The MIT Graduate Student Council (GSC) represents the 6,900 graduate students of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in all matters concerning their welfare, academic opportunities, and professional careers after graduation. We strongly oppose policies that disrupt students’ work or studies and support all measures that enable international students enrolled at accredited US universities, including MIT, to obtain visas to study in the US and enter the country unimpeded.

The State Department has given consular officers increased authority to provide visas only lasting a single year to Chinese students in select technical fields. This change not only unfairly burdens a large portion of US graduate students based on their country of origin, but also negatively impacts the United States’ economy and image as a leader of R&D. The MIT graduate student council urges the State Department to maintain the 5-year visa duration.

Most Chinese student visas, such as class F visas, must be renewed at a US Embassy or Consulate office abroad, and the Department of State recommends that applicants apply in their home country. The visa issuance and renewal process for Chinese students regularly takes over a month to complete. Requiring annual visa renewals for Chinese students will negatively impact their productivity in a number of ways:

1. The time required to travel and renew academic visas abroad interrupts their academic career and stalls the development of cutting-edge US-based research.

2. These students incur the additional financial burden of having to travel back to their home country for visa renewal. For example, if a student attends an international conference or conducts research abroad, they often make an extra trip to their home country in order to renew their visa.

3. Students forgo international travel due to the financial and time commitment of renewing their visa. Therefore, students often elect not to attend international conferences or visit their loved ones back home.

This is having a particularly onerous impact on the MIT graduate student body. 41% of MIT graduate students are international, and 51% of the international student population comes from Asia. These are our co-workers, classmates, friends, neighbors, and family members. They deserve the full dignity to be treated the same as any other member of the MIT graduate community, and these policy changes disproportionately affect them. For this reason, above all others, we encourage the policy change above.

Beyond the effect this will have on graduate students themselves, it will also likely have detrimental effects on the American economy. MIT students and faculty alone have founded more than 30,000 currently active companies that employ about 4.6 million people and generate annual revenues of $1.9 trillion, equivalent to the 10th largest economy worldwide. Statistics show that foreign-born students have contributed disproportionately to the number of MIT alumni-founded companies. Furthermore, upon examining billion dollar startup companies across the US, the National Foundation for American Policy reported that almost 25% of these companies “had a founder who first came to America as an international student.” With more

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1 https://web.mit.edu/facts/enrollment.html
than one million international students pursuing graduate degrees in the US in 2017, and nearly 12% of those students being Chinese graduate students\(^6\), it is evident that this change to the Chinese visa process will have a considerable impact on US-based academic research output as a whole.

This change will further disincentivize Chinese students from pursuing graduate studies in the US and ultimately damage the United States’ ability to attract the world’s best and brightest. Between 2001 and 2014, the U.S. share of the “global market” of international students declined by 29%\(^7\), partly because foreign students are choosing to study in other countries with more attractive student visa policies\(^8\). When we create overbearing hurdles to the students who want to come to the United States, study here, work here, and create these economic benefits for all who live here--but cannot--then we are tossing those desires and those benefits away. Visa policies that prevent students from coming to the US and staying will ultimately send those students elsewhere, impacting our economy. Starts-ups that could have been started in America will inevitably be started elsewhere. Research that could have resulted in scientific discoveries in America will inevitably happen elsewhere. In addition to the human cost of these policies, these economic costs will only harm America.

Some in Washington have argued that Chinese Student Visas should be curtailed because of geopolitical conflicts between the United States and Chinese governments. In his recent testimony before Congress, FBI Director Christopher alleged that there exists a problem of Chinese government espionage through US universities\(^9\). While political challenges between governments and difficulties of safeguarding intellectual properties may be grounded in legitimate national security concerns, requiring more frequent visa renewals for

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\(^7\) Atlas of Student Mobility, Institute of International Education. http://www.iie.org/projectatlas

