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## Latitudes: What a new generation of international students means for American colleges

1 message

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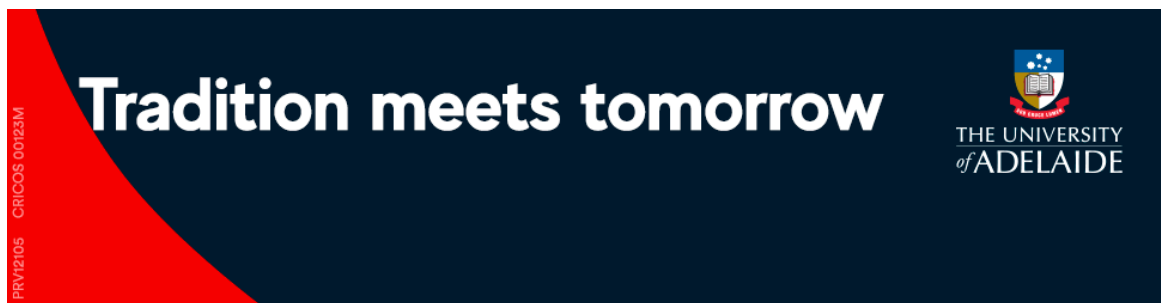
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# Latitudes

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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## A rebound, but not a return to normal

After plummeting during the pandemic, international enrollments have been on the rise, notching the highest single-year growth in decades in the most recent “Open Doors” report.

But to call this gain in foreign students a rebound is a bit of a misnomer. That's because there are major differences in the profile of international students in the United States, with Covid as a sort of demarcation line.

Before the pandemic, the typical visa-holding student was an undergraduate from China. Today, enrollment gains are being driven by [Indian students](#) seeking master's degrees. In fact, when I dug into the numbers, I discovered that there now are more foreign graduate students in the United States than there were international undergraduates during the heyday of the China boom.

This new surge has been important not just for international admissions but for American graduate schools, which have been grappling with declining interest among domestic students. A third of the students in graduate-school classrooms are from abroad.

In a [longer piece for \*The Chronicle\*](#), I examined the shifting trends in international enrollments and their implications for American colleges. (As always, nonsubscribers who [register for a free \*Chronicle\* account](#) can read two articles a month. Your readership supports our journalism.)

Here are a few takeaways:

**Middle-class aspirations and insufficient educational capacity at home are driving student mobility.** In that sense, students coming from India (and to a lesser extent, sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere in South Asia) have similar motivations as their Chinese predecessors for seeking a foreign degree. Pradeep Kumar Choudhury, an assistant professor of educational studies, told me that many of his colleagues at Jawaharlal Nehru University plan to send their children abroad. When Choudhury did a fellowship at Harvard University last year, he took his 12-year-old son on a mini-college tour. "It's the American dream, through the Indian eye," he said.

But there are real differences, among them, how to pay for that degree. While Chinese students typically funded their education through [family savings](#) or property, most Indian students borrow. MPower Financing is a public-benefit corporation that makes loans to international students — nearly all at the master’s level — who are studying in the United States and Canada. Some 70 percent of its borrowers come from households with incomes under \$12,000. As a result, students’ financial footing may be less stable.

**High visa-refusal rates add to the uncertainty.** As I’ve [written before](#), students in India, and especially Africa, have a much higher likelihood of having their American visa applications denied than those in China, where nine out of 10 visas are approved. As a result, colleges cannot be sure that the students they accept will actually make it to campus.

**Different students have different needs.** Well, obviously, right? For starters, recruiting graduate students, who typically are in the work force, requires separate strategies from the more centralized, collegewide approach to enrolling foreign undergraduates.

The campus infrastructure built up for an earlier wave of international students may not be the right fit for current students, who demand different academic and cultural support. For example, Indian students who have studied in English don’t need preparatory language courses. Since they don’t live in dormitories, they’re not concerned about having familiar food in the dining halls.

