

Position of Professional Science and Engineering Societies on F-1 Visas

September 18, 2018

The undersigned organizations, representing more than 350,000 scientists and engineers, ask that you support legislation to amend Sections 101 and 214 of the Immigration and Nationality Act to allow for F-1 student visa holders to express “dual intent” – a policy provision that has a history of bipartisan support in Congress. This change would benefit both our economic and national security, allowing international students studying science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) to begin applying for permanent legal status in the United States while they are students, rather than needing to wait until after they graduate to start the process.

Historically, the United States has had an unrivaled ability to attract the best and brightest students from around the world. Complementing our home-grown STEM talent, international students help provide the U.S. innovation ecosystem with the next generation of scientists and engineers necessary for us to remain a global leader. But the 21st-century landscape is changing – international applications and enrollments to U.S.-based STEM programs are declining. The National Science Board’s *Science and Engineering Indicators 2018* showed a 6% decline from 2016 to 2017 in the total number of international graduate students at U.S. institutions across all STEM fields. More recent data suggests this trend could be worsening. A survey conducted by the American Physical Society of nearly 50 of the largest physics Ph.D. programs at U.S. institutions found that there was nearly a 12% decline in international applications between 2017 and 2018.

This decline in international students has a negative impact on both our economic and national security. American innovation – the backbone of our economy – is bolstered by international talent. Of the 87 U.S. startup companies valued at least at \$1 billion in 2016, more than half were founded by immigrants, with 21 of those companies’ founders first coming to the U.S. as international students. Additionally, our national security requires attracting the best and brightest international students in order to develop their key innovations here, so that U.S. security isn’t dependent upon purchasing those innovations from competitors.

In short, America is becoming less attractive for highly skilled international students exactly when we need highly skilled workers more than ever. With competition for the top international students increasing, legislation making F-1 visas dual intent – allowing international students to declare their intent to pursue careers in America post-graduation – would help attract the best and brightest students to U.S. universities and encourage them to become Americans.

A small legal adjustment – making F-1 visas dual intent – can attract highly skilled international students, without adding costs or complexity. We ask that you support making the F-1 visa dual intent to help ensure the U.S. remain a top choice for exceptional international STEM students, whose talents help to strengthen our nation’s economy, improve our global competitiveness and enhance our national security.

Sincerely,

American Physical Society
ASME
IEEE-USA
OSA—The Optical Society
The international society for optics and photonics (SPIE)