

Latitudes: The government is investigating Harvard's foreign funds. Are other colleges next?

1 message

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Latitudes

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**In fight with Harvard, Trump administration
probes its foreign funding**

In a replay from the president's first term, the Trump administration has opened an investigation into Harvard University's reporting of gifts and contracts from foreign sources.

The U.S. Department of Education sent a [letter](#) last week to Harvard's president, Alan M. Garber, asking for extensive information, including all names and records of communication with overseas donors.

But the request includes records that are unrelated to and go far beyond the scope of foreign-funds reporting, among them details about all international students who have been expelled or had their Harvard credentials canceled since 2016. It also asks for information on all visiting or temporary researchers, scholars, students, and faculty members from other countries hosted by Harvard over the past 15 years, including their last known address.

It's unclear if the inquiry is one more salvo in the administration's [clash](#) with the nation's wealthiest university or if it signals a renewal of broader government scrutiny of colleges' international ties and overseas funding. During Trump's first presidency, officials conducted foreign-funds [investigations](#) of 20 elite colleges, including Yale and Stanford Universities and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The Education Department had notified Harvard in late 2024 that it had concluded its inquiry.

The administration said that the first round of investigations was precipitated by colleges accepting too much money from overseas without implementing proper controls to prevent foreign influence or theft of intellectual property. Since then there has been a substantial increase in colleges' compliance with federal reporting requirements, said Sarah Spreitzer, vice president for government relations at the American Council on Education.

Of course, the investigation could be one more tactic in the administration's pressure campaign against Harvard, which has included threats to revoke the university's [tax-exempt status](#) and to block it from [enrolling international students](#). Harvard [sued](#) the Trump administration on Monday, alleging that a decision to freeze billions of dollars in research grants over antisemitism concerns violated the First Amendment and a range of federal laws and regulations.

For more on the Education Department's demands of Harvard and the status of federal and state efforts to increase overseas-funds disclosure requirements, check out my article, "[The Trump Administration Is Scrutinizing Colleges' Foreign Gifts. It's Not the First Time.](#)"

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Government's argument in international-student cases puzzles experts

The U.S. government contends in court filings that terminating students' records in a federal international-student database does not necessarily mean that their legal status to be in the country has been revoked, an argument that has confounded colleges and immigration lawyers.

Hundreds of international students — 4,700 by [one count](#) — have been told that their records have been terminated in the Student Exchange and Visitor Information System, or SEVIS, in recent weeks. But in response to a Michigan court case brought by four of those students, the government [argued](#) that SEVIS is “simply a database and does not control or even necessarily reflect whether a student has lawful nonimmigrant status.”

The students had asked for an emergency order to maintain their status and continue their studies.

While experts agreed that a SEVIS record and legal status were separate, they said it is a distinction without a difference. Without a SEVIS record, students cannot do things that legal status affords, including transferring to another institution, going to their home country to visit their families, and working in the United States after graduation.

Under the law, colleges are mandated to regularly update students' information in the database to maintain their status, and they cannot do so if there is no record. One international-student administrator ticked off a list of reporting requirements she could no longer meet,

such as keeping students' addresses current, noting changes of academic major, or even notifying the government of violations, like expulsion or unauthorized work, that could cause students to lose their status.

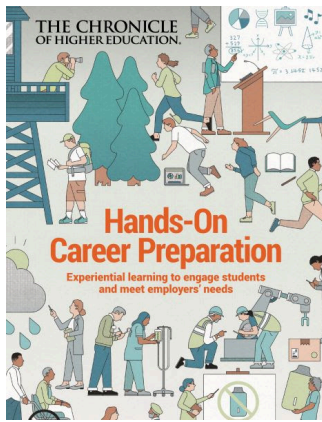
"What's the point of terminating a student's record if you're not terminating their status?" said the administrator, who asked that she not be identified when discussing the hot-button issue.

