Statement on Retaining U.S.-Educated International Talent to Strengthen Innovation and Job Creation in the United States

While our universities consistently attract and train global talent, current immigration policy ultimately prevents many international students from remaining in the country, which in turn limits their post-graduation contributions to innovation and job creation in the United States. Expanding opportunities for the brightest international graduate students to remain in this country after graduation would not only allow individual graduates to pursue careers here, the United States economy would also benefit from their contributions to American innovation and job creation.¹

The MIT Graduate Student Council (GSC) represents the 6,800 graduate students of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in all matters concerning their welfare, academic opportunities, and professional careers after graduation. We strongly support policies that make employment opportunities and more employment-based visas available to international students who obtain their graduate degrees in the United States. In particular, we support reforms that would: (i) authorize dual intent for student visa holders, (ii) increase the number of employment visas and green cards available to recent graduates, and (iii) create a new immigration pathway for successful international entrepreneurs.

At MIT, 43% of graduate students are international students.² Although F-1 student visas are non-immigrant visas, many international students decide to remain here after graduation and go on to be employed at or found companies in the United States. Nationally, the National Science Foundation reports that 35% of doctoral degrees and 26% of master’s degrees in science and engineering were awarded to temporary visa holders in 2013.³ In order to align immigration policy with the reality of many international students’ experiences, and to encourage talented students to contribute to the American economy in the long-term, we support authorizing dual intent for student visa holders.

Upon graduation, the options for U.S.-trained advanced degree holders to remain in the United States and obtain green cards are limited for common career paths, including both employment in industry and entrepreneurship. Given these limitations, F-1 Optional Practical Training (OPT), including the recently implemented STEM OPT extension,⁴ and J-1 Academic Training provide valuable mechanisms for international students to gain practical experience while making meaningful contributions to research, technology development, and product development in the United States. This facilitates international students in transitioning into the workforce, and also transferring knowledge from research settings into industry. Ultimately, however, graduates must secure another type of visa to work here on a more permanent basis, either at established companies or at startups they found themselves.

Unfortunately, due to the lack of an entrepreneurship visa, aspiring U.S.-trained entrepreneurs face significant barriers to remaining in the United States, to the detriment of the American economy. Given the disproportionate role of startups in job creation,⁵ it is vital for Congress to address this gap in immigration

³ Science & Engineering Indicators 2016, National Science Foundation.
⁴ Improving and Expanding Training Opportunities for F-1 Nonimmigrant Students with STEM Degrees and Cap-Gap Relief for All Eligible F-1 Students, Homeland Security Department. Federal Register, 11 March 2016.
policy. MIT students and faculty alone have founded more than 30,000 currently active companies that employ about 4.6 million people and generate annual revenues of $1.9 trillion, equivalent to the 10th largest economy worldwide; foreign-born students contributed disproportionately to the number of MIT alumnifounded companies.\(^6\) Furthermore, upon examining billion dollar startup companies across the United States,\(^7\) the National Foundation for American Policy reported that almost one-quarter of these companies “had a founder who first came to America as an international student”.\(^8\)

**We urge lawmakers in Congress to create a startup visa**, a valuable addition to existing immigration pathways that has already been created in some form in many other countries.\(^9,10\) Startup visa proposals have already been put forward that would streamline and expand the ability of promising foreign entrepreneurs to start their own businesses in the United States, if they are able to secure highly competitive startup funding, create a certain amount of revenue in the United States, and provide full-time jobs for American workers. According to the Kauffman Foundation, policies like this have the potential to create millions of jobs over the course of ten years.\(^11\) While we strongly urge policymakers in Congress to make creating an entrepreneurship visa a priority, in the meantime, we support the International Entrepreneur Rule,\(^12\) which grants immigration parole to entrepreneurs whose businesses provide significant public benefit, thus enabling highly-skilled foreign entrepreneurs to start and grow businesses in the United States.

In addition to founding successful startups, international students also go on to contribute to research and development in private industry. U.S.-educated advanced degree holders who seek employment-based visas intended for highly-skilled individuals often fall under the H-1B visa umbrella. Although H-1B visas can lead to employer-sponsored green cards, the number of available visas for U.S.-educated individuals is drastically short of demand, as is the number of available employment-based green cards for people born in certain backlogged countries.\(^13\) This creates a number of problems.

First, the risk of not obtaining an H-1B visa is a substantial roadblock for U.S.-trained graduates and potential employers: post-graduation career options for graduate students are drastically limited, while additional hiring hurdles and uncertainty hurt companies at the forefront of innovation that rely on the ability to hire the best possible candidates. Ultimately, graduates who are denied the opportunity to put their skills to best use in the United States leave for other countries where highly educated workers are more welcome, strengthening foreign nations and economies.

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\(^9\) “Visas for entrepreneurs: Where creators are welcome.” The Economist, 9 June 2012.  
Second, the combination of the green card backlog (sometimes years, depending on country of chargeability) and the rule preventing employees on H-1B visas from switching jobs while an application to register permanent residence is pending creates an environment that is at best frustrating to employees and at worst a boon for opportunistic employers who take advantage of employees in this situation. Hence we support immigration reforms that would result in expanded, streamlined work visa programs for highly skilled US-trained international students to transition into both employment and permanent residency in the United States.

Current immigration policy dissuades future innovators from pursuing careers in this country and thereby encourages the development of new technologies and growing companies elsewhere in the world. Therefore, we urge policymakers to expand the employment and entrepreneurship pathways for U.S.-educated international students who will strengthen innovation and economic growth in the United States.

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