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Latitudes: Immigrant-origin students are the biggest drivers of U.S. college-enrollment growth

1 message

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Latitudes

THE CHRONICLE
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Immigration fuels numbers, diversity at American colleges

Immigrant-origin students are the fastest-growing group of students on American campuses, accounting for 32 percent of all higher-education enrollments.

American colleges enrolled 5.9 million immigrant-origin students, who are first- and second-generation immigrants — those born abroad and those born in the United States to one or more immigrant parents — in 2022. That's up from 5.3 million, or 28 percent of all enrollments, four years earlier.

In fact, over the past two decades, immigrant-origin students have driven 90 percent of domestic-enrollment growth, according to an [analysis](#) from the Migration Policy Institute and the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration.

International students on student visas are not counted as immigrant-origin students.

The findings underscore the increasing importance of first- and second-generation immigrants both to college enrollments and to the American work force. “These students are integral to the mission of higher education and to the future of our national economy,” the analysis concludes.

As colleges reel from the impact of the 2023 [U.S. Supreme Court decision](#) banning race-conscious admissions and state-level efforts to [limit diversity, equity, and inclusion programming and policies](#), such students can be a source of diversity on campus. Eighty percent of immigrant-origin students identify as students of color, while about 30 percent of American-born domestic students do.

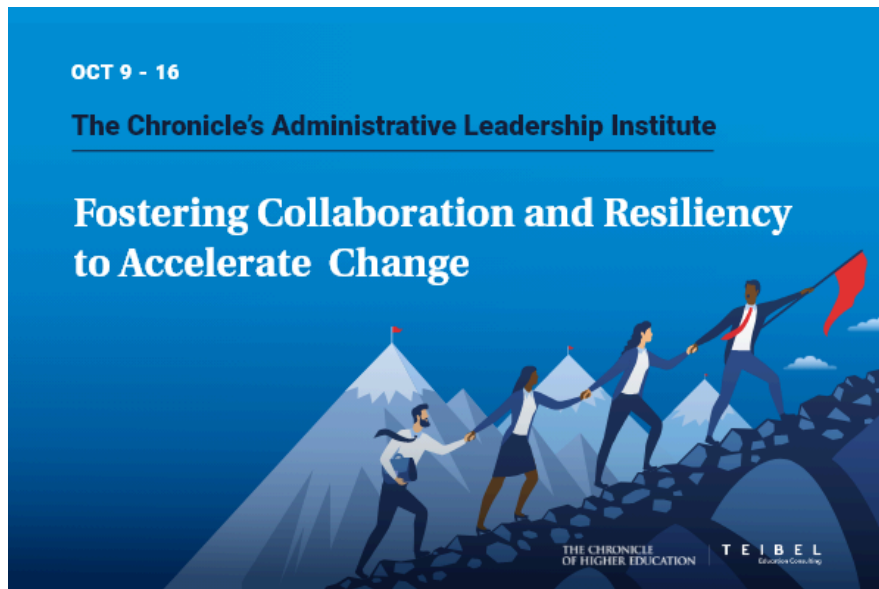
One third of first-generation immigrant students are studying at the graduate or professional level, compared to about 20 percent of domestic students.

Immigrant-origin students account for at least a fifth of higher-education enrollments in 23 states and the District of Columbia. Forty percent or more of students in California, New York, Florida, New Jersey, Minnesota, and Nevada are first- or second-generation immigrants.

Immigration flows into the United States declined over the same period that college enrollments of immigration-origin students increased. First- and second-generation immigration students may be affected by federal and state policies, such as [glitches](#) in the rollout of changes to federal student aid felt disproportionately by mixed-status families and ongoing [legal challenges](#) to a government program that provides legal protections to undocumented students.

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Stanford professors oppose a return of the China Initiative

More than 165 Stanford University professors are speaking out against efforts to revive a federal investigation of academic ties to China.

Faculty members signed a [letter](#) to congressional leaders to “strongly oppose” legislative efforts to reinstate the China Initiative. The U.S. House has [passed](#) a measure to bring back the Trump-era inquiry, which was ended in February 2022. Lawmakers also included language directing the U.S. Department of Justice to restart the probe in a government-spending bill. Both proposals require Senate approval.

Supporters of the House proposals have criticized the Biden administration’s decision to end the China Initiative as “unwise” and “deeply irresponsible.” During a [recent debate](#), one Republican congressman called Chinese influence and theft of intellectual property “the greatest threat of our lifetime.”

In their letter, the Stanford professors said they understood the need to stop espionage and illicit technology transfer. But they said the government's approach under the China Initiative was "much more harmful than constructive," discouraging Chinese graduate students from coming to the United States, chilling international research partnerships, and causing some Chinese-born scholars to leave American colleges. These developments undercut American science and threaten its research competitiveness, they said.

