A Message of Support for International Students

MAY 29, 2020

Dear Rackham Students,

This week’s news cycle brings forward reports of plans that may significantly impact international students, and prompts me to strongly reaffirm my personal commitment to welcoming and supporting such vital members of our graduate community—both those members who are currently here studying and training, as well as those who will seek to pursue their educational goals with us in the future, including in fall 2020. Rackham Graduate School, like the university as a whole, has long welcomed students from around the world, and we deeply value their many contributions through teaching, scholarship, and research. While COVID-19 has caused severe disruption for everyone at the university, international students have faced additional worries tied to visa status, travel restrictions, distance from loved ones, and more.

Approximately 40 percent of all Rackham students come to U-M from outside of the United States. As measures to combat COVID-19 began taking shape, as travel restrictions were implemented—often with little or no warning—and as U.S embassies and consulates closed indefinitely, I know that you faced difficult choices over your travel options and their potential effect on your immigration status, educational goals, and career pathways. This came in addition to an existing national political climate in which you were often made to feel distrusted or unwelcome, or that options available to you might suddenly change. Rackham and the university are deeply concerned about these issues. The university continues to make its position very clear at the federal level and to leverage our educational alliances to work with those in Washington about the burdens and barriers that international students are facing, and the value they bring to our university, region, and nation.

As concerns over the virus spread, international students around the United States reported experiencing microaggressions and even more serious examples of discrimination. Our institutional values of inclusion leave no room for harassment born of xenophobia and racism. I encourage anyone who has experienced or witnessed such behavior at U-M to immediately report it to the Office of Institutional Equity [1].

I have great empathy for those of you who are feeling isolated or experiencing challenges to your well-being at this time. Our need to shelter in place has restricted our very ability to engage with the communities that help sustain us. Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) continues to offer both clinical services [2] and crisis services [3], available to all U-M students. In addition, CAPS has an embedded staff member, Dr. Laura Monschau [4], dedicated to working specifically with graduate students. They also provide a range of virtual resources [5] for support during the pandemic. International
students looking to create connections among one other might also consider the virtual conversation circles [6] being offered by the English Language Institute.

Finally, I would like to affirm that Rackham’s planning for the fall term and the upcoming academic year includes steps to maximize the potential for all admitted students to participate in fall 2020 instruction, and this includes addressing the numerous questions remaining for current and incoming international students. This work requires careful coordination with organizations across the university and elsewhere. I recognize the stress generated by the current uncertainty, and I look forward to sharing details as they are finalized in the coming weeks. Since the situation is continually evolving, please make sure to regularly check the International Center’s COVID-19 update page [7] for important information in the meantime.

Our university is made stronger as a whole because we attract not only outstanding students, but also outstanding faculty and staff members from other countries. All of us at Rackham are committed to supporting you throughout our current crisis and beyond.

Sincerely,

Mike Solomon
Dean

Source: Rackham Graduate School [8]

Source URL: https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/message-support-international-students

Links
[3] https://caps.umich.edu/article/crisis-services-0