On the other hand, as international students jumped from 42 percent of all graduate-school enrollments at the University of Maryland-Baltimore County in the 2019-20 academic year to 58 percent today, the university has had to add bus routes to serve foreign students living off campus without cars, said Janet C. Rutledge, vice provost and dean of the graduate school. Career-services offices could find themselves working overtime to help professionally minded students.

**When return on investment is paramount, an American degree and work experience are a package deal.** Optional Practical Training, the federal program that lets foreign graduates of American colleges stay in the country and work, has expanded, allowing STEM majors to get three years of on-the-job learning. Sai Sourab Ganti, an engineering-management student at UMBC, told me that a “U.S. degree plus three years of OPT, that will be of value” when he returns to India.

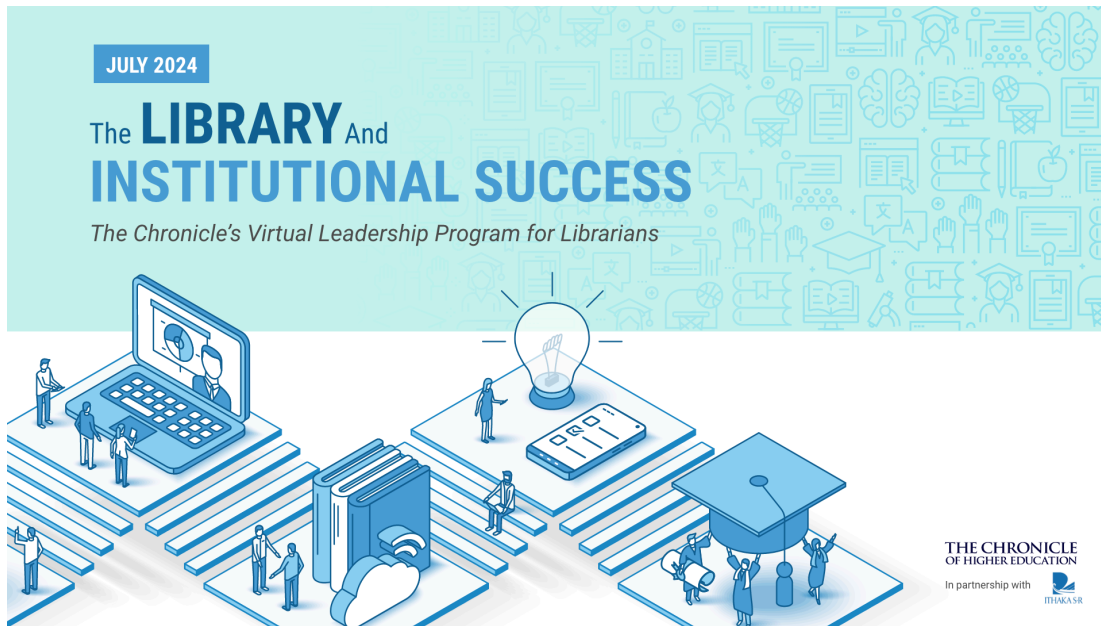
Despite OPT, many American employers balk at hiring applicants on visas, and layoffs have recently hit the tech sector, which attracts many overseas students. The aberrations to high job-placement rates for graduates of the University of Washington’s business school are “almost without exception” international students, said Frank Hodge, the school’s dean.

An additional wild card is this fall’s presidential election. Former President Donald J. Trump, the likely Republican nominee, is a critic of OPT, and there are concerns he could restrict, or even gut, the program if he returns to office.

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## **American instructors in China injured in stabbing**

Four Iowa college instructors teaching at a partner university in China were stabbed in an [attack](#) in a public park.

Chinese police have detained a suspect in the attack on instructors from Cornell College, a small private institution, who were walking on Monday with a colleague from Beihua University, in the northeast city of Jilin, when the stabbing occurred. All four were taken to a hospital and are in good condition, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

The two colleges have had a [partnership](#) since 2018 that brings Cornell faculty members to China to teach for two-week stints.

