
Latitudes: Drop by drop, advocates hope to create a river of opportunity in Afghanistan

1 message

Karin Fischer <newsletter@newsletter.chronicle.com>

Wed, Feb 19,
2025 at 11:00
AM

Reply-To: newsletter@newsletter.chronicle.com
To: amadorsapo@gmail.com

ADVERTISEMENT



Latitudes

THE CHRONICLE
OF HIGHER EDUCATION

You can also [read this newsletter on the web](#). Or, if you no longer want to receive this newsletter, [unsubscribe](#).

**For Afghan women, web-development classes
are a second chance at education**

After teaching through the pandemic, Nayeon Kim was used to the rhythm of online courses. This one, though, was different. During class, the chat lit up with questions and comments. Students started their own WhatsApp group to help one another with assignments.

The students were young Afghan women, and the course, in web development, was their chance at an education denied to them when the Taliban [seized power](#) more than three years ago, ending schooling for women and girls.

The course was a happy accident in a dark time, the result of a chance meeting between the dean of the engineering school at the University of Southern California, where Kim taught for a decade, and a former Afghan lawmaker. Together with a nonprofit group, Her Future Afghanistan, USC has developed an Afghan Pathways Program, offering courses in web development and programming languages to Afghan women. Over two years, they have awarded more than 200 certifications.

The goal is to give women a skill that allows them to work at home at a time when many jobs are off limits. The courses could also be a bridge to further education outside of Afghanistan — one of Kim's former students recently started at a Canadian university.

The courses — taught by Kim and another USC professor, Trina Gregory — are in many ways the same as those offered in Los Angeles. Over the 10-week sessions, students meet twice a week for several hours. They have readings. Their assignments build on each other, culminating in a final project, a fully realized website.

Although the courses were designed to be synchronous, internet access in Afghanistan can be spotty, so Kim, who now works in the private sector while teaching part time, records classes as well as

short videos meant to give students a jump-start on the material for each session.

To lessen cultural differences, the engineering school recruited Afifa Zaman, an Afghan American graduate student studying education, as a consultant. She helped Kim understand the students' circumstances, such as the significant family responsibilities they typically have.

Erik A. Johnson, the engineering school's vice dean for academic programs, said the decision to have an all-female team was meant to help smooth cultural hiccups. It was also practical — in a country where women's education is forbidden, "we were trying to fly under the radar," he said.

To ensure students' safety, USC's nonprofit partner carefully recruits and vets prospective students. Despite the difficulties, it's worth it, Johnson said. "I have two teenage daughters, and I couldn't do nothing thinking of the situation there."

Over time, USC has expanded support for the students. When Zaman and Kim realized students had started a WhatsApp study group, they added extra help, hiring several students who'd completed more basic courses as teaching assistants. They've held workshops on mobile photography and résumé writing. Next, the university hopes to add one on women's health.

The students have been critical champions for one another. "They help each other get across the finish line," Zaman said.

Both Zaman and Kim said they were struck by the students' eagerness to invest in their future. They remain optimistic, even cracking jokes about their situation. During a class session, Kim mentioned American holidays, and one student quickly replied, "now every day is a holiday because we can't go to school." The chat filled up with laughing-crying emoji.

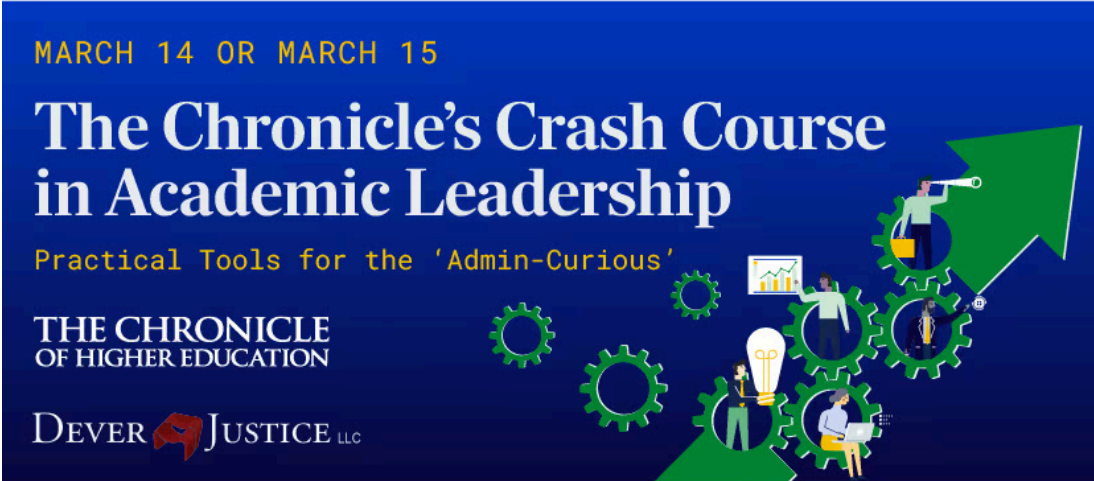
Like USC, other American colleges have also stepped in to help, offering [remote coursework](#) to students in Afghanistan and supporting those [displaced](#) in the United States.

The need remains great. Johnson recalls that Naheed Farid, executive director of Her Future Afghanistan, was disappointed when he said USC could initially take on 25 or 50 students. There are thousands, she told him.

Still, in a culture where education is revered, the work matters, Zaman said. There is a saying in Farsi, she said, “that drop by drop is how a river is formed. Like our students, we have to be hopeful and optimistic.”

