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Latitudes: Is foreign-language study facing an enrollment cliff?

1 message

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Latitudes

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Language majors at U. of Connecticut could be on the chopping block

Another public flagship could eliminate foreign-language majors as part of a review of low-enrollment programs. With the exception of Spanish, every program in the University of Connecticut's literatures, cultures, and languages department is under review.

UConn's situation mirrors that of [West Virginia University](#), which a year ago shuttered 28 academic programs and eliminated 143 faculty positions, including its department of world languages, literatures, and linguistics. WVU no longer offers any foreign-language majors, although students can take [elective courses](#) and pursue a few minors.

In both cases, budget shortfalls drove the evaluation process.

Some 70 programs at UConn's flagship campus in Storrs are under review because fewer than 100 students completed majors over the past five years. College deans will have until November 1 to recommend the suspension, closure, or continuation of these programs.

In a [letter](#) to campus, President Radenka Maric and Provost Anne D'Alleva called the review "common sense academic housekeeping" and said the process was not targeting the humanities. Philosophy, animal science, and women's, gender, and sexuality studies are among other majors up for review.

"It is critical that the university regularly apply a healthy level of scrutiny to our own operations and make data-informed decisions about them," Maric and D'Alleva wrote.

Stephanie Reitz, a university spokesperson, [told](#) my colleague Amanda Friedman that the university sees language study as "essential to our strong identity as a global university. However, we also know that students are turning away from language study all around the country, and low enrollment in those areas is an issue beyond UConn."

A [report](#) released last fall by the Modern Language Association found that enrollments in foreign-language courses at American colleges tumbled nearly 17 percent between the fall of 2016 and the fall of 2021, the largest decline in the six decades the organization has been tracking foreign-language study.

All but three of the 15 most commonly studied languages experienced enrollment decreases, the MLA found. Since peaking in 2009, foreign-language enrollments have deteriorated by almost 30 percent, a reversal of three previous decades of growth.

Campus leaders are not the only ones driving cutbacks. The U.S. Department of Defense earlier this year shut down a number of its [language flagship programs](#), which provide intensive critical-languages instruction, including all but one Chinese-language program at colleges west of the Mississippi River.

The reductions in foreign-language instruction have led to alarm that students may lose out on gaining important communication skills that make them more employable as well as exposure to world cultures. Colleges like UConn also play a critical role in training language teachers for the public schools.

"I have administrators and principals that are emailing me regularly asking, 'Do you have a Spanish teacher? Do you have a French teacher?' And I have to say no, because of low enrollment," Michelle Back, an associate professor of world-languages education, told the [Hartford Courant](#).

Faculty members in the languages department will consider whether to continue with the review process or to consolidate the department's nine programs into one or two majors.

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New ranking assesses international-student employability

A [new college ranking](#) is rating American institutions on career outcomes for international students.

San Jose State University, in Silicon Valley, tops the list released by F-1 Hire, a company that works to connect international students, who study on F-1 visas, with employment opportunities. Other universities in the top five include Carnegie Mellon, Stanford, Princeton, and Central Michigan.

An institution's ranking is based on four factors: average salary, the ratio of salary to tuition, the total number of applicants for permanent residency over the past 10 years, and the ratio of total number of international students to number of permanent-residency applicants.

The survey, which is based on data collected by the federal

government, includes 274 colleges that enrolled at least 500 foreign students in 2023.

There has been growing attention to how well colleges help international graduates, who face more restrictions than their American classmates, [navigate the path to a career](#). But with so many college rankings out there, I asked Andrew Chen, chief executive of F-1 Hire, why create another one. Our exchange has been edited for length and clarity.

Who is the audience for this ranking, and how do you hope they will use your findings?

This ranking is a consumer guide for international students to make education choices in the United States for one of their most significant lifetime investments. I think the main audience is economic-driven international-education seekers.

Your list of highly rated colleges includes Ivy League universities as well as public, often technically focused, colleges. What do you think explains that mix?

Institutions like Stanford, Princeton, and Harvard, which was No. 9, feature highly selective admissions, which significantly improved their career outcomes.

Technically focused universities perform better in this ranking for two reasons: More than 70 percent of U.S. H1-Bs [skilled-worker visas] are issued to STEM majors. And the [STEM OPT extension policy](#) [which allows STEM graduates to stay and work for up to three years] gives international STEM graduates more career opportunities than their non-STEM peers.

The highly ranked colleges are diverse. Unlike trying to win a Nobel Prize, any college can make a difference in the career outcomes of its international students. It is not too late to improve.

Did any of the top ranked institutions surprise you?

I didn't expect 14 out of the top 25 to be R-1 AAU [elite, research-intensive] universities. Those fine American universities are excellent in both academic and career outcomes because of their overall performance, abundant resources, and quality of students.

Four out of the top 10 are regional public universities because of their lower tuition, proximity to major industries, and career-focused

services to their students.

