National Foundation for American Policy

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International Students Enrolled in Graduate Level Science & Engineering Fell 6% in 2017; Indian Student Graduate Enrollment in Computer Science and Engineering Declined 21%

Arlington, Va. – The number of international students enrolled at the graduate level in science and engineering at U.S. universities declined by 6 percent, or 14,730 fewer students, between 2016 and 2017, according to a new analysis of government data released by the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP), an Arlington, Va.-based policy research group. The report finds the number of international students from India enrolled in graduate level programs in computer science and engineering declined by 21 percent, or 18,590 fewer graduate students, from 2016 to 2017. Indian graduate students completing degrees in science and engineering at U.S. universities are a major source of talent for U.S. companies.

"If Indian students stop coming to the U.S. to study in high tech fields, then U.S. students, universities and companies will all be in trouble," said NFAP Executive Director Stuart Anderson, former head of policy at the Immigration and Naturalization Service under President George W. Bush. "Universities won't be able to offer as many programs to U.S. students and a key source of tech talent in the U.S. will disappear for American companies. Unfortunately, administration policies are likely to make the problem worse."

The Trump administration has announced plans to issue new regulations to restrict the ability of international students to work after graduation on Optional Practical Training (OPT) and OPT in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math). OPT allows an international student to work for 12 months after graduation and STEM OPT permits students in certain STEM fields to extend that an additional 24 months. Educators and employers say the additional 24 months is important both to provide practical educational opportunities for students and for companies to have additional opportunities to obtain long-term work authorization on H-1B visas (which have regularly become unavailable each year because of demand).

Major U.S. competitors for talent, such as Canada and Australia, make it relatively easy for international students to work after graduation. In addition to concerns about STEM OPT, the Trump administration has made it more difficult to gain approval for H-1B visas and has announced it will rescind a regulation that allows the spouses of H-1B visa holders to work. It may also change the rules on who qualifies or is likely to receive an H-1B visa.

Between 2016 and 2017, the number of international students enrolled at U.S. universities declined by 31,520, or approximately 4 percent, from 840,160 in 2016 to 808,640 in 2017. (See Table 1.) As illustrated in Table 2, the decline in international student enrollment in 2017 follows consistent increases in enrollment since 2012.

The government data were published in a chapter of a recently released report by the National Science Board, which serves as the board of directors of the National Science Foundation, and compiled from the U.S. government's Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) database. This is the first hard count available of international students enrolled in U.S. postsecondary institutions in the Fall 2017, and thus our first confirmation of an overall decline in

new international students. Given that these numbers represent enrollment and not just new students, the decline in new international students is likely greater than 4 percent. The data were part of a larger report and has so far received little attention. Since data from 2012 through 2017 are snapshots taken from SEVIS at the same time each year, they represent a good way to analyze increases or decreases in international student enrollment.

The NFAP analysis notes it will be important to watch trends over a period of years to know whether the decline is temporary or part of a larger reversal. U.S. policy and international student perceptions may have played a role in the recent decline. Potential new restrictions on the ability of international students to work after graduation could accelerate the trend.

Table 1
International Student Enrollment at U.S. Universities: 2016 to 2017

Student and Level	2016	2017	Decline From 2016 to 2017
International Students Enrolled at U.S. Universities (Undergraduate and Graduate Levels)	840,160	808,640	-4% (31,520)

Source: National Foundation for American Policy; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, special tabulations (2017), Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) database; National Science Board, *Science and Engineering Indicators 2018.*

Table 2
International Student Enrollment at U.S. Universities: 2012 to 2017

Level (All Fields)	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
All Levels	633,070	673,480	747,400	776,720	840,160	808,640
Undergraduate	349,400	371,990	405,930	416,350	450,850	440,720
Graduate	283,680	301,490	341,470	360,380	389,310	367,920

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, special tabulations (2017), Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) database; National Science Board, *Science and Engineering Indicators 2018.*

Table 3
Indian Student Graduate Enrollment at U.S. Universities in Computer Science & Engineering, 2016 to 2017

Student and Level	2016	2017	Decline From 2016 to 2017
Indians Enrolled in Computer Science and Engineering at U.S. Universities (Graduate Level)	86,900	68,310	-21% (18,590)

Source: National Foundation for American Policy; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, special tabulations (2017), Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) database; National Science Board, *Science and Engineering Indicators 2018.*

Table 4
Science & Engineering Field: International Student Graduate Enrollment at U.S. Universities, 2016 to 2017

Student and Level	2016	2017	Decline From 2016 to 2017
International Students Enrolled at U.S. Universities (Graduate Level)	244,040	229,310	-6% (14,730)

Source: National Foundation for American Policy; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, special tabulations (2017), Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) database; National Science Board, *Science and Engineering Indicators 2018.*

Table 5
Science & Engineering Fields: International Student Enrollment at U.S. Universities, 2012 to 2017

Science & Engineering	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
All Levels	278,180	305,610	355,910	384,540	420,610	406,240
Undergraduate	115,800	130,050	147,790	157,820	176,570	176,930
Graduate	162,390	175,570	208,110	226,720	244,040	229,310

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, special tabulations (2017), Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) database; National Science Board, *Science and Engineering Indicators 2018.*

About the National Foundation for American Policy

Established in the Fall 2003, the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, non-partisan public policy research organization based in Arlington, Virginia focusing on trade, immigration and related issues. The Advisory Board members include Columbia University economist Jagdish Bhagwati, Ohio University economist Richard Vedder, Cornell Law School professor Stephen W. Yale-Loehr and former INS Commissioner James W. Ziglar. Over the past 24 months, NFAP's research has been written about in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and other major media outlets. The organization's reports can be found at www.nfap.com. Twitter: **@NFAPResearch**

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