The background of the top half of the image is a dark, weathered wooden surface. On the left side, there is a portion of an American flag, showing the stars and stripes. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# THE IMPACT OF **U.S. IMMIGRATION POLICIES** ON OUR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

**HOW CAN WE HELP?**



TERRADOTTA



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# INTRODUCTION



**A**s the gloom of the pandemic years continues to recede, prospective students are again exploring options for higher education farther from home. **At the same time, a mad dash to attract them, by institutions around the world, is afoot.**

Within the U.S. the call by institutional presidents, provosts, chancellors, and trustees for more students in general, and more diverse students in particular, means that senior international officers (SIOs) often will be expected to find new ways to attract more global talent. This includes greater numbers of international students. Work shortages in the private sector, and the competition for smart, innovative workers across the economy means employers are also looking to higher education to bring in the next generation of big thinkers from around the world.

According to the Institute of International Education (IIE), during the 2019–2020 academic year, there were approximately **1.08 million international students** enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities.

While acknowledging that U.S. immigration policy itself is a prevailing headwind on the road to success, what does an SIO need to know to successfully recruit talent?

With adequate support, SIOs can identify new ways to market more and better, hire additional staff for personalized recruitment, and drill deeper into data. But the U.S. faces steep competition for international students and scholars from other countries investing in a national strategy to attract, welcome, and retain individuals seeking more than a college degree. **Many of those who choose to leave their countries to earn a degree abroad seek not merely an education, but also a path to a more fulfilling life in a society appreciative of their contributions.**



**U.S. immigration policy has an impact on the decision by many international students and scholars to pursue higher education in this country—and in turn, on the economy and the future of the U.S. as a global leader.** Here, we explore those aspects of U.S. policy about which SIOs should be aware. Understanding the impact—and the need for change—is of benefit to those in international education who are increasingly expected to address a situation far bigger than individual influence allows.



# PRESSURE & COMPETITION



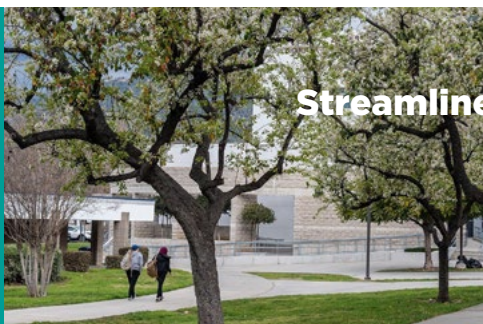
**HISTORICALLY**, the U.S. has been a long-sought destination for international students at all levels of higher education. These students have contributed to internationalization efforts, providing an opportunity for domestic students, faculty, and staff to gain from their presence on campus. At the same time, institutions have come to rely on the revenue that derives from enrolling international students who, without access to financial aid, often pay full tuition fees.



## Triple Digit Growth at Denison

Terra Dotta's ISSS solution is deployed at institutions like Denison, to help automate processes and grow programs. Read more [here](#).

With dwindling budgets, pressures around funding have increased in recent years, especially with decreased state government support at public institutions. The anticipated domestic “enrollment cliff” is looming. Due to declining birth rates beginning with the Great Recession (2007–2009), Kevin Carey, vice president at New America, a think tank in Washington D.C., notes that incoming classes will shrink, year after year, for most of the next two decades (2022).



## Streamline pre-arrival and orientation.

Learn how Citrus College does it for their 1,000+ international students [here](#).

**While the U.S. remains a highly appealing destination, other countries are attracting larger numbers than in the past** by taking advantage of a set of circumstances that negatively impact our ability to compete. Prior to the pandemic, China demonstrated its ability to compete for students, primarily from neighboring countries in Asia. In 2016, China ranked third overall in numbers of international students, just behind the U.S. and the U.K. (ChinaPower, 2016). At the same time, Canada, Australia, and the U.K. remain our primary competition—all English-speaking countries that offer strong academic programs, open economies, and opportunities for upward mobility (HolonIQ, 2023).



On what basis might a talented and curious student of engineering, or physics or medicine choose to study in one of the other English-speaking countries over the U.S.? Understanding what attracts talent to a particular country is critical to our ability to sustain our place in the global educational system and, perhaps ultimately, our place as a global economic powerhouse.

