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Travel Ban Concerns Addressed

With scores of Harvard scholars and students affected, the University addressed growing concerns



By JAKE MILLER

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At least 143 Harvard University scholars and students are from nations that were affected by the presidential ban on travelers from seven Muslim-majority countries, University officials said at Harvard Medical School forum, including a post-doctoral researcher from an HMS neuroengineering program who was barred from entering the U.S. because of her Iranian citizenship.

“The effects are real. They are upending plans people have been making for many months and, in some cases, years,” said Mark Elliott, Harvard’s vice provost for **international affairs**, who spoke at the HMS gathering.

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Elliott added that there are no schools and few fields at the University that were not affected by the order signed on Jan. 27. The government has since halted enforcement of the ban in compliance with a federal judge's ruling, and a federal appeals court denied a Justice Department's request for an immediate reinstatement of the ban.

“The executive order signed by Trump ... has introduced some very significant uncertainty into our world,” said Elliott, speaking to a large

gathering of students, staff, faculty and administrators in the Carl W. Walter Amphitheater at HMS on Feb. 2.

“There’s nobody here who’s entirely isolated from this,” Elliott said. “We are determined to find every way we can to resist and then overcome (these) effects.”

Elliot’s talk on the Harvard Longwood campus was designed to share information about the University’s response with the medical school community and to provide resources for HMS students, staff and faculty who may have been affected by the travel restrictions.

Samira Asgari, a postdoctoral fellow originally from Iran who has been studying in Switzerland for the last five years is planning to study the effects of genetics on susceptibility to infectious disease at Brigham and Women's Hospital. She was prevented from flying to Boston because of the ban but was allowed to come to the U.S. a week later when the ban was suspended.

“We continue to believe that immigration is a source of strength for the University and the community ... It is central to our mission.” -- Mark Elliott

Elliott was joined by Maureen Martin, director of immigration services at

the **Harvard International Office**, and Jason Corral, a staff attorney at the **Harvard Law School Immigration and Refugee Clinical Program**.

They outlined the University's initial efforts to respond, explaining that work is also under way to prepare next steps and to better understand what possible continuation of the ban would mean for international students who are already at Harvard and for students who may be affected by an expansion of the ban.

“We continue to believe that immigration is a source of strength for the University and the community,” said Elliott. “It is central to our mission.”

During a question and answer period, students, staff and faculty shared concerns that ranged from personal questions about the challenges of securing a visa for parents who are hoping to attend graduation this spring to programmatic questions about securing visas for students from the affected regions who were planning to attend continuing medical education classes. In many cases, there were no clear answers.

'This is Not a Drill'

Audience members expressed both a sense of apprehension and an

eagerness to organize a strong response to the challenges to open scholarship that they feel the executive order represents.

Arpiar Saunders, an HMS research fellow in the Department of Genetics, said that it was important to work together as a community at both the grassroots and institutional levels to respond to the challenge to scholarship and human rights, to protect one another, and to keep the community intact.

“This is not a drill,” Saunders said. “It's a 100 percent real crisis.”

In the week following the travel ban order, Elliott said the University focused on assisting students, scholars and staff who were traveling at the time of the ban.

He said as the crisis response to the confusion that surrounded the initial roll out of the executive order winds down, more effort is being made to engage in long-term responses and planning, as well as extensive information gathering. Lobbying efforts aimed at gaining more clarity about the rapidly evolving situation as well as advocacy of Harvard's commitment to open scholarship, are ongoing, they said.

“Harvard is deeply committed to being an open, welcoming and highly international university,” Elliott said. “Immigration is a source of

strength, not of weakness for the university and for the nation.”

To defend these ideals, he said, the University is actively working to overcome these challenges through all available administrative, legal and advocacy means.

“Executive orders are not law, so if they violate a statute, they can be deemed illegal,” said Corral.

Resources Available

The **Harvard International Office** is a key resource for Harvard community members with questions about international travel or their immigration status, Martin said.

