



March 25, 2022

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

VIA EMAIL

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

I write on behalf of NAFSA: Association of International Educators to urge you to maintain international education provisions that are in S. 1260, the U.S. Innovation and Competitiveness Act (USICA) of 2021, and H.R. 4521, the America Creating Opportunities for Manufacturing, Pre-Eminence in Technology, and Economic Strength (COMPETES) Act of 2022 in the final U.S. competitiveness package.

International education provisions are essential to an innovation and competitiveness package because the United States is in a global competition to create the best possible ecosystem for talented people from around the world who will envision, create, and manufacture the innovations of today and tomorrow. To achieve this, we need robust policies that improve access to international education for American students and that attract and retain international students and scholars who want to contribute their talents and skills to our country.

American students must have a better understanding of the world to succeed in an environment where nearly every business is affected by activities beyond our borders. This means greater access to study abroad opportunities and foreign language training. Attracting and retaining international students requires policies that meet both the needs of the United States and the aspirations of the students. Federal investment in international education will ensure the United States has the talent pool necessary to innovate and stay ahead of its global competitors.

### **Study Abroad and Foreign Language Training**

Study abroad and foreign language training provides American students with the global skills, knowledge, and experiences necessary to compete in today's global workforce. 86 percent of American business leaders believe their business would increase if their employees had international experience.<sup>1</sup> Research by NAFSA in 2020 revealed a strong connection between the skills gained

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.nafsa.org/sites/default/files/media/document/simon\\_program\\_infographic.pdf](https://www.nafsa.org/sites/default/files/media/document/simon_program_infographic.pdf)

from a study abroad experience and the skills employers are looking for in filling their management and leadership positions.<sup>2</sup> Despite these proven benefits, only 7.5 percent of U.S. college students enroll in foreign language courses<sup>3</sup> and only 10 percent study abroad before they graduate. Understandably, the COVID-19 pandemic suppressed study abroad participation (down 99 percent in summer 2020<sup>4</sup>), limiting students' access to the associated career enhancing benefits of study abroad.

To support critical international education opportunities, I urge the inclusion of the following provisions in a final competitiveness package:

- Reauthorize the Education Department's Title VI and Fulbright-Hays international education programs by adopting the language in S. 1260, USICA, Section 6121;
- Establish a State Department fund for the study of Chinese languages by adopting language in H.R. 4521, America COMPETES Act, Sec. 30219F; and
- Restore the State Department's Fulbright program in China and Hong Kong by adopting language in H.R. 4521, America COMPETES Act, Section 30303(c)(10).

### **Attracting and Retaining International Students and Scholars**

The United States is uniquely positioned in this global competition for talented people because of our unrivaled higher education system that has attracted and retained international students seeking education and potential career opportunities for generations. However, as other countries have discovered that international students benefit their countries, they have implemented proactive government policies that ease access to study, work, and opportunities so that international talent can become permanent members of their communities. As international students contribute academically and culturally to our campuses, they also contribute significantly to the U.S. economy. The nearly one million international students at U.S. colleges and universities contributed \$24.8 billion to the U.S. economy and supported more than 300,000 jobs during the 2020-2021 school year.<sup>5</sup> However, the number of new international students enrolling in U.S. higher education institutions has been in decline for the past five years, dropping 11 percent from fall 2016 through fall 2019. In the fall of 2020, due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, new enrollments plummeted an additional 43 percent.<sup>6</sup>

This enrollment decline has serious economic ramifications. The international student enrollment decline in the 2020-2021 academic year reduced their economic contribution to the U.S. economy by more than \$10 billion compared to the previous year—the largest single-year drop since NAFSA began tracking these figures more than 20 years ago.

Including key immigration provisions related to international students and scholars in the competitiveness package will ensure the United States attracts and retains the best and brightest, particularly in STEM fields. International students in particular want assurances that if they study in the United States, they will have a fair shot at employment opportunities after graduation and the

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/developing-globally-competitive-workforce-through-study-abroad>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/03/07/study-finds-sharp-decline-foreign-language-enrollments>

<sup>4</sup> <https://opendoorsdata.org/infographic/duration-of-u-s-study-abroad-2019-20/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nafsa.org/economicvalue>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Publications/Fall-2020-International-Student-Enrollment-Snapshot>

possibility of permanent residence. Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and China offer international students such assurances and have seen their enrollments increase significantly because of it.<sup>7</sup>

I urge the inclusion of the following immigration-related provisions from H.R. 4521, America COMPETES Act, into a final competitiveness package:

- Maintain the green card cap exemption for international STEM PhD students, including health professions and related programs, who graduate from qualified higher education institutions. Furthermore, I urge an expansion of the definition of “qualified U.S. institution” to include all public and private nonprofit U.S. higher education institutions. I also urge an expansion of the definition of eligible STEM programs to include the STEM degrees as defined by the Department of Homeland Security’s STEM Designated Degree Program List. This list determines eligibility for STEM optional practical training and has a process for regular updating to reflect current and future programs (Section 80303);
- Maintain the expansion of dual intent to STEM PhD international student (F-1) visa applicants by allowing them to express intent to seek a green card after graduation at the time of visa application (Section 80303);
- Maintain the exemption of international STEM master’s degree graduates from existing green card caps IF they work in an industry critical to U.S. national or economic security (Section 80303);
- Maintain the creation of a special immigrant visa category for essential scientists to promote U.S. national security (Section 80401); and
- Allow special immigrant visas for Afghan nationals currently participating in Fulbright and other State Department-sponsored exchange programs, along with program alumni who returned to Afghanistan (Section 80307).

Thank you for your consideration of these important requests. The above provisions will make the United States stronger and more competitive globally. They will ensure U.S. students have access to critical international education and foreign language programs that will prepare them to succeed in a global economy. And they will ensure the United States continues to attract and retain the best and brightest students and scholars, particularly in STEM fields.

Sincerely,

[Signature Redacted]

Esther D. Brimmer, DPhil  
Executive Director & CEO  
NAFSA: Association of International Educators

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<sup>7</sup> [https://www.nafsa.org/sites/default/files/media/document/20-024\\_Update\\_US\\_At\\_Risk\\_v01-11-20-2021.pdf](https://www.nafsa.org/sites/default/files/media/document/20-024_Update_US_At_Risk_v01-11-20-2021.pdf)