

National Foundation for American Policy

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New Research Finds International Students Important to Universities, Research and U.S. Labor Force Needs

Study Finds International Graduate Students Help America Maintain its Place as Center for Teaching, Research and Innovation

Arlington, Va. – International students provide a key source of talent for U.S. employers and are crucial to enhancing the ability of U.S. universities to conduct research and offer high quality academic programs to U.S. students, according to a new report released by the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP), an Arlington, Va.-based policy research group.

The report, “The Importance of International Students to America,” is available at www.nfap.com.

“With foreign nationals accounting for approximately two-thirds of the graduate students at U.S. universities in electrical engineering and computer science, and a majority in other key fields, it’s clear international students enhance the ability of U.S. universities to conduct research, recruit and retain teaching talented faculty, and offer high quality academic programs to U.S. students,” said the report’s author Stuart Anderson, executive director, National Foundation for American Policy, and former head of policy and counselor to the Commissioner of the INS (August 2001 to January 2003). “Moreover, international students provide a key source of talented professionals and researchers for U.S. employers.”

The report also found, “International students provide cultural and foreign policy benefits to the United States and are an important and inexpensive way to promote American ideas and values abroad.” It cites the example of international students from India influencing that country’s move from socialism to free market policies that have lifted millions of people out of poverty.

Among the findings in the report:

- International students account for 70 percent of the full-time graduate students (master’s and Ph.D.s) in electrical engineering, 63 percent in computer science, 60 percent in industrial engineering, and more than 50 percent in economics, chemical engineering, materials engineering and mechanical engineering.

- In electrical engineering, at 145 U.S. universities, representing nearly 90 percent of the U.S. graduate school programs with at least 30 students, the majority of full-time graduate students are international students.
- In computer science, at 152 universities, representing 76 percent of the U.S. graduate school programs with at least 30 students, the majority of full-time graduate students are international students.
- Foreign graduate students are crucial in assisting in research that attracts top faculty and strengthens the academic programs at U.S. schools, which benefits U.S. students and ensures America retains its preeminence as a teaching center in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields.
- By assisting in important research foreign graduate students foster innovation at U.S. universities that benefits U.S. society and the American economy. In 2010, U.S. universities conducted 51 percent of all basic research performed in the United States.
- International students often become contributors to the U.S. economy as professors, researchers and entrepreneurs. Nearly 40 percent of immigrant entrepreneurs in recent venture-funded companies first entered the country as international students, according to a survey conducted by the National Venture Capital Association.
- International students may make it possible for many universities to offer academic programs in technical fields that would be of lower caliber or be unable to attract top-flight faculty without international students.

Reforms in Congress that would make it easier for international students to come to America and remain if offered a job would benefit the U.S. economy, the study found. Pending legislation would allow foreign graduate students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields to be sponsored without being subject to the current green card quota (S. 744) or to wait less than they would today (H.R. 2131). "A policy of welcoming international students helps America maintain its leadership as a center of learning and innovation," the study concludes. A grant from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation funded the research for this paper. The contents are solely the responsibility of the National Foundation for American Policy.

About the National Foundation for American Policy

Established in the Fall 2003, the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, non-partisan public policy research organization based in Arlington, Virginia focusing on trade, immigration and related issues. The Advisory Board members include Columbia University economist Jagdish Bhagwati, Ohio University economist Richard Vedder, former U.S. Senator and Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham and other prominent individuals. Over the past 24 months, NFAP's research has been written about in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and other major media outlets. The organization's reports can be found at www.nfap.com.

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