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Let us stand with Julia! International Students or Immigrant Workers in the United States

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[Julia Lafrate](#), a Canadian-born immigrant medical doctor, who now works at Columbia University Irving Medical Center, shared her personal story with CNN's Chris Cuomo that her green card was denied. She received the news of denial while she was treating critically ill coronavirus patients in the ICU in early May 2020. Julia earned all her medical degrees and credentials from American universities-- Arizona College of Osteopathic Medicine, Mayo Clinic, and the University of Iowa Hospital & Clinics. She is one of millions of former international students or immigrant workers in the United States. Currently, there are more than 44,728,721 immigrants living and working in the United States.

According to the [USA Facts](#), the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) granted 1,096,611 green cards, 707,265 naturalizations, 38,687 asylum claims, 8,742,068 visas, and 387,842 DACA cases in 2018. I am one of them, a former international student who went to different schools in the United States, gained employment as a professor, received permanent legal status; and now a proud resident of this great country of immigrants. This short essay reviews the contributions of former international students or immigrants in the United States who have contributed significantly to U.S. health and medicine, science and technology, education and business, government and military, and job creation and innovation.

[Julia's story](#) of the denial of her application filled my eyes with tears. She is an unsung hero treating patients on the front lines of COVID-19. As of now, more than [351,000](#) people are dead worldwide and 100,000 in the United States due to COVID-19. Like Julia, more than 2.8 million immigrant healthcare professionals are sacrificing their lives everyday in the fight against the COVID-19 across the country. [Data](#) show 244,249 immigrants served as physicians and surgeons, 578,270 health aids, 597,426 nurses, 58,013 lab technicians, 14,593 respiratory therapists, and 8,543 emergency medical technicians. It is [estimated](#) that more than one in four doctors in

the United States were born in another country, and many of them are not U.S. citizens.

As Julia did, I also came to the United States as a student with a big dream. Like us, there are more than 1.8 million students from all over the world currently pursuing their higher education at American colleges and universities, in search of a brighter future. According to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#) (2020), more than 21,460 international students (also known as nonresident aliens) received doctoral degrees, 135,942 received master's degrees, 84,2550 bachelor's degrees, and 28,374 associate degrees. I was one of the aliens (not from another planet!). Sponsorship through employment is one of the paths to green cards or citizenships for many international students after completing their studies, which was the case for me. There are several categories of work eligibility and types of green cards (permanent residency) available in the United States.

In addition to healthcare professionals, about 25 percent of the most innovative American companies, such as Intel (Andy Grove, Hungary), eBay (Pierre Omidyar, France), Yahoo! (Jerry Yang, Taiwan), and Google (Sergey Brin, Russia), were started by former international students who graduated from American colleges and universities. Today, there are at least 13.5 million people employed in 101 U.S. Fortune 500 companies started by foreign-born individuals, and another 122 by the children of immigrants (Fearnow, 2019). For example, Andrew Grove, now CEO of Intel (w/10,000 employees), was a former international student at the City College of New York in 1960; Nancy Chang, co-founder of Tanox (\$45 million revenue with 200 + employees), was an international student from Taiwan at Brown University in 1974. Sundar Pichai, now CEO of Google Inc, moved from India to the U.S. to earn a master's degree at Stanford University in 1995. Today, there are more than 20 million foreign-born STEM workers in the United States. [Recent data](#) indicated that the fastest growing areas include software engineers (47,458), computer programmers (124,228), computer systems analysts (122,648), other areas of math and computers (426,436), nuclear engineers (142,223), electrical engineers (62,105) and information system managers (127,996).

While studying and living in the United States, many of these international students, like refugees, asylum seekers, and temporary workers, fall in love with the socio-cultural fabric of this nation and stay here to raise their families. Some former foreign students or [foreign-born individuals](#) have even become successful politicians in the United States. Historically, [the United States Senate](#) listed 73 senators born outside the United States. Currently, there are 29 serving [congressional members](#) (24 representatives and five senators) who were born outside the U.S. are serving for the office.

