

June 17, 2020

The Honorable Sherrod Brown
United States Senate
503 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Brown:

As you may be aware, the White House is considering suspending the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program for international students in the United States. We are writing to ask you to unequivocally support the OPT program and to speak out against its possible suspension.

[OPT](#) provides an invaluable opportunity for students who have completed at least one year of education in the United States to be placed in a job directly related to their field of study. Unfortunately, there seem to be a number of misconceptions about the program itself and the immense benefits it provides to our economy.

The OPT program provides significant economic benefits to all Americans. According to a [March 2019 Niskanen Center report](#), experiential learning opportunities like OPT lead to increased innovation and higher average earnings, without costing U.S. workers their jobs or decreasing U.S. worker wages. [A National Foundation for American Policy March 2019 study](#) focused on STEM employment found no evidence that OPT participation reduces job opportunities for U.S. workers. [A December 2018 report by the Business Roundtable](#) illustrated significant negative effects on the U.S. economy if OPT were scaled back or curtailed, including job losses impacting U.S. workers.

The importance of maintaining our attractiveness to international students cannot be overstated. [According to NAFSA: Association of International Educators](#), foreign students (including those on OPT) and their families contributed nearly \$41 billion dollars to the U.S. economy and their presence supported more than 458,000 jobs during the 2018-2019 academic year, making international education the fifth-largest U.S. services export. At Case Western Reserve University, our 2,200 international students contributed [over \\$130 million](#) to our economy, and they supported nearly 1,800 jobs. International students do not “take” jobs from Americans; rather they support the jobs of hundreds of thousands of Americans.

We know that the OPT program is one of the main reasons students choose to study in the U.S. Experiential learning and on-the-job training are key components of higher education and a deciding factor for students when they consider where to attend university. [A 2016 survey conducted by Studyportals](#), an online resource for international students researching study destinations, showed that 62% of prospective students rated being able to work in the country after graduation as very important. Yet, while the United States considers suspending our post-graduate work program, other nations are expanding theirs:

- The United Kingdom [recently restored](#) the two-year post-study work visa for foreign students, a benefit ended by the UK government in 2012. Following the decision to end the post-study work

option, foreign student enrollment in UK higher education flattened. The UK clearly recognized the error of its decision to curtail the program.

- Australia, Canada, and China also offer post-study work opportunities to foreign students and have seen their higher education enrollments skyrocket.
 - **Canada:** Foreign students can work following graduation for a period equal to the time they studied, up to a maximum of three years. In 2018, foreign student enrollment increased by 16%. “Skilled” work experience also helps graduates qualify for legal residence.
 - **Australia:** Foreign students can work for up to 18 months following graduation. In 2018, foreign student enrollment increased by 15%.
 - **China:** Foreign students graduating with a master’s degree or above are immediately eligible to apply for work visas within one year of graduation. The country is on track to meet its goal of hosting half a million foreign students by 2020, with 492,000 foreign students enrolled in 2018.

It is also important to note that, without international students, some key programs which benefit American students may no longer be available to them. Any specialty within a university must have a minimum number of students in order to exist. It is highly likely that certain programs that are of great interest to the “best and brightest” among American students would not exist without the enrollment of international students, who fill out the rolls and make the programs viable.

International students bring innumerable benefits to their communities. They broaden the perspectives of their American classmates, foster inclusive campus environments, and they support local economies through spending locally—renting apartments, grocery shopping, and much more. Additionally, international exchange is one of the strongest agents of [soft power](#) the United States has. International students gain deeper understandings of Americans through time spent at our universities, and they carry that understanding and those warm feelings of welcome back to their home countries.

We understand that our country is only now beginning to grapple with many of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing economic downturn. It can be tempting in times of stress and upheaval to turn inward or to think we must focus only on supporting Americans as they recover. However, our decisions must be data-driven, and the data clearly shows that the OPT program is a net positive for America and Americans. We respectfully ask for your public support of international students and the Optional Practical Training program.

If you would like to learn more about Case Western Reserve University’s outstanding international students, we encourage you to read these profiles:

[Marzieh Ayati](#), PhD in Computer Science

[Zhipeng Trista Li](#), BA in Economics

[Jose Diaz Salazar](#), MBA

Also, read about [Anirban Sen Gupta](#), one of our renowned international faculty members who was able to join our community because of the time granted him through the OPT program.

Sincerely,

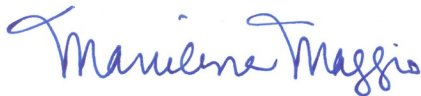
The Staff of the Center for International Affairs
Case Western Reserve University



David Fleshler, Vice Provost
International Affairs



Molly Watkins, Assistant Provost
International Affairs



Marielena Maggio, Director,
International Student Services



Angela Miller, Director
Education Abroad



Angela Beca, International Student Advisor



Kaitlyn Lionti, Coordinator of Special Projects



Autumn Beechler Stebing, Assistant Director
Education Abroad



Tetiana Lopatkina, Information Specialist



Trissa Chaney, Executive Aide



Elizabeth Miller, Assistant Director
International Student Services



Adolfo Franco, International Student Advisor



Rachel Paiscik, Associate Director
International Student Services



Briana Jewers, Department Assistant



Camala Ross, Study Abroad Advisor



Alec Jokubaitis, Business Systems Analyst