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**Daily Briefing: More international students are staying in the U.S.**

1 message

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# Daily Briefing

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Good morning, and welcome to **Tuesday, November 19**. Rick Seltzer wrote today's Briefing. Julia Piper compiled Comings and Goings. Get in touch: [dailybriefing@chronicle.com](mailto:dailybriefing@chronicle.com).

## International enrollment's unsteady growth

Recent growth in international enrollment may be on shaky footing just as a Republican party that's hostile to immigration is about to sweep into power in Washington, D.C. Our Karin Fischer [took a look at the latest data](#).

**International enrollment hit an all-time high last year.** Almost 1.13 million foreign students studied in the United States in 2023-24, up 7 percent from the year before, according to the annual [Open Doors](#)

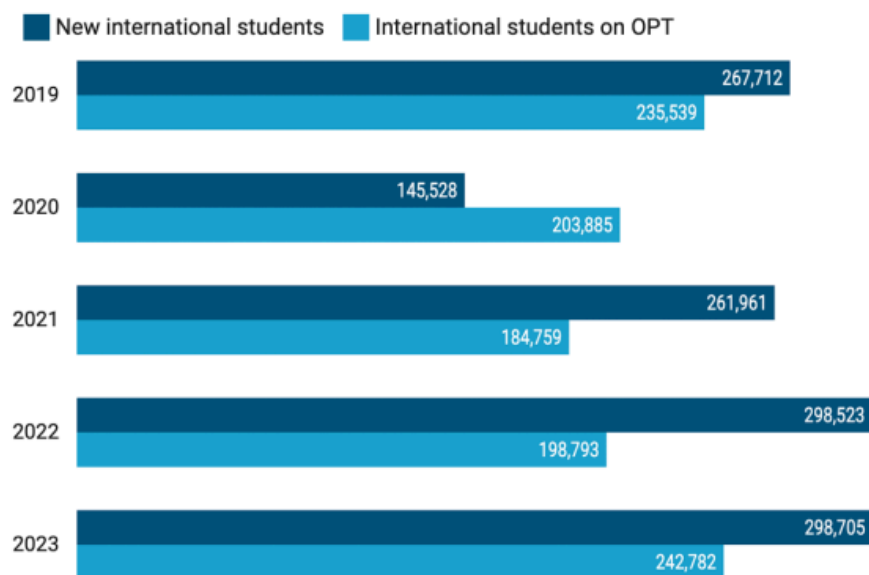
[census](#). That eclipsed a previous high-water mark of nearly 1.1 million in 2018-19.

**But that wasn't because a larger number of new students traveled to U.S. shores.** About 299,000 new international students enrolled in 2023-24, in line with the previous year.

- **American colleges may have “finally cycled through” demand that accumulated during the pandemic**, according to Mirka Martel, head of research, evaluation, and learning for the Institute of International Education.

**Instead, more students who were already here pursued further training.** Those taking part in a program known as optional practical training, or OPT, can stay in the United States on student visas for up to three years as they do work that's considered a key part of their education.

- **OPT enrollment spiked by 22 percent** to 242,782 last year. That eclipsed levels seen before the pandemic.



**OPT has drawn criticism as a “back door visa.”** In 2022, Sen. Chuck Grassley, a Republican, suggested colleges were trying to classify as OPT various programs that didn't meet the original intent of plugging skilled-worker shortages.

**And other data points raise questions about whether international enrollment can keep growing:**

- **Overall enrollment of graduate students moderated** after booming in the two prior years, the Open Doors data show. International graduate

enrollment was up 8 percent in 2023-24 after spiking by 21 percent and 17 percent in the two previous years, respectively.

- **The number of student visas issued fell by 12.5 percent** from May to August of this year, [according to a recent \*Chronicle\* analysis](#). Some officials have said American consulates were issuing more visa denials.
- **New enrollments of international students *this fall* fell by 5 percent**, according to another survey of 690 colleges.

**The bigger picture:** Colleges that count on international students as a source of intellectual diversity and full-pay students are watching closely to see if the second Trump administration will try to [choke off](#) student visas or [welcome more](#) highly skilled students. If it's the former, programs like OPT could be prime candidates for scrutiny.

 **For the full story, read the latest Latitudes newsletter: [Foreign enrollments at U.S. colleges hit a new high. It's not due to an influx of new students.](#)**

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## Quick hits

- **Top colleges haven't improved their economic diversity:** The overall college-going population skewed less wealthy over the century ending in 2013, but 65 highly selective colleges did not enroll a larger share of low-income students, [according to](#) a new working paper that's yet to be peer reviewed. Those institutions did, however, increase the racial and geographic diversity of their student bodies, [the paper found](#). That suggests the “changes in racial and geographic diversity have all taken place within the middle and upper portions of the parental income distribution.” (*The Chronicle*, National Bureau of Economic Research)