

Academic isolation of the US: How are Trump's immigration policies affecting international students and what is American University doing about it?

By Sophia Carroll

Swastik Kundu is a senior student of international studies at American University. A citizen of India with an F-1 Student Visa, Kundu has spent the past four years studying, learning and living in the U.S. with the legal documentation that is supposed to guarantee him the right to do so.

But with the recent inauguration of Donald Trump to his second term as president, the status of that right has become increasingly unclear. This has led international students like Kundu to feel anxious about their place in the country.

Since his inauguration, Trump has signed several executive orders concerning immigration policy in the U.S. A recent [executive order](#) signed by the president states that the federal government will “Deport Hamas Sympathizers and Revoke Student Visas.” This order effectively has given the government the ability to revoke hundreds of student visas from international students simply for exercising their right of free speech and access to academia granted to them legally.

So how are international students feeling? And what can universities with large international student populations, like American University, do to support their students?

American University [reports](#) having over 1,100 international students, from 112 different countries currently attending the university. According to [AU's academic profile](#), “eleven percent of graduate students and 10.6 percent of undergraduate students are international.”

The executive orders signed by President Trump and recent events regarding the detentions and revocations of student visa holders have increased the vulnerability of international student populations all over the country and at AU greatly.

Current Events in the US

Incidents involving the confrontation, detention and deportation of visa holding international students by officers, like ICE agents, have been occurring all over the country in recent months.

Over 500 students, faculty and researchers have had their visas revoked since the beginning of this year, according to an April 11 article posted on [CNN](#). An April 11 article by [AP](#) said, “Officials from colleges around the country have discovered international students have had their

entry visas revoked and, in many cases, their legal residency status terminated by authorities without notice.”

One local incident involved the arrest of Georgetown professor and postdoctoral fellow, Badar Khan Suri. On March 17, Suri was approached and taken into custody by Department of Homeland Security agents.

A [statement](#) from the Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown’s Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service criticized the DHS action, saying, “he was arrested in the context of a campaign by the Trump Administration to destroy higher education in the United States and punish their political opponents.”

Incidents like this one are happening at higher rates and have already impacted people within the AU community. So the question is, will AU speak out in defense of their international students?

What’s going on at American University?

American University international students, too, are forced to be on high alert. In early February a man wearing a jacket that read “ICE - immigration” was seen walking through AU’s campus by various students, professors and university staff.

Students later learned, in an [email](#) from AU faculty members, Vice President and Treasurer Bronté Burleigh-Jones and Assistant Vice President for University Police Services and Emergency Management Phil Morse, that the supposed ICE agent was not an actual officer.

Despite the fact that this was an incident of impersonation, it was still a scary thing for students, especially the international student population, to witness on campus.

With that being said, support from the university can come in many forms. One of the largest resources for international students is the office of [International Student and Scholar Services](#).

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Menu

International Student & Scholar Services

A Home Away from Home

- ISSS Home
- Incoming Students +
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- Forms
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- Personal Safety**
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The deadline to file 2024 taxes is **April 15, 2025**. If you were in the U.S. during the 2024 calendar year, you must file US taxes by this date even if you did not earn any income.

ISSS offers AU international students and scholars access to **Sprintax**, tax prep software, to

American University's ISSS office provides international students with [F-1](#) or [J-1](#) visas services and programs aimed at promoting and advising these students throughout their entire academic journeys.

"We support students at, really, all parts of their academic journey, during and after," said International Student Advisor Rachel Blevins. Services provided by ISSS include office availability for advising appointments, online resources from the office's website and more.



"When a change happens it's our office's responsibility to take that change, digest it, and see how exactly this could or will affect our students," said Blevins. Since the inauguration of President Trump, the AU ISSS office has sent out two emails to students regarding the changes to U.S. immigration policies that have occurred.

The first email was a preemptive spring break travel notice that contained information regarding policy changes. It dealt with various aspects of student visas, to keep in mind when travelling outside the U.S.

The second email notified students about the loss of a resource used by many international students to book their visa interview (a website containing every U.S. embassy and consulate with their availability for visa interviews).