President Trump has called for [deporting student protesters](#) as part of a broader push to combat campus antisemitism. But [affidavits](#) filed in the Michigan case and other legal challenges across the country said that the students' records were terminated after their "information was run against criminal databases." Some students said they had minor interactions with law enforcement, such as traffic violations or charges that were dropped.

NAFSA: Association for International Educators has continued to [collect information](#) on visa revocations and records terminations and says it has not identified patterns. Students of multiple nationalities and studying at all types of institutions have been affected. The impact has been felt largely equally by undergraduate and graduate students as well as recent graduates working in the United States as part of optional practical training.

In a recent [poll](#), only a quarter of Americans said they support deporting international students on valid student visas for expressing pro-Palestinian views. More than half are opposed, according to the poll conducted by the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression.

This week's episode of *The Chronicle's* podcast College Matters focuses on the administration's [student-visa war](#).



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More from the Trump-sphere

Here's other news affecting international education:

The president's chief science adviser said he supports tightening restrictions on foreign scientists.

"To safeguard our intellectual capital, we must restrict foreign access to sensitive data and strengthen oversight of international collaborators," Michael Kratsios, the new director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, said in a [speech](#) outlining research and other science-policy priorities.

He said he favored "an unapologetic America-first attitude" when it comes to China.

Reserving a third of Fulbright scholarships for applicants who are married or have children is among the ideas being kicked around in pronatalist brainstorming at the White House.

The administration is considering ways to increase marriage and birth rates, a position advocated by some of the president's supporters. In

addition to marriage quotas for government fellowships like Fulbright, proposals include a baby bonus, better education for women about their menstrual cycles, and a national medal for mothers of six or more children, *The New York Times* [reports](#).

It's unclear if the proposed quotas would apply across the flagship U.S. exchange program, which includes both fellowships for recent college graduates and established academics and professionals. The *Times* article seems to suggest the advocates are focused on participants who have recently graduated, "many of whom are single and travel abroad alone."

I took over the [Daily Briefing](#), *The Chronicle's* newsletter for subscribers, on Monday to write about whether political dissatisfaction would push more young Americans to go to college overseas. That would be a major switch since the United States attracts many magnitudes more international students than it sends Americans abroad, whether short term or for a full degree.

One institution that has seen a surge of interest is the University of British Columbia, where American graduate applications are up by 27 percent. The Canadian institution last week reopened admissions to many of its graduate programs and promised quick decisions for American applicants.

Georgetown U. renews Qatar campus

Georgetown University has [renewed an agreement](#) with the Qatar Foundation to operate a campus in the Persian Gulf emirate, extending its two-decade-old partnership for another 10 years.

The decision to stay the course contrasts with another prominent American institution, Texas A&M University, which announced last February that it would [shut down](#) its Qatari outpost. Both are part of Qatar's [Education City](#), which hosts branches of several top world universities.

Texas A&M-Qatar had come under both internal and external pressure over a [contentious reorganization](#) and charges that the Qatari government was underwriting weapons research on campus, an allegation the university has denied.

Georgetown's campus, which offers degrees in foreign service, has not been a similar lightning rod. At a 20th-anniversary celebration, Qatari officials said the emirate's partnership with Georgetown would continue to "build bridges between nations and lead our world into a better future."

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Around the globe

Four in five British universities failed to meet their [targets](#) for international-student enrollment last year.

Algeria's education ministry has told all public universities to begin teaching first-year medical and science courses in [English](#) amid a diplomatic rift with France.

Egypt will join a major [European Union research program](#) despite concerns about academic freedom.

Iraq is dealing with a [surge in degrees](#) from private institutions in other countries that don't meet requirements for official recognition, putting thousands of graduates in limbo.

A Pakistani government investigation has identified nearly 150 educational institutions [operating illegally](#).

India is promising to speed up [recognition of overseas degrees](#).

Students in Myanmar will have to [retake college-entrance exams](#) after copies of their tests were destroyed in a fire precipitated by a major earthquake.

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