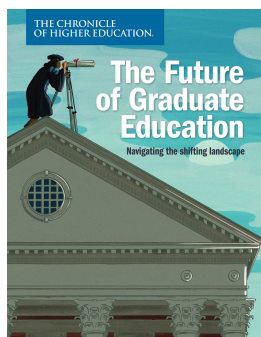
The metrics you've included reflect outcomes for international students who stay in the United States to work, but many hope an American degree will give them an [employability edge](#) in their home countries. Why focus only on students who seek to stay?

Trustworthy career-outcome data sources are very limited. Also, the percentage of international students who want to stay in the United States should be similar across different universities. Unifying the home-country career data across different universities will be tough.

While the primary audience for your ranking is students, what do you hope colleges will take away from your analysis?

American universities, especially public institutions, understand each international student's economic value is several times that of a domestic student. Therefore, the primary concern of international students, career outcomes, should be addressed as a priority. More instant data, enhanced job-hunting processes, and better tools are necessary for the overloaded career advisers and their eager international students.

From the Chronicle Store



The Future of Graduate Education

Graduate education has enjoyed a jump in enrollment over the past five years, but it faces a host of challenges. [Order this report](#) for insights on the opportunities and pitfalls that graduate-program administrators must navigate.

Some graduate business programs hit with declining interest from abroad

International applications to American graduate programs in business were flat this year, a cautionary sign for programs that have come to

heavily rely on enrollments from abroad.

A [report](#) released today by the Graduate Management Admission Council found that international applications increased by an anemic 1 percent, while domestic interest was up by 19 percent. Overall, applications increased by 8 percent.

That's a reversal from recent years, especially following the pandemic, when [strong international growth](#) offset declining applications from Americans to business schools and other graduate programs.

Some programs, such as accounting and full-time M.B.A.s, experienced increases in both overseas and domestic applicants in the most recent GMAC figures, but other specialized programs, like business analytics, saw greater international declines. Because of their dependence on overseas enrollments, such programs are "susceptible to shocks in the international flow of students," the report noted.

Britain and Canada had especially steep declines in applicants from abroad.

Globally, in-country applications to graduate business programs drove a 12 percent increase in total applications.

Events this week

Join the **Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration this Thursday, October 24, at 2 p.m. ET for a webinar on Supporting Immigrant-Origin Students in Higher Education.**

The online event will highlight new research on the growing presence of first- and second-generation immigrant students at American colleges. I'll be moderating a discussion with campus leaders and experts about immigrant students and federal policy, institutional inclusion, and postsecondary attainment and work-force development. [Register here.](#)

I'll be speaking on a **plenary panel on the power and impact of global learning as part of the American Association of Colleges and Universities' [conference on global learning](#)** in Washington, D.C. The session will also be on Thursday, October 24, at 5:30 p.m.

ET. If you'll be at the conference, please join me and my co-panelists for a lively discussion.

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Around the globe

The Institute of International Education received “[transformational](#)” gifts of \$33 million to aid its work in responding to higher-education crises around the globe.

NAFSA: Association of International Educators is asking the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to [clarify](#) that foreign students who study abroad for five months or more will remain in active visa status.

The Department of Homeland Security will grant emergency-employment authorization to students affected by the humanitarian crisis in [Lebanon](#) to allow them to work more hours and take fewer courses than is typically permitted under visa rules. The special waiver will be in effect until January 2026.

Seventy percent of international students have a [favorable view](#) of Vice President Kamala Harris, a higher approval rating than of President Biden, whom Harris replaced as the Democratic presidential nominee. Still, many students said the outcome of November's election was unlikely to influence their decision to study in the United States.

It is “more critical than ever” for American colleges to diversify their international enrollments, says a [white paper](#) that offers strategies for broadening recruitment.

Congressional Republicans accused [Harvard University](#) of placing students who protested a campus speech by the Chinese ambassador to the United States on disciplinary probation while taking no action against a counter-protester who is said to have assaulted them.

Lawmakers also questioned why Gov. Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan, a Democrat, has not pressed the University of Michigan to [cut ties](#) with Chinese partners after several of the college's former students were charged with spying on a National Guard facility.

A new mentoring program announced by the [Indian embassy](#) in Washington, D.C., will connect students and researchers from Indian institutions with Indian-origin faculty members at top American colleges.

International students in Canada are protesting the government's decision to end a policy that allowed them to [extend post-graduate work permits](#).

Ontario universities forecast losses of more than \$900 million Canadian over the next two years because of an [international-student cap](#).

Rumored plans to end [free higher education](#) led to student demonstrations in Estonia.

A new report is calling for greater support for and investment in the [humanities worldwide](#), including defending language study, preserving archives, and safeguarding freedom of inquiry.

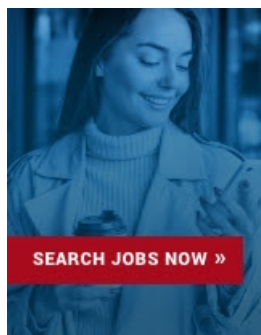
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