



I. Positioning the U.S. to compete and cooperate on a global stage by fostering international student success

Efforts to retain the U.S.'s status as a top destination for international students are well-aligned with the Department of Commerce's mission to create conditions for economic growth and opportunity for all communities.

The articulation of the value of international education in the Biden administration's [Joint Statement of Principles in Support of International Education](#) and the [National Export Strategy](#) (NES) represents a significant step forward on this issue. The recommendations outlined in the Export Strategy, in particular, could have a significant impact on student flows by:

- **Connecting** U.S. institutions and consortia with foreign groups interested in U.S. education;
- **Promoting** the United States as a premier study destination;
- **Identifying** and promoting global opportunities to the U.S. education industry;
- **Highlighting** the importance of international education as a U.S. export; and
- **Leveling** the playing field in export markets.

II. Background

International students create a valuable source of skilled labor, positively impact U.S. diplomacy, and contribute tens of billions of dollars to the U.S. economy. The recent [Open Doors 2023](#) report highlighted some positive trends in international student enrollment, but there is more work to be done to attract, support, and retain talented learners. With its vast expertise and services offered to U.S. companies and Industry Trade Advisory Committees (ITACs), the Department of Commerce (DoC) is uniquely well-positioned to play a major role in maintaining the United States as a global leader in this sector.

Over the last two decades, there has been a steady decline in international student flows to the United States compared to other global study destinations. In 2022, education

ranked [ninth](#) among U.S. service exports, down from sixth in 2020. [NAFSA estimates](#), also broken down by congressional district, show that the more than one million international students studying in the United States in 2023 brought in \$40 billion to the U.S. economy in tuition and living expenses.

Meanwhile, other countries have been intensifying their efforts to attract a greater share of the international student market. Successful global strategies include:

- Adoption of national international education policies, including coordinated recruitment strategies and immigration policies;
- Streamlined visa application processes and generous post-study work pathways; and
- Inclusion of education in trade agreements.

The U.S. has [lost](#) almost 20% of its share of international students among the “Big Four” (U.S., UK, Australia, and Canada) over the past 20 years.

III. Recommendations

We strongly recommend that the Department of Commerce work closely with the Departments of Education, State, Homeland Security, and other agencies to develop and implement a strategic plan to carry out the recommendations from the National Export Strategy in a timely and effective manner. The plan should guarantee leadership attention, dedicated staff, and other necessary resources to ensure action is taken.

Specifically, we look forward to working with the Department of Commerce to:

- **Promote interagency efforts** to coordinate a strategic plan that includes concrete actions and a timeline based on the National Export Strategy and the Joint Statement;
- **Expand U.S. exhibits** at international fairs and events where other top destination countries are present, particularly in diverse markets where the United States could do better in enrolling international students;
- **Convene quarterly meetings** for industry stakeholders to share information and progress on strategy and best practices;
- **Incorporate language** from the [APEC Education Strategy](#) – in the context of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) or Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity (APEP) – that supports cross-border education and academic mobility into trade agreements and frameworks. Example action items that can be used as a baseline include:

- o Calling on parties to *share best practices* in cross-border education, including provider, student, and academic mobility;
- o Calling on parties to *promote academic exchanges* for teachers, dual and joint degree programs, immersion and short- and long-term study abroad programs and internships; and
- o Calling on parties to *promote language education* as a way to enhance global competencies.
- **Consider establishing** an international higher education services subgroup of the interagency trade policy staff committee to coordinate interagency and private sector input on education priorities for pending and prospective bilateral and regional trade negotiations, as well as educational-related trade work of international organizations such as the OECD and APEC.
- **Leveraging state-level consortia and district export councils** to position the U.S. to compete and cooperate on a global stage for international students.

These action items reflect some of the ways the Department of Commerce can leverage its expertise to support efforts to retain the United States' status as a top destination for international students. Such priorities advance the agency's dedication to fostering innovation, equity, and resilience at the heart of the U.S. comparative advantage.