



In a crisis, calm authority can ease anxiety by establishing that someone with a broader perspective and deeper knowledge of the situation will support and guide us. We are in an immigration crisis, and one of the casualties is research and the freedom of movement necessary to facilitate it. In spring 2020, international scholars had their flights home cancelled due to COVID-19, while researchers about to begin new academic appointments could not get into the United States. Consular offices around the world closed and the President issued an executive order freezing a range of immigration services.

The news alarmed administrators, like myself, who manage programs that promote exchange and foster a global academic community. In response to the Harvard community's concern, the Director of Immigration Services at the Harvard International Office led a webinar. First she gave a general address. She did not gesticulate without intention or move unconsciously; her physicality revealed a true state of "groundedness." She was secure, deliberate, and spoke clearly. She acknowledged uncertainties and outlined challenges, but never showed doubt or resignation. She described how all that was in her power and in the power of her office to be done was being done. She provided a few key statistics to illustrate points, yet never overwhelmed or distracted her audience with unnecessary details. She explained the broader landscape -- how she and other colleagues work behind the scenes with the State Department and other government entities -- and conveyed that she and her colleagues are constantly monitoring shifts in immigration policy. I felt she had complete intellectual control over the crisis. She had digested all the relevant information and was already taking appropriate action to affect change where she could.

After her 20-minute address, she took over 45 minutes to answer a wide range of questions which administrators from across the university had been invited to

submit. She reiterated the procedures that were unaffected by the current situation and provided clear instructions to administrators. Her directness and strength of mind made me confident that the Harvard International Office would continue to steer us correctly in navigating the crisis and would remain the essential resource for all our visa and immigration related questions. I have always had a high opinion of the HIO advisors with whom I've consulted over the years. My understanding now after hearing the Director of Immigration Services is that the office's spirit of competence, clear-headed confidence, and fact-based guidance begins from the top.

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