

Latitudes: For Iranian students, a new travel ban is an end to American dreams

1 message

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Latitudes

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**With border restrictions, Iranian students’
future is “blurry”**

When President Trump issued an order last week barring travelers, including students and scholars, from a dozen countries from coming to the United States, Sam had been waiting more than a year for her student visa.

The new [travel ban](#), which blocks all visitors from Iran, could quash her hopes of studying in America. “I feel overwhelmed, and honestly, the future is blurry for me,” said the student, whom *The Chronicle* is identifying by a nickname because of her fears about the repercussions of speaking out.

Sam had twice deferred her admission to a master’s program in chemistry at Texas Tech University while her application went through an onerous screening process, known as [administrative processing](#), that is practically automatic for Iranians. Now, she said, “I must either choose another country or give up on my academic goals.”

The border restrictions are the latest blow landed by the Trump administration on international education. On the same day, the president signed a proclamation freezing entry to the United States for Harvard students and scholars, an attempted end run around a federal judge’s ruling that the government could not [revoke](#) the university’s authorization to participate in the student-visa system.

In recent weeks, the administration has threatened to “aggressively” [cancel](#) Chinese students’ visas, [terminated](#) (and later restored) the legal status of thousands of foreign students, and [suspended](#) new student-visa interviews worldwide — at the busiest time of the year for college applicants. Collectively, the actions have left international students and American colleges reeling.

While many of the directives have come as a surprise, Trump had long signaled plans to reimpose a travel ban, a [policy from his first term](#) in office. The new measure, which took effect on Monday, limits travel from an additional seven countries and specifically suspends

student and scholar visas. The administration cited national-security reasons for the restrictions.

Of the countries included in the ban, Iran is the most significant for higher education. Nearly 12,500 Iranian students currently study on American campuses, and they enroll disproportionately in graduate programs and in STEM fields, amplifying the impact of the new restrictions. The 2017 version of the ban had exempted students from Iran.

The latest ban applies to foreign citizens who are outside the United States and do not have a valid visa. Yet it has caused consternation among current Iranian students. Because students from Iran are typically issued a single-entry visa — most students are given visas good for the duration of their studies — the new restrictions mean that they will be barred from returning if they leave the United States.

The University of Massachusetts at Amherst had been planning for a potential travel ban throughout the spring and was able to quickly notify those affected, said Kalpen Trivedi, vice provost for global affairs. No current students or faculty members were stuck outside the country when the ban went into effect.

But supporting incoming students is another matter. UMass may be able to accommodate some undergraduate students denied entry, the largest group of which is from Myanmar, at study-abroad sites overseas, a strategy the university employed during the pandemic. Remote learning isn't an option, however, for graduate students, in part because of federal rules governing research in certain scientific fields.

"We're trying to stay a step or two ahead of an unpredictable administration," Trivedi said.

Iranian students have started a letter-writing campaign to public officials and journalists, urging that the ban be lifted or revisited. Many,

like Sam, said they had not engaged in any political activity.

Saeed had been set to start a Ph.D. program at Montana Technological University, one of two institutions that offered him full scholarships. His particular interest is in groundwater remediation, and at the American colleges, he could find professors pursuing similar research.

Saeed hoped his work could help deal with environmental problems globally. “It is strictly scientific and nonsensitive,” he said, “with no security implications.”

Hossein had spent years studying, improving his English, and saving money to pursue a master’s degree in health care management at George Washington University. He was attracted to education in the United States because of its quality and because it offers programs that combine practical skills, policy expertise, and public service.

George Washington had deferred his admission to the spring semester, but even if the ban was removed, Hossein worried that scholarships and courses would no longer be available. He is thinking about applying to programs in Canada or Europe, but because deadlines have passed, he would need to delay his education by another year. And neither, he said, was his first choice. “Everything is on pause with no timeline or transparency.”

Blanket restrictions based on citizenship ignore individual merit, said Hossein. “The emotional toll of being rejected not because of anything I did, but because of my nationality, is incredibly disheartening.”

Meanwhile, Harvard won a temporary halt to the international-admissions freeze after the university amended an earlier lawsuit against the Trump administration to include the most-recent directive.

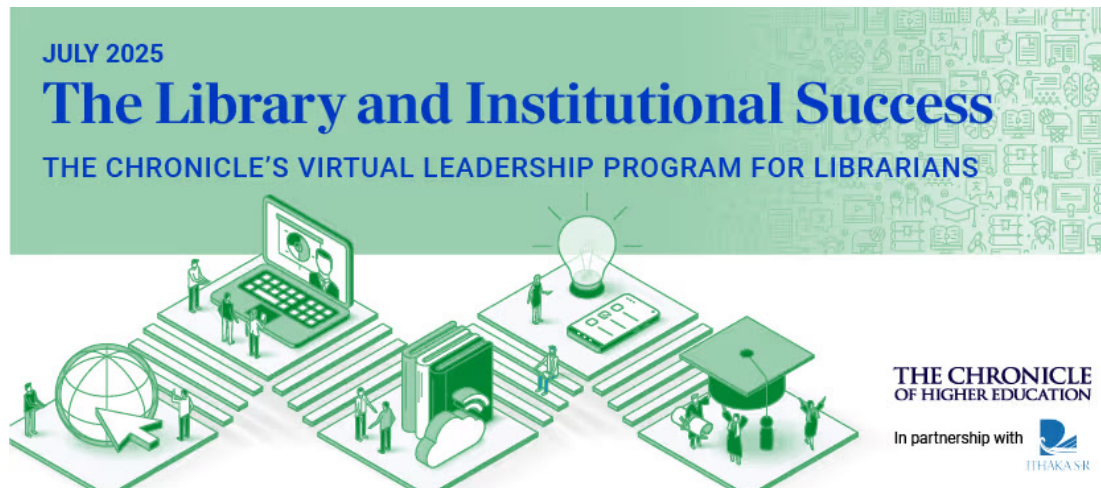
And the president seemed to retreat from his administration’s plan to revoke the visas of Chinese students who had ties to the Communist

