March 5, 2013

Dear University and College Presidents and Chancellors,

Today, we invite you to join us in bringing attention to one of the biggest challenges facing our colleges and universities: How US immigration laws impact our ability to attract, retain, and educate the world's leading minds.

As educators at our nation's higher education institutions, we stand in support of an ever-changing workforce environment, and as drivers of American innovation. Our classes help shape the next generation of scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs, creators of culture, and thinkers, while our labs help bring the next great ideas to life. Too often, however, our ability to educate and our ability to innovate are frustrated by US immigration laws. Particularly in the innovation-rich fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM), we train many of the brightest minds of the world, only to have those students sent abroad to compete against us because our immigration laws do not provide a viable path for them to stay.

On April 19, 2013, we will address our respective campuses about the role of immigration in driving innovation and creating American jobs, and the frustrations we experience when US immigration law impedes our ability to attract and retain the world's top students and researchers. We invite you to join us on this day with your own campus events, in hopes that, by speaking with one coordinated voice, we can best bring our message to the public and to our representatives in Washington, DC.

The costs to the US economy of these policies are profound. More than three out of every four patents (76%) that the top 10 US patent-producing universities received in 2011 had an immigrant inventor. Keeping these inventors in the US after graduation would help power American innovation and create American jobs. A recent study by the American Enterprise Institute and the Partnership for a New American Economy found that every foreign-born advanced-degree graduate we train in our universities and then keep in America working in a STEM field creates an additional 2.62 jobs for American workers. Yet, as we see on our campuses every day, many of these job creators we trained are sent abroad even though the US economy faces a severe shortage of STEM workers. By 2018, the US will have an estimated 779,000 jobs that require advanced STEM degrees, but only an estimated 555,200 advanced STEM degree holders, a shortage of more than 220,000 workers.

It is also important to understand that this shortfall – and the challenges presented by our existing immigration laws – begin immediately upon high school graduation. Many foreign-born students arrived in our country as children but are prevented from attending college because of their undocumented status. As we deny young people in our country who are qualified to attend college access to higher education, we deny our country the talent we very much need.

We hope that you will join us by speaking out on your campus on April 19, 2013, about these and other immigration issues that affect us. To assist in planning and executing these discussions at universities around the country, we are working with the Partnership for a New American Economy, the bipartisan coalition of more than 500 CEOs and mayors making the economic case for immigration reform, and the National Immigration Forum, one of the nation's leading immigration advocacy organizations. The Partnership and the Forum will help coordinate all events, suggesting talking points for your consideration and planning support to ensure each campus event is successful.

If you are interested in participating or would like more information, we encourage you to get in touch with Jeremy Robbins, director of the Partnership for a New American Economy (jrobbins@cityhall.nyc.gov).

We thank you and look forward to working with you to bring attention to this important issue.

Best regards,

Michael M. Crow
President
Arizona State University

Eduardo J. Padrón
President
Miami Dade College

David J. Skorton
President
Cornell University