**Talking Points: Defending F-1 Optional Practical Training**

The current administration is considering measures to pause or end the F-1 Optional Practical Training program, or OPT. The United States cannot afford to make such a consequential change. Our nation needs to attract the best minds to help get the U.S. economy back up and running again. We need to have the next innovation and ground-breaking research happen here. Foreign students benefit not only our colleges and universities and American students, but also our businesses and the wider economy.

**OPT benefits U.S. higher education.**

* Experiential learning, or on-the-job-training, is a key component of higher education today. Internships, externships, the first years following graduation – this is the time when education and employment come together to prepare for long-term career success. U.S. students are not limited in those opportunities whereas foreign students must get permission from both their college or university and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to do so.
* Foreign students increasingly view this type of educational work-based experience as critical to their degree program, and it has become an important factor in deciding where to pursue study outside their home country. [A 2016 survey conducted by Studyportals,](https://studyportals.com/blog/one-year-later-international-students-changing-perceptions-of-the-u-s/) an online resource for international students researching study destinations, showed that 62% of prospective students rated being able to work in the country after graduation as very important.
* Many foreign students studying in critical STEM fields pursue OPT opportunities in medical and scientific research, sustaining the United States as a global leader in these areas.

**OPT benefits Americans.**

* OPT benefits U.S. employers and other Americans. According to a [March 2019 Niskanen Center report,](https://www.niskanencenter.org/wp-content/uploads/old_uploads/2019/03/OPT.pdf) experiential learning opportunities like OPT lead to increased innovation and higher average earnings, without costing U.S. workers their jobs or decreasing U.S. worker wages.
* [A National Foundation for American Policy March 2019 study](https://nfap.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/International-Students-STEM-OPT-And-The-US-STEM-Workforce.NFAP-Policy-Brief.March-2019.pdf) focused on STEM employment found no evidence that OPT participation reduces job opportunities for U.S. workers.
* [A December 2018 report by the Business Roundtable](https://www.businessroundtable.org/policy-perspectives/immigration/economic-impact-curbing-optional-practical-training-program) illustrated significant negative effects on the U.S. economy if OPT were scaled back or curtailed, including job losses impacting U.S. workers.
* [According to NAFSA: Association of International Educators](http://www.nafsa.org/economicvalue), foreign students and their families contributed nearly $41 billion dollars and more than 458,000 jobs to the U.S. economy during the 2018-2019 academic year, making international education the fifth largest U.S. services export.

**Other countries offer experiential learning and post-graduation employment.**

* The United Kingdom recently restored the two-year post study work visa for foreign students, a benefit ended by the UK government back in 2012. Following the decision to end the post-study work option, foreign student enrollment in UK higher education flattened, rising just 4.1 percent over the five-year period from academic years 2012-13 to 2016-17. The UK clearly recognized the error of its decision to curtail the program.
* Australia, Canada, and China also offer post-study work opportunities to foreign students and have seen their higher education enrollments skyrocket.
  + **Canada:** Foreign students can work following graduation for a period equal to the time they studied, up to a maximum of three years. In 2018, foreign student enrollment increased by 16%. “Skilled” work experience also helps graduates qualify for legal residence.
  + **Australia:** Foreign students can work for up to 18 months following graduation. In 2018, foreign student enrollment increased by 15%.
  + **China:** Foreign students graduating with a master’s degree or above are immediately eligible to apply for work visas within one year of graduation. The country is on track to meet its goal of hosting half a million foreign students by 2020, with 492,000 foreign students enrolled in 2018.