Specialty Areas Writing Assignment

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Student Questions Written Assignment

International students are experiencing a crossroads in higher education today due to the coronavirus pandemic. Universities still hope to host international students, but policy changes in the United States are rapidly occurring that are complicating international student enrollment. Compared to 2019, undergraduate international student enrollment is down 14% and graduate international student enrollment is down 8% (Fischer, 2020). Students who were in America when the pandemic began had to make the choice to go back to their home countries or stay at their university. Even when borders started to close, most believed it would not last longer than a month.

The first cases of the virus emerged late December 2019, in Wuhan, China, and now in November 2020, the spread of the virus in America does not seem to be slowing down. Unfortunately, there has been increased xenophobia especially regarding those of Asian descent. Many Asian students worry they will encounter confrontational or even dangerous situations in public, so they have been staying home further isolating themselves. There has also been tension between the students and their families in their home countries. In the beginning, students were worrying for their families' safety, but now their families worry for their student's safety. Flights to student's home countries have been in short supply or cost prohibitive, so many students could not fly home even when they wanted to. This is also exacerbating financial concerns as many students thought they would fly home for the standard cost of a plane ticket, but instead have stayed in America with unexpected rent and living costs.

In July, President Trump issued an executive order that international students must attend classes in person or lose their student visas (Fischer, 2020). Although quickly rescinded, it is one example of the uncertainty in policy the international students have been experiencing. The 2020 presidential election has heightened this uncertainty because the students are immersed in a society telling them to vote. Furthermore, the results of this election will directly affect international students, but they are not eligible to vote. Some students who have been studying in America since before the 2016 election have mentioned concerns of increasing societal norms that promote micro aggressions under the current “America first” climate (Fischer, 2020). The inability to vote only increases the feeling of isolation and helplessness that international students are facing today.

However, there are positive outcomes resulting from the many trials of the Covid-19 pandemic for international students. Many schools are embracing the challenges that the pandemic has presented by offering more accessible mental health services for international students. In many cultures, seeking mental health assistance is looked down on, so the ability to provide these services to previously unreached populations is a pleasant surprise. There has also been increased involvement from the community to help support international students including food drives from local churches and recruiting volunteers to call international students to check how they are doing. Finally, virtual meetings have been utilized to connect international students to each other and to faculty and staff of the university.

These efforts do not exist in a vacuum, so there will likely be a return on the university’s investment into their international students. These trying times have exposed which universities value and support their international students, and those universities will likely receive more applications when the time is right.

**References**

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