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# Latitudes: In a reversal, Trump promises green cards to foreign graduates of U.S. colleges

1 message

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# Latitudes

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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## On visas and immigration, a gap between record and rhetoric

Former President Donald J. Trump said he would make it a “day one” priority to keep “brilliant” international students in the United States,

pledging, if elected to a second term, to grant green cards to foreign graduates of American colleges.

No, that's not a typo. "You should get automatically, as part of your diploma, a green card to be able to stay in this country," Trump, the prospective Republican nominee, said last week in an [interview](#) on *All-In*, a podcast hosted by Silicon Valley investors.

In fact, he went further than other public officials, [including President Biden](#), saying that the United States should seek to retain not just those with advanced degrees in high-demand science and technology fields but all graduates of two- and four-year colleges. The country loses out when talented graduates return home and start businesses there, Trump said.

Policies to retain American-trained students aren't typically associated with Trump — I [recently reported](#) that many international educators worry if he returns to office, he could put in place more-restrictive measures that could make it harder to attract international students.

So what to make of Trump's comments? For one, it's not the first time he has said he wants the best and the brightest students and workers to stay in the United States, said Sam Peak, a senior policy analyst on immigration with Americans for Prosperity, a think tank backed by the conservative billionaire Charles Koch that supports skilled immigration.

As president, Trump posted on social media about creating a "[potential path to citizenship](#)" for people with skilled-work visas. At a [2019 White House event](#), he called for allowing "exceptional students and workers to stay, and flourish, and thrive in America."

Under the current immigration system, Trump said at the event, "we discriminate against genius. We discriminate against brilliance."

The Trump administration did [change procedures](#) for the H-1B lottery to favor applicants for the work visas with advanced STEM degrees over those with less education. But on the whole, his visa policies, or policy proposals, were more restrictive, Peak said.

During his four years in office, Trump limited visas for some Chinese graduate students, ordered heightened scrutiny of student and other visa holders by border officials, and barred international students from reentering the country for relatively minor infractions, like failing to update their American address with their college. (The latter rule change was [blocked in court](#).)

He also proposed a regulation that would have put [time caps](#) on student visas, potentially forcing students to reapply for visas in the middle of their studies, but ran out of time to finalize it. And his administration [repeatedly said](#) it wanted to limit optional practical training, a federal program that allows recent graduates to temporarily remain in the United States and work.

In a policy document that many see as a [blueprint for a potential second term](#), a former senior Trump administration official called for reforms to the oversight of the student-visa system and to “eliminate or significantly reduce the number of visas issued to foreign students from enemy nations.”

How do you to square Trump’s rhetoric about attracting and retaining top students with his record? He may be sincere in his statements, Peak said. “I don’t think that he necessarily doesn’t mean it, but he’s not engaged” in policymaking on immigration and visas.

Instead, in his first term, Trump named appointees to key roles, like Stephen Miller, a senior adviser for policy, who opposed such positions. “Personnel are policy,” Peak said.

In the [National Review](#), Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, which backs immigration and visa

restrictions, criticized Trump’s green-card plan. “It would turn every university (and community college!) into a citizenship-selling machine,” he wrote.

A Trump campaign spokesman later clarified his comments, saying that a policy would apply only to the “most skilled graduates who can make significant contributions to America,” as determined by an “aggressive vetting process” and would “exclude all communists, radical Islamists, Hamas supporters, America haters, and public charges.”

Whether Trump or Biden wins in November, don’t expect the government to start stapling green cards to college diplomas on the first day of the next administration — such a change would require congressional approval. Although the idea has some bipartisan support, lawmakers [rejected a similar proposal](#) two years ago.

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## Trump or Biden? The election may not affect plans to study in the U.S.

The election may be causing college officials to lose sleep — but international students don't seem as concerned about the outcome of the presidential race.

Forty-two percent of prospective foreign students said who was in the White House would make little difference to their plans to study in the United States, according to a [recent survey](#). That's a marked shift from eight years ago, when [similar polling](#) found that six in 10 students would reconsider their overseas-study choices if Trump won the presidency.

In fact, a roughly equal share of prospective students — about 30 percent each — said they would be more or less likely to consider studying in the United States if Trump returned to the White House.

As for Biden, his re-election could have a greater upside for colleges — 44 percent said they would be more likely to come to America, while just 13 percent said they would have second thoughts.

