

# America Risks Losing International Student Talent

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**Ask: We urge Congress to:**

- 1. Introduce or cosponsor legislation to expand dual intent and provide a direct path to a green card for international students graduating from U.S. colleges and universities to remain and contribute to the U.S. economy.**
- 2. Exercise oversight of U.S. visa and immigration policy and systems through hearings and other actions to ensure secure and efficient processing that keeps America safe and strong.**

While America is fortunate to have a large and dynamic workforce, we do not produce enough graduates to meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century knowledge economy. America benefits from a critical domestic student pipeline as well as contributions from international students studying at our colleges and universities and after they graduate.

The economic contribution of international students is clear. NAFSA's latest analysis finds that international students studying at U.S. colleges and universities contributed **\$43.8 billion** and supported **378,175 jobs** to the U.S. economy during the 2023-2024 academic year.

Additionally, the presence of international students on our campuses and classrooms enhances U.S. students' education by providing global perspectives and collaboration opportunities that help to prepare them to live and work in an economically interconnected world. However, the United States competes with other nations for these students and, without decisive action, is at risk of losing its position as the most attractive destination for international student talent.

Uncertainty about visa policy and a reduction in research opportunities increases the risk that America's share of the world's students and scholars will shrink. Generations of foreign policy leaders agree that international students and scholars are one of the world's greatest assets, as they create jobs, drive research, enrich our classrooms, and strengthen national security.

If we do not proactively attract international talent, the talent will go elsewhere, to the detriment of U.S. academia and industry that rely on their contributions. Instead, we should choose to set a new competitive standard to attract and retain talent. We have already seen our immigration policy benefit other countries. For example, when Turkish scientist Erdahl Arikan could not stay after graduation to continue his work in the United States, he moved to China and helped Huawei create 5G technology. America's immigration policy pushes talented people to leave after graduating which benefits the rest of the world.

## **We urge Congress to:**

### **1. Create an immigration system that works, ensuring America benefits from international student talent.**

Creating an immigration system that works for international students and benefits America requires changing the law to create a direct path to green card status for graduates from U.S. colleges and universities and expand dual intent to allow international students to express interest in remaining in America after graduation.

In prior Congresses, the bipartisan and bicameral Keep STEM Talent Act (S. 2384 and H.R. 5477 in the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress) was introduced to accomplish this goal. The bill would create a direct path to a green card for U.S. advanced STEM degree graduates (master's and higher), exempts them from the annual green card caps, and expands dual intent for these students.

### **2. Direct federal agencies to effectively and efficiently implement the law.**

Our higher education institutions invest significant time and resources to recruit international students and scholars to study, teach, and conduct research. Congressional oversight is needed to ensure key federal agencies function optimally in the following areas to advance our competitive advantage and the U.S. economy:

- **Visa Processing:** We need a visa process that is efficient, with reasonable wait times for in-person interviews, and an adjudication process that is both rigorous and timely. With uncertainty about possible reductions in the number of U.S. consulates around the world or in staffing levels, Congress must ensure a functioning visa system.
- **Immigration Processing:** A key outcome of efforts to eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse in immigration processing should be enhancing collaboration across the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to provide efficient and predictable processing and procedures. The complex immigration system for international students and scholars relies on the cooperation of two DHS agencies: the Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Student and Exchange Visitor Program and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. Data and information should be effectively shared between these agencies to accomplish the mission of the Department.

## **Contact**

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