Dear XX,

I write to you today as a constituent and on behalf of graduate education at (***Your Institution***). My name is (***Your Name***), and I serve as (***Your Title/Role***). ***Please personalize this introduction as appropriate***. Our institution is also a member of the Council of Graduate Schools, which represents approximately 500 colleges and universities across the nation.

More than ever, it is critical that the United States remains a top destination for international graduate students. These talented and driven individuals make significant contributions to research and scholarship that benefit domestic students and institutions, as well as the U.S. economy and the American people. Additionally, the preservation of Optional Practical Training is critical as this program helps to attract international students and offers work experience applicable to their academic program.

*Contributions to our Campus and the Surrounding Community*

[***Insert institutional/regional/state data and evidence about international graduate student community as you think is appropriate***.]

*Contributions to the U.S. Economy, Research Enterprise, and the Workforce*

According to data from 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.[[1]](#footnote-1) The economic strength of international education cannot be ignored. Maintaining a healthy exchange of international students and scholars to the U.S. reaps benefits in addition to dollars and cents. For example, international students bring with them rich cultures and diverse thought that are instilled into the campus community. This provides both international and domestic students opportunities to learn from one another while engaging in problem-solving and discovery. Increasingly so, molding a future workforce that is diverse, collaborative, and connected to each other is imperative to the U.S. position in the global market.

In addition, America’s ability to remain at the forefront of global competitiveness, including its research enterprise, is not complete without the contributions of international students, scholars, and researchers. This is particularly true in STEM fields where other countries are continuing to expand their scientific and technological footprint. Moreover, recruitment and retention of those who receive their graduate degrees in the U.S. go hand in hand. A recent Congressional Research Service report includes 2017 survey data from the National Science Foundation, which show that “72% of foreign doctorate recipients were still in the United States 10 years after receiving their degrees.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Both academia and industry heavily rely on this workforce pipeline.

Recent discussions have focused on national security related to research endeavors and intellectual property at U.S. institutions. We take these concerns very seriously and they are of utmost priority. It is worth noting that international students are very carefully vetted and tracked through the Department of Homeland Security to mitigate risk. We are also cognizant of how recent policy proposals aimed at curtailing the international graduate student pipeline may contribute to a chilling effect that would impact prospective students’ perceptions of the U.S. as a choice destination. **I urge you to support policies that ensure the U.S. remains a competitive and welcoming environment for attracting top international talent.**

**Optional Practical Training**

In addition, the graduate education community is concerned that the Administration is taking steps to place limitations or eliminate the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program altogether. Administered under the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services, OPT provides international students on F-1 visas opportunities to gain work experience that is directly related to their program of study. Students may be authorized for 12 months of OPT, and those who are enrolled in certain science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs may be eligible for an additional 24 months. In 2018, over 288,000 individuals were authorized to participate in OPT, and of these, 118,660 were authorized for the STEM extension.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The Administration has already taken several actions to curtail the OPT program. President Trump’s April 22 proclamation suspending new immigrant visas was issued on the basis that immigrants will harm domestic U.S. workers by competing for jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic economy. Language included in that proclamation further asks the secretaries of the Department of Homeland Security, Department of State, and Department of Labor to provide additional recommendations on how to limit “non-immigrant programs” in order to “ensure the prioritization, hiring, and employment of United States workers.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Since the proclamation, the Department of Homeland Security has continued the effort to crack down on the program and jeopardize our nation’s ability to attract top talent.

Other countries, including China and the UK, offer experiential learning and work visa programs that are in direct competition with OPT. OPT is a significant reason why many international graduate students choose to study at U.S. institutions, thus, restricting the program would be to our own detriment. In fact, research 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.[[5]](#footnote-5) 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.”3 **Therefore, I respectfully ask that you urge the Administration to preserve Optional Practical Training**.

Thank you for your consideration in these matters, and please don’t hesitate to contact me if I can be of assistance.

Sincerely,

1. 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>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Congressional Research Service. (2019). Foreign STEM students in the United States. Retrieved from: <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11347> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. U.S. Immigrations and Customs SEVP Data Library International Student and Exchange Visitor Data. (n.d.). 2018 total number of SEVIS records with authorization to participate in CTP, OPT, or STEM OPT. Retrieved from: <https://www.ice.gov/SEVPdata>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. # The White House, President Donald Trump. (2020). Immigrants Who Present Risk to the U.S. Labor Market During the Economic Recovery Following the COVID-19 Outbreak. Retrieved from: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/proclamation-suspending-entry-immigrants-present-risk-u-s-labor-market-economic-recovery-following-covid-19-outbreak/>.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 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>. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)