

F&M president: International students are vital for local colleges, communities [column]

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At Franklin & Marshall College, we support and value our international students, for their sake and for the sake of the college, the community, and the commonwealth. We therefore oppose the current attempt to expel international students, because it will impoverish us all.

Pennsylvania stands to lose in a big way if the current guidance from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement causes international students to leave the country. The editorial from the Greensburg Tribune-Review, reprinted on the LNP | LancasterOnline Opinion page July 11, points out the negative economic consequences of that guidance for large research institutions such as Penn State, Pitt and Carnegie Mellon.

The same is true for the 12 institutions in and around Lancaster County, which together educate about 20,000 students and help provide thousands of good jobs that support local families and businesses. The graduates of our colleges and universities often stay to live and work in Pennsylvania. Ultimately, the loss of international students undermines the powerful economic engine that our schools represent on a local, regional, state and national level.

But the argument in favor of educating international students on our campuses goes far beyond economics. Franklin & Marshall has a larger percentage of international students than many other liberal arts colleges, and we want it that way. Our academics, athletics, cultural life and preparation for the world of work are richer for including a multiplicity of perspectives. The city and county benefit, too.

We are poorer when we shut ourselves off from the rest of the world. How can domestic students gain authentic exposure to multiple points of view if not in a student body that contains many kinds of difference? How can our talented American students train to be effective in a global economy and world culture unless they work collaboratively with bright people who have grown up in circumstances different from their own?

Residential liberal arts colleges are a uniquely American phenomenon. The desire among international students to study in outstanding Pennsylvania institutions speaks to the power of the kinds of education we offer. That kind of education depends on a steady influx of great minds from everywhere.

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