



Dale Gough <amadorsapo@gmail.com>

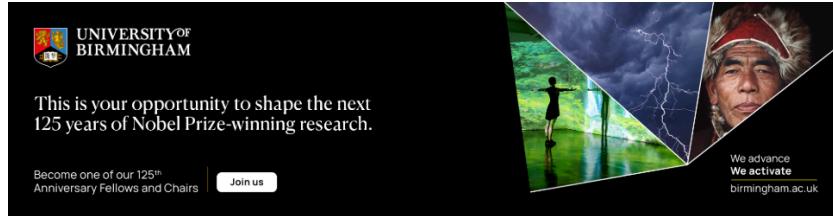
**Latitudes: Texas is the latest state to police overseas academic ties**

1 message

**Karin Fischer** <newsletter@newsletter.chronicle.com>  
Reply-To: newsletter@newsletter.chronicle.com  
To: amadorsapo@gmail.com

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# Latitudes

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## Texas orders restrictions on colleges’ ties to China and other “adversarial” countries

Texas is the latest state to impose [new restrictions and security requirements on colleges’ international work](#), including potentially barring travel to China for faculty research and student recruitment.

The state’s governor, Greg Abbott, a Republican, issued a pre-Thanksgiving executive order focused on safeguarding public agencies, including higher-education institutions, from the influence of the Chinese government and the Chinese Communist Party. There are concerns that the [directive](#) could hobble academic engagement between Texas colleges and a country that remains a major source of international students and a critical research partner.

Under the order, public employees cannot accept gifts from or travel in a professional capacity to countries included on a [U.S. Department of Commerce list](#) of foreign governments “engaged in a long-term pattern or serious instances of conduct significantly adverse to the national security of the United States.” In addition to China, countries

designated as foreign adversaries are Cuba, Iran, North Korea, and Russia.

Colleges and other agencies will have to create policies for employees to report personal travel to such countries, including filing updates after returning from their trips.

The order will also prohibit colleges and agencies from entering into or renewing contracts with companies that are owned or controlled by regulatory bodies in risky countries and mandate stricter background checks for public employees or contractors who work with critical infrastructure.

Colleges would be required to submit annual reports disclosing gifts and contacts from overseas sources to state authorities. And faculty and staff members would be forbidden from taking part in talent-recruitment plans like China's Thousand Talents program, which offers visiting appointments and research stipends to foreign scholars.

The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, or FIRE, criticized the order's wording as "unclear and open to interpretation." It could be "deeply damaging" to free speech and academic freedom in Texas and send a message to professors that the state government is "surveilling them, even in their free time," Sarah McLaughlin, a FIRE senior scholar, wrote in a [blog post](#). She called on Abbott to clarify whether the order is intended to be a blanket ban on professional travel to China and other foreign-adversary countries.

"This sounds more like the type of measure that would be imposed by China, not about China," McLaughlin wrote.

Abbott's office did not respond to questions about the impact of the order or higher-education-specific security concerns.

Texas isn't the first state to take actions to get tough with China. [Florida](#) has also passed laws mandating public colleges to report foreign funding and restricting research and partnerships with "countries of concern."

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## Government reverses “troublesome” study-abroad policy

The U.S. government has done a 180 on a recent revision to guidance that would have prevented international students studying abroad for more than five months to remain in active visa status.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security made a “technical correction” last week to its policy manual, removing language that said foreign students studying overseas for five months or longer could not remain enrolled at their American colleges and would have to reapply for a student-visa document known as a form I-20 to return to the United States.

NAFSA: Association of International Educators noted the update to the “troublesome” education-abroad provision in an [online post](#). The manual now directs those seeking information about study-abroad requirements to a government [homepage](#) with regulatory information for holders of student, or F-1, visas.

While the homepage does not have specific information about study abroad, the site elsewhere contains resources that “establish and

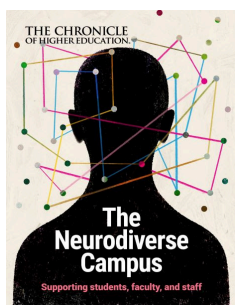
support the long-standing understanding” that foreign students on long-term overseas study remain on active F-1 visas, NAFSA said.

The organization had [written](#) to federal officials asking for a clarification to August guidance so that international students could “continue to benefit from these invaluable global learning opportunities without having to suffer new and unnecessary immigration consequences.” Without changes, NAFSA warned, there were questions about “whether certain education-abroad programs for international students remain viable.”

