



Northeastern University

January 20, 2021

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary-Designate
United States Department of Homeland Security
Biden-Harris Transition
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary-Designate Mayorkas,

On behalf of thousands of international students and scholars who are an essential part of the Northeastern University community—and as a former member of the Homeland Security Academic Advisory Council—I write to request that you commit to preserving and bolstering the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program as soon as you are confirmed by the United States Senate.

As you know, OPT offers eligible international students studying in the United States the opportunity to participate in up to twelve months of temporary employment directly related to their field of study either during or immediately after completing their academic work. Experiential learning opportunities such as this have become an essential component of higher education—they are highly sought-after experiences for students and important to employers as well.

As such, the availability of these opportunities is a significant differentiator for international students deciding where to pursue their studies and begin their careers. The United States cannot afford to lose these students to opportunities elsewhere. According to NAFSA: Association of International Educators, international students studying in the United States contributed \$38.7 billion to the United States economy and supported more than 400,000 jobs during the 2019-2020 academic year alone.

Joseph E. Aoun
President

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At Northeastern University, global experiential learning is the core of our mission. We are home to more than 14,000 international students and more than 5,000 of our graduates are currently participating in OPT. Our signature cooperative education program—integrating periods of classroom instruction and real-world experiences—provides our students with opportunities to put ideas into action all over the world. By providing students and recent graduates with valuable career-aligned experiential learning opportunities, OPT plays a critical role in helping our students engage with the world in meaningful ways.

Efforts to undermine OPT have come at a time when we must be squarely focused on putting people back to work and rebuilding an economy ravaged by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In order to meet this opportunity, the United States must be a beacon for talent and ideas and build an immigration system that reflects American values and expands opportunity and competitiveness.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that you commit to preserving Optional Practical Training and take immediate steps to strengthen the program by fully resourcing processing centers in order to eliminate existing backlogs and prevent future ones, allowing students to apply as early as they know their expected date of completion, and expanding the duration of all OPT opportunities.

If I can be of any service to you and the President-elect as you begin your important work on behalf of the American people, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe Aoun', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Joseph E. Aoun
President