DATE:  February 20, 2017
TO:  Jamie Cassels, President and Vice-Chancellor
FROM:  Jim Dunsdon, Associate Vice-President Student Affairs
RE:  Report of Working Group on Impact and Response to the US Executive Order

Background

On Jan. 27, 2017, the US implemented an executive order preventing individuals from Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen from entering the U.S. for 90 days and suspending the entry of all refugees for 120 days and those from Syria indefinitely.

This order prompted a statement issued Jan. 29 by Universities Canada, a subsequent statement by President Jamie Cassels on Jan. 30, and then the establishment of an institutional working group on February 3 to "assess how the recent US executive order banning entry into the United States from seven Muslim-majority countries is affecting students, faculty and staff at UVic, and how best to meet their immediate needs."

The working group comprised: Graduate Studies Dean David Capson, Humanities Dean Chris Goto-Jones, Electrical and Computer Engineering Professor Fayez Gebali, Acting Director of Equity and Human Rights Mary Ellen Purkis, Director of the Office of the President Sally Eshuys and the Associate Vice-President (Student Affairs) Jim Dunsdon, who also chaired the group. The working group was tasked to propose effective and appropriate forms of action and support for UVic students, faculty and staff and submit recommendations for these to the President by Friday, Feb. 17.

Critical Themes Considered

The working group met on Thursday, Feb. 9 and then again on Tuesday, Feb. 14 to discuss: (a) the implementation and then suspension of the executive order (b) the impact of both to campus (c) common issues/challenges experienced by UVic community members as well as individuals attempting to access our institution and then (d) recommendations for consideration by President Cassels.

During the course of our meetings and work, the travel ban was halted by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. While this legal decision removed the temporary restrictions for individuals from the seven named countries, we do anticipate a further Executive Order to be issued in the weeks to come that may impact or influence the four common issues/challenges facing members of our campus community as well as those trying to access our community.
1. Opportunities to respond to campus climate concerns

- It is important for the university to create opportunities for our community to engage in critical conversations about diversity and inclusivity. This work is ongoing and includes important events such as the recent Provost’s Diversity Research Forum and the Healing the World: Appreciating Diversity/Creating Community event hosted in the David Lam Auditorium on Feb. 5. At this point, we are also hearing from students on campus about the importance of having meaningful conversations in the classroom about these issues. http://www.martlet.ca/lift-the-ban-on-discussion/
- In the current polarized and divisive political climate and with the ability of organized groups to use social media to target and overwhelm those whom they consider to be opposed to their point of view, it is important that we find appropriate ways to support members of our community who choose to engage in principled discussions on these important issues.
- How can the university effectively encourage and enable students, faculty, and staff to engage in an ongoing way in such critical conversations?

2. Opportunities to respond to travel issues/concerns

- Graduate students are the largest group affected by the executive order (currently approximately 150 individuals from the countries identified on Jan. 27). The order, or its replacement, has the potential to significantly disrupt travel for these individuals and the committee discussed the importance of providing support in dealing with canceling of reservations/Flights but also in rebooking to different conference to ensure this doesn’t impact academic progression.
- In reaching out to current graduate students, the Dean of Graduate Studies is aware of a limited number of individuals affected. How best do we support these students?
- Faculty/staff may be affected by the travel ban and may be unable to attend academic conferences in the US.
- What options exist for faculty and staff members who have pre-booked conference travel to the US (prior to the executive order) and no longer able to complete their travel?

3. Opportunities to support potential applicants/employees

- The university has received inquiries from faculty members and graduate students who are interested in leaving their respective institutions in the US in order to move to Canada as a result of the executive order.
- What can UVic do to support prospective students who have been negatively affected by an executive order?
- In support of faculty, our institution is bound by our Collective Agreement and policies as well as immigration law which limits flexibility in terms of developing interim solutions. However, a number of Canadian Universities participate in: https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/ and https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/sections/sar-canada/
- “Scholars at Risk is an international network of institutions and individuals whose mission is to protect scholars and promote academic freedom. By arranging temporary academic positions at member universities and colleges, Scholars at Risk offers safety to scholars facing grave threats, so scholars’ ideas are not lost and they can keep working until conditions improve and they are able to return to
their home countries.” (Found here https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/about/). More information about participating institutions and cost can be found in Appendix A.