Party or were studying in unnamed sensitive fields.

“Chinese students are coming. No problem,” Trump said during a [White House briefing](#). “It’s our honor to have them.”

I’ll be joining *The Chronicle*’s free monthly webinar series on the Trump administration’s impact on higher education to talk about all the recent developments affecting international ed. To join us on Thursday, June 12, at 1 p.m. ET, [register here](#).

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With Trump’s help, Texas repeals undocumented-tuition law

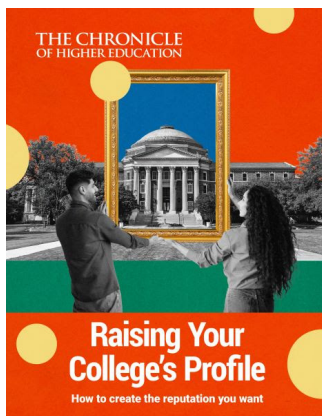
The country's oldest law offering in-state tuition to undocumented students was abruptly [repealed](#) after the Trump administration filed a lawsuit challenging Texas' longstanding policy.

Rather than contesting the lawsuit, Texas' attorney general, Ken Paxton, a Republican, asked a federal court to side with the federal government and declare the 24-year-old law unconstitutional. A judge then complied.

Opponents of the policy, which permitted students without legal documentation to qualify for lower resident tuition rates, accomplished through the courts what they could not legislatively. A bill rolling back the tuition benefit stalled during the most recent legislative session.

Florida lawmakers this year voted to end a similar benefit. Twenty-three states and the District of Columbia allow in-state tuition for undocumented students.

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Campaign emphasizes career value of study abroad

The Forum on Education Abroad has begun a campaign to promote the economic and career benefits of study abroad.

The forum, an organization of colleges and overseas-study providers, is seeking to highlight how the skills students acquire by studying, interning, or doing research abroad are relevant in the workplace. “In today’s world, being work-ready means being globally prepared,” the [campaign said](#). Among the skills strengthened abroad are adaptability and agility, cultural intelligence, and problem-solving in complex situations.

Students who studied abroad said it was important for their personal and professional development. And résumés with international experience are more likely to receive a callback for an interview, [studies suggest](#).

Melissa Torres, the group’s president, said a goal of the campaign was “to build a bridge” between international learning and the fact that “U.S. companies increasingly value those very same skills to enable economic growth.” The forum is surveying alumni about their experiences abroad and encouraging students and alumni to write op-eds for their local newspapers.

Previously seen primarily as having cultural and linguistic benefits, research has increasingly shown the [academic impact](#) of education abroad, particularly for low-income and first-generation students and those from minority backgrounds. Yet relatively few American students study abroad.

English-language programs see small enrollment gains

English-language programs continued their slow rebound from the precipitous drop in enrollments during the pandemic.

The number of students studying at independent and college-based English-language institutes increased by 2 percent in 2024, according to a [report](#) from the Institute of International Education. In total, 69,300 students came to the United States to learn English.

The largest number of students in intensive-English programs were from Japan, followed by China, Brazil, and France.

Around the globe

The U.S. Department of Justice charged a Chinese researcher at the University of Michigan with attempting to smuggle a “potential agroterrorism weapon” into the country. Scientists say that the fungus in [widely prevalent](#) in the United States and likely originated in North America.

IDP Education, a major player in foreign-student recruitment, **said** it expects to place 30 percent [fewer students](#) because of political uncertainty in the United States and other major destination countries.

The Australian government is encouraging a larger share of high-school graduates to pursue [vocational training](#), rather than a college degree.

Malaysia will stop sending [scholarship students](#) to study in the United States because of concern about American policies affecting international students.

A trade war with the United States could exacerbate [youth unemployment](#) in China.

A Hungarian oil and gas company has [purchased a stake](#) in the foundation that runs Budapest University of Technology and Economics, the country's most prestigious engineering college. The government under Viktor Orbán had effectively [privatized](#) Hungary's public universities, stripping control away from the central Ministry of Education and giving it to boards stocked with political loyalists.

Denmark's prime minister wants to extend a [ban on full-coverage veils](#) in public places to colleges and schools.

Dutch universities hope that the collapse of the current government will lead to [more funding](#) for education and research.

Trinity College Dublin will cut ties with Israeli universities in [protest](#) of "ongoing violations of international and humanitarian law" by Israel's government.

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

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