Because the situation is changing on a daily basis, she said, it was difficult to answer many of the specific questions that students and faculty have, such as whether they should change their summer travel plans or whether family members from one of the seven listed countries would be able to travel to attend spring commencement ceremonies.

“Right now these are questions we just can’t answer,” Martin said.

She noted that there has been little information forthcoming from the

government and that the situation is changing on a daily basis; it will continue to change as regulations are tweaked and litigation seeking to overturn or clarify the executive order makes its way through the courts.

On Feb. 3, Harvard joined seven other New England universities in an amicus brief that challenges the executive order. Those include Boston College, Boston University, Brandeis, MIT, Northeastern, Tufts and Worcester Polytechnic Institute, all arguing that the ability of scholars and students to travel across international borders is essential to their educational missions.

It is also possible that there will be new executive orders or amendments to the current one, Martin noted.

“If you’re going to travel, and you’re from the region, we suggest you get in touch with us,” Martin said.

Corral outlined the ways that the **Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinical Program** is working to develop legal responses to the travel ban, saying that the clinic can provide one-on-one consultation with community members who have concerns about their immigration status, travel plans or a visa that is about to lapse.

He also said the clinic is developing resources and exploring options to

meet the increased demand for legal representation from community members.

The University is also encouraging all community members who travel internationally, regardless of their destination, to enter their itineraries and contact information in the **Harvard Travel Registry**, which is managed by **Harvard Global Support Services**.

Registering expedites access to **Harvard Travel Assist**, a 24/7 global emergency response program for community members. It also enables Global Support Services to advise travelers if sudden immigration policy changes may affect their trip. Some language in the executive order suggests that other countries could be added to the banned list.

If individuals from Harvard travel abroad and are not permitted to return to the U.S., they should contact Harvard Travel Assist at +1-617-998-0000 or **travelassist@harvard.edu** to immediately notify the University.

In the days following the signing of the executive order, Harvard leaders addressed the community. Harvard President Drew **Faust wrote** that this moment of unsettling change is a call to remember the University's deepest values and ideals, including "the recognition that drawing people together from across the nation and around the world is a paramount

source of our University's strength.”

In a letter to the HMS community, HMS Dean George Q. Daley wrote that the school was monitoring the evolving situation and working in tandem with the University to assess its impact on the community.

“As a physician, teacher and scientist, I am deeply conscious of how international scholars and the diversity of my lab family and our community have enriched us both scientifically and personally,” **Daley wrote**. “Our interactions with colleagues of varied backgrounds and cultural heritage have been essential to our scientific progress.”

On Feb 1, several HMS chairs of major academic departments of medicine joined with colleagues around the country to **voice their concerns** "that the consequences of this approach for U.S. health care, and our field of internal medicine, are far reaching and damaging."

Resources for international community members and international travel:

- [Harvard International Office](#)
- [Harvard Law School Immigration and Refugee Clinical Program](#)
- [Harvard Global Support Services](#)

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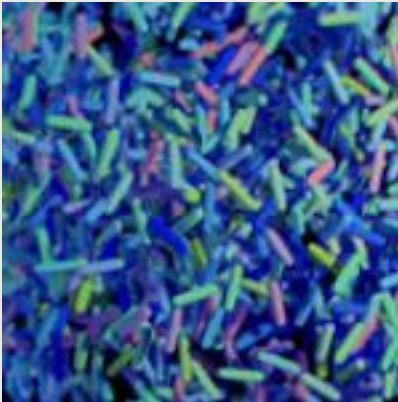
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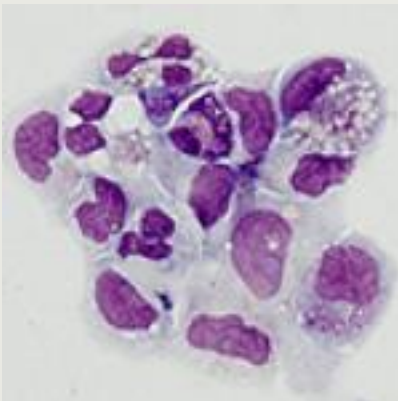
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