

Latitudes: They wanted to work overseas for the U.S. Then their international fellowship was terminated.

1 message

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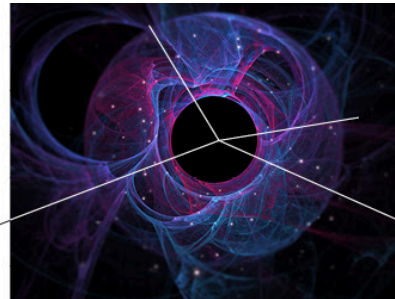
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Latitudes

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**A program meant to make the foreign service
look more like America is on the chopping block**

Without a Payne fellowship, graduate school was not an option for Saran Camara. Continuing her studies, said Camara, whose parents are from Guinea, in West Africa, “was beyond my reach.”

Only about three percent of applicants are selected for the prestigious award, formally called the Donald M. Payne International Development Graduate Fellowship Program, which pays the full cost of graduate school in exchange for working five years as a foreign-service officer for the U.S. Agency for International Development.

The Trump administration’s plans to [shutter USAID](#) means that Camara — who speaks four languages and is studying three more — no longer knows how she’ll afford the second year of a master’s degree in international relations at the Johns Hopkins University. The program provides more than \$100,000 per fellow in tuition, living stipends, and internship support.

Camara might need to take out student loans just to pay her living expenses. “I don’t know what next year holds, to be honest,” she said.

Like Camara, the roughly 60 Payne fellows are in limbo, unsure how they’ll pay tuition, uncertain if they’ll have a job after graduation.

While the program is small, it reflects the fallout of the tumultuous first weeks of the Trump administration on international education and global development — and on higher education and the federal government writ large.

Recipients got the news at the end of February, in an email from Howard University, the program administrator, that the fellowship had been terminated. Although an earlier stop-work order had frozen much of USAID’s foreign-aid operations, the announcement was a gut punch to Kyla Denwood, who will graduate in May with a master’s degree in international development from Georgetown University.

Denwood got her first passport, for free, as an undergraduate at Tulane University, where she studied and interned abroad in Europe, South America, and Africa. International work wasn't an obvious choice for Denwood, who grew up in a single-parent household in the Chicago area. But she drew connections between her experience overseas, at a camp for HIV-positive children in Kenya, with the impact of neighborhood revitalization and development in her own community. When she learned about Payne and the opportunity to work at USAID, her path was set.

"I saw the good development work could do," she said, "and I thought I could make an even-bigger impact in low-income countries."

Part of the goal of the program is to expand the pipeline into foreign service and international development to a more-diverse set of applicants. Many of the fellows are, like Lindsey O'Neal, who is studying environmental policy at American University, first-generation college students and Pell Grant recipients. "This fellowship looks like America," she said.

It's also highly competitive. Those selected have stellar academic records, leadership experience, and a commitment to public service. Maggie Mello, a recipient and 10-year Marine Corps veteran, compares it to the competition for military-officer-training scholarships. "I just didn't have to do as many situps for this one," she said.

Mello became interested in international-development work after receiving training in emergency humanitarian operations from USAID as a military-logistics officer. She is supposed to begin a master's program in applied economics at the Catholic University of America later this year. Now Mello, who is pregnant with her third child and whose husband is still in the Marine Corps, isn't sure what's next.

Part of the confusion, Mello and others said, is that while Howard was sent a program-termination notice, the participants, who signed

individual contracts with USAID, haven't received any official notification about their scholarships. They also don't know whether — or how — they'll meet the five-year work obligation. "I signed a commitment with the U.S. government," Mello said, "and I want to fulfill that commitment."

Lawmakers in the U.S. House and Senate have [introduced resolutions](#) recognizing the contributions and opposing the shuttering of Payne and other merit-based diplomatic fellowships, like the Rangel and Pickering programs. (While the other programs have not been ended, legislators are concerned about their future because of Payne's fate.)

"It is critical to our national security that Congress preserves these time-tested pipelines for young professionals to enter public service," said Rep. Gregory W. Meeks, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee. "They ensure our national-security work force not only recruits the best talent our nation has to offer but also reflects the America these agencies represent abroad."

Jioni Tuck is set to graduate in May from Harvard University with a degree in public health. Now she is in the midst of an unexpected job hunt, competing with both recent graduates and seasoned development veterans. "LinkedIn," she said, "it's the new version of doomscrolling."

Tuck has attended some job talks, looking for ideas of how to apply her skills to work in related areas. The Payne fellowship is regimented — the program approves students' course of study, sets a bar for academic performance, and requires them to complete internships in Congress and abroad. Tuck said she might have made some different choices, taking other courses or applying directly to a Ph.D. program, if she hadn't been on a trajectory to foreign-service work.

