

“No evidence” OPT students take jobs from US workers – NFAP

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There is “no evidence” that international students participating in Optional Practical Training reduce job opportunities for US workers, instead they act as a “safety valve” for tight labour markets and as a source of STEM employees, a [National Foundation for American Policy](#) study has found.



Students on OPT may act as a "safety valve" for tight labour markets and as a source of STEM employees. Photo: Pixabay

An alternative to the H1-B visa, OPT offers international students an opportunity to work in the US for 12 months. Those with a degree in a STEM field have the option to extend their work period by another 24 months.

However, after expanding a [reported 400%](#) among STEM students in the eight years following 2008, in 2017 the OPT saw its slowest growth since 2004 – a drop that some stakeholders linked to the immigration [crackdown](#) by president Donald Trump.

Further concerns for the future of the program were raised when the Trump administration submitted a [regulation](#) for release potentially in 2019 or 2020 that could place new restrictions on the OPT program, in order to “improve protections of US workers who may be negatively impacted by employment”.

But according to the NFAP [study](#), which analysed data on OPT approved international graduates and their impact on competition for jobs from 2008 to 2016, there is “no evidence” that these students reduce job opportunities for US workers.

“Even though the [OPT] program has grown, foreign students... account for a small share of new graduates and a far smaller share of US workers,” the study noted.

“The evidence suggests that US employers are more likely to turn to foreign student workers when US workers are scarcer.”

According to NFAP, a larger number of international students approved for OPT – relative to the number of US workers – is associated with a lower unemployment rate across the US economy.

“While the OPT program may seem large, the US workforce is enormous,” the study noted.

It highlighted that in 2016, OPT represented less than half of 1% of STEM graduates with a bachelor’s degree, 1.5% of STEM PhDs, and 2.5% of STEM master’s graduates.

“Overall, OPT participants comprise less than 1% of all workers with a bachelor’s degree in a STEM field,” it read.

“The OPT program is a small drop in a very large bucket.”

By acting as a “safety valve” for tight labour markets and a source of STEM workers, the study continued, the OPT program may also contribute to [economic growth](#).

Concluding the findings study, NFAP research fellow Madeline Zavodny described the OPT program as “a win-win for foreign students and US employers alike”.

“The program offers employers a chance to see if foreign students are a good fit before sponsoring them for a costly—and scarce H-1B temporary visa,” she said.

“At a time when other countries are increasingly vying for foreign students and skilled STEM workers and US firms are turning to offshore because of a shortage of IT professionals, the OPT program is an important way for [the US] to attract and retain foreign-born talent.”

In response to the study, some critics of the OPT program suggested that it allows US employers to exploit non-citizens as cheap labour at the expense of US students and workers.

“There is no educational basis for anyone to need three years of work experience to complete their educational experience,” [argued](#) one critic, Howard University professor Ron Hira.

“We confer degrees with the expectation that our graduates can practice their profession.”

However, speaking to *The PIE News*, NFAP executive director Stuart Anderson said the research shows international students are not harming US workers and are actually “important contributors to America”.

“International students want to pursue their dreams and for some that may include the experience of working, at least for a time, for a US company after graduation,” he added.

<https://thepienews.com/news/no-evidence-intl-students-on-opt-take-jobs-from-us-workers-study/>