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Statement on President Trump's immigration executive order

Jan. 30, 2017

Dear Colleagues:

On Friday, President Trump signed an executive order banning all immigration from seven predominantly Muslim nations. Although I was away from campus over the weekend to attend a family function, I spent the past two days carefully monitoring the news and the implications for Western Michigan University and our students.

First, the facts. Please know that our current student body includes nearly 100 students from the seven nations specifically identified in the executive order. In addition, we have many other Muslims among our nearly 1,900 international students and in our University community. As a globally engaged University, we enthusiastically recruit, welcome and embrace students from throughout the world. We provide a great education for our international students. They, in turn, enrich the University experience for all by sharing their gifts—intellect, culture, language and customs—with faculty, staff and students. International students help us understand the fact that intellect and creativity are found in every part of the world. That understanding helps build friendships and trust.

These latter points were recently emphasized by Gov. Rick Snyder in his State of the State address when he referenced immigrants and their positive impact on our state's population as well as their contributions to the Michigan economy. The commitment and inclusive spirit reflected in his words are in keeping with our nation's values. Such sentiments are part of our national identity as a caring and nurturing country.

Sadly, while it may not have been the intent of the executive order, many students, faculty and staff are feeling fearful, threatened, unwelcome, and cut off from their nations and their families who reside in the seven countries identified in the order. It is now impossible, at least for a period of time, for any of them to travel home for a break or family emergency. If they do, they may not be able to return to complete their studies.

In the coming days, weeks and months, I am asking you to join me in taking every proactive step possible to reach all international students, particularly those from the nations outlined in the executive order, to let them know that we as a university community welcome and support them. As educators and compassionate citizens, we must do all that we can to counterbalance the negative impact of political developments over which they have no control. Further, it is my intent as president to do all in my power to protect and advocate for our international students. That includes those who are currently protected under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals—DACA—policy. This means that we will not release immigration or student information unless we are mandated to do so within the constraints of the law.

This may as well be a time to let your views be known to your elected representatives. As a public university, we do not take political stands. But we do not check our views and best judgment at the door. We retain and should exercise the right every citizen enjoys to let our elected representatives know our thoughts. Our personal experience in working with international students from the countries involved may well provide the real-world perspective needed by those charged with making public policy. Instead of political savvy or ideology, we individually and collectively can offer the perspective of the human toll that may not have been fully vetted during development of the executive order.

Thank you, in advance, for helping our students navigate this difficult period. Your every effort makes ours a stronger community.

Best regards,

John M. Dunn
President