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Latitudes: As Trump nears return, colleges' foreign ties draw more heat from Congress

1 message

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Latitudes

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Lawmakers increase oversight of international-academic partnerships

Donald J. Trump's return to the White House has triggered concerns that his hawkish stance toward China could constrain international academic ties.

But an [announcement](#) late last week by the University of Michigan that it would end a longstanding partnership with a Chinese university after a U.S. House committee raised questions underscores the impact Congress has been having on higher education's engagement with China — with or without Trump.

Michigan's president, Santa J. Ono, said the university would close a joint institute focused on engineering education it has run for two decades with Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

While Michigan will continue to work with universities around the world, "we must also prioritize our commitment to national security," Ono said, adding that the decision was made after "discussions with U.S. congressional leadership" as well as internal stakeholders.

In October, Rep. John Moolenaar, a Michigan Republican and chairman of the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, sent Ono a [letter](#), urging him to shut down the institute because of Shanghai Jiao Tong's ties to the Chinese military and intelligence services.

Ono is not the first college leader to receive a letter from Moolenaar's committee — nor the first to announce an overseas closure. In the past year, both the [Georgia Institute of Technology](#) and the University of California at Berkeley said they would shutter joint institutes with Chinese universities.

In a [report](#) released in September, the select committee, along with the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, charged that American academic collaboration has aided Chinese advancement in critical areas like artificial intelligence, hypersonic weapons, and semiconductor technology. (Michigan has said its institute offered dual-degree programs, academic exchanges, and study-abroad opportunities.)

In a [statement](#), Moolenaar called the closure “the right decision” and said that “more of our nation's universities should follow [Michigan's] action.”

The congressional inquiries into Michigan and other institutions highlight how, in Trump's four-year absence from power, Congress has continued scrutiny of American colleges' relationships with China. Lawmakers have approved new disclosure requirements for foreign funds to colleges and barred researchers who receive federal grants from taking part in “malign” talent-recruitment plans like China's Thousand Talents program, which offers visiting appointments and research stipends to foreign scholars. House members have repeatedly attempted to revive the China Initiative, a far-reaching investigation of academic and economic espionage that was started during the first Trump administration and ended under President Biden.

Before leaving town at the end of last year, Congress approved legislation to block the Department of Defense from funding fundamental research collaboration between American colleges and overseas universities deemed by the government to pose a risk of inappropriate technology transfer, most of which are in China or Russia. The measure is an expansion of an earlier prohibition against defense grants going to colleges that host Confucius Institutes, the language and cultural centers supported by the Chinese government.

Trump has [cast a long shadow](#) over international education. In addition to the China Initiative, he put in place a number of policies during his first term that chilled engagement with China, including

Gmail - Latitudes: As Trump nears return, colleges' foreign ties draw more heat from Congress restricting visas for some Chinese graduate students and canceling the flagship Fulbright program to mainland China and Hong Kong.

Still, when it comes to international-education policy, particularly on China, Trump isn't the only one to watch.

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Rule to expand college-prep programs to noncitizens withdrawn

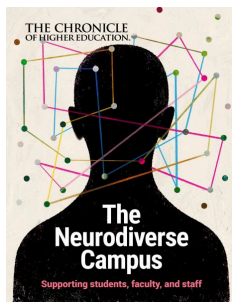
The Biden administration has withdrawn a [rule](#) that would have opened up some federal college-preparatory programs to undocumented and other immigrant students.

The U.S. Department of Education had proposed allowing students at American high schools to participate in three programs for first-generation and other disadvantaged students, Upward Bound, Talent

Search, and Educational Opportunity Centers, regardless of their immigration status.

But in a [177-page document](#), mainly of rules that received final approval, the government scrapped the regulation, saying that it was “too narrow” and should have allowed noncitizen participation in other similar federal programs. Permitting participation in only three programs could also add to schools’ immigration burden, the withdrawal notice said.

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A call to look after international students and scholars

On the day after the November election, Christina W. Yao, an associate professor of education at the University of South Carolina, made a point of checking in on one of her graduate students who is from overseas.

Yao’s instincts were right. The student, who is working with her on a National Science Foundation grant, was worried about the election outcomes. “Am I going to have enough money to finish my degree?” the student asked Yao.

There is apprehension that Trump, in a second term, could put new restrictions on visas, including [reinstating a disruptive travel ban](#) from his first presidency. Likewise, there is concern that federal research funding could be on the chopping block in the new administration. For many international students, both could have an impact.

Professors need to be aware of the apprehensiveness and uncertainty such students are feeling, Yao, whose research focuses on global-student mobility, told *The Chronicle*. At a post-election faculty meeting, Yao said members of her department talked about ways to respond to

Gmail - Latitudes: As Trump nears return, colleges' foreign ties draw more heat from Congress and support international students, including educating themselves about campus resources.

"It's important to have conversations," Yao said. "We do need to look after international students and scholars."

Read more of Yao's takeaways in a recent piece she wrote for [Nature](#).

Around the globe

In a [letter](#), Ted Mitchell, president of the American Council on Education, called on President-elect Trump to support policies that "attract the brightest and most talented students from around the world to study, work, and innovate here."

NAFSA: Association of International Educators said that health-insurance companies should cover all [vaccines](#), including those that are travel related, without cost sharing. The extra costs could discourage some students from studying abroad, the group said.

The number of international students in [Germany](#) has topped 400,000.

Colleges in Syria have begun to [reopen](#) after the fall of the Bashar Al-Assad regime, but there are concerns about [women's role](#) in education under a new conservative Islamic government.

Proposed changes in India would make candidates from [outside higher education](#) eligible to be appointed as vice chancellors, the equivalent of a college president.

Speakers invited to the National University of Singapore will be required to be [vetted for political risk](#) before they come to campus, sparking controversy.

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And finally ...

Academic exchange is supposed to foster mutual understanding. In [Africa](#), leaders who decades ago studied in the Soviet Union are now

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some of Russia's biggest backers.

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