From politics to business or education, the contribution made by these foreign born individuals are evident. American colleges and universities have the most to benefit from the services of foreign-born faculty, post-docs, educational thinkers, and alumni in the world. For example, there are at least 25 foreign-born college presidents/ chancellors leading their prestigious world class institutions in the United States. Some of these exemplary institutional leaders included Jean-Lou Chameau (France), former president at CalTech; Subra Suresh (India), president at Carnegie Mellon University, Nariman Farvardin (Iran), president of Stevens Institute of

Technology; Molly Waso Smith (India), president at Manhattanville College, [Wallace Dzu Loh](#) (China), president of the University of Maryland College Park, and [Renu Khator](#) (India) chancellor and president of the University of Houston. There are many other American institutions whose presidents are foreign born or former international students, including Seton Hall University (Philippines), Howard University (Trinidad & Tobago) and several community colleges. So far, Indian-born scholars or former foreign students have been tapped to lead several top American research universities including the University of Houston, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, the University of California at San Diego, Carnegie Mellon University, the University of Texas at Arlington, Lawrence Technological University.

In addition to the college senior leadership (presidents and provosts), the number of mid-career foreign-born leaders, including department chairs, deans, and assistant/associate vice-presidents are on the rise. Morteza Khaledi, a former student from Iran, now serves as Dean of Science at the University of Texas at Arlington; Yacob Astatke, another foreign student from Ethiopia has become assistant vice-president of international affairs at Morgan State University. The

[Institute of International Education](#) (2019) listed at least 136,563 international scholars (professors/instructors/postdocs) working at American institutions of higher education, of which 77% of them are in STEM fields. The top ten leading host institutions of foreign-born scholars include Harvard University (5,278), Stanford University (3,964), University of California- Los Angeles (3,598), Columbia University (3,464), University of California- Berkeley (3,107), University of Michigan- Ann Arbor (2,899), Yale University (2,789), University of California- San Diego (2,697), John Hopkins University (2,599), and University of California- Davis (2,440). In 2019, China (35.1%), India (10.3%), South Korea (5.3), Germany (3.5), and Canada (3.4%) represented the top leading countries of origin of foreign-born scholars in American institutions.

Currently, 1,095,299 international students are attending U.S. colleges and universities which represent 6% of total higher education. Of these, China (369,548), India (202,014), South Korea (52,250), Saudi Arabia (37,080), and Canada (26,122) are the top sending countries. More than 52% of all international students pursued the STEM field in 2018/19. According to IIE Open Doors data, New York University (19,605), University of Southern California (16,340), Northeastern University (16,075), University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign (13,497), Arizona State University (13,324), University of California-Los Angeles (11,942), Purdue University (10,943), University of California-San Diego (10,943), and Boston University (10,598) are the top institutions hosting the highest number of international students. According to [NAFSA](#) (2019), these international students contributed nearly \$41 billion to the U.S. economy and supported 459,20 jobs during 2018-2019. International students are the foundations for tomorrow's American workforce. They are watching us how we work with them, what our values are, and where we are heading next as leaders and as members of this nation.

Julia is a part of this trend in international education mobility who grew up in American higher education and is willing to give help back to the country. In addition to these students, there are at least 2.1 million immigrants ([22% of all workers](#)) in the

U.S. food industry, who are busy in growing, harvesting, processing, and selling food to American families during this pandemic. There are another 6 to 8 million immigrants who work in restaurants, hotels, office cleaning services or other industries to help our lives keep moving. California, New York, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Washington, and Texas are the hotspots of immigrants and foreign students.

As members of this “melting pot” society – and as intellectuals of higher education – we fail when we do not promote the fabric of diversity, history and heritage, socio-cultural identities; we fail when we do not emerge in the waves of globalization and internationalization of practice, policy, and programs; we fail when we do not promote and support students and faculty, their strengths and leadership who come from diverse cultures and backgrounds. Although we encounter diverse cultures and values, we have not yet emerged or become immune to diversity and globalization. We share some common views and we love and are proud of this country and community we live in, yet we often wonder whether there is enough glue to hold us together. Despite the political divisiveness, despite the rising media friction, despite the politicians and positions we believe in, this is the same soil for the have and have-nots, this the same soil to stand up for immigrants or non-immigrants/citizens, the same neighborhoods for the friends and spouses to raise their families, the same schools and churches to attend and accept our differences. During this pandemic, the main race is to save lives, and the entire world is after humankind. Julia is on the frontline of this race! Let us stand with Julia!

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