

PUBLIC STATEMENT

IEEE-USA Calls for Extended Online Class Exemption for Student Visas

WASHINGTON (13 July 2020) – Last week, the Administration announced that it would begin enforcing current laws regarding students enrolled in online degree programs. This would force thousands of students out of the country at a time when health experts are urging people to avoid travel. IEEE-USA urges the Administration to extend the temporary exemption to the online class rule through at least the end of 2020. This will allow students already in this country to continue their studies, regardless of the impact COVID-19 has had on their universities.

“With many colleges and universities forced to shift to an entirely online curriculum, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services’ (USCIS) rule puts students and schools in a difficult place,” said James Conrad, 2020 President of IEEE-USA. “Those who entered the United States in good faith to pursue their educations should not be penalized because of COVID-19.”

IEEE-USA recognizes and appreciates USCIS’ proposal to soften current law by allowing international students to take more than one online class per semester. This is a good reform, even without COVID-19.

In normal times, requiring international students to take at least some in-person classes is reasonable, sensible and protects the integrity of the student visa program. But we need to recognize the extraordinary times we are in. International students who were already in the United States when the COVID-19 pandemic hit should be allowed to remain, regardless of how their courses are taught this fall.

This controversy further highlights the tenuous conditions faced by potential immigrants relying on their skills or educations to join our country. Because the United States lacks a coherent, skill-based immigration system, we risk losing many of the most innovative, entrepreneurial, and creative people in the world to our overseas rivals.

America benefits when well-educated and innovative people join our nation, but we should not assume that they will always do so if we continue to rely on an antiquated, broken, and confusing immigration system to admit them.

IEEE-USA urges Congress to reform our high-skill visa system to make it simpler, faster and easier to navigate. Specifically, Congress needs to make F visas dual-intent so that students who desire to immigrate into the U.S. can start the immigration process before they graduate. Congress should also create 50,000 new EB green cards, specifically to allow

STEM graduate students to move directly from their student visas to a green card within a year of graduating. Both of these reforms will help protect international students from future emergencies and encourage them to stay and add their talents to our country.

About IEEE-USA:

IEEE-USA serves the public good and promotes the careers and public policy interests of nearly 180,000 engineering, computing and technology professionals who are U.S. members of IEEE, the world's largest technical professional organization.

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