- Recognizing current limitations regarding immigration, what can UVic do to show its commitment and support for the principles of academic freedom and free intellectual inquiry?

4. Opportunities to support refugees

- Refugees from the countries identified in the executive order have been significantly affected. In September 2015, UVic expanded its efforts in support of refugees by increasing our commitment to World University Services of Canada (WUSC), providing a $25,000 tuition offset for refugees wishing to enrol in English language courses through the Division of Continuing Studies, and creating matching funds of $50,000. Funds continue to be available in these programs and could be used to expand opportunities for refugees.
- Initial contact with the Intercultural Association of Victoria (ICA) indicates that they are not aware of recent refugees who would be academically admissible to the University of Victoria but that continued access to English language support programming remains important in supporting the transition process.
- Is there anything additional we can do to support refugees recently arrived to Victoria?

Recommendations

1. Opportunities to respond to campus climate concerns

It is recommended that President Cassels ask the Provost and academic leaders across campus to encourage discussions in various learning environments about recent events occurring in the US and Canada (including the executive order and the attack on the Quebec mosque) as a way to engage students in these important and topical issues. The Learning and Teaching Centre has indicated a willingness to host a panel discussion for faculty and sessionals on how to incorporate these issues into their courses. In the event that proposals come forward for large, public events, requests for potential funding can be considered through the Provost’s Office.

It is also recommended that University Communications + Marketing provide guidance and appropriate support through deans and units heads to individuals who may wish to engage in public statements of principle related to these issues.

2. Opportunities to respond to travel issues/concerns

Graduate Students

It is recommended that the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS) be provided a portion of the President’s one-time funding in order to minimize the financial impact to our graduate students from the affected countries who have experienced financial hardships or academic progression challenges due to related travel in (or via) the US, and booked such travel prior to the date of the executive order. In order to access this funding, graduate students who have been unduly affected financially for travel expenses related to required attendance at academic conferences or for international research purposes, should bring the details of their situation to the attention of their academic supervisors and/or grad advisors who will work with FGS to address their situation.
Faculty/Staff
It is recommended that faculty/staff who have booked travel to the US in advance of the travel ban and have subsequently needed to adjust their travel bookings, discuss this with their chair and/or supervisor in order to determine how the cancellation of their trip can be managed within current University policies.

3. Opportunities to support potential applicants/faculty

Faculty/Staff
It is recommended that, given the significant immigration constraints associated with international recruitment, we:

a. provide standardized language to academic units that receive inquiries from faculty members looking for opportunities at UVic in order to ensure they receive clear, timely information

b. explore the purchase of an institutional membership in the Scholars At Risk program described above in order to assist these individuals

Graduate Students
It is recommended that the Faculty of Graduate Studies:

a. continue its practice of providing flexible deadlines on a case by case basis for admission to programs up to September 2017

b. use its discretion in determining whether to waive application fees to prospective students affected by the travel ban

Undergraduate Students
It is recommended that we maintain current application deadlines and fees but re-visit this position if a travel ban is re-implemented.

4. Opportunities to support refugees

It is recommended that we work with the ICA and other community organizations to ensure that recent refugees are aware of the funds available through the Division of Continuing Studies to support English language programming. In the event that a travel ban is reinstated or these funds are fully utilized, we may want to revisit this commitment to assess whether there is additional assistance that could be offered.

If the above recommendations are approved, the working group will, once the parameters of any replacement US executive order are known and its impact on UVic faculty, staff and students has been assessed, provide specific recommendations about the disposition of the funds the president has made available to mitigate the effects of the order on our community members and those who wish to join our community.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 250-721-6421 or avpsa@uvic.ca.

Sincerely,

Jim Dunsdon
AVP Student Affairs