Strengthening Workforce Development, Economic Prosperity, and Global Leadership
Public Messaging Guidance for College and University Leaders
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Overview

Higher education institutions play a vital role in shaping the nation's future by fostering innovation, strengthening the workforce, and expanding opportunities for all students and scholars—including Dreamers, international and refugee students and other non-citizen campus members. Policies that support access to education for these populations contribute to the United States' economic prosperity, innovation, global competitiveness, and national security.

The Talent Imperative

- The United States thrives when it attracts, educates, and retains talent from around the world. Dreamers, refugee students, and international scholars contribute significantly to our campuses and to local and national economies.
- With labor shortages in key industries, expanding opportunities for all students is essential to sustaining economic growth and innovation.
- Colleges and universities are hubs of knowledge creation, and students from various backgrounds strengthen learning environments, drive scientific and technological advancements, and prepare the nation for the challenges of the future.
- In 2022, immigrant-origin students made up 5.8 million—nearly one-third—of all students in U.S. higher education and accounted for 90% of the total enrollment growth between 2000 and 2022.
- With a declining domestic population and looming "enrollment cliff," U.S. higher education institutions need global talent to sustain enrollment and academic programs.

Dreamers with and without DACA

- Dreamers—immigrants who arrived in the U.S. as children—are an integral part of American society. They are students, alumni, faculty, staff, entrepreneurs, military members, and homeowners who contribute to communities nationwide.
- While most of the 400,000+ undocumented students enrolled in higher education do not have any formal immigration status, others hold temporary protections such as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) or Temporary Protected Status (TPS).
- Policies that expand opportunities for this talented group—which has already contributed significantly to the U.S. and in whom the nation has invested through education—will strengthen long-term economic prosperity and workforce stability.
- Undocumented immigrants hold a spending power of $254.8 billion, contributing $21.5 billion in federal taxes and $13.6 billion in state and local taxes annually.
- DACA-eligible individuals alone contribute an additional $25.3 billion in spending power, paying $6.2 billion in federal taxes and $3.3 billion in state and local taxes each year.

- The uncertain future of programs like DACA leaves many Dreamers without stable work authorization, limiting their full contributions to communities and the economy.
- Many states have enacted policies that allow Dreamers to access in-state tuition, reflecting a commitment to economic growth and workforce development. Efforts to roll back these policies are counterproductive and undermine the future of local economies.
- Access to professional and occupational licensure allows students and graduates to apply their skills in the states that educate them, combatting labor shortages and ensuring that our country can benefit from investments in postsecondary training.

International Students

- Since 2013, the U.S. has welcomed over 12 million international students who drive innovation, advance research, support U.S. businesses, and foster global connections.
- Although they made up just 6% of the U.S. higher education population in 2023-2024, international students contributed over $50 billion to the U.S. economy, making higher education the nation's eighth largest service export.
- Their presence also fuels local economies, contributing over $44 billion annually and supporting thousands of jobs nationwide.
- Many international students pursue degrees in STEM fields, helping address critical workforce shortages in healthcare, technology, and engineering. Today, more than one million international students—including over 240,000 participating in Optional Practical Training (OPT)—bolster America's workforce and global competitiveness.
- Retaining top international graduates strengthens U.S. research and economic leadership. A quarter of America's billion-dollar start-ups were founded by former international students. Expanding employment-based pathways will help fill labor gaps, retain highly trained talent, and sustain U.S. global competitiveness.

Refugee and Displaced Students

- Refugees who resettle in the U.S. contribute to economic growth, help revitalize local economies, and foster community development. Between 2005 and 2019, refugees and asylees contributed an estimated $581 billion in tax revenue to federal, state, and local governments, resulting in a net fiscal benefit of $123.8 billion over that period.
- Programs like Welcome Corps on Campus help colleges and universities create pathways for refugee students to access higher education and build successful careers in the U.S.
- Policies that limit refugee admissions or disrupt resettlement hinder economic growth and contradict the country's long-standing commitment to humanitarian leadership.
- Supporting refugee students aligns with the nation's values and strengthens institutions by bringing in students with unique perspectives and experiences.

Advancing policies that support a broad range of student populations strengthens our institutions, fuels the economy, and reinforces U.S. workforce development, prosperity, and global leadership.

You can also explore the Higher Ed Immigration Portal for data, research, personal stories, and key talking points to support policies benefiting immigrant-origin, international, and refugee students and graduates, and other non-citizen campus members.