

## Optional Practical Training Talking Points

**Request:** *Preserve Optional Practical Training (OPT) and ensure international students can apply for and participate in OPT despite challenges brought on by the novel coronavirus pandemic.*

Optional Practical Training is a program under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security that provides international students on F-1 visas opportunities to gain work experience directly related to their program of study. To achieve the program's potential, the applicant, their institution, and an employer must follow a complex and time-sensitive OPT authorization process.

### ***OPT is a Competitive Recruitment Tool***

- OPT attracts talented individuals from across the globe to U.S. institutions of higher education as it addresses the demand for “real-world” work experience to complement one's program of study.
- This program is critical given that prospective international students have an array of options aside from the U.S. Other countries, including China and the U.K., offer work training/work visa programs with terms that may be more favorable than what the U.S. currently offers.

### ***OPT Benefits Students, U.S. Employers, and the U.S. Economy***

- International students may apply to participate in **12 months of OPT, and students in certain STEM programs may be eligible to participate in an additional 24 months** (36 months total). This is critical given their contributions to these fields, which are vital in an increasingly competitive global economy.
- According to NAFSA: Association of International Educators, international students and their families **contributed approximately \$41 billion and more than 458,000 jobs to the U.S. economy** during the 2018-2019 academic year.<sup>1</sup>
- OPT helps **connect employers, both within and outside of academia, with highly-educated individuals** who possess the knowledge and skills to advance industry. These students, whether or not they remain in the U.S. to work, are helping to fill workforce gaps, particularly in STEM fields.
- Business Roundtable forecasts that **scaling back OPT would lead to short- and long-term economic consequences for both international and domestic workers**, including decreased employment opportunities and depleted wage growth.<sup>2</sup> In fact, Business Roundtable projects that 443,000 jobs (including those held by native-born U.S. citizens), would be lost and states that “foreign born workers actually create jobs for native-born workers on aggregate rather than displace them.”<sup>2</sup>
- A 2019 Niskanen Center research paper states that the OPT “**increases innovation, does not adversely affect natives on average, and increases the earnings of college-educated natives.**”<sup>3</sup>
- OPT offers U.S. domestic students and U.S. employers the chance to **build connections with international students and to learn from one another**, which is crucial in an increasingly globalized economy that requires collaborative, global solutions.

<sup>1</sup> NAFSA: Association of International Educators. NAFSA international student economic value tool. Retrieved from: <https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/nafsa-international-student-economic-value-tool-v2>.

<sup>2</sup> Business Roundtable. The Economic Impact of Curbing the Optional Practical Training Program. Retrieved From: [https://www.businessroundtable.org/policy-perspectives/immigration/economic-impact-curbing-optional-practical-training-program?utm\\_campaign=latitude%28s%29&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=Revue%20newsletter](https://www.businessroundtable.org/policy-perspectives/immigration/economic-impact-curbing-optional-practical-training-program?utm_campaign=latitude%28s%29&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Revue%20newsletter).

<sup>3</sup> Neufeld, J. (2019) Niskanen Center research paper: Optional Practical Training (OPT) and International Students After Graduation. Retrieved from: [https://www.niskanencenter.org/wp-content/uploads/old\\_uploads/2019/03/OPT.pdf](https://www.niskanencenter.org/wp-content/uploads/old_uploads/2019/03/OPT.pdf).