

## **Recommendations for Biden-Harris Administration: Rebuilding & Restoring International Education Leadership**

The Biden-Harris administration takes over at an unprecedented moment in U.S. history when rebuilding and restoring U.S. engagement with the world is critical. This is essential if we are to get the country's economy and higher education system back on track. International education must be a key element of this recovery.

President-elect Biden understands the critical need to put the United States back on firm foreign policy ground having served for many years on the Foreign Relations Committee as a U.S. senator, and, more recently, as President Obama's vice president. In the Obama administration, he championed its proactive global engagement agenda, which included the launch of several international education initiatives like 100,000 Strong China, 100,000 Strong in the Americas, and the Young African, Young Southeast Asian, and Young Leaders of the Americas initiatives, many of which continue today. Vice President-elect Kamala Harris understands this too, as she is the daughter of two successful international students. During the campaign, Biden and Harris pledged to restore global alliances and undo the harmful immigration policies put in place by the prior administration.

Just as the COVID-19 virus knows no borders, neither should the solutions to it. To emerge from this crisis, the United States will need to rely on global collaboration. Rebuilding and restoring U.S. global leadership and economic strength will require reaffirming a dedication to international education through administrative and congressional action. We stand ready to work with the Biden-Harris administration to advance the following policy priorities in order to "build back better":

### ***Establish a Welcoming Environment for International Students and Scholars***

Attracting the best and the brightest from across the world contributes immeasurably to the nation's preeminence in academic research and scientific innovation. International students are also more likely to start businesses than U.S. citizens. Half of U.S. private companies worth over \$1 billion have at least one immigrant founder – 22 percent of whom first came to the United States first as international students.<sup>1</sup> A one percent increase in international student graduates results in a 15 percent increase in patents per capita.<sup>2</sup> Immigrants are overrepresented in healthcare as, according to Department of Labor statistics, immigrants accounted for 28 percent of the 958,000 physicians and surgeons practicing in the United States.<sup>3</sup> The role of immigrant physicians in treating COVID-19 patients is evident in the high number of immigrant physicians in states like New Jersey (39 percent), Nevada (38 percent), Florida and New York (36 percent each), and Massachusetts (34 percent).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Business Roundtable, <https://www.businessroundtable.org/policy-perspectives/immigration/economic-impact-curbing-optional-practical-training-program>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Migration Policy Institute, [https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/immigrant-health-care-workers-united-states-2018#:~:text=Immigrants%20accounted%20for%2028%20percent,aides%20\(see%20Table%201\)](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/immigrant-health-care-workers-united-states-2018#:~:text=Immigrants%20accounted%20for%2028%20percent,aides%20(see%20Table%201))

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Thriving nations depend on such a pipeline of talent, and yet, recent trends indicate that this valuable resource may be at risk for our country. New international student enrollment at U.S. colleges and universities has been in decline since fall 2016 due to increased competition from other countries and a sustained belief that international students are not welcome in the United States.<sup>5</sup> NAFSA's latest economic analysis shows international students contributed \$38.7 billion to the U.S. economy during the 2019-20 academic year and supported nearly 416,000 jobs; international students studying at community colleges contributed \$2.3 billion and support 12,116 jobs. While the United States remains the top destination for international students, our market share has been in decline as international students are choosing to study in countries besides the United States. The COVID-19 pandemic has only accelerated these declines. Results of a recent Fall 2020 enrollment snapshot survey published by the Institute of International Education show overall international student enrollment fell 16 percent, largely due to a 43 percent drop in new international student enrollment.<sup>6</sup> When just comparing the number of new students physically in the United States, the drop is 72 percent from last fall.<sup>7</sup>

The pandemic, coupled with numerous harmful federal policy changes adopted by the prior administration, has caused severe damage to this country's reputation as the premier destination for international students and scholars. To change course, policy changes must be enacted. Only then will we have a United States where the best and brightest are able to fully contribute to our campuses and communities.