“What I’m trying to understand,” she said, “is how we can be cut off from the opportunity to serve our government.”

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Could the Trump administration spark a U.S. brain drain?

Deep cuts to research funding and the cancellation of grants that the Trump administration finds objectionable could weaken American higher education’s global standing, dealing a blow to its ability to

attract and retain top graduate students. Already, a number of colleges have reduced or paused admission to doctoral programs because of the uncertainty.

Because academe and science in the United States are substantially dependent on a steady influx of bright young scholars from around the world, President Trump's policies could have a disproportionate impact on overseas recruitment of Ph.D. students. Forty-three percent of full-time doctoral students in STEM fields are on student visas.

In a number of critical fields, international students are the majority: They account for 64 percent of doctoral recipients in computer and information sciences, 57 percent in engineering, and 54 percent in mathematics and statistics.

The current turmoil could have consequences for the American research ecosystem. "This is self-inflicted brain drain," one expert said.

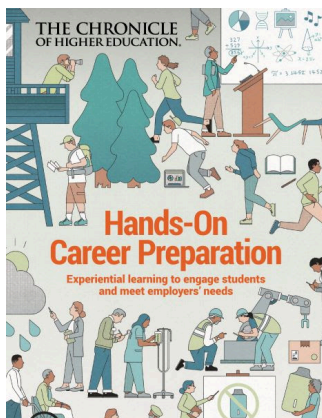
You can read my [analysis](#) of the short-term impact and potential long-term disruption to the international talent pipeline to the United States.

Also on the Trump-news front:

- An [undergraduate](#) at Columbia University, [a Ph.D. student at Tufts University](#), and a [postdoctoral fellow](#) at Georgetown are the latest to get swept up in the Trump administration's efforts to revoke the visas of international students and scholars who take part in campus protests. Several higher-education groups have filed a [lawsuit](#) to try to stop detentions and deportations. The administration's efforts may [stretch the bounds of the law](#), legal experts said.
- French officials accused the United States of [denying entry](#) to a researcher with material critical of Trump administration policies on his cellphone, but the U.S. Department of Homeland Security said he was blocked because he had "confidential" data from an American lab.

- Several countries have [updated their advisories](#) warning about travel to the United States.
- The administration has eliminated the Office of the Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman, a watchdog entity for [immigration issues](#).
- A ratings agency has [downgraded](#) the outlook for American higher education, in part because of increased uncertainty around student mobility to the United States.
- A Massachusetts community college has canceled all of its short-term summer [study-abroad programs](#) out of concern about risks of and restrictions on travel under the new administration.
- And grant payments from the U.S. Department of State for international education and exchange programs have restarted in earnest following a funding freeze. Mark Overmann, executive director of the Alliance for International Exchange, said his association's members, who run exchanges and global education programming, report having received about 85 percent of the monies held up during the funding pause. International education groups had mounted a campaign to [restore the spending](#).

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Congress focuses on China

The chair of a House select committee on China sent [letters](#) to the presidents of six major research universities, asking about their policies on the enrollment of Chinese students in STEM graduate programs.

The letters — to the presidents of Carnegie Mellon, Purdue, and Stanford Universities and the Universities of Illinois, Maryland, and Southern California — asks about background screening for such students and their involvement in federally funded research.

In the letters, Rep. John Moolenaar, a Michigan Republican, called the U.S. visa system “a Trojan horse” for the Chinese government, “providing unrestricted access to our top research institutions and posing a direct threat to our national security.”

Take part in a webinar on cost-effective international recruitment

Join *The Chronicle* for a virtual forum on budget-conscious overseas student recruitment on Monday, April 7, at 2 p.m. ET. We'll talk about the challenges of recruiting on a budget, where to target limited resources, and strategies for stretching your dollar.

The webinar is free, but registration is required. [Sign up here.](#)

Around the globe

Wait times for international students seeking visas to study in [Italy](#) are stretching over months.

Russian scientists have become [increasingly isolated](#) since the start of the war with Ukraine, with fewer co-publications with international researchers and a decline in conference attendance.

Russia has taken over colleges and other educational institutions in [occupied Ukrainian territory](#).

Members of Ukraine's military will be able to [continue their education](#) while serving.

A Turkish university has annulled the degree of the [main political rival](#) of President Tayyip Erdogan, preventing him from mounting a campaign challenge.

Pakistan wants to use money it recovered from Britain to [start a new university](#).

Indonesia will increase higher-education spending to improve [research quality](#).

Fudan University, in China, is moving from [majors to projects](#) that focus on interdisciplinary learning.

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