

Dear International Cougs,

As you may know, I was an international student at WSU in the 1980s. WSU provided the educational platform for my future success in my foreign service career, including my time as ambassador to Moldova. My love and appreciation for WSU and the Cougar family brought me back to the University in 2015 as your Vice President for International Programs. It has been my honor and joy to serve, but these days, we are living through uncertain times. That is why I am writing to you today.

It may seem that recent federal government decisions from Immigration and Customs Enforcement mean that the U.S. does not welcome its international students. I want to assure you that this is absolutely not true where we live. At WSU, we highly value our international community; I hope you've read our recent letter from President Schulz, me, and other WSU leaders to all Cougs worldwide about the recent hurtful and unjust decisions by the federal government. As part of our international community, you directly influence our education and research mission. You help drive the innovation and economy in the state of Washington and are part of creating a learning environment that fosters peace, understanding, and global competence in a world of interconnected global challenges. And we know our international students and scholars are some of our top-performing academics. I am proud of you!

You undoubtedly remember this spring when the U.S. government allowed flexibility for international students to take online courses as colleges and universities pivoted to online instruction to ensure the health and safety of their faculty, staff, and students amid COVID-19. Then, on July 7, updated federal guidance came out stating that F-1 visa holders could not attend universities that had online coursework only. If they did, they had to transfer or face deportation. Although WSU falls under a hybrid model, which keeps our students in compliance with the new guidance, we expressed our opposition and held a town hall to discuss this unjust guidance with you. On July 14, under pressure from a lawsuit from Harvard and MIT and an outcry from schools, businesses, and even politicians across the country, the federal government rescinded its order. WSU also joined a lawsuit against this guidance that was filed on July 10 under Washington State Attorney General Ferguson. We strongly oppose any measure that would compromise the safety and health of our students from the COVID-19 pandemic. You should not have to choose between your safety and continuing your education, ever.

With this change, we go back to the guidance that governed your enrollment through late spring and summer: Remote and online classes are acceptable and international students are not required to be exclusively in a face-to-face class. Web-arranged and online courses (respecting the regulatory limitations) are acceptable for the entire fall term, including after Thanksgiving break. International students will still be required to maintain a full-time course load, however (undergraduates must take 12 credits and graduate students 10 credits). All of us in the Office of International Programs remain dedicated to serving the academic, social, and cultural needs of you and our international community. We continue our work to ensure you continue building your own educational platform at WSU as part of our efforts to foster a diverse and inclusive community. You should also know we have re-established our International Emergency Fund and are asking for donations into that fund to support you during this time.

As always, if you have any questions, please contact ip.intlservices@wsu.edu.

We will not stop working to do what is right for our international community. Thank you for the contributions you make to WSU and the United States. You will always be welcome at WSU.

With utmost regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Asif Chaudhry". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

Asif J. Chaudhry, Ph.D.
U.S. Ambassador (Ret.) Vice President
Washington State University | International Programs