



To: The Caltech Community
From: Thomas F. Rosenbaum, President
David A. Tirrell, Provost
Date: July 11, 2019
Re: Our International Community of Scholars

The strength of the United States as a scientific, technological, and economic power has depended crucially on the contributions of scholars and entrepreneurs from all over the world. Our universities, in particular, have long opened their doors to foreign talent, seeking to become destinations for the most creative, original minds, irrespective of heritage or national origin. At Caltech, 45% of our faculty were born outside the United States, and roughly the same percentage of our graduate student body is international. Approximately 35% of American Nobel Prizes in the sciences have been awarded to individuals born outside the United States.

Recent news stories and communications from government agencies have raised concerns about threats to U.S. national security and economic competitiveness, concurrent with rising tensions in international trade and the growing technical capability of international corporations. In such a climate, it can be tempting to try to protect our national interests by putting boxes around our researchers and our laboratories, to attempt to constrain the transfer of scientific discoveries and technological innovation. But the academic enterprise is utterly ineffective in that mode; it depends on talent and interaction and the challenge of ideas, all of which may arise anywhere in the world. Our universities thrive by bringing together people of diverse perspectives, of different backgrounds, of distinct sensibilities, and letting them hone their conceptions of the world by confronting and shaping each other's ideas.

It is essential that we maintain the open, vibrant sense of community that is so central to successful scholarship and innovation. In particular, we must ensure that our international colleagues – students, postdoctoral scholars, staff, and visitors – continue to feel welcome here, and continue to enjoy the personal and professional support that they need to pursue their most ambitious goals. We have heard from some of these colleagues that they are feeling heightened stress, not because of actions taken by our community, but because of the broader public conversation and policies that are understandably unsettling. Under such circumstances, we must all make special efforts to reaffirm our embrace of scholars from all over the world, our commitment to open exchange, and our celebration of the richness of international collaboration.

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