"Actions that substantially discourage the flow of exceptional talent to our country, and discourage those that are here from remaining, risk far greater damage than any plausible loss due to espionage or intellectual property theft," the professors wrote.

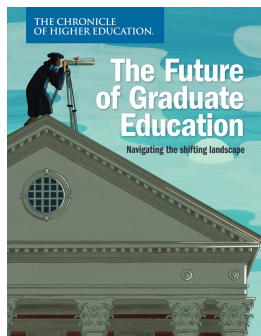
Gisela Kusakawa, executive director of the Asian American Scholar Forum, said it was important for professors and researchers to voice their concerns because they see firsthand the importance of international collaboration — and the [chilling effect](#) of the initial federal inquiry.

The group has worked to have policymakers hear directly from scientists, including those who were subject to [failed investigations under the China Initiative](#), such as Gang Chen, a physics professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Anming Hu, a professor of mechanical engineering at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. (Charges were dropped against Chen, and a judge [acquitted](#) Hu, saying prosecutors had failed to make their case.)

Kusakawa said she encouraged faculty members at other colleges to also weigh in. "By speaking out, these scholars can help shape policies that safeguard the academic landscape for future generations," she said,

Steven A. Kivelson, a professor of physics who spearheaded the drafting of the Stanford letter, said he has worked with "brilliant" graduate students, postdocs, visiting scholars, and longtime research partners from China. "The China Initiative was significantly harmful to such collaborations, without having any clear positive implications for national-security issues," he wrote in an email to *The Chronicle*. "There are few policy matters that seem so clear-cut to me as that the China Initiative should not be revived."

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.

Globally, there were nearly 400 attacks on higher education over the last year

Attacks on higher education affect students and professors in closed, authoritarian societies — and in more open, democratic countries.

An [annual report](#) from Scholars at Risk, an international network that advocates for and protects threatened scholars, documents 391 attacks on higher education in 51 countries between June 2023 and July 2024.

Violent conflict in Palestine, Sudan, and Ukraine has destroyed campuses and wrecked higher-education systems. In Russia, scholars who spoke out against government policy or conducted research that differed from official narratives have been fired, and [international academic collaboration has been cut off](#). Iran continues to detain those who participated in [pro-democracy protests](#). The Taliban has [prevented women from studying](#) in Afghanistan. China's Communist Party has taken more direct administrative control of universities at home and surveilled students abroad.

But higher education in the United States is not immune, Scholars at Risk said. Among concerning developments in this country, the report notes, are state legislative proposals to restrict tenure, control college curricula, and eliminate diversity programming. Following campus unrest over the Israel-Hamas war, some institutions called police on protesters and limited free expression on campus, the report said.

Presidential elections may not affect foreign students' interest in the U.S.

More than half of prospective international students said the outcome of November's presidential contest would not affect their decision to study in the United States.

Fifty-four percent of those [surveyed](#) by IDP Education, a company focused on international-student recruitment, said the election would "not at all" influence their choices. Thirty-five percent of respondents said it could have an impact — although most said only slightly.

The remaining students said they were unsure of the election's impact.

Among those who said election outcomes could sway their choices, 57 percent said they would prefer to study in the United States if Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic nominee, wins in November.

These findings differ significantly from a similar survey after the 2020 presidential election, when two-thirds of all respondents said they were more likely to come here after Joe Biden defeated Donald Trump. The latest IDP results [echo other recent polling](#) that suggests the influence of American politics on prospective foreign students may be waning.

It's also possible that [increasingly restrictive policy changes](#) affecting international students in other major destination countries, such as Australia, Britain, and Canada, may make the United States more appealing, regardless of election outcomes.

The IDP survey included 916 prospective students, the largest numbers of whom were from India and China.

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Around the globe

A lawsuit accuses the University of California system of discriminating against undocumented students by not considering them for [campus jobs](#). Gov. Gavin Newsom [recently vetoed a bill](#) that would have allowed undocumented students to work at the state's public colleges, saying it created too many legal risks for colleges and students themselves.

Clarifications to student-visa policy could have "[unintended consequences](#)" for international students studying abroad for more than five months.

A Colombian student at the University of South Florida said he [lost his visa](#) and was forced to leave the country after being suspended during campus protests against Israel.

China's only branch campus in Israel has [closed](#) after enrollments declined because of the war with Hamas.

Five Chinese graduates from the University of Michigan have been charged as part of a [federal countersurveillance investigation](#).

The U.S. embassy in India has added 250,000 appointments for visa applicants to [meet demand from international students](#) and other travelers.

Hungary hopes to regain [European research funding](#) by banning politicians and elected officials from college governing bodies.

Students in the United States from Bangladesh, Kenya, Lebanon, Venezuela, and Israel and the Palestinian territories are eligible to apply to an [emergency-assistance fund](#).

MIT has displaced Stanford as the top American college in a new [global higher-education ranking](#).

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