

May 15, 2020

To the Arizona Congressional Delegation:

We write to you to share our concerns over the potential that the administration might pause or end the F-1 Optional Practical Training program, or OPT. On behalf of Arizona's business community, we urge this important program, which allows foreign students to work in the United States in their chosen field following the completion of their studies, to continue without interruption.

The ability to attract the globe's most talented individuals to the U.S. has always been a competitive advantage for our country, something that will prove essential as we begin down the path to a post-pandemic economic recovery.

Foreign students benefit not only our colleges and universities, but also our businesses and the wider economy. Many foreign students studying in critical STEM fields pursue OPT opportunities in medical and scientific research, sustaining the U.S. as a global leader in these areas, which has taken on even greater importance in the global race to develop effective Covid-19 therapeutics and vaccines.

These foreign students who launch their innovations and discoveries from the U.S. are job creators. A National Foundation for American Policy study found that unemployment rates are lower in fields with large numbers of OPT participants.¹ According to a Business Roundtable study, reducing OPT would increase unemployment by .15% with a total job loss of 433,000 positions for American workers.²

The U.S. is not alone in the competition to attract talented foreign students to its colleges and universities. Several countries, including China, offer generous post-study work opportunities to foreign students, giving their domestic economies a leg up over the U.S. if our country were to curtail or suspend our OPT program.

Hands-on, experiential education has become a deciding factor for students from abroad exploring where to study. A 2016 survey conducted by Studyportals, 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.³

The U.S OPT program plays a critical role in the U.S.' ability to remain competitive in the global marketplace. OPT students provide employers with the skills they are looking for and often allow them to expand their business and create more jobs, fueling overall economic growth.

Continued

¹ <https://nfap.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/International-Students-STEM-OPT-And-The-US-STEM-Workforce.NFAP-Policy-Brief.March-2019.pdf>

² <https://www.businessroundtable.org/policy-perspectives/immigration/economic-impact-curbing-optional-practical-training-program>

³ <https://studyportals.com/blog/one-year-later-international-students-changing-perceptions-of-the-u-s/>



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On behalf of employers from across Arizona, we urge you to communicate to the administration support for the F-1 Optional Practical Training program and advocate for its continuation.

Sincerely,

Arizona Chamber of Commerce & Industry

Arizona Manufacturers Council

Greater Phoenix Chamber

Greater Phoenix Economic Council

Greater Phoenix Leadership