

# Uncertainties Persist For F-1 Students Under Trump Policies

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24 July, 2020 by Suresh Rajan



**Right Skills & Experience Can Help People Navigate All Kind Of Uncertainties: Sanjay Gupta, HCL Technologies**

International students with F-1 visas continue to face uncertainties about their ability to study and pursue career opportunities in the US. The Trump administration keeps raising the prospect of restricting what these students can do in the coming school year.

Most recently, the administration proclaimed that international students would have to transfer or leave the country if their universities opted for online-only learning this fall because of the coronavirus pandemic. Just a little over a week later, on July 14, the administration reversed course, when the Department of Homeland Security appeared to give in under the threat of being sued by several universities, including Harvard University and MIT.

The week of uncertainty occurred on the heels of other proclamations by President Trump that have restricted new immigration to the US and suspended some students from entering the US from certain countries.

Under the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program, F-1 students can stay in the US for a year after graduation if they work within their field of study and up to three years if they take a STEM-related job. Then, they can try the H-1B lottery to change their work status and continue staying in the US.

Even before the pandemic, the OPT program has come under scrutiny and legislative proposals have threatened to eliminate it. It's often accused of taking jobs away from US residents. In reality, programs like this actually lead to progress in employment for US residents, as well as higher productivity numbers, entrepreneurial ventures, and innovation. Many US employers continue to back immigrant programs because they provide a pipeline of specialized skills that are in high demand.

The pipeline, however, relies on program participants who are willing to put up with growing uncertainties for their career path. As it is, the F-1 visa does not offer a 'sure thing' for its holders - they must find a job three months after graduating and register with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. If they do not fulfill those requirements, they must leave.

The EB-5 Immigrant Investor Program offers a more solid alternative, by providing students who are granted a green card the ability to achieve permanent residency. Once they graduate, they are not limited by the type of job they can pursue and they do not have to deal with applying for another visa or getting a work permit. What happens is they make a one-time investment of \$900,000 for a new US business that creates at least 10 jobs for US workers. While this capital is considered "at-risk," the business projects are carefully chosen to keep that risk at a minimum, and the investment is returned after the student receives his or her permanent green card. When all is said and done, the student's family may have had to pay just the cost of administration fees and immigration attorney costs. That's still less than what it costs to attend one year of schooling at many universities in the US.

Starting in 1990, this program has been a clear benefit not only to international students and US job seekers but to companies seeking top talent as well. When other ways of setting down roots in the US are rife with unpredictability, the EB-5 investment visa presents a more apparent way to move forward.

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