*NAFSA urges the Biden-Harris administration to take the following actions:*

- Reverse or halt the implementation of the Department of Homeland Security's proposed rule to eliminate duration of status.
- Restore the perception of the United States as a welcoming destination for international students, scholars, and researchers, and make this goal a priority for the State Department and embassy outreach.
- Overturn harmful visa and immigration policies established through executive order by the prior administration, such as the travel bans.
- Establish a coordinated U.S. recruitment strategy to proactively attract a diverse pool of talented individuals from around the world.
- Restore the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program and allow both new and renewal applications to be processed.
- Restore service to the mission and practice of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and reestablish longstanding effective policies that were ended by the prior administration (e.g., deference to prior decisions in extension of status filings).
- Preserve post-study experiential learning opportunities for international students like Optional Practical Training.
- Protect sensitive research and technology developed at U.S. higher education institutions, without implementing policies that target broad swaths of international students and scholars based on nationality.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nafsa.org/sites/default/files/media/document/nafsa-losing-talent.pdf>

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

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stuartanderson/2020/11/17/international-student-enrollment-plummets-biden-could-bring-it-back/?sh=7a8e561e7ada>

- Provide flexibility for U.S. higher education institutions to admit international students for modern, innovative and evolving educational programs including low residency programs, online courses, and programs requiring multiple study abroad experiences.
- Protect the immigration status of current and prospective international students and scholars during national and international emergencies, transitions within their current status, and transitions to other statuses.

*NAFSA urges the Biden-Harris administration to support legislation that would:*

- Extend current dual intent policy to international students in F status to allow them the opportunity to remain in the United States after completing their program of study.
- Create a direct path to lawful permanent residence (green card) for international graduates of U.S. colleges and universities.
- Eliminate current green card backlogs and prevent future backlogs.
- Provide limited work authorization for families of international students with F status.
- Permanently protect Dreamers and DACA recipients who continue to live in limbo.
- Provide predictable temporary and permanent legal immigration pathways for international faculty, researchers, scientists, and others on campus that contribute to the strength of U.S. higher education.
- Bring fairness and transparency to our visa and immigration system.

### ***Ensure the Global Competency of U.S. College Graduates Through Study Abroad***

We believe everyone who graduates from college in this country should have a solid understanding of the wider world and study abroad is an effective means toward achieving this end. Research demonstrates the benefits of study abroad for U.S. students: increased graduation rates, higher grade point averages, and the intangible positives of experiencing a different culture.<sup>8</sup> More recent studies illustrate the value of a globally educated workforce. A recent NAFSA report found that employers associate the key soft skills acquired and developed in study abroad with management, leadership, customer service, and sales. Findings from this same report indicate employers posted 31 million job openings in 2019 requiring skills that a student acquires while studying abroad. Job postings that include key soft skills are more likely to be for project managers, sales managers, and software engineers.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, 86% of employers believe business would increase if more staff had international experience.<sup>10</sup> Despite these proven benefits, less than 10 percent of U.S. college students study abroad before they graduate.<sup>11</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically impacted U.S. higher education and international education particularly, especially study abroad, with spring, summer and fall programs all cancelled this year. With cancellations possibly continuing through the spring term next year, academic year 2020-2021 could turn into “the year without study abroad.” Without additional financial and policy support, it could take years for study abroad to fully recover; leaving U.S. students with fewer international education opportunities, U.S. higher education institutions with

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.usg.edu/assets/cassie/documents/Study\\_Abroad\\_National\\_Sample\\_CASSIE\\_Infographic.pdf](https://www.usg.edu/assets/cassie/documents/Study_Abroad_National_Sample_CASSIE_Infographic.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/developing-globally-competitive-workforce-through-study-abroad>

<sup>10</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)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/trends-us-study-abroad>

fewer international collaborations, and our country less prepared to tackle global challenges or compete in the global marketplace.

*NAFSA urges the Biden-Harris administration to take the following actions:*

- Provide robust aid to U.S. students and U.S. higher education institutions impacted by COVID-19. Such aid would directly support international education professionals and programs affected by layoffs or contracting budgets.
- Ensure the survival of U.S. study abroad programming impacted by COVID-19 by supporting:
  - Additional funding for the Increasing and Diversifying Education Abroad for U.S. Students program run by the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs;
  - Increased or new funding for virtual exchange programs; and
  - New funding in the U.S. Department of Education’s Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education to support innovation in study abroad consistent with the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Program Act.
- Support the passage of the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Program Act. Introduced in every Congress since 2006 with bipartisan support, it would allow U.S. colleges and universities to increase the number and diversity of students who complete a study abroad experience prior to graduation and enhance their future employability.
- Prioritize the global competency of U.S. students through higher education.

**Additional Resources:**

- [Losing Talent 2020: An Economic and Foreign Policy Risk America Can’t Ignore](#)
- [Issue Brief: Welcoming International Students and Scholars](#)
- [Issue Brief: Sustain International Student Enrollment at U.S. Colleges and Universities Impacted by COVID-19](#)
- [Issue Brief: Support U.S. Study Abroad Programs Impacted by COVID-19](#)
- [Issue Brief: The Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Program Act](#)

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