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Latitudes: For athletes around the globe, the path to the Olympics runs through U.S. colleges

1 message

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Latitudes

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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How American colleges became a training ground for the world’s athletes

When Léon Marchand swamped the competition to win Olympic swimming gold in the 400-meter individual medley, the home-country crowd roared with excitement. President Emmanuel Macron of France called to congratulate him.

But Marchand, who draws comparisons to Michael Phelps, the American champion, is often found in the pool wearing the gold and maroon of Arizona State University's Sun Devils. More than 800 current or former college athletes are representing 125 countries and teams at the Summer Games in Paris, many of them, like Marchand, international students, according to the [National Collegiate Athletic Association](#). Another 385 are part of the U.S. Olympic team.

International students will compete in water polo for Australia, beach volleyball for Latvia, and soccer for Nigeria. Ten of 12 players on the roster of Canada's women's basketball team went to college in the United States. In fencing alone, medalists have included a Stanford graduate from Hong Kong, as well as students from St. John's of New York representing Egypt, from Notre Dame representing Hungary, and from Long Island University representing Tunisia.

With top coaches, superior facilities, and deep-pocketed scholarships, American colleges are the training ground for Olympic and professional athletes around the world. "One of the best routes is to go through American colleges," said Victoria Jackson, a sports historian and clinical associate professor at Arizona State.

But, [as my colleague Nell Gluckman wrote](#) recently, the college-to-Olympics pipeline could be undercut by a proposed antitrust settlement. Under the settlement, Division I institution would pay students who play revenue-generating sports like football and basketball, part of an effort to compensate college athletes for the use of their name, image, and likeness, known as NIL. It could shift money from Olympics-feeder sports such as gymnastics, swimming, and track and field.

Even as the number of international students playing men's and women's basketball has increased, it's not clear whether those students would share in the proposed payments. That's because U.S. visa regulations prohibit students from working off campus without

special employment authorization. Without clarifying guidance from the federal government, student-visa holders haven't been able to take the endorsement and sponsorship deals that some of their American teammates have received.

More than 25,000 international students [play American college sports](#), the NCAA reports. While that's less than 3 percent of foreign students studying in the United States, international students make up about 13 percent of athletes on Division I rosters.

Certain sports are more global than others: Six in 10 college tennis players and about 40 percent of those playing ice hockey are from overseas.

On the other end of the spectrum, just 1 percent of Division I football players are foreign students — although Timothy F. Bryson of San Diego State, who studies sports diplomacy, argues that major American professional sports like football and basketball are trying to raise their international profiles, setting up development academies and playing games abroad. At this year's Super Bowl, the National Football League aired a two-and-a-half-minute [commercial](#) featuring gridiron stars running through the streets of Ghana to signal its global ambitions.

Bryson said the increased visibility of American professional sports could attract more international students to play on the college level. When I tagged along on a college-recruitment trip to [Africa](#) a couple of years ago, I saw admissions representatives field lots of questions about basketball scholarships from prospective students hoping to follow in the footsteps of Oscar Tshiebwe, a Congolese player at the University of Kentucky and a national college player of the year.

For athletes on top American college teams, the level of competition may be unmatched, especially in sports without semi-pro or

development leagues, Jackson said. “There isn’t an international playing experience that looks like that.”

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Upcoming Workshop

The graphic is a dark blue rectangle with white and yellow text. At the top, it says 'AUGUST 23 OR AUGUST 24' in yellow. Below that, the main title 'The Chronicle's Crash Course in Academic Leadership' is in large white font. Underneath the title, it says 'Practical Tools for the 'Admin-Curious'' in yellow. On the left side, there is a logo for 'THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION' and 'DEVER JUSTICE LLC' with a red gear icon. On the right side, there is an illustration of several yellow gears of different sizes, with a large yellow arrow pointing upwards and to the right. Inside the gears, there are small icons of people, a lightbulb, and a bar chart.

AUGUST 23 OR AUGUST 24

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Will the U.S. keep attracting international athletes?

Only about a fifth of international college athletes play in Divisions I or II, which award athletic scholarships. Still, smaller Division III colleges give students the opportunity to keep playing a sport they love, said Elizabeth Thompson, associate director of international outreach and strategic partnerships for the NCAA.

