

INT'L CONSTITUENTS: SUPPORT NEEDED DURING COVID

The Dashew Center administered a survey to international students, scholars, and employees beginning April 3, 2020 and ending April 14, 2020 to understand 1) international student needs during the university's move to online learning, services, and programs, and 2) the impact of COVID-19 on their UCLA experience. This data snapshot summarizes responses to the following open-ended question on the survey.

Question of Interest: How can the Dashew Center and UCLA best support you during this time?

769 international constituents responded to this questions with 834 different types of responses within nine themes. The nine themes include communication, services, finances, programs and workshops, academics, health and safety, career development, housing, and international identity. The top three themes included:

- Communication (378 respondents or 49% of all respondents)
- Services (89 respondents or 12% of all respondents)
- Finances (67 respondents or 9% of all respondents)

Communication

Within the communication theme, international constituents most wanted visa status advice and updates along with quick responses and availability from the Dashew Center. Respondents mention an array of areas for which they hope to receive updates: general policy changes, news, regulations, CPT and OPT changes, and services as well as COVID updates pertaining to the university, Los Angeles, and the U.S. Representative quotes include:

- If I go back to my home country [with] my visa expired, I have to wait for my visa to be issued, and I cannot go back to the US before the quarter begins, what can I do?
- Information on visa support and guidance from the Government would be really helpful. Knowing now, what I have to do in Summer would help me plan out contingencies, etc.
- Maybe it would be great to get a reply/respond... via email as soon as possible. Although some questions are not easy to be answered, so the center recommends to contact with the counselor, it would be great to get a reply asap instead of making an appointment with the counselor. Knowing about my situation asap will be helpful for me. The center is already doing a great job, but I just recommend it.
- I appreciate the Dashew Center's efforts to stay connected with us. The virtual sessions everyday are a real relief, seeing as we get the chance to reach out and address any questions. Keeping lines of communication open is important, I think, as it lets students interact with real people to solve any issues.
- I would like to know more about the travelling restriction and what we should expect if the restriction is still valid in September or October. I am really concerned that if I go back to my home country... I will [not] be able to come back.
- I think helping students understand travel guidelines/recommendations now and when restrictions are lifted. Being open to concerns and problems students might be facing, especially being far from family and support during these uncertain times.
- ...sending regular updates regarding visa status and CPT/OPT regulations for the summer would be helpful.
- Dashew has been doing great. It would be better if we could get OPT application materials counseled or checked (on a scan version) before we mailed it out by ourselves.
- Could we have a virtual workshop on how specifically should we apply for OPT during COVID times, e.g. what if printing services and mailing services were disrupted in the future?

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Services

Within the services theme, respondents reported that they want faster processing in general and specifically mentioned travel signatures, CPT processing, and OPT processing. Additionally, international constituents requested assistance extending visa documents (e.g. I-20 or DS-2019) and OPT timelines. Representative quotes include:

- Most of us did not have enough notice from when the email was sent out to when we flew out and could not get our I-20s signatures renewed. We also expected to come back before they expired, which is no longer the case for most of us. It would be really helpful if we didn't have to pay for new I-20s to be sent to us.
- Dashe Center has been very supportive since the start of this pandemic. I don't mean to push you guys. But it would be much appreciated if you can process new I-20 application[s] and ship...faster. I am very worried about not having those documents in hand right now.
- Due to the COVID-19 impact on the economy, I [am] strongly concerned that I will be...unemploy[ed] soon, and I [am] strongly concerned about that 3-month limit of no-job in OPT. I wish Dashe Center could urge [the] federal government to extend OPT unemployment limits at this moment.
- I hope [the] Dashe Center could expedite the process of OPT I-20 and respond to student emails. It has been 10 days and I received no response regarding my OPT I-20. In this urgent time I think the faster we can get OPT I-20, the faster I can mail it to the next destination.
- Please help us to fasten the Visa [process], OPT/CPT application and please if you could, reply [to] email promptly. Also, it is great if we can have a virtual session/ quick 10-15 mins drop in hours to ask F1 counselors questions regarding OPT and VISA issues.

