The Benefits of F-1 Optional Practical Training

Ask: We urge members of Congress to communicate their support for Optional Practical Training with the Administration.

For decades, Optional Practical Training (OPT) has provided international students critical access to experiential learning and benefited the U.S. economy and the American workforce. America's reputation as the top destination for global talent and ultimately, its preeminence in research and innovation, will take a devastating hit—particularly in STEM fields—if OPT is restricted or ended.

OPT is essential to maintaining America's standing as the leading destination for global talent. A majority of the 8,000 international students surveyed by IDP Education in August 2025 said post-study work opportunities strongly influence their choice of study destination; 66 percent said they would go elsewhere or consider going elsewhere if those opportunities were not available.

Attracting international students to this country is in our nation's best interest. Many international students in critical STEM fields pursue OPT in medical and scientific research, sustaining the United States as a global leader in these areas.

The U.S. economy benefits from the contributions of international students and the jobs they create for American workers. A majority of the nearly 6,000 international students surveyed by IDP Education in May 2026 said post-study work opportunities strongly influence their choice of study destination; 66 percent said they would go elsewhere or consider going elsewhere without those opportunities.

- According to a 2023 analysis by the Niskanen Center, "Foreign Students in STEM Don't Hurt American Workers," 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 2019 study by the National Foundation for American Policy focused on STEM found **no evidence that OPT participation reduces job opportunities for U.S. workers**.
- "The Economic Impact of Curbing the Optional Practical Training Program" (2018) report by the Business Roundtable illustrated **significant negative effects on the U.S. economy if OPT were scaled back or curtailed, including job losses impacting U.S. workers**.
- International students and their families contributed **$39.9 billion dollars and 309,409 jobs** to the U.S. economy during the 2025-2026 academic year. (nafsa.org/econvalue).

Our nation thrives on the contributions of both foreign and domestic talent; policymakers can create opportunities for the American workforce while maintaining this important program. Eliminating or curtailing OPT would degrade the relevancy of a U.S. higher education by removing the key component of applied learning, harm our national and economic security, and deprive U.S. students and institutions of the diverse and enriching contributions international students bring to our campuses.

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