The summertime revision could have also jeopardized students’ participation in optional practical training, or OPT, a program that allows them to temporarily remain in the United States after graduation to work.

The earlier policy memo had spelled out [additional rules for OPT](#), including permitting students to count one online course per term toward visa requirements.

#### From the Chronicle Store



### The Neurodiverse Campus

Each year tens of thousands of students with diagnoses of neurodivergence graduate from high school. Yet many neurodivergent students remain invisible or undersupported on college campuses. [Order this report](#) to learn how colleges can strengthen their support for neurodivergent students, faculty, and staff.

## A red flag for foreign enrollments?

Growth in the number of domestic applicants is outpacing that of international applicants for the first time in five years, according to early data for this year’s admissions cycle.

The number of prospective American students submitting applications through the Common App [increased by 7 percent](#), to almost 825,000, according to data collected through November 1. Meanwhile, applications from overseas rose by 5 percent, to nearly 80,000.

While preliminary, the findings could be another warning sign for international enrollments. New overseas enrollments were [flat](#) in

2023-24, and student-visa issuances this fall [dropped](#) by more than 12 percent.

In addition, the Common App data suggest that rapid growth from [Africa](#) could be stalling, with applicants from there down by 9 percent. The data reflect applications to 863 colleges that have participated continuously since 2020.

Meanwhile, the bond-rating agency Fitch Ratings cited uncertainty in international enrollment, in part, in its “[deteriorating outlook](#)” for American higher education. While one of the recent bright spots for American colleges, student interest from abroad is “fragile” because it “remains highly susceptible to unfavorable shifts in both geopolitical sentiment and policy,” said Emily Wadhvani, a senior director for the rating agency.

## **Colleges advise students to return before possible travel ban**

Some colleges are warning international students to return to the United States from holiday travel before President-elect Donald J. Trump takes office in January.

The [University of Massachusetts at Amherst](#) and [Wesleyan University](#) are among institutions advising students traveling abroad to be back before inauguration day, January 20. That’s because of concern that Trump could reinstate his first-term prohibition on the entry of travelers from a half-dozen predominantly Muslim countries. The 2017 travel ban caught higher education flat-footed, [stranding](#) some students and scholars overseas.

Also, could students’ federal financial-aid paperwork put undocumented family members at risk? The National College Attainment Network is [raising concerns](#) that data collected as part of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid could be used by the incoming Trump administration in its promised mass deportations.

What sort of guidance is your college giving [international, undocumented, and immigrant students and researchers](#)? *The Chronicle* is tracking Trump’s [potential impact on higher ed](#). Email me at [karin.fischer@chronicle.com](mailto:karin.fischer@chronicle.com) or connect with me on [X](#) or [LinkedIn](#).

## Around the globe

**The U.S. government will extend** emergency relief for [Lebanese students](#) on F-1 visas who are experiencing severe economic hardship because of a crisis at home, allowing them to work more hours and take a reduced course load.

**A proposed bill would cut** federal financial aid to colleges that [divest from Israel](#).

**Students and faculty members said the University of Chicago** is backing out of a commitment to [host scholars affected by the conflict in Gaza](#), made as part of negotiations in response to campus protests over the Israel-Hamas war.

**Students and employees at Texas A&M University's** branch campus in Qatar are facing [uncertainty](#) after an abrupt decision earlier this year to [close the Persian Gulf outpost](#).

**Iranian diplomats complained** that Russian police used [excessive force](#) to break up a dispute between foreign students.

**A former law professor was sentenced** to 10 years in prison for leading [pro-democracy protests](#) in Hong Kong.

**The United States has more** highly cited researchers than any other country, but the number of top scientists in [China](#) is soaring.

**Professors in South Korea are joining** in calls for the [resignation](#) of the country's president, Yoon Suk Yeol, because of crises and missteps, including cuts to research spending.

**Plans to cap student visas** to [Australia](#) have stalled amid political opposition.

**Colleges located outside major English-speaking countries have** [nearly doubled](#) the number of academic programs offered in English since 2019.

**In addition to higher tuition rates** and lack of eligibility for most forms of financial aid, international students can face "hidden" expenses when studying in America, including employment restrictions, opportunity costs, and higher living expenses, according to a [new report](#).

**UPCOMING WEBINAR:** In a competitive global environment, American colleges must ensure that international students have positive experiences on campus to keep enrollment levels steady. Join *The Chronicle* on December 11 at 2 p.m. E.T. for a discussion on the