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The recent Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) decision to rescind temporary exemptions allowing F-1 and M-1 visa holders to take more online courses than usually allowed leaves the academic futures of UCLA international students uncertain. The threat to revoke I-20s if students attend universities that have decided that all instruction will be online in Fall 2020 means that these students are being forced to either return to their home countries for remote instruction or to transfer to universities that offer in-person classes in their area of study (and this decision comes so late that transferring is almost certainly not a viable option). Both options put international students in the undeserved position of having to choose between their education and their health.

This policy shift is particularly cruel because it adds further disruption to the lives of international students on top of that already caused by the ongoing Covid-19 crisis in the US. This directive will not only unnecessarily endanger the health of international students, but also that of their instructors, staff, and other students. It will also have the long-term effect of derailing the educational dreams of these deserving young scholars who enrich the academic life at UCLA with their presence and contributions. Losing them will diminish the breadth, depth and creativity of the educational experience for all members of the UCLA community.

We urge the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to extend the exemptions put in place in spring at least until in-person university instruction no longer endangers the health of campus communities. After all, studying remotely is a temporary measure and will last only until the pandemic has been brought under control. For those that worry about a potential security risk posed by allowing admittance to the US of international students who will take all their courses remotely, it is important to remember that upon their acceptance to UCLA, international students are thoroughly vetted to ensure that they do not pose such a threat. We on the Writing Programs faculty stand beside UCLA international students and will do all we can to advocate for them by contacting our elected representatives and will find ways in our local context to enable them to continue their education without this unwarranted interruption. We appreciate the University's efforts to clarify the policy and find a solution and applaud the UC system for suing to block this directive.