# PUSH-PULL FACTORS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS



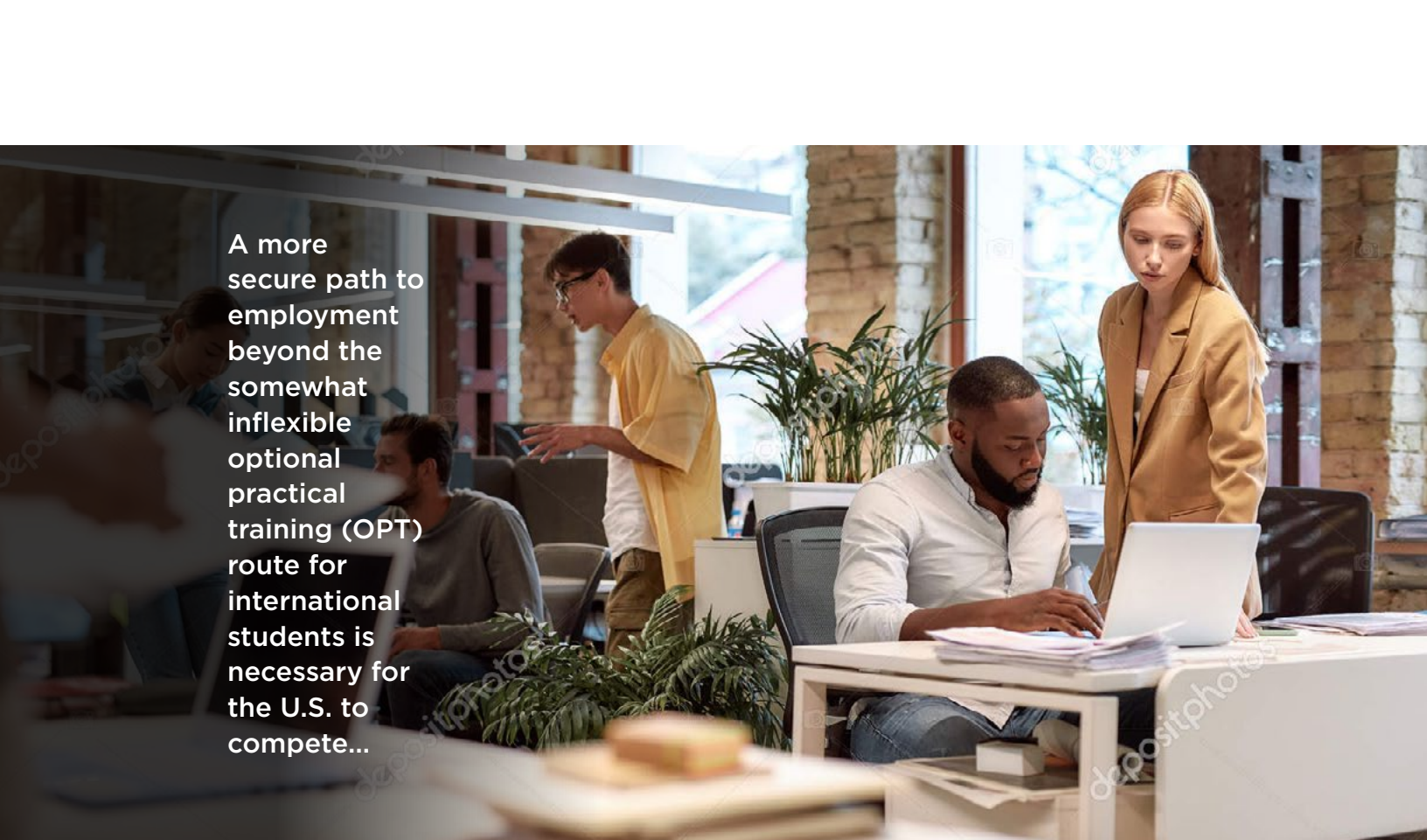
**THE U.S. HAS LONG BEEN A DRAW** for immigrants and non-immigrants (e.g., international students traveling on F-1 and J-1 visas) for a number of reasons:

- A democratic society with more freedoms, and an opportunity for upward mobility
- An environment in which to learn and perfect the English language
- A reliable public education system
- Thousands of higher education institutions (HEIs) offering the opportunity to acquire knowledge and expertise for a better future, and participate in extensive and exciting research that inspires innovation

**AUSTRALIA, CANADA, AND THE U.K.** are similar in this regard, while demonstrably dissimilar with respect to our increasing list of “push factors” which include:

- High tuition rates
- An increase in mass shootings and gun violence (Knox, 2024), leading to concerns around safety
- The rise of anti-immigrant sentiment and hate crimes against many nationalities and people of color
- A complicated immigration system that is fraught with delays and expense, designed to deter the process of moving individuals from “non-immigrant” to “immigrant” status





A more secure path to employment beyond the somewhat inflexible optional practical training (OPT) route for international students is necessary for the U.S. to compete...

