



September 13, 2012

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave
Washington, D.C. 20500

Sen. Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Hon. John Boehner
Speaker of the House
H-232, US Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Sen. Mitch McConnell
Senate Republican Leader
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Hon. Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
H-204, US Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. President, Majority Leader Reid, Republican Leader McConnell, Speaker Boehner, and Democratic Leader Pelosi:

As leaders of universities educating the creators of tomorrow's scientific breakthroughs, we call on you to address a critical threat to America's preeminence as a global center of innovation and prosperity: our inability under current United States immigration policy to retain and benefit from many of the top minds educated at our universities.

From the industrial revolution to today's information age, the United States has led the world in creating the inventions and ideas that drive economic prosperity. America's universities are responsible for 36 percent of all research in the country, including 53 percent of all basic research, and they help keep America at the forefront of the 21st century economy. The Federal Government has recognized the importance of university research by providing roughly 60 percent of all academic R&D funding.

American academic research has benefited from the fact that the US remains a top magnet for the world's best and brightest students and graduates 16 percent of all PhDs worldwide in scientific and technical fields. In 2009, students on temporary visas were 45 percent of all graduate students in engineering, math, computer science and physical sciences – earning 43 percent of all master's degrees and 52 percent of all PhDs. New research shows that in 2011, foreign-born inventors were credited contributors on more than 75 percent of patents issued to the top 10 patent-producing universities in the United States – irrefutable

proof of the important role immigrants play in American innovation. These inventions lead to new companies and new jobs for American workers, and are an enormous boon to our economy.

But after we have trained and educated these future job creators, our antiquated immigration laws turn them away to work for our competitors in other countries. Low limits on visas leave immigrants with no way to stay or facing untenable delays for a permanent visa. Top engineers from India and China face wait times of up to 9 years to get a permanent visa, and new applicants from these countries may face considerably longer waits. And while we turn away these American-educated, trained and funded scientists and engineers, there is a growing skill gap across America's industries. One quarter of US science and engineering firms already report difficulty hiring, and the problem will only worsen: the US is projected to face a shortfall of 230,000 qualified advanced-degree workers in scientific and technical fields by 2018.

The US cannot afford to wait to fix our immigration system. Even as we send away highly skilled workers trained at American universities, competing economies are welcoming these scientists and engineers with streamlined visa applications and creating dedicated visas to ensure that the foreign students who graduate from their own universities can stay and contribute to the local economy. We ask you to work together to develop a bipartisan solution that ensures our top international graduates have a clear path to a green card, so they can stay and create new American jobs. Recent polls show that there is broad, bipartisan support for this reform, and that the American people want our leaders in Washington to act. Now is the time to do so and ensure that the US remains the world's leading home for innovators.

Sincerely,

Cornelius M. Kerwin
President
American University

William P. Leahy, S.J.
President
Boston College

Michael M. Crow
President
Arizona State University

Robert A. Brown
President
Boston University

Clayton Spencer
President
Bates College

Mary Ellen Mazey
President
Bowling Green State University

Harvey Stenger
President
Binghamton University

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Robert Kustra
President
Boise State University

Christina H. Paxson
President
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Jean-Lou Chameau
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California Institute of Technology

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President
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President
Case Western Reserve University

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President
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President
Clemson University

Dr. M. W. Scoggins
President
Colorado School of Mines

Lee C. Bollinger
President
Columbia University

Robert A. Kennedy
President, Board of Regents for Higher Ed.
Connecticut State Colleges & Universities

David J. Skorton
President
Cornell University

Timothy R. Lannon, S.J.
President
Creighton University

Jim Yong Kim
President
Dartmouth College

Rev. Dennis Holtschneider, C.M.
President
DePaul University

John A. Fry
President
Drexel University

Richard Brodhead
President
Duke University

Charles J. Dougherty
President
Duquesne University

James W. Wagner
President
Emory University

Mark B. Rosenberg
President
Florida International University

Eric Barron
President
Florida State University

Ángel Cabrera
President
George Mason University

John J. DeGioia
President
Georgetown University

Steven Knapp
President
The George Washington University

G. P. Peterson
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Georgia Institute of Technology

Drew Gilpin Faust
President
Harvard University

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Hofstra University

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President
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Lehigh University

William L. Jenkins
Interim President
Louisiana State University System

Daniel D. Reneau
President
Louisiana Tech University

Scott R. Pilarz, S.J.
President
Marquette University

L. Rafael Reif
President
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Dr. Raymond Greenberg
President
The Medical University of South Carolina

