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## Latitudes: Caribbean Medical Schools Are Said to Exploit a Loophole to Get Federal Student Aid

1 message

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# Latitudes

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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## Caribbean medical schools use loophole to get U.S. student aid

For-profit Caribbean medical schools have been exploiting a loophole in the U.S. federal student-aid system to obtain funding for which they would not otherwise be eligible, an accountability-based research group has found.

The offshore medical schools encourage students to concurrently enroll in secondary, and often unnecessary, degree programs at online American universities that are approved to participate in the Title IV system. Students are then urged to borrow the maximum amount in federal loans and to use that money to pay for both programs.

The workaround was uncovered by the Postsecondary Equity and Economics Research, or Peer, Project, a public-interest research group started by academics at Columbia and George Washington Universities and lawyers at the National Student Legal Defense Network. A [recent report](#) describes the scheme.

At least 18 Caribbean medical schools and two American online providers, Franklin and Walden Universities, have been part of the concurrent-enrollment partnership, which has been around for a decade, said Abigail Moats, the report's author. Moats, an intake and digital-advocacy manager at the network, said none of the students interviewed by the Peer Project had received a degree, either from the medical schools or the online universities.

Caribbean medical schools often cater to American students who are unable to win admission to American medical schools. The schools have offices in the United States, but many do not meet eligibility requirements to participate in the Title IV federal-aid program because of poor job-placement results and subpar passage rates on medical-licensure exams, among other factors. They are also not subject to American regulatory oversight.

Although the cost of attendance at Title IV-ineligible medical schools is typically less than at their eligible peer institutions — average tuition and fees at ineligible Caribbean medical schools is \$109,100 — they can be costly for students who have to pay out of pocket or take out private loans.

Students told Moats that the online universities set up tables or hosted pizza lunches at the medical schools to market the program. Others were told about it by their medical-school financial-aid office.

Many of the secondary degrees were in health-care management or administration, which are not necessary for practicing medicine, Moats said. In some cases, students were borrowing for additional bachelor's degrees.

The online programs benefited from additional students' enrolling in one or two courses a semester, while the medical schools were able to get federal-aid funds. "The Department of Education essentially helped keep them afloat," she said of the medical schools.

"To be clear, concurrent enrollment was presented to students not as an academic option but for financial-aid purposes," said Libby DeBlasio Webster, co-director of the Peer Project and senior counsel at the network. Medical students approached the researchers after the network filed a [federal civil-rights lawsuit](#) against Walden.

Moats was unable to determine how many students had taken part in concurrent enrollment in order to borrow federal funds, but anecdotally she said the programs were well known among the medical schools' large numbers of American students.

Federal regulations don't explicitly forbid concurrent-enrollment plans, although it is illegal for colleges to tell prospective students they can use federal student-aid dollars to pay tuition for a second-degree program at an ineligible institution. Moats and Webster said they hoped the Department of Education would review Title IV regulations to close the loophole.

A spokeswoman for Franklin said in a written statement: "As the report states, Franklin's practices are completely legal and fully compliant with all applicable financial-aid regulations." A Walden spokesperson noted that the university has "strategic partnerships with many

institutions globally.” The written statement added that “Walden University administers its financial-assistance programs consistent with federal regulations.”

The Peer researchers also said they hoped the report would prompt congressional oversight that could answer some questions they could not, including the scope of participation, how much money had been borrowed over time, and details of joint marketing and revenue-sharing agreements between the medical schools and their partners.

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## **‘Even in America, I don’t have the same rights that Americans do’**

Controversy over a decision by Yale University’s student newspaper not to allow Chinese student journalists to anonymously cover a protest of the Chinese government’s “zero Covid” policy is bringing renewed attention to how international students from authoritarian countries may feel politically vulnerable, even when on American campuses.

Editors at the *Yale Daily News* denied the request of two student reporters from China to remove their bylines from an article on a campus protest last week of China’s restrictive Covid measures and declined to publish the piece. The editors said publishing articles anonymously would prevent readers from holding reporters accountable for inaccuracies or biases in their work.

But in an interview with *The Chronicle*, one of the two Chinese student journalists said the editors’ decision had failed to account for the risks

they or their families back in China could face for highlighting criticism of their home government. “People need to understand that even in America, I don’t have the same rights that Americans do,” the student said. *The Chronicle* is not identifying the student because of the risks she could face by speaking out.

The incident drew the attention of journalists and academics who are from China or who work on issues related to China. “I am openly asking you to consider the unique challenges reporters face from authoritarian states,” Jin Ding, a Chinese-born journalist who is chief of staff at the Center for Public Integrity, wrote in a [Twitter thread](#) addressed to the Yale editors. She pointed out that mainstream publications such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* have granted anonymity to reporters at political or security risk.

Plans for a vigil in solidarity with protests in China began to circulate among Yale students on WeChat, the Chinese social-media app. Unusually widespread [demonstrations](#) broke out in China after 10 people were killed last month in a residential fire in the Xinjiang region, home to the country’s Uyghur Muslim minority, raising questions about whether Covid lockdowns had prevented victims from fleeing or rescuers from reaching them.