Finances

Within the finances theme, about half of the responses mention general comments about funding or financial worries due to the unique circumstances of COVID. Nearly the same number of responses include a recommendation to waive or refund part of student tuition due to the changing classroom environment. Representative quotes include:

- I am personally running low on finances. It would be great if UCLA could offer some sort of remote work assistantship. I have 2 degrees... and...work experience in tech industry so I am highly educated and experienced resource who can do a lot for you and others at UCLA whether helping with software systems or just plain IT administrative functions. This would help me dramatically as my sources of income have shut down due to COVID-19.
- Finance is my biggest concern. In countries that are most affected, the currency exchange rate is at its highest and there should be more opportunities for remote employments for international students whose countries have been socioeconomically most affected by the pandemic. I also think non resident tuition should be partially refunded for spring.
- If possible, advocate for the elimination of the non-resident supplementary fee since many international students are still paying out-of-state fees while being in their hometowns and staying up in the middle of the night for classes...
- Return at least part of our tuition. We are paying full time for classes online that I could do in summer for a third of the price
- Thanks for all the supports provided. I understand not much could be done since almost everyone is having a hard time. I just hope that we won't be running out of supplies on the hill, and that I won't need to worry about my family's financial problem too much. I hope there could be some reduction in our tuition.

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- Inform exchange students of the refunds they are eligible for, e.g. health care insurance if moved back home

Other themes

Each of the other themes accounted for less than 9% of the total respondents.

- **Programs and Workshops** (53 respondents or 7% of all respondents): responses in this theme suggests creating platforms for virtual socializing or events; holding sessions for answering visa-related questions; offering workshops; and holding online sessions for questions. (Note: many more expressed interest in virtual events in the quantitative component of the survey when asked specifically about their interest).
- **Academics** (47 respondents or 6% of all respondents): responses in this theme suggest a mismatch between time zone of classes and campus activities and students' home time zones, which makes it difficult for international students residing in their home countries to participate fully; request flexibility with online classes and grading; and suggest that UCLA extend deadlines for degrees and final projects such as theses and dissertations.
- **Health and Safety** (45 respondents or 6% of all respondents): responses in this theme request more information about adjusting to quarantine and isolating circumstances; suggest distribution of hand sanitizer, gloves, masks as well as sanitizing campus locations such as the dorms; call for improvements to on-campus food service; and request information about health insurance as well as detailed instructions on COVID testing by the Ashe Center.
- **Career Development** (42 respondents or 5% of all respondents): responses in this theme request help finding employment or internships, especially with a remote work option; suggest the Dashe Center send updates about COVID's impact on future jobs in the U.S.; request advice on career development after graduation; and request more services for career development.
- **Housing** (20 respondents or 3% of all respondents): responses in this theme report problems with moving, including the inability to move out and retrieve belongings from university housing while overseas; request a guide for housing options; and request decreases in rent.
- **International Identity** (18 respondents or 2% of all respondents): responses in this theme ask for understanding of those with an international identity, generally speaking, and support dealing with hate speech and discrimination.

Positive Comments

61 respondents or 8% of all respondents opted to use this space to write a positive word for the Dashe Center. Select quotes include:

- ...I loved the last email about how to make your own mask!
- I am one of the International student ambassadors and I'm impressed by how much Dashe center cares about us! So far I think Dashe is doing very great!
- I have asked the Dashe [Center] to issue me [an] I-20 with travel authorization and they responded to my request very quickly. They are doing great job at this time. Appreciate their efforts.
- I liked this survey
- I think that the information and emails that Dashe Center has sent to me and has guided me to know what is happening. I really appreciate the concern with international students and researchers.
- It's already taking good care of scholars while keeping them updated in this urgent situation.
- Thanks for all the updates; really eases my mind to see the different plans in place