When given the option to explain their reasoning, students who viewed Trump favorably cited economic issues. They thought he would promote economic growth and job creation, which could make it easier for them to start their careers in the United States.

Those who saw Biden positively said he would foster a more welcoming experience for international students. Respondents in this group also cited concerns about actions Trump could take on immigration, international relations, and other social and political issues.

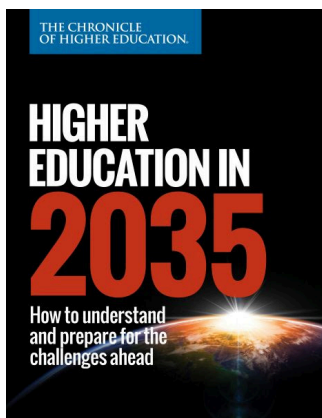
The survey of 2,500 students was conducted this spring by Intead, an international-education marketing and research firm, and Studyportals, a global-education platform.

For many students, politics may take a back seat to academic quality and personal goals in their college decision-making. They also have grown up in the current political climate and become inured to it, suggest the authors of a report on the findings.

And Trump's election in 2016 didn't have a calamitous impact on enrollments — while the number of new international students [fell during his term](#), the declines were more modest than originally feared.

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## House amendment threatens international exchanges

An amendment to be debated as part of the [State Department appropriations bill](#) could zero out funding for academic and cultural exchanges run by the department.

The amendment would eliminate funding for educational programs like the flagship Fulbright program, the Gilman scholarship program to send first-generation and low-income students abroad, and EducationUSA, a global network of centers that advise international students about studying at American colleges. Offered by Rep. Brian Mast, Republican of Florida, the amendment is similar to one proposed last fall, which [failed](#) to win approval.

The spending bill allocates \$721 million for such programming.

Two other amendments that would cut exchange funding have been approved for debate on the House floor. The bill could be taken up later this week.

In an email message, Mark Overmann, executive director of the Alliance for International Exchange, a group that represents organizations and providers that run exchanges and support global-education programming, asked members to contact their congressional representatives and urge them to oppose the amendments. "We must ensure that members of Congress are fully aware of the profound consequences of this amendment," he wrote.

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## **A second chance for a lawsuit over a sham university**

A panel of judges will allow a lawsuit against the federal government over a sham college set up as a student-visa sting to go forward, reversing a previous dismissal of the case.

Students filed a class-action lawsuit to try to recover tuition they had paid to the University of Farmington, a fictitious college set up by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. A claims court had ruled that the government was shielded from paying out reimbursements because it had entered into the contracts with students as part of its sovereign capacity to investigate visa fraud.

But the federal appeals court panel said on Tuesday that there was a lack of judicial precedent for such a determination and that interpreting sovereign capacity so broadly meant that “almost everything the federal government does, including renting office space” could fall under an exemption. It [sent the case back](#) to claims court to determine the intent of the plaintiff when he entered into the contract with the University of Farmington. If he did not intend to study in the United States, he would not be entitled to damages.

Government officials had set up the college — [complete with a website and social-media presence](#) — to try to ensnare recruiters or others posing as students in order to come to the United States. They were told they could get a student visa without attending classes.

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## Around the globe

**Two members of President Biden’s Cabinet sent a [letter](#) to college presidents, urging them to do more to [welcome and support refugees](#),**



including by [sponsoring refugee students](#) and temporarily housing families in underused residence halls.

**Some refugee students could qualify** for less-expensive in-state tuition rates at community colleges in California, under [proposed legislation](#).

**Attacks on education rose** in the last two years, with the [largest number](#) in Palestine, Ukraine, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Myanmar.

**Colleges in Australia oppose** a government plan to [cap international-student enrollments](#), saying it could have a “disastrous effect on both Australian society and our economy.”

**India’s Ministry of Education canceled** the results of a [national exam](#) that determines eligibility for doctoral programs, junior research fellowships, and assistant professor posts because of fraud concerns. Some 900,000 people took the exam this year.

**The European Union wants** to appoint “[liaison officers](#)” from national intelligence agencies to work with higher education to protect sensitive research from China and other foreign governments.

**College and political leaders in Europe must work** together to achieve greater academic collaboration across borders, a [new report](#) said.

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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