



Keeping international students in U.S. key to boosting economy, advocates say in Detroit gathering of Midwestern groups



By [Khalil AlHajal](#) | kalhajal@mlive.com

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DETROIT, MI -- Adonis Flores came to the U.S. at age 9, graduated from a Detroit charter school and went on to college, but he may never be able to secure a job in his field or even stay in the U.S.

He's been studying part-time at Wayne State University for the last seven years, seeking a degree in business administration with a focus on global supply chain management.

But he's an unauthorized immigrant, and though he's applied for the federal government's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, a record of driving without a license could derail his effort to gain legal status.

"I'm struggling just to stay here," Flores said. "Struggling even more just to continue studying."

He pays international student tuition rates and has relied in part on scholarships from local immigrant support groups.

Groups from [seven Midwestern cities that support immigrants with an eye on boosting the economy](#) are meeting in Detroit on Thursday to discuss stories like Flores'.

Strategies for keeping international students in the U.S. after graduation and connecting with employers who can sponsor work visas are major parts of the discussion at the Global Great Lakes conference

Organizations from Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Indianapolis, and Lansing that provide services like entrepreneurship training and lending programs are participating.

Flores said his father, who brought him to the U.S. but has since returned to Mexico, may have been able to stay if he had access to help from such a network of groups.

"He has a bachelor's degree in education, but because there was no way for us to legalize our status, he was never able to work in his field," Flores said. "He never really found his way around. He decided that it wasn't going to take him anywhere and he's back in Mexico."

Peter Gonzales, director of the Welcoming Center of New Pennsylvanians, said about 38 percent of the immigrants who seek services from the group hold college degrees.

"It's not uncommon for a doctor from Afghanistan or a dentist from Indonesia... to be sitting in our office trying to connect with an opportunity to work again in the United States," Gonzales said.

The organizations will be sharing ideas and best practices all day for helping immigrants contribute the economy.

Athena Trentin, director of the Michigan Global Talent Retention Initiative, said international students contribute some \$759 million to U.S. economy every year, and that they often obtain post-graduate degrees that are in high demand.

She said international students in Michigan who are able to stay are also statistically more likely to remain in the state than domestic students.

Support organizations have been working to fill a gap left by overburdened college career officers and international student offices that aren't authorized to seek U.S. jobs for students without work visas, Trentin said.

"If we don't consider them as par of our talent pools, we're never going to be able to fill the jobs... in the areas that we need most," she said.

More information on the conference [here](#).

Follow Khalil AlHajal on [Twitter @DetroitKhalil](#) or on [Facebook at Detroit Khalil](#). He can be reached at kalhajal@mlive.com or 313-643-0527.



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