The spokesman, Lin Jian, called the attack an “isolated incident” and said it would “not disrupt normal cultural and people-to-people exchanges between the two countries.” China’s government has recently sought to encourage more Americans to study there after their numbers [sank](#) because of the pandemic and politics.

Chinese officials have previously [warned](#) Chinese students and other travelers about safety concerns in the United States.

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## Colleges oppose foreign-disclosure provision added to defense bill

Higher-education groups said they “strongly oppose” a provision added to a key defense bill that would increase federal oversight of foreign gifts and contracts to American colleges.

In a [letter](#) to U.S. House leaders, two-dozen organizations said the “complicated and expansive” language shouldn’t be attached in an amendment to annual defense-authorization legislation but “should move deliberately through additional hearings and consideration” in Congress.

A [stand-alone version](#) of the so-called Deterrent Act was introduced last year but did not pass. The bill’s title is an acronym for “Defending Education Transparency and Ending Rogue Regimes Engaging in Nefarious Transactions.” Supporters say the measure is needed because colleges have been insufficiently transparent about the funds they receive from foreign sources.

Higher-ed groups called the proposal a “massive and problematic expansion” of current federal reporting requirements that would tax college resources and could discourage researchers from collaborating with overseas partners, harming American competitiveness.

The [legislation](#) is awaiting a vote by the full House after receiving committee approval. Because the defense bill typically receives bipartisan support, it is regularly used as a vehicle to pass potentially controversial provisions. In the past, for instance, lawmakers have included language restricting or barring defense research funds from going to colleges with [Confucius Institutes](#). As a result, nearly all the Chinese-government-funded language and cultural centers on American campuses have closed.

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**Around the globe**

**FBI officials assured** researchers of Asian descent that they've taken concerns about [anti-Asian bias](#) seriously. The meeting, at Rice University, was an effort to repair trust damaged by the [China Initiative](#), the federal investigation of academic ties with China.

**The Canadian government is considering** restricting the number of [post-graduate work visas](#) it awards. Officials earlier in the year announced [limits on international-student visas](#).

**British universities are more frequently barring** [speakers or events](#) from campus, with the number rejected tripling since the pandemic.

**The American and French governments pledged** to expand [student exchanges](#) during a visit by President Biden to France to commemorate the 80th anniversary of D-Day.

**Russia has charged** a dozen physicists with [treason](#), but colleagues said they were only engaging in routine international research collaborations.

**Funding for science is likely to be** a priority for Narendra Modi, who recently began his third term as India's prime minister, but some observers worry that he will [favor certain areas of research](#) at the expense of others.

**A record number of Chinese students took** the [gaokao](#), the national college entrance exam, last weekend. Some Chinese provinces used artificial intelligence to [crack down on cheating](#) on the test.

**Four colleges** — Arizona State and Northeastern Universities, Borough of Manhattan Community College, and the University of California at San Diego — have been awarded \$1-million [grants](#) to develop study-abroad programs to improve student success.



**Nearly 60 percent of international students in the United States plan** to work, but four in 10 say it is difficult to find employers to sponsor them or to get a work visa, according to a [survey](#) by Terra Dotta.

**The University of Oxford will return** a [500-year-old bronze sculpture](#) of a Hindu saint to India.

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## **And finally ...**

Travel is a means to gain an understanding of, and respect for, other cultures, especially when learning a language, the historian Peter Brown said in an interview in [The New York Review of Books](#). “When we travel, and especially when we learn a language to help us to travel, we do not simply go to see the sights, or learn a language simply to get around. With each language we encounter a culture — often a culture very different from our own.” (h/t to my colleague Len Gutkin, who writes [The Review newsletter](#).)

Because of the Juneteenth holiday, next week’s Latitudes will publish on Thursday, June 20.

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 [X](#) or [LinkedIn](#). If you like this newsletter, please share it with colleagues and friends. They can [sign up here](#).

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