

# US unveils changes to attract foreign science, tech students

January 21 2022, by Josh Boak

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President Joe Biden meets with members of the Infrastructure Implementation Task Force to discuss the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, in the Cabinet Room at the White House in Washington, Thursday, Jan. 20, 2022. The Biden administration is announcing policy changes to attract international students specializing in science, technology, engineering and math. It's part of the broader effort to make the U.S. economy more competitive. Credit: AP Photo/Andrew Harnik

The Biden administration on Friday announced policy changes to attract international students specializing in science, technology, engineering and math—part of the broader effort to make the U.S. economy more competitive.

The State Department will let eligible visiting students in those fields, known as STEM, complete up to 36 months of academic training, according to a notice in the [Federal Register](#). There will also be an initiative to connect these students with U.S. businesses.

Homeland Security will add 22 new fields of study—including cloud computing, [data visualization](#) and [data science](#)—to a program that allows international graduates from U.S. universities to spend up to three additional years training with domestic employers. The program generated about 58,000 applications in fiscal 2020.

The programs are designed to ensure that the U.S. is a magnet for talent from around the world, attracting scientists and researchers whose breakthroughs will enable the economy to grow. Government data shows that international students are increasingly the lifeblood of academic research.

It is the latest example of the Biden administration using presidential powers, as Donald Trump did, to retool the immigration system in the face of decades of congressional inaction. The Migration Policy Institute tallied [nearly 300 changes](#) to the system during Biden's first year in office, many of them to undo Trump's actions to restrict immigration.

The Trump administration's agenda [frequently included](#) plans to reduce or eliminate visas that allow college graduates, largely in STEM fields, up to three years to chart a career path in the United States. It never announced a change, though, which would have added to other measures that limited legal immigration.

The government's [National Science Board reported this week](#) that [international students](#) on temporary visas account for more than half of U.S. doctoral degrees in economics, computer sciences, engineering and mathematics and statistics. But in the sciences and engineering, China is fast closing the gap in doctoral degrees by generating nearly as many graduates as the U.S. did in 2018.

Business groups and immigration advocates welcomed Friday's announcement, while critics said it would damage job prospects for native American citizens.

"These targeted actions will help American companies meet their critical workforce needs moving forward and is one of a series of key actions needed to address the workforce shortage crisis," said Jon Baselice, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's vice president of immigration policy. "Much more needs to be done to update and modernize our nation's immigration system, and those types of changes require congressional action."

U.S. Tech Workers, an advocacy group critical of the post-graduation visas, said the changes will encourage companies to discriminate against native-border job applicants.

"This is exactly the kind of policy that destroys the career prospects of young American graduates," the group posted on Twitter.

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