

With US colleges staring at 25% drop in foreign students, lawmakers ask Donald Trump to ease immigration process

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Business NewsNRIVisa and ImmigrationWith US colleges staring at 25% drop in foreign students, lawmakers ask Donald Trump to ease immigration process

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Priyanka Sangani

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The US government has been urged to streamline its immigration process to ensure that international students can enrol in the September term, as US colleges stare at a 25% drop in foreign students this year.

In a letter to the US administration, a group of Republican congressmen also sought to retain the optional practical training (OPT) program, which allows students graduating in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) to work in the country for an additional 24 months before applying for H-1B work permits.

The request comes at a time when the United States is trying to end OPT for foreign students amid Trump's anti-immigration stance.

Foreigners constitute around 5.5% of students enrolling in US colleges and contributed over \$41 billion to the economy in fiscal year 2019, the letter addressed to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf, said.



"This is a welcome recognition of how foreign students help form the edge through which we are leading the world in technology," said Rajiv S Khanna, managing attorney at law firm Immigration.com. "It asks to maintain the OPT which is important as there have been calls to remove or weaken it," Khanna said.

The lawmakers also said that the US may lose out on international students to neighbouring Canada.

If the Trump administration decides to streamline student visas, it will benefit Indian students, the second largest foreign student group in the US, a majority of whom take up graduate or postgraduate courses in STEM subjects.

India sent over 200,000 students to the United States in fiscal year 2019, only second to China.

The US last week issued a notification barring Chinese graduate students or higher-level candidates with links to the Chinese government, a move that is expected to reduce their intake at US universities.

As US embassies and consulates closed across the world, incoming students were unable to schedule visa appointments.

The lawmakers recommended prioritising of the F-1 and J-1 visas and waiving certain interview requirements, as well as creating a timely application and renewal process for professors, scientists and researchers.

"We further request your agencies coordinate the admission of medical residents and fellows on J-1 and H-1B visas scheduled to begin their training program on July 1, many of whom will make vital contributions at university hospitals. Without these residents and fellows, patient care will be disrupted," they wrote.

The lawmakers also said that the US may lose out on international students to neighbouring Canada.

"As countries like Canada, the United Kingdom, China and Australia bolster immigration policies to attract and retain international students, the last thing our nation should do in this area is make ourselves less competitive by weakening OPT," they said.