https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/sevp-modifies-temporary-exemptions-nonimmigrant-students-taking-online-courses-during>.

this brief. Further, the university failed to release a statement to the campus community showing their support for international students. International students did not receive any communication from the university that expressed how they would protect said students from deportation if the university would have moved to fully online instruction. Many of these students lived in fear for this past week with little to no contact with university officials.

This is not the only time that Valparaiso University has overlooked the international student community. When the university hired Parkhurst to run dining services, they had failed to make a dining plan specific to international students. It was not until after representatives from the Office of International Programs intervened that this problem had been recognized. Further, the university does not allow international students to fill out and submit the College Scholarship Service (CSS). This application is similar to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), however it applies to international students as well as domestic students. The CSS is not funded from the federal government, but through the universities themselves. Due to Valparaiso University refusing to accept the CSS application, they do not put money aside for international students to use to pay off their tuition. Peer institutions do offer aid through the CSS, including Gustavus Adolphus College and DePauw University. While the University aims to protect all students, it appears that international students have continually fought for basic protections and amenities.

As a result of recent events and Valpo's silence on this issue, we are asking Valparaiso University to take the following actions to protect our international student community:

1. Release a public statement from the university administration that expresses solidarity with international students
2. Release a public statement from the university administration declaring that, in the case of a new regulation affecting Valpo's international students, Valparaiso University will offer in-person learning for international students throughout the Fall 2020 semester while following CDC guidelines to ensure students remain protected from COVID-19
3. Ensure the safety, security, and education of international students who cannot travel to their home countries OR back to the USA due to conflict or any other reason by allowing international students to remain in the residence halls
4. Ensure professors are aware of any new policies that affect international students' education and work with international students to meet their needs
5. Ensure all students coming back for the Fall 2020 term will have their I-20 forms on time
6. Support VISA and international students by hosting a meeting to discuss the resources available to them on campus
7. Ensure clear communication and availability so questions can be answered

We believe that the university should uphold the standard set by their OneValpo promise, which reads, “I **promise** to show respect for all others regardless of race, ethnicity, color, religion, nationality, age, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, physical ability, or mental ability,” to ensure that every student at Valpo is cherished and respected. Our international student population is not exempt from this promise.

Sincerely,

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P.S. This letter was sent to the following administrators.

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VP of Student Affairs Julie DeGraw

Executive Director of International and Intercultural Engagement Byron Martin