America Benefits from International Students

International Students Benefit American Students
American students, colleges, and universities benefit greatly from the economic, academic, and cultural contributions of international students and scholars. For example, the 1,094,792 international students\(^1\) attending U.S. colleges and universities during the 2017-18 academic year, contributed $39 billion to the U.S. economy and supported more than 455,000 jobs\(^2\). In addition, nearly one-quarter of the founders of the $1 billion U.S. startup companies first came to America as international students\(^3\) and 40 percent of the Nobel Prizes awarded to Americans in chemistry, medicine, and physics since 2000 were immigrants\(^4\). For the United States to remain competitive and maintain its status as a global leader in education, science, and technology, we must continue to welcome the world’s best students and scholars.

U.S. Losing Talent
Statistics show the United States is losing talented international students as new students are choosing to study elsewhere. In the 2017-18 academic year, new enrollment of international students fell by 6.6 percent compared to the year before. This builds off a 3.3 percent loss of new enrollments in the prior 2016-17 academic year.\(^5\)

Graduate schools are experiencing even greater declines. First-time enrollments for international graduate students have declined for the second year in a row with the biggest declines in engineering (down 16 percent), physical and earth sciences (down 9 percent), and business (down 8 percent).\(^6\)

While U.S. colleges and universities work to create a welcoming environment, other countries use our pervasive negative rhetoric and policies to compete and attract international students to study in their countries and not in the United States.

The International Student Process
The process for obtaining an international student visa and maintaining legal status is arduous for international students and higher education institutions. To admit international students, colleges and universities must be authorized by Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) and must track the students in the ICE Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS).

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\(^1\) Institute of International Education, [http://www.iie.org/opendoors](http://www.iie.org/opendoors).
\(^2\) NAFSA: Association of International Educators, [www.nafsa/economicvalue](http://www.nafsa/economicvalue).
\(^3\) National Foundation for American Policy, tinyurl.com/y8n4yxj4
\(^4\) National Foundation for American Policy, tinyurl.com/ImmigrantsNobelPrizes
\(^6\) Council of Graduate Schools, [https://cgsnet.org/international-graduate-applications-and-enrollments-continue-decline-us-institutions](https://cgsnet.org/international-graduate-applications-and-enrollments-continue-decline-us-institutions).
To be eligible for student visas, prospective students must prove the ability to fund their education and have no intent to remain permanently in the United States after graduation. When granted visas and allowed to enter the United States, international students are continually tracked in SEVIS. Designated school officials (DSOs) must maintain a record of students’ arrival on campus, enrollment each semester, academic majors, work authorization, home address, and other information.

After graduation, some international students are permitted to continue their learning through optional practical training (OPT). One year of OPT is available to most international students with two additional years available to international student graduates with degrees in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Students who wish to work for longer periods with employers willing to sponsor them have few options. There is no direct path to green card status for international students. Employers may participate in the H-1B lottery to attempt to win one of the 85,000 H-1Bs available each fiscal year. If the employer is successful and wants to hire the student permanently then the employer may begin the green card process. However, the green card process is long and complicated. There are annual caps and limits on the number of green cards issued by country of origin of the green card applicant that can result in multi-year delays for some and decades for others.

Next Steps Needed
The Administration and Congress should create and implement policies to better attract and retain international students. They should also make public statements of support for international students. Opportunities for qualified international students to contribute to our campuses and communities should be protected and expanded. In order to encourage international student enrollment, U.S. policies should provide access to practical training and a path to green cards so that after earning their degree in the U.S., international students can remain here to work, build businesses, and strengthen our economy. Given the great economic impact of international students, it is important that we create and implement policies that encourage study in the U.S. and ultimately allows for the best and brightest to remain to create new innovations, businesses, and jobs for the U.S.

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