While a change in any one of these pull/push factors could impact the ability of the U.S. to attract more international students, an alteration to immigration policy that provides international students with the opportunity to work and remain in the country after graduation from a college or university would add to the “pull” significantly. In the current climate, when a non-U.S. citizen weighs the work opportunities available to those graduating from an HEI in Canada or the U.K., for example, a completely rational basis exists to choose a destination other than the U.S.

Canada’s new International Education Strategy specifically identifies the need to “attract and retain international talent as an avenue to fulfilling foreign policy objectives and to enhancing national prosperity” (ICEF Monitor, 2019). The plan commits CDN\$148 million over five years to international education initiatives, followed by a further CDN\$8 million per year of ongoing funding. In the U.K., students who graduate with a college degree in any subject can work for up to two years, and those with a doctorate for up to three (British Council, 2023).

**A more secure path to employment beyond the somewhat inflexible optional practical training (OPT) route for international students is necessary for the U.S. to compete for talent more fairly in the short term, and a stronger national economy in the long term** (Welch, 2023).



# IMMIGRATION REGULATIONS AND POLICIES THAT IMPACT STUDENT GOALS

What does an SIO need to know to appreciate the challenges HEIs in the U.S. face in the international student recruitment market? And what kind of training and considerations ought we provide for those whose job it is to recruit students to the U.S.?

1

**FIRST**, our immigration system is **a complex web of law, regulation, and policy that defies easy or thorough understanding**, absent a deep dive into its many nuanced details. But identifying those elements that serve to dissuade students from coming to the U.S. to study is useful to the predicament in which we currently find ourselves as SIOs.

2

**SECOND**, while almost all students now imagine higher education as the first step to career development, the U.S. immigration service imposes **a dissociation between an academic education and professional development**. An international student who enters on either an F-1 or J-1 visa must necessarily have a “non-immigrant” intent—that is, no intent to stay beyond the time required to earn a degree, or to otherwise “immigrate” permanently.

3

**THIRD**, “practical training”, e.g., work experience permitted those on an F-1 visa, **is limited in both duration and scope**. And, for those who entered the U.S. on a J-1 visa, only science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) graduates have the opportunity to engage in further research through training or educational exchange visitor programs with host organizations, including businesses (U.S. Department of State, 2023).



### DID YOU KNOW?

Terra Dotta's ISSS solution allows universities to manage international scholar records and petitions by creating automated processes for your international scholars (J-1, H-1B, O-1, more). You can manage your cases online—intake and assignment features let everyone track case status throughout the entire process.

Beyond these avenues linked specifically to the academic journey of an international student are a) longer-term-yet-still-temporary-employment through an H1-B visa, which requires employer sponsorship (i.e., an employer willing to wade through a complicated process) and/or b) a tortured, complicated process of permanent residency through acquisition of a “Green Card.”

#### H1-B VISA

The maximum number of H1-B visas each year by the U.S. Citizen and Immigration Service (CIS) is currently 65,000. Because of the high demand for global talent, the “H1-B cap” is typically filled within weeks of the April 1 filing deadline each year. According to VisaNation, in 2022, it is reported that 483,927 petitions were filed with a 13% chance of selection for the 65,000 designated spots (American Immigration Council, 2022).