The student, who has written for the Yale paper since she enrolled, pitched coverage of the vigil to her editors. Even before the protest, held on November 28, she and the other student journalist had raised concerns about being publicly identified. Although the editors said they did not want to publish anonymous articles, the students thought they might be able to find a workaround, such as writing the article under another reporter’s byline or using a pseudonym.

But after they filed the article, the editors said they would not publish the piece without the students’ names. They gave the reporters two choices: Kill the article or hand over their notes to another reporter, who would report out the piece. But the student said she did not want

to do that because no other student journalist at Yale has her expertise on issues involving China.

She withdrew the article and [shared it](#) on the online-publishing platform Telegraph. “Even though it’s the best story I’ve written so far, I didn’t want to publish it under my byline,” the student said. “I couldn’t do that to my family.”

In a [column](#), the public editor of the *Yale Daily News* defended the decision not to publish anonymously as meeting journalistic standards, but said editors should “identify ways to better support reporters covering matters of personal significance without threatening their safety.”

The Chinese student said the editors had failed to understand the risks associated with being a Chinese student journalist — or even just a Chinese student. She said she frequently worries that what she says or writes on campus could be reported and endanger her or her parents at home.

With some 300,000 Chinese students in the United States, there are real concerns that Chinese surveillance and political censorship could be reaching into American classrooms. In February the Chinese Students and Scholars Association at George Washington University called on administrators to [investigate and punish](#) fellow students who had hung posters critical of the Chinese government. In 2020 a Chinese student was [sentenced](#) to six months in prison for tweets disparaging Chinese leaders he had posted while studying at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities.

Some academics and human-rights groups have called for American colleges to [enact policies](#) to safeguard the rights of international students from China and other authoritarian countries, such as appointing a university ombudsman to whom threats, harassment, or surveillance on campus could be reported.

But the Yale student, who dreams of being an investigative reporter, said she was skeptical that American colleges could do much to allay her concerns. “As Chinese students in America, we constantly face a choice: Speak up and risk your family, or stay silent and cry in your room.”

In a [commentary](#) in *The China Project*, an online publication on China news, a group of Yale students from mainland China and Hong Kong said that the *Yale Daily News* should “prioritize journalistic voices from reporters more familiar with China and make strict policies to protect the safety of their reporters and informants.”

Meanwhile, in an [open letter](#), Chinese students urged colleges to do more to provide mental-health and academic support to Chinese and Uyghur students amid the protests and political turmoil at home.

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## Group wants to revive legal challenge to program for international graduates

A years-long legal challenge to Optional Practical Training, the popular work program for international graduates of American colleges, is set to go another round.

A group of technology workers is asking a federal appeals court to [reconsider](#) an [October ruling](#) by a three-judge panel upholding the program's legality. In its brief to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, the group said the judges had misinterpreted visa law and had conferred "massive authority" on an executive-branch agency without the express approval of Congress.

Under the program, graduates can remain in the United States and work while on their student visas from one to three years, depending on their field of study.

Both the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and a coalition of business groups have filed briefs arguing the ruling should stand. The request for a review by the full circuit court is "meritless," the business groups [wrote](#).

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## **Around the globe**

**A bipartisan pair of U.S. senators said** they had hammered out a [compromise measure](#) that would give a path to citizenship to young people brought illegally to the United States as children, many of whom are college students.

**A possible amendment to a defense-authorization bill** could [criminalize](#) research-disclosure failures and include visa revocation or ineligibility among its penalties.

**The FBI's director, Christopher Wray, defended** government investigations into academic fraud linked to China, [saying](#) at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor that there is no "more serious, more persistent threat to our innovation, our ideas, and our economic



security than the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese government.”

**Universities must play** a critical role in helping the United States compete with China, the commerce secretary, Gina Raimondo, said in a [speech](#) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

**The U.S. government will extend** [temporary immigration protections](#) for 18 months to Haitians in the United States because of the humanitarian crisis in their home country.

**International students in Britain may be dropping out** to take jobs in health care after the government relaxed its rules for [skilled-worker visas](#) to no longer require students to have earned a degree to qualify.

**Educational agents in China are** peddling “[guaranteed acceptance](#)” to elite American colleges.

**Elaine Meyer-Lee, provost of Goucher College,** will be the [new editor](#) of *Frontiers*, the academic journal of study abroad.

**Just 22 countries issued fewer student visas** this fall than the previous year, while 142 countries saw growth in student-visa issuances, according to an [analysis](#) by the education company Shorelight. You can also read *The Chronicle's* [take](#) on the student-visa data.

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**And finally ...**

Like many of you, we've got World Cup fever around here. My 3-year-old nephew has taken to bellowing “I am Cristiano Ronaldo” at odd

times, and was seriously deflated when we could not tease his baby-fine hair into the Portuguese soccer star's pomaded swoop. Of course, the tournament has an international-education angle — games are being played at Qatar's Education City Stadium. If that rings a bell, it's because Education City is home to a number of foreign-university branch campuses, including overseas outposts of Georgetown, Northwestern, and Texas A&M.

Thanks for reading. I always welcome your feedback and ideas for future reporting, so drop me a line, at [karin.fischer@chronicle.com](mailto:karin.fischer@chronicle.com). You can also connect with me on [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#). If you like this newsletter, please share it with colleagues and friends. They can [sign up here](#).

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