Some international students at American University say that university offices, like ISSS, have done a good job at providing them with the necessary information regarding immigration and student visa policy.

"I think informing us is a good first step and keeping us updated, which I feel like they have been doing," said AU School of Communication junior and Brazil national Nina Bodanese.

Another international student Agustina Roffo, a senior neuroscience major and citizen of Argentina agreed that resources like ISSS have been helpful to her personally. Roffo said, “I don’t see a reason why, if I go asking for support with this situation, they wouldn’t answer or be there.”

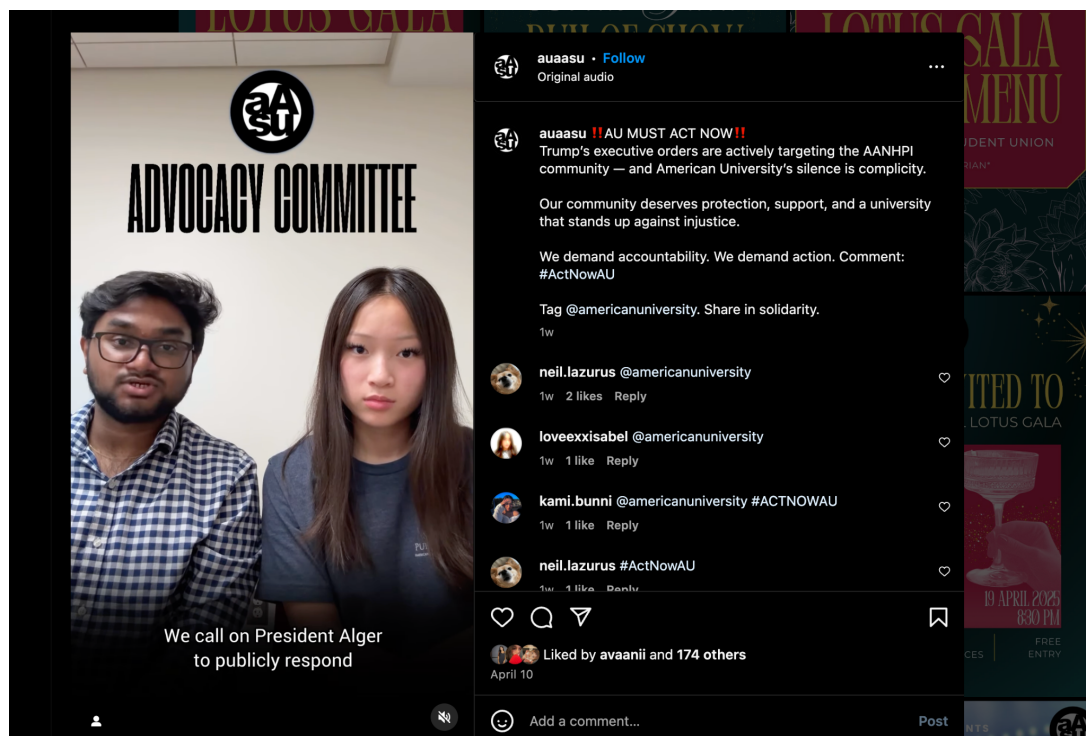
While students, like Roffo and Bodanese, said that offices within the university, such as ISSS, are doing the best they can with the current chaos that is U.S. immigration policy, some students, themselves included, think there is more to be done by the university as a whole.

Sophomore international student from Berlin Germany, Emilia Winkler, says that it’d be nice to get more information from the school about the current chaos. “I feel like I’m just hearing a lot of stuff and it’s scaring me, but I don’t really know what to do. Or if there is anything I can do in the first place,” said Winkler.

Roffo agreed saying, “I think there could be more communication.” Many international students feel that the university could be doing a better job at informing their students about the current situation. “I definitely feel that they could be more transparent about it,” said Roffo.

This lack of communication between university administration and international students is a common grievance between international students. Sophie Willemse, a sophomore F-1 student visa holder and Netherlands citizen said, “I feel like the majority of what I know is from news and not what the school is telling us.”

