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118 Colleges And Universities File “Friend Of Court” Brief To Protest Potential Rollback Of Optional Practical Training

November 25, 2019



118 COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES FILE “FRIEND OF COURT” BRIEF TO PROTEST POTENTIAL ROLLBACK OF OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

Loss will harm U.S. economy and undermine leadership in international education

CLICK HERE TO VIEW THE LIST OF AMICI (<https://www.presidentsimmigrationalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Final-OPT-Amicus-Brief-list.pdf>)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 25, 2019

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Washington, D.C.—This past Friday, 118 public and private universities and colleges filed an *amicus* brief (<https://www.presidentsimmigrationalliance.org/opt-amicus-brief/>) in the *Washington Alliance of Technology Workers Union vs. U.S. Department of Homeland Security* (Washtech) litigation to defend the long-standing immigration program known as Optional Practical Training and its more recent expansion, STEM OPT (collectively “OPT”). “Experiential learning, such as OPT, is now and has long been, a crucial component of education in this country,” **said Miriam Feldblum, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Presidents’ Alliance of Higher Education and Immigration.** “The brief and its diverse, wide-ranging list of supporters, representing all sectors of higher education, demonstrate how colleges, universities, and the economy benefit tremendously from OPT. Any rollback of OPT will severely harm international students, the future of American higher education, and economic growth.”

“Our nation’s economy and educational institutions are undeniably enriched by the presence of talented, diverse, and motivated international students and OPT is a key factor in attracting those very students,” **said Esther D. Brimmer, Executive Director and CEO, NAFSA: Association of International Educators.** “The U.S. is now in a global competition for international students and scholars. To ensure that we continue to benefit from these individuals and their investments in our communities, we must maintain this time-tested program.”

OPT permits international students studying at colleges and universities in the United States on F-1 status to pursue practical training with a U.S. employer in a position directly related to their course of study. Hundreds of thousands of international students and graduates participate in OPT across the nation each year with over 325k participating in 2017 (<https://www.ice.gov/sevis/whats-new#tab2>) (the most recent year statistics are available) with 1.5 million participating

(<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/05/10/number-of-foreign-college-students-staying-and-working-in-u-s-after-graduation-surges/>) between 2004 and 2016. As the *amicus* brief (<https://www.presidentsimmigrationalliance.org/opt-amicus-brief/>) states:

[OPT] is a longstanding government program that permits international students to continue, and deepen, their education by applying the skills and knowledge they learn in the classroom to a professional setting. OPT provides untold benefits for these international students. But, just as critical, being able to provide international students with the opportunities facilitated by OPT gives American institutions of higher education an edge in an increasingly competitive global education market.  ([https://twitter.com/PresImmAlliance?](https://twitter.com/PresImmAlliance?ref_src=twsrc%5Ftfw))

The following are quotes from a select number of the institutions that signed onto the brief:

Alan W. Cramb, President of Illinois Institute of Technology, stated: “In an increasingly competitive global education market, institutions must be able to offer all students the opportunity to pursue real, hands-on technical experience, regardless of country of origin. OPT represents a crucial avenue for international students to apply their education within the U.S. workforce, and a rollback of OPT would significantly hinder the ability of international students to contribute to our nation’s economic engine.”

Michael M. Crow, President of Arizona State University, stated: “Other countries are vigorously competing to attract international students to their institutions. OPT represents an enormous opportunity for our nation’s colleges and universities to be on equal footing with these nations and ensure that international students consider the United States as a potential destination for their higher education. The rollback or end of OPT would serve only to exacerbate the challenge of attracting international students who contribute enormously to the expansion of our knowledge base and help advance our economy.”

Jane K. Fernandes, President of Guilford College, stated: “OPT is a critical program of immense benefit to our international students. Any actions taken to limit or decrease student participation in this program will significantly harm U.S. higher education. Loss of the OPT program will reduce our ability to recruit excellent international students and benefit from their presence. More importantly, as many of these students participate in post-graduate OPT, the American businesses, corporations, organizations, schools, churches, and communities that benefit from their presence will severely suffer. As an intersection between academic institutions, international students, and the workforce we aim to support, OPT is the thoroughfare that allows for growth, entrepreneurship, innovation, and globalization.”

Dr. Kent Ingle, President of Southeastern University, stated: “OPT offers an incredible opportunity for international students to consider the United States for their higher education. The program was originally introduced as a bipartisan effort to fund and attract some of the world’s brightest students to our colleges, universities and businesses. Any rollback on funding for OPT offered to F-1 students would hinder the many who aspire to earn an education or internship in the United States. It would also drastically decrease the enrollment of international students at our colleges and universities. The protection of OPT is vital for the countless who seek to utilize this experiential opportunity. It is crucial for the equipping of students in America.”

Joseph E. Steinmetz, Chancellor, University of Arkansas, stated: “It is incumbent on institutions of higher education to ensure that international students are able to engage in all aspects of educational development and training. The end of OPT would dramatically hurt and undermine the success of international students, eliminating a critical experiential component, which would hurt graduate education on our campus. We strongly encourage the continuation of this already established and well-vetted program that has demonstrated benefits to U.S. universities— including the University of Arkansas.”

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About the *Amicus* brief

The Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration (<http://presidentsimmigrationalliance.org>) and NAFSA (<https://www.nafsa.org>) coordinated the brief; and the *amici* are primarily represented by Jenner & Block (<https://jenner.com/>). The Presidents’ Alliance thanks and acknowledges the incredible work of Jenner & Block attorneys Ishan K. Bhabha and Lauren J. Hartz on the brief. The full text of the *amicus* brief may be accessed online (<https://www.presidentsimmigrationalliance.org/opt-amicus-brief/>).

About the Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration

The nonpartisan Presidents’ Alliance brings together college and university leaders dedicated to increasing public understanding of how immigration policies and practices impact our students, campuses and communities, and supporting policies that create a welcoming environment for undocumented, immigrant, and international students. The Presidents’

Alliance is comprised of over 430 presidents and chancellors of public and private colleges and universities, representing over four million students in 41 states, D.C. and Puerto Rico. Learn more at <http://presidentsimmigrationalliance.org/> (<http://presidentsimmigrationalliance.org/>) and follow us at @PresImmAlliance (<https://twitter.com/presimmalliance>).

About NAFSA: The Association of International Education

With more than 10,000 members, NAFSA: Association of International Educators is the world's largest nonprofit association dedicated to international education. NAFSA advocates for policies that foster a more peaceful world, result in a commonsense immigration process, encourage enlightened global engagement, and sustain an informed civic culture through international education. NAFSA also advocates efforts on behalf of international education at ConnectingOurWorld.org (<http://www.connectingourworld.org/>) and @ConnectOurWorld (<http://twitter.com/connectourworld>) on Twitter. <https://www.nafsa.org/> (<https://www.nafsa.org/>)

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