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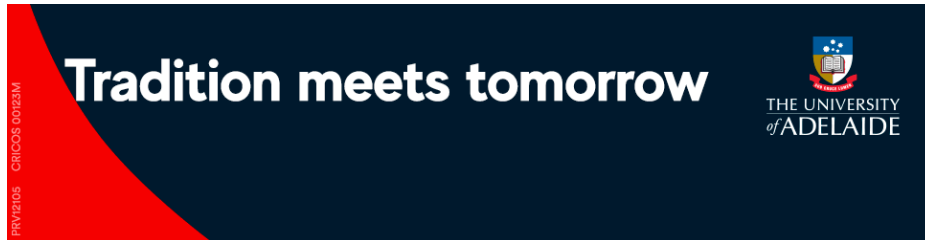
Latitudes: The U.S. relied on its reputation to attract foreign students and scientists. Now it needs a strategy.

1 message

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Latitudes

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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To remain scientifically competitive, the U.S. must take a coordinated national approach

The United States should develop a government-wide strategy to recruit and retain talented students and scientists from around the world in critical fields, according to a panel convened by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.

In a [report](#) released last week, a special committee on international-talent programs said the United States needs a coordinated national approach, or it risks ceding further ground in the global competition for research and innovation.

Unlike other countries, the U.S. does not have an overarching talent plan, and its existing policies, such as tight limits on skilled-worker visas, can work at cross-purposes.

By comparison, countries like Canada, Singapore, and South Korea make it easier for international students to stay after graduation and for highly educated immigrants to get work permits. The government of China has taken deliberate — and sometimes aggressive — steps to improve its scientific capacity at home and attract scientists and researchers from abroad. It has about 10 national programs to [recruit overseas-trained academics](#) to lead its laboratories and research programs as well as several hundred more at the provincial and municipal levels.

In part, the United States doesn't have a national strategy because it hasn't needed one, said Mark A. Barteau, a professor of chemistry at Texas A&M University and chair of the National Academies committee that compiled the report. "The U.S. has a talent program," Barteau said. "It's called graduate school."

But it's no longer realistic to assume that American higher education's reputation alone will be a sufficient [magnet](#). Among western countries, Britain and Germany now enroll about as many foreign students in science and engineering as the United States, while Canada and others are gaining ground.

The United States needs to import high-tech workers because it doesn't produce enough of its own, the panel wrote: More than a third of STEM graduates working in American research are foreign-born.

In their report, Barteau and his committee colleagues — including experts in international education, science policy, and national security — acknowledge growing concern among public officials that countries like [China](#) are taking advantage of American colleges' open research environment and say that a comprehensive strategy must guard against national-security vulnerabilities. Still, they [echo](#) other advisory panels in saying that such risks should be assessed on a case-by-case basis, holding up the now-shuttered [China Initiative](#) — a federal investigation into academic ties with China — as an example of what not to do.

Among its other recommendations, the committee urges Congress to reform immigration law, including authorizing additional green cards for applicants with expertise in critical fields, lifting some per-country visa caps, and making it easier for international STEM graduates to stay in the United States.

It also says the federal government should encourage international enrollment and strong overseas research partnerships, both with longstanding allies and with countries, such as those in the Global South, that are trying to build up their educational and scientific infrastructures. And colleges, scientific associations, and industry groups should work to educate policymakers on the economic and national-security value of foreign talent, the importance of open research, and existing research-security issues, the report says.

The report also calls for more vigorous efforts to create a larger pool of Americans with STEM expertise, including eliminating barriers that keep students from underrepresented groups from studying science, and advocates for the passage of legislation modeled on the National Defense Education Act, the 1958 law that invested in American education to meet national-security needs in science and technology.

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OPT update includes guidance on online education, study abroad

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has released [new guidance](#) on eligibility for optional practical training, the popular work program for international graduates of American colleges.