David C. Hodge
President
Miami University

Lou Anna K. Simon
President
Michigan State University

Donald M. Blacketter
Chancellor
Montana Tech of the University of Montana

Daniel J. Klaich
Chancellor
Nevada System of Higher Education

John Sexton
President
New York University

W. Randolph Woodson
Chancellor
North Carolina State University

Dean L. Bresciani
President
North Dakota State University

William G. Goetz
Chancellor
North Dakota University System

Joseph E. Aoun
President
Northeastern University

E. Gordon Gee
President
The Ohio State University

George Pernsteiner
Chancellor
Oregon University System

Edward J. Ray
President
Oregon State University

David W. Leebron
President
Rice University

Marc Tessier-Lavigne
President
The Rockefeller University

Richard L. McCormick
President
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Elliot Hirshman
President
San Diego State University

A. Gabriel Esteban
President
Seton Hall University

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President
Southern Illinois University System

R. Gerald Turner
President
Southern Methodist University

John L. Hennessy
President
Stanford University

Nancy L. Zimpher
Chancellor
The State University of New York

Nariman Farvardin
President
Stevens Institute of Technology

Samuel L. Stanley Jr., M.D.
President
Stony Brook University

Nancy Cantor
Chancellor
Syracuse University

Guy Bailey
President
Texas Tech University

Anthony P. Monaco
President
Tufts University

Scott S. Cowen
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President
University at Albany - SUNY

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President
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G. David Gearhart
Chancellor
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Chancellor
University of Arkansas at Little Rock

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President
University of Arkansas System

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President
University at Buffalo

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Chancellor
University of California, Berkeley

Gene D. Block
Chancellor
University of California, Los Angeles

Henry T. Yang
Chancellor
University of California, Santa Barbara

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President
University of California System

John C. Hitt
President
University of Central Florida

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President
The University of Chicago

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President
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President
University of Colorado

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Chancellor
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Susan Herbst
President
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Daniel J. Curran
President
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Patrick T. Harker
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University of Delaware

Robert Coombe
Chancellor
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President
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M. Duane Nellis
President
University of Idaho

Robert Easter
President Designate
University of Illinois

Paula Allen-Meares
Chancellor
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Susan J. Koch
Chancellor
University of Illinois Springfield

Phyllis M. Wise
Chancellor
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Sally Mason
President
University of Iowa

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Chancellor
The University of Kansas

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President
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President
University of Louisville

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University of Maryland

Freeman A. Hrabowski, III
President
University of Maryland, Baltimore County

Robert L. Caret
President
University of Massachusetts

Donna E. Shalala
President
University of Miami

Mary Sue Coleman
President
University of Michigan

Daniel W. Jones
Chancellor
The University of Mississippi

Brady J. Deaton
Chancellor
University of Missouri-Columbia

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President
University of Missouri System

James B. Milliken
President
University of Nebraska

Harvey Perlman
Chancellor
University of Nebraska – Lincoln

John Christensen
Chancellor
University of Nebraska at Omaha

Marc A. Johnson
President
University of Nevada, Reno

Edward R. MacKay
Chancellor
University System of New Hampshire

Mark W. Huddleston
President
University of New Hampshire

Robert G. Frank
President
The University of New Mexico

Thomas W. Ross
President
The University of North Carolina

Holden Thorp
Chancellor
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Philip L. Dubois
Chancellor
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Linda P. Brady
Chancellor
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Robert O. Kelley
President
University of North Dakota

Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C.
President
University of Notre Dame

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The University of Oklahoma

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Interim President
University of Oregon

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President
University of the Pacific

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President
University of Pennsylvania

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President
University of Rhode Island

Joel Seligman
President
University of Rochester

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President
University of San Francisco

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President
The University of South Dakota

C. L. Max Nikias
President
University of Southern California

Judy Genshaft
President
University of South Florida System

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Chancellor
University System of Maryland

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Chancellor
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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President
The University of Texas at Arlington

William Powers Jr.
President
The University of Texas at Austin

David E. Daniel
President
University of Texas at Dallas

Giuseppe Colasurdo, M.D.
President ad interim
The University of Texas Health Science Center
at Houston

Kenneth L. Kalkwarf, DDS, MS
President ad interim
The University of Texas Health Science Center
at San Antonio

Ronald DePinho
President
The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer
Center

Robert S. Nelsen
President
The University of Texas-Pan American

Ricardo Romo
President
The University of Texas at San Antonio

Daniel K. Podolsky
President
The University of Texas Southwestern Medical
Center

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President
The University of Utah

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Interim President
The University of Vermont

Teresa A. Sullivan
President
University of Virginia

Michael Young
President
University of Washington

David Ward
Interim Chancellor
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Michael R. Lovell
Chancellor
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

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University of Wisconsin System

Tom Buchanan
President
University of Wyoming

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President
Utah State University

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Chancellor
Vanderbilt University

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President
Wake Forest University

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Chancellor
Washington University in St. Louis

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President
Western Michigan University

James P. Clements, Ph.D.
President
West Virginia University

James T. Harris, III
President
Widener University

Dennis D. Berkey
President
Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Richard C. Levin
President
Yale University

Richard M. Joel
President
Yeshiva University

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