Because few other countries have sports baked into their higher-education systems, American colleges can have a special appeal abroad. “American college athletics is unique,” Thompson said. “This system doesn’t exist anywhere else in the world.”

While college coaches often rely on their own recruiting networks, the NCAA has increased its global outreach. It collaborates with sports organizations in many countries, beginning at the youth level, Thompson said, and frequently teams up with EducationUSA, an international network of college-advising centers run by the U.S. Department of State, on college fairs.

It has also worked on guides to help college athletes from abroad navigate the visa process and [adjust to studying in the United States](#).

The proposed antitrust settlement, which still faces review by a judge, could alter colleges’ role as a training ground for Olympic talent. International sports federations, Jackson said, have “a vested interest in ensuring U.S. college sports stay healthy.”

Meanwhile, members of both the [U.S. House](#) and [Senate](#) have introduced bipartisan legislation that would carve out exceptions to current visa regulations to allow college athletes from abroad to benefit from NIL deals.

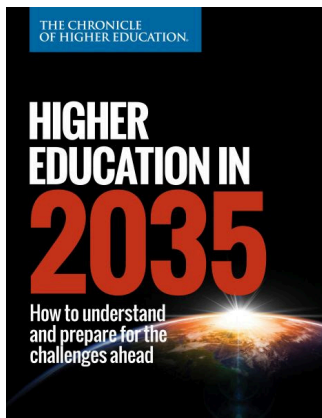
Connecticut’s U.S. senators have urged the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to begin the rulemaking process and to issue guidance to colleges and international athletes on interpreting current visa regulations. The “status quo is fundamentally unfair,” they wrote in a [letter](#) to the DHS secretary, Alejandro Mayorkas.

A spokeswoman for Sen. Richard Blumenthal, a Democrat and sponsor of the Senate bill, said he took an interest in the issue after learning that several members of the University of Connecticut's national-championship basketball teams could not get the same sponsorships and endorsements as their teammates.

One of those players, Aaliyah Edwards, is in Paris. She's among the 10 American-educated members of Canada's women's Olympic team.

Check out *The Chronicle's* [Olympics tracker](#) to see which colleges have won the most individual medals.

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College settles lawsuit alleging human trafficking

Western Iowa Tech Community College will pay a [\\$2.3-million settlement](#) to 10 Brazilian students who accused the college of recruiting them with promises of a free education and internships. Instead, they allege, they were forced into manual-labor jobs at meatpacking plants to pay tuition.

The college reached a [similar settlement](#) with students from Chile in April. President Terry Murrell has denied wrongdoing, telling Western Iowa Tech's Board of Directors that administrators had settled for financial reasons.

Keep up-to-date on DEI policies

How is your work being affected by the movement against diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts on campus? With so many bills and new policies influencing higher ed across the country, it's hard to keep track. Our new email alert saves you time in staying up-to-date. [Sign up](#) and we'll update you only when new bills or laws drop.

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Around the globe

The National Science Foundation selected the University of Washington to operate a national center for [research security](#) that will share information on risks, provide training, and act as a bridge between colleges and researchers and the federal science agency. Texas A&M University at College Station was picked to lead analyses for the new center.

A drop in academic papers co-authored by [Chinese researchers](#) and colleagues in other countries is largely due to a decline in collaborations with American scientists, according to a new study. It's

the latest evidence of the [impact of tensions](#) between the two countries on international research.

A former visiting scholar and democracy activist is [standing trial](#) in New York on charges of spying for China.

Fewer Chinese students are studying in [Canada](#).

China could make it easier for [foreign scientists](#) to live and work in the country.

Renmin University swiftly fired a professor who a graduate student said had demanded to have sex with her and had physically and verbally abused her, a sign of growing pressure on Chinese colleges to curb [sexual harassment](#).

Student leaders have been arrested in [Bangladesh](#) following [widespread protests](#).

Israel is considering [legislation](#) that would allow a government-appointed committee to order the firing of faculty members and academic staffers who have expressed “support for terror.”

Cyprus will limit the number of [foreign students](#) from outside the European Union who attend private colleges in the country.

The German Academic Exchange Service is concerned that [proposed funding cuts](#) could weaken international academic exchange.

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