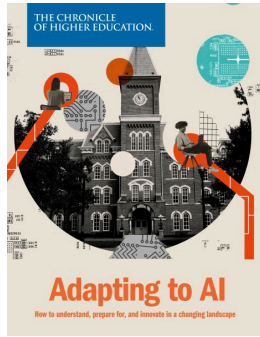
The policy memo clarifies that students can count one online course, or up to three online credits, per term toward study requirements for the program, which is also known as OPT. Under the terms of their visas, international students must take most of their coursework in person, but the update gives them important flexibility after many colleges have continued to embrace [online and hybrid courses](#) since the pandemic.

The guidance also says students are permitted to transfer between colleges that are approved to enroll foreign students, both at the same academic level or between degree programs. In addition to the simplified transfer process, the department will allow students who earn associate's degrees to qualify for OPT, not just those who earn bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degrees.

International students who study abroad for five months or less will keep an active record in the federal student-visa database. That makes it easier for them to return to the United States without having to reapply for visa documents.

Finally, the updated guidelines define the window of time during which students in high-demand science and technology fields can file paperwork to extend their work authorization from one year to three years. The guidance also provides for a 60-day grace period during which students can continue their education or change their visa status to stay in the United States after they complete OPT.

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Unrest in Bangladesh may make it more difficult for students to get U.S. visas

Some Bangladeshi students may have to defer their studies after unrest caused the U.S. embassy in Dhaka, the capital, to [suspend consular services](#).

The embassy has been closed or partially closed for much of July and August, peak student-visa season. Some 4,000 visa appointments, including 1,400 for student visas, were canceled.

On its website, the embassy said applicants with immediate departure dates could request expedited visa interviews and that there were limited appointments for Bangladeshi students at the U.S. embassy in Kolkata, India. However, it acknowledged that some students may miss the start of the fall semester.

About 13,500 [students from Bangladesh](#) studied on American campuses in the 2022-23 academic year, the 13th-largest group of foreign students in the United States.

The State Department has not said when it will resume normal operations in Bangladesh. Weeks of protests by students and others over the summer led to the [resignation](#) of the country's longtime prime minister last month.

New rules published for foreign-language and international-studies centers

The U.S. Department of Education has published [new rules](#) for National Resource Centers despite concerns from some stakeholders about a requirement that the foreign-language and international-studies hubs have a geographical focus.

During a public-comment period earlier this year, there was some criticism that the proposed geographic requirement could undermine the global nature of the centers and impede their ability to quickly start programming in response to world crises. In its response, published in the *Federal Register*, the department said there is sufficient flexibility in the rules to allow colleges to define geographic region, whether as a country, a traditional world region, or other area.

The federal government funds the campus-based centers to help improve American capacity in world languages and in area and international studies.

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Around the globe

A 45-year-old pact between the United States and China on [scientific cooperation](#) has expired. The agreement was twice extended over the last year, but it faced opposition from American officials concerned about national-security risks.

Congressional Republicans object to a U.S. Department of Education plan to open up several federal programs for low-income students to those who are [undocumented](#).

Texas State University has been approved to open a branch campus in [Mexico](#).

A Northwestern University professor who died by suicide in July was allegedly under investigation for undisclosed China ties, the *South China Morning Post* [reported](#).

A group opposed to expanded immigration is using the case of an Indian student who faked his academic record to win a full scholarship at Lehigh University to argue for the need to [root out fraud](#) in the student-visa system.

Australia is the latest country to [announce](#) that it will [limit](#) new international students.

New Zealand will double [student-visa fees](#) beginning in October.

Britain's newly elected Labor government won't reverse [student-visa restrictions](#) put in place by its Conservative predecessor.

Canada seeks to attract more [Francophone students](#) by offering a direct path to permanent residency.

Ontario's provincial government is banning [new international activities](#) for public colleges.

Belarus's universities must be "whipped into shape," the country's president, Aleksandr Lukashenko, told higher-education leaders.

The Russian government will cut spending on [research](#) by 25 percent over the next two years.

Myanmar has experienced a brain drain since a military coup three years ago. [This university lecturer](#) left the country after being fired from his job and losing his research funding.

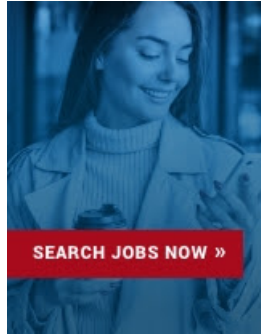
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