

## INTRODUCTION

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**A WELL-KNOWN SONG** by country singer Alan Jackson asked the question, “Where were you when the world stopped turning that September day?” The ancient university town of Salamanca, in northwestern Spain, is my answer. I was a 19-year-old study-abroad student on my very first trip outside the United States. Only weeks into the trip, 9/11 happened. It was a day of confusion, fear, and utter bewilderment, exacerbated by being miles away from home in a different country, watching news in a different language.

Yet, there was also great solidarity and shared concern. Throughout the day, many fellow students (Spanish, French, German, Italian, and more) came over to me to show their support and sympathy. On September 14 at noon, the whole city of Salamanca had three minutes of silence for the victims of the terrorist attack, followed by mass. We all cried together; the tragedy had touched us all.

That semester was life-changing for me. I became fully immersed in the benefits of international education and exchange (diversity of perspective, open mindedness, solidarity, empathy, and so on) just before our immigration system underwent dramatic changes that would frame immigration primarily as a national security issue. This experience was a major driver of my decision to become an immigration attorney.

Now more than 20 years later, I am honored to interact daily with physicians providing desperately needed medical services in this country; researchers and students engaged in groundbreaking research related to medicine, science, and social studies; students building the next great companies, and so on. Many students and scholars also return to their home countries where they will foster positive views of the United States and improve future diplomatic efforts.

As succinctly stated by the prior Biden administration:

The robust exchange of students, researchers, scholars, and educators, along with broader international education efforts between the United States and other countries, strengthens relationships between current

and future leaders. These relationships are necessary to address shared challenges, enhance American prosperity, and contribute to global peace and security.<sup>1</sup>

Even as the higher education landscape swifts<sup>2</sup> under the current Trump Administration, the truth of this statement continues to be supported by several facts, including the following:

- Since 2000, immigrants have received 38% (45 of 117) of the Nobel Prizes won by Americans in chemistry, medicine and physics.<sup>3</sup> According to research by the National Foundation for American Policy, “between 1901 and 2023, immigrants have been awarded 36%, or 115 of 319, of the Nobel Prizes won by Americans in chemistry, medicine and physics.”<sup>4</sup>
- Twenty-five percent of licensed U.S. doctors are international medical graduates (IMGs),<sup>5</sup> and nearly 21 million people live in areas of the United States where IMGs account for at least half the physician workforce.<sup>6</sup> IMGs are also more likely to serve areas with greater poverty, less education, and more minorities.<sup>7</sup>
- We all know about famous immigrant entrepreneurs, such as Levi Strauss (Germany), Elon Musk (South Africa), Sergey Brin (former Soviet Union), and so many others. In 2019, immigrant entrepreneurs made up 21.7 percent of all business owners in the United States, and according to 2017 data, employed 8 million people at their companies.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, 46 percent of 2024 Fortune 500 firms had at least one immigrant founder or a founder who is the child of immigrants.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of State and U.S. Department of Education’s Joint Statement of Principles in Support of International Education *available at* [https://educationusa.state.gov/sites/default/files/intl\\_ed\\_joint\\_statement.pdf](https://educationusa.state.gov/sites/default/files/intl_ed_joint_statement.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> See <https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/trumps-reshaping-higher-education-tests-americas-appeal-international-121701410>.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stuartanderson/2024/10/14/3-immigrants-to-america-win-2024-nobel-prize-in-economics/>.

<sup>4</sup> See NFAP’s policy brief entitled “Immigrants and Nobel Prizes: 1901-2023” *available at* <https://nfap.com/research/immigrants-and-nobel-prizes-1901-2023/>.

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.ama-assn.org/education/international-medical-education/how-imgs-have-changed-face-american-medicine>.

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.ama-assn.org/education/international-medical-education/why-img-physicians-are-vital-us-health-security>.

<sup>7</sup> See [https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/foreign-trained\\_doc-tors\\_are\\_critical\\_to\\_serving\\_many\\_us\\_communities.pdf](https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/foreign-trained_doc-tors_are_critical_to_serving_many_us_communities.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> See information from New American Economy at <https://bit.ly/3BxfMtD>.

<sup>9</sup> See the American Immigration Council’s report entitled “New American Fortune 500 in 2024: The Largest American Companies and Their Immigrant Roots,” *available at* <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/new-american-fortune-500-2024>.

- According to NAFSA, “[I]nternational students studying at U.S. colleges and universities contributed \$48.3 billion and supported 378,175 jobs to the U.S. economy during the 2023–24 academic year.”<sup>10</sup>

Even the Trump Administration appreciates much of the above data, including as it relates to India, highlighting the following in a recent United States – India Joint Leaders’ Statement,<sup>11</sup>

President Trump and Prime Minister Modi noted the importance of advancing the people-to-people ties between the two countries. In this context, they noted that the more than 300,000 strong Indian student community contributes over \$8 billion annually to the U.S. economy and helped create a number of direct and indirect jobs. They recognized that the talent flow and movement of students, researchers and employees, has mutually benefitted both countries.

Despite clear data putting the benefits of international education and exchange on display, the U.S. immigration system is overly cumbersome, unforgiving, and often unaligned with the best interests of the nation in attracting global talent. Recent actions by the Trump Administration, such as a wave of student SEVIS record terminations and visa revocations<sup>12</sup> have only made matters worse.

The purpose of *The Academic Immigration Handbook* is to demystify the journey of students, professors, researchers, residents, fellows, and others through the “alphabet soup” of visas (Fs, Ms, Js, Hs, etc.) and into the green card process. The first and second segments will detail the paths of students and scholars, respectively. From there, permanent residence options will be addressed in detail. Finally, the book will raise important institutional considerations, a helpful discussion for university counsel, administrators, student and scholar advisors, and others.

I am pleased to offer this resource to the academic immigration community and welcome your feedback. Please contact me at [acohen@visalaw.com](mailto:acohen@visalaw.com).

*Adam Cohen*

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<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/nafsa-international-student-economic-value-tool-v2>.

<sup>11</sup> United States – India Joint Leaders’ Statement available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2025/02/united-states-india-joint-leaders-statement/>.

<sup>12</sup> See <https://www.nafsa.org/regulatory-information/ice-initiated-sevis-record-terminations>.