

## **OU prez, students, speak out on Trump's travel ban**

*OU's Iranian student population is particularly worried*

By Conor Morris

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Ohio University students – many of them from Iran – protested out front of Baker University Center earlier this week to speak out against President Donald Trump's executive order banning travel to the U.S. from seven Muslim-majority countries, including Iran.

Outgoing Ohio University President Roderick J. McDavis released a statement last weekend reaffirming the university's support for international students and staff in the face of President Donald Trump's executive order travel ban.

At least eight international OU students and others protested Trump's executive order in front of Baker Center Monday. The order bars citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries from entering the U.S. for 90 days.

Meanwhile, multiple protests and other actions happened this week or are set to happen. See story on this same page for more details.

McDavis encouraged "citizens of those countries" Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen to refrain from leaving the United States "at this time."

Seyed Mohammadreza Heidari, a PhD student in the civil engineering department, held chains with the other student protesters Monday. Heidari is president of the Iranian Student Society at OU, which has a membership of around 100 Iranian graduate students and professors at OU.

"The chains exactly represent our situations," Heidari said. "We cannot go out of the USA and come back to continue our study. We cannot see our family and also they are not allowed to be here to visit us."

Mahvand Khamesian, an OU PhD student studying physics from Iran, was one of the protesters outside Baker Center. She said she hasn't seen her family in the last four years. Her parents were set this week to receive a visa they had applied for, but it was cancelled after Trump's executive order.

"We are so upset and we don't know what to do," she said. "I'm not sure when I'm going to see my family again."

Heidari had planned to go to Canada to see his family in late May this year, but received a cancellation email from the U.S. embassy to Canada, which he provided.

"I had a plan to see my family this summer and participate in my sister's wedding party," Heidari said. "But now, as the only brother, I cannot go there. It really makes me upset."

Reza Mehr, an OU graduate student studying film, was another one of the students from Iran protesting outside of Baker Center. He said he was planning on seeing his mother soon, but that's no longer the case.

"Remind me, in the last two decades, how many Americans... (have been) killed or harmed by Iranians?" Mehr asked.

According to the CATO Institute, not one person from the seven countries included in Trump's travel ban has killed anyone in a terror attack on U.S. soil in the last 40 years, a number which includes refugees. In that same period of time, six Iranians, six Sudanese, two Somalis, two Iraqis, and one Yemeni-born person have been convicted of attempting or executing terrorist attacks on U.S. soil.

McDavis wrote in his statement that OU has been communicating with students and staff who are affected by the travel ban executive order, and noted that OU's International Student and Faculty Services department is offering information and counseling to those students.

"Ohio University welcomes and supports students without regard to their immigration status," McDavis wrote. "We comply with federal requirements associated with managing our international programs. Pursuant to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), we protect the privacy of student information."

It's not clear if OU has taken a stance yet on whether the university/its police department will decline to work with federal immigration officials unless they are forced to by law, as some universities have stated. When asked about these measures, OU spokesperson Carly Leatherwood declined in a response to go into details about OU policing practices.

“OUPD is not changing the way it conducts business as a result of the executive Order,” Leatherwood wrote. “As it always has, OUPD will comply with lawful orders, such as warrants, issued by an appropriate court.”

OU Student Senate issued a statement Tuesday decrying Trump’s executive order.

“As Bobcats, it is our duty to look out for one another,” the Senate said. “We have an unspoken promise to this community to uphold the values that make Ohio University great: Character, community, citizenship, civility and commitment.”

Ian Armstrong, president of Graduate Student Senate, said that OU’s GSS is in the process of working with graduate senates across the state to organize themselves in opposition to the travel ban, with plans to speak with Ohio Governor John Kasich and senators Rob Portman and Sherrod Brown. Many of the Iranian students at OU are graduate students.

Students from Iran make up the fourth-largest population of OU international students enrolled (72 students) according to data from the fifth week of fall 2016, below China (499), Saudi Arabia (105) and India (98).