What many international students want from the AU administration is transparency and clear communication so that they can be as prepared as possible in these uncertain times. Some say, however, that further public action by the university is also in order.



Student organizations like AU's Asian American Student Union are calling on higher members of the university's administration, like President Jonathan Alger, to take further action.

A [statement](#) made in a social media post by the organization's advocacy committee said, "We call on President Alger to publicly respond to the ACLU [letter](#) and commit to protecting students from federal overreach. And reaffirm AU's commitment to free speech and expression without fear of surveillance, retaliation, or deportation."

This April 10 post came in response to a lack of acknowledgement from the AU administration of a letter sent to the Presidents and Provosts of District of Columbia Colleges and Universities. The letter called these universities to action to protect their students, especially their international ones, from the actions of the Trump administration.

This lack of response from AU administration members, such as President Jonathan Alger, gave students like those in the Asian American Student Union a reason to feel that they cannot rely on their university for support or protection of their rights.

AU Senior Professorial Lecturer Lara Schwartz agreed that there is more to be done by the university administration.

"I would like to see AU engage in collective action with the other universities that are taking steps to fight against threats to international students," noted Schwartz.

Along with being a professor at AU's School of Public Affairs, Schwartz is the founding director of [The Project on Civic Dialogue](#), which aims to help "students cultivate a love of and the skills for listening and communicating across differences."

Schwartz said that AU needs to take action to protect the rights of its international students to engage in their studies freely, which they cannot do if they are in constant fear of visa revocation, detention, and deportation.

Schwartz said there are many things AU can and should do. The first being to join efforts in the courts to oppose threats to international students, she said.

According to an April 25 [article](#) by Time, "Over 100 lawsuits were filed—by students, universities, and advocacy organizations—charging that the terminations violated due process and targeted students without sufficient cause."

This onslaught of legal actions have had recent positive effects. According to an April 26 [article](#) by CNN, international students from 64 different schools have had their previously revoked visas reinstated.

Despite some successes, the battle is not over, “Still, attorneys said ICE will continue to exercise discretion to terminate student records in other instances.” said the same CNN [article](#). Support for international students from universities is still necessary for the protection of those students.

The second action Schwartz would like to see from AU is to stop attempting to regulate non-disruptive expression (gathering on the quad, passing out leaflets, etc.), and not involve AUPD or Metropolitan Police in these attempts to regulate student protest.

Finally Schwartz said, the university must provide updated guidance and increase resources for students who are vulnerable. This is what many of AU’s international students are looking for from the university currently.

These actions can and will provide AU international students with the support, many feel they are currently lacking, from the university administration, Schwartz said.

The future of academic globalization in the US:

With the constant threat of visa revocation, ICE detentions and even deportation, many international students either looking to or currently studying the US may be making alternative plans.

Kundu said many people from home who previously may have looked to study in the U.S. are asking advice and wondering whether it’s the best choice for them to come to this country given the current situation.

“It has a chilling effect,” said Clay Harmon, executive director of AIRC, a membership organization focused on recruiting and enrolling international students, in a March 25 [article](#) by AP.

International students all over the country fear that expressing their rights to free speech will land them in a detention center or even get them deported. This gives many students a good reason *not* to come to the U.S. for education or research.

“I feel like obviously with the recent politics it's definitely making it less attractive to try and stay here,” said Willemse. This growing sentiment could have major effects on both the national economy and the academic world.

A NAFSA [economic analysis](#) for the 2023-2024 academic year said, “1.1 million international students at U.S. colleges and universities contributed \$43.8 billion to the U.S. economy during the 2023-2024 academic year and supported more than 378,000 jobs.” International students at American University alone financially contributed \$86 million, according to the same [study](#).

It is clear that international students are an asset to universities and the US economy. Yet actions by the current administration leave them vulnerable and anxious about their place in this country. Support and defense from the universities they’ve paid to study at, like AU, is something many of them are looking for.

“Will AU stand up for its students? Or will we be left to fend for ourselves?” asked the AASU Advocacy Committee. The answer to this question will affect future, and current international students' decisions in terms of their choices for education.

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