ADVERTISEMENT

Upcoming Workshop

The graphic is a dark blue rectangle with white and yellow text. At the top, it says 'MARCH 14 OR MARCH 15' in yellow. Below that, the main title 'The Chronicle's Crash Course in Academic Leadership' is in large white font. Underneath the title, it says 'Practical Tools for the 'Admin-Curious'' in yellow. The logo for 'THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION' is in white, and 'DEVER JUSTICE LLC' is at the bottom left in white with a red horse head icon. On the right side, there is a green illustration of several interlocking gears of different sizes. Inside the gears are small icons of people: one with a magnifying glass, one with a lightbulb, one with a laptop, and one with a bar chart. A large green arrow points upwards and to the right, passing through the gears.

We've partnered with experienced academic leaders at Dever Justice LLC to design a virtual four-hour program for aspiring administrators. This workshop will offer faculty members the opportunity to explore a potential career path in academic administration, with insights on the personal, professional, and logistical steps involved. [Learn more and register.](#)

Latest funding freeze hits State Department programs

The U.S. Department of State last week put a 15-day pause on all grant funding, a move that could affect marquee international education and exchange programs like the Fulbright and Gilman scholarships.

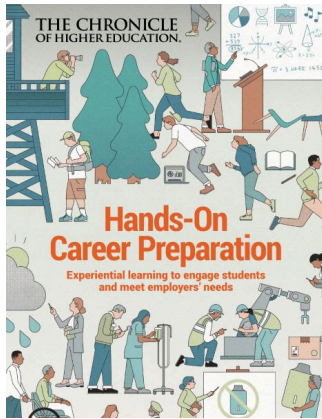
Recipients learned last Wednesday of the payment suspension, which is distinct from an [earlier freeze](#) on most federal spending, which was halted by the courts.

The State Department action, taken to conduct program reviews, appears to be department wide, not targeted at exchanges or global education, said Mark Overmann, executive director for the Alliance for International Exchange. “But it’s unclear what these reviews entail and what will happen at the end of the 15-day pause.”

In a [post on LinkedIn](#), Fanta Aw, executive director of NAFSA: Association of International Education, asked colleges and providers to share information about the impact of the funding freeze on their work.

For all the latest coverage, check out *The Chronicle*’s [special page](#) on the Trump administration and higher education.

From the Chronicle Store



Hands-On Career Preparation

Experiential-learning programs are grounded in the belief that true understanding comes from direct engagement with the world. [Order this report](#) to learn how to create learning experiences that align academic goals with work-force demands.

Move to block Florida law that restricts foreign grad students

A Florida judge has moved to block a [state law](#) that restricts public colleges from hiring graduate assistants or visiting scholars from “countries of concern,” including China, Iran, and Russia.

Two doctoral students and a professor had [filed a lawsuit](#) challenging Florida’s foreign-influence law as unconstitutional and discriminatory. It requires all offers of graduate assistantships and fellowships to candidates from those countries to go through a cumbersome state-board approval process, even if they already meet federal visa requirements. Academics have said it hamstrung them in recruiting top graduate students and postdocs.

A magistrate judge recommended a [preliminary injunction](#) against the law, which now must be approved by a district-court judge.

International-student webinar today!

It's still not too late to [sign up for a *Chronicle* virtual forum](#) on recruiting a new generation of budget-conscious international students. Join me and a panel of experts at 2 p.m. ET today, February 19, for the free discussion.

Miss the webinar? You can register to watch it on demand.

ADVERTISEMENT

Around the globe

Florida repealed in-state tuition benefits for [undocumented students](#).

Legislation being considered in [Minnesota](#) would block undocumented residents from qualifying for a state program that provides free college tuition to low- and middle-income families.

A social network of Columbia University alumni and parents has been working to [identify students](#) they say are “supporters of Hamas” and get them deported.

International exchanges contribute more than \$810 million to the American economy and help forge ties between the United States and other countries, according to a [new report](#).

The American and Indian governments agreed to [strengthen academic collaboration](#) through joint and dual degree programs, joint centers of excellence, and the establishment of branch campuses of American colleges in India.

Scientists in Norway are challenging a law that would require foreign graduate students and postdocs to take a [mandatory Norwegian language course](#).

Students are worried about plans by Myanmar's government to [draft women](#) into two years of military service.

The Institute of International Education is conducting a [global survey](#) of international academic partnerships.

Eight colleges have been recognized by NAFSA for their [commitment to campus internationalization](#).

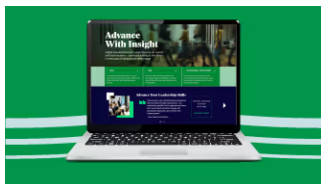
Thanks for reading. I always welcome your feedback and ideas for future reporting, so drop me a line at karin.fischer@chronicle.com. You can also connect with me on [X](#), [LinkedIn](#), or [Bluesky](#). If you like this newsletter, please share it with colleagues and friends. They can [sign up here](#).

From **Chronicle Careers**

Job Opportunities

[Search thousands](#) of faculty, administrative, and executive job openings and [upload your resume](#) to be searchable by employers!

Career Resources



[Chronicle Careers](#) provides insights, tools, and advice to help you in career development, job seeking, and hiring, plus read this month's article collection!

Read Our Other Newsletters

[Race on Campus](#) | [The Review](#) | [Teaching](#) | [Your Career](#) | [Weekly Briefing](#) | [The Edge](#)

Newsletter Feedback

Please let us know what you thought of today's newsletter in this three-question survey.

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

This newsletter was sent to amadorsapo@gmail.com.

[Read this newsletter on the web.](#)

[Manage](#) your newsletter preferences, [stop receiving](#) this email, or [view](#) our privacy policy.

© 2025 [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#)
1255 23rd Street, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20037