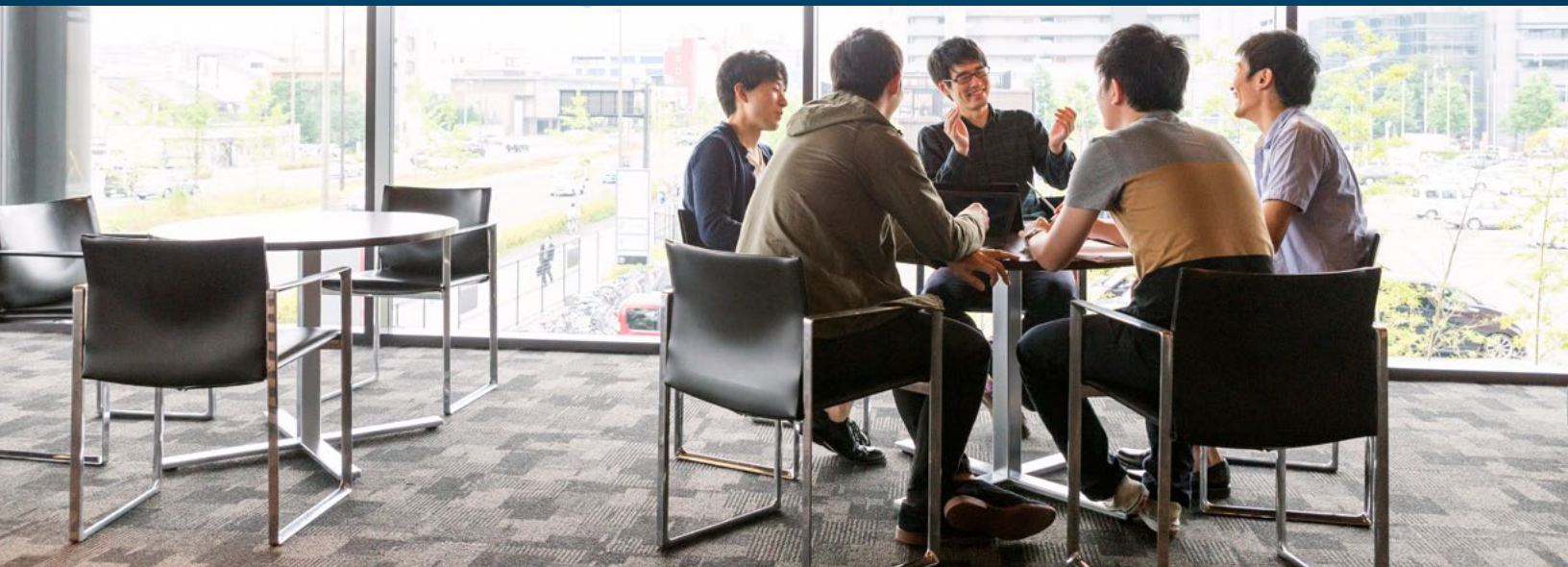
Moreover, the partners and families of international students are limited in what they can do in the U.S. While the H1-B visa holder can work full time, gaining experience and a sense of value, the H-4 dependent of the H1-B visa holder is not allowed to work. This can and does often mean long, lonely days and a loss of productivity for tens of thousands of people likely qualified to engage in the workforce in some capacity. It is estimated that “almost 90 percent of spouses of likely H1-B holders have at least a bachelor’s degree, and over half have a graduate degree” (Zavodny, 2022).

#### GREEN CARD

Finally, a fulsome explanation of “Green Card” status (officially known as “legal permanent resident”) defies space constraints and available time for an overworked SIO to fully master. Suffice it to say that there are only 140,000 Green Cards available each year for immigrants in five employment-based categories, and a very long backlog of those who meet the conditions of the status after the per-country cap had been met (Gelatt, 2019).



# BETTER POSITIONING OUR INSTITUTIONS



**AS CAMPUS LEADERS** who are charged with identifying, recruiting, and retaining international talent, we need to be more than well informed about how our immigration system impacts our students. We need to be able to articulate what about that system runs counter to the goals of our communities to be inclusive and to our ability to provide opportunities for all our students to be successful.

Much comes down to **educating our staff, faculty, and students** about policy updates, to make sure that we are sharing correct information through training, websites, and information sessions. **Creating clear guidelines and processes** can help prospective students and community members wade through the complexity of immigration guidelines.

Prospective students will want information on what immigration policies require of them, as well as possible pathways for staying in the U.S. following graduation. To this latter point, institutions **must be realistic about what is possible**, to remind students that immigration decisions are outside of their control and that there are no shortcuts.

At the same time, **providing clear information and support can be a differentiating factor** for institutions seeking to attract more international students, by demonstrating that support, knowledge, and expertise are available.

# CAN WE MAKE A **DIFFERENCE?**



**IN THE ABSENCE OF** significant change, **our recruitment teams are placed in the difficult position of articulating why choosing to study in the U.S. is “better” than, or more productive than, studying in another English-speaking country.** And while the U.S. offers much in the way of quality of education and opportunities to expand one’s horizons, it does not offer a clear path to permanent employment or a chance to permanently—and positively—shape our shared future.

We need to **forge alliances with the private sector.** Professional schools should ally with local companies to advocate for change; schools of science and engineering should ally with the technology sector, and schools of health sciences with the medical professionals who are in desperate need of trained professionals.

As SIOs, moreover, we need to be able to **advocate for change to our leadership, and our elected officials.** Understanding the specifics of what should be changed will allow us to articulate suggestions to our state and federal congressional committees, and to remind our presidents and provosts that expanding marketing outreach will not be sufficient to attract new students (Ogden, 2023). Simply put, **we can and must do more together to effect change.**





**INCOMING**



**OUTGOING**



**TRAVEL RISK**

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