



University of California, Merced
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GRADUATE DIVISION

July 7, 2020

Dear UC Merced Graduate Community,

Since COVID-19 shelter-in-place orders began, our international graduate students have been able to remain in the U.S. and continue their studies remotely because U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) issued an exemption for the requirement of enrolling in courses with in-person instruction. Yesterday, ICE issued the following announcement that modifies the exemption for Fall 2020: <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/sevp-modifies-temporary-exemptions-nonimmigrant-students-taking-online-courses-during>

In summary, ICE is requiring students on F-1 or M-1 visas to enroll in a curriculum that has some degree of in-person instruction in order to enter or remain in the U.S. Our Office of International Affairs (OIA) is in contact with all of our graduate students who might be affected by the ICE announcement. President Napolitano issued this statement today: <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/content/statement-uc-president-janet-napolitano-ice-announcement>

It goes without saying that the Graduate Division and campus leadership agree with President Napolitano: The decision to modify the exemption adds unnecessary and perplexing constraints and hurdles for our plans to deliver Fall instruction while mitigating the risks of COVID-19 as much as possible for all members of our community. I want everyone to know that we are working with OIA, leadership, and other stakeholders on campus and throughout the UC system to identify course units and delivery modes that will satisfy the SEVP modifications so that our international students who want to study in the US can continue to do so. The ICE announcement is missing critical details that we need to ensure our plans comply with the required certifications, and we will communicate with students and faculty about solutions as soon as we have more information.

The global pandemic has been difficult enough. This unexpected ICE announcement adds yet another challenge for us to face, but I am optimistic that we will overcome this one too by working together and looking out for each other. Thank you to everyone helping to keep our research and educational missions moving forward, for each and every one of our students and members of our graduate community.

Sincerely,

Chris Kello, Ph.D.
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