



Tips for Advising Campuses in a Time of Immigration Uncertainty

By [Dan Berger](#), [Emily Cohen](#), [Jonathan Grode](#), and [Stephen Yale-Loehr](#)

December 18, 2024

Since the 2024 presidential election results, immigration lawyers have been building on strategies and [advice](#) that we gave during the previous Trump administration. We realize this is a time of [uncertainty](#) and that it is difficult to predict the future. More than ever, simple questions such as “am I safe to travel next summer?” are complicated, and we do not know exactly what new policies will be announced. We can assure you that we will work with colleges and universities to provide updated guidance in the weeks and months ahead. We will review new policies, try to summarize them, and put them in context as best we can. We will also share updates on any [challenges](#) to policies as they arise.

Below we try to answer nine questions about immigration issues that have been raised by multiple campuses.

- 1. Is domestic airplane travel OK?** From now until January 20, the situation remains the same as in the last four years. As you prepare for trips after January 20, it may be helpful to know that there were a few [reports](#) of random immigration checks on domestic flights during the first Trump administration. Similarly, there were reports of random immigration checks along highways in central New Hampshire.

This is a good time to remind ourselves that the [law requires](#) anyone who is not a U.S. citizen to carry [evidence of status](#) at all times (green card, Employment Authorization Document (EAD), Form I-94 or electronic I-94 printout, valid, unexpired nonimmigrant admission or parole stamp in a foreign passport, etc.). Make it easy for a government officer by having a copy of immigration documents available. Ensure you make multiple copies of these documents and store them in different places—not all on your person or on a single device you are carrying—to reduce the risk of losing all documentation at once. Even U.S. citizens who might face checks or profiling can save a copy of their birth certificate or passport on their phone in case they are questioned. U.S. citizens can also apply for a U.S. passport card that can easily fit in their wallet. Anyone who is undocumented should consult an attorney or [nonprofit legal service provider](#) before flying domestically.

The bigger picture is that immigration enforcement agents had [more discretion](#) in the previous Trump administration. Two [memos](#) issued by the Department of Homeland

Security (DHS) in 2017 allowed for the expansion of “expedited removal,” which is a streamlined process without a hearing with an immigration judge. Having a copy of a document showing your immigration status and that you have been in the United States for more than two years could help avoid questioning and expedited removal. Store these copies in secure locations—such as a trusted family member’s home, an email account, or a cloud storage service—to ensure access in case of an emergency.

- 2. How about electronic devices? Can those be searched at the airport or border?** The simple answer is “[yes](#).” We recommend encrypting private information on your electronic devices and backing them up before traveling in case they are seized. According to the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) website, CBP officers may search laptops, cell phones, or other electronic devices. CBP may not select someone for a personal search or secondary inspection based on religion, race, national origin, gender, ethnicity, or political beliefs. U.S. citizens may also be questioned and have their devices seized for refusal to provide passwords or unlock devices, but they cannot be prevented from entering the United States. Be [aware](#) of sensitive information on electronic devices when traveling.
- 3. What is some general advice for international students and scholars on campus now?** While we wait to see what policies may change, we recommend filing any applications as early as possible. For example, applications for optional practical training (OPT) can be filed up to 90 days before the program end date. It is possible that processing times will slow as they did during the previous Trump administration, so filing on the earlier side can help. Also, if you can afford it, consider using premium processing.
- 4. What does this all mean for DACA recipients?** The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program is already at risk through litigation that will probably reach the Supreme Court in 2025 or 2026 or via executive action by the new President. We [recommend](#) that DACA recipients apply to renew their DACA six months before expiration to have as much time as possible left if the program is ended. We also recommend that DACA recipients be screened for other immigration options such as [employer-sponsored visas](#) or green cards.
- 5. What does this mean for undocumented parents of students who want to fly within the United States?** Many of them have traveled domestically before with no problems. President Biden issued a [policy](#) that puts undocumented individuals with no criminal record or prior removal order low on the priority list for enforcement. That could change next year. Campuses unfortunately have seen families unable to attend campus events before, and many schools set up a video feed of the ceremonies and events.
- 6. Going beyond travel advice, are there other ways campuses can prepare for new immigration enforcement priorities?** Yes, there are some [basic steps](#) that campuses can take. Campus responses varied in the previous Trump administration but

were generally supportive of international education and diversity. A Washington Post [article](#) in 2017 found that most schools made some kind of statement. Some schools have been concerned about the political effects of opposing possible new travel bans. While some schools may be less vocal in their responses, most are supporting students and scholars who are concerned, connecting students with counseling and legal services, and helping to share [up-to-date information](#).

7. Is the “protected areas” memo, which said ICE enforcement should not take place at locations such as campuses, churches, and hospitals, still in effect?

While the [policy](#) of not conducting immigration enforcement, such as arrests, at “protected areas” is currently still in effect as of December 2024, [recent reports](#) indicate that the Trump administration is planning to rescind it. We hope this protection will continue, but its future remains uncertain.

8. Is it true that the Trump administration and Congress plan to cut back F-1 STEM OPT and the H-1B program and to raise the minimum salary requirements for H-1B workers?

A lot of ideas and draft memos are floating around Washington. Passing legislation in Congress and amending federal regulations are generally long-term projects. There was significant litigation during the previous Trump administration on F-1 and H-1B issues, and we can [expect](#) the same again.

9. Anything else I should know?

It takes energy to operate in times of uncertainty. In a recent presentation at a university, the director of the counseling center explained that uncertainty can be more tiring and emotionally challenging than bad news. We recommend taking this one step at a time, taking care of ourselves, and addressing new policies or trends as we see them. It’s important for undocumented and international students and scholars to know that they are not alone and that advocacy work is ongoing and nationwide.

RESOURCES

1. [Overview of Trump Administration Immigration Policies and Their Impact on Students and Campuses, 2017-2021](#) – Detailed analysis of Trump-era immigration actions and their impact on students, faculty, and staff, along with advocacy, litigation, and mobilization efforts from the Presidents’ Alliance.
2. [Immigration Priorities of the Incoming Trump Administration and Implications for Higher Education](#) – Overview of anticipated policy priorities and their potential impact on undocumented students, international students and scholars, and refugees in higher education.
3. [Webinar Recording and Resources: Post-Election Briefing on Higher Education and Immigration](#) – Recording and resources from a briefing on policies affecting Dreamers, international students, and refugees, with strategies for campus support.
4. [5 Ways Campuses Can Support Non-Citizen Students and Employees](#) – This one-pager outlines five essential ways U.S. colleges and universities can support non-citizen students and employees during this critical time.
5. [Promoting a Safe and Secure Campus for All](#) – This guidance from the California Attorney General helps higher education institutions support immigrant students by outlining their rights, best practices, and protective measures.
6. [Handling Uncertainty: Tips for Working with Undocumented Students through their Career Journey](#) – This guide for career advisers, higher ed practitioners, and educators provides essential information and actionable strategies to help undocumented students make informed decisions as they navigate their career journeys.
7. [Data Protections for FAFSA Information](#) – This guide provides an overview of how FAFSA information is used to determine financial aid eligibility and what protections are in place for families’ personally identifiable information. It also helps counselors address concerns from families about the safety of submitting FAFSA forms.
8. [Directory of Resources to Support DACA Recipients, Undocumented Students, and Institutions of Higher Education](#) – Comprehensive list of resources, advocacy tools, and best practices to support DACA recipients, undocumented students, and other Dreamers.