



Dale Gough <amadorsapo@gmail.com>

Latitudes: Visa fears disrupted foreign students' summer plans. Here's how one college stepped in.

1 message

Karin Fischer <newsletter@newsletter.chronicle.com>

Wed, Jul 16,
2025 at 11:01
AM

Reply-To: newsletter@newsletter.chronicle.com

To: amadorsapo@gmail.com

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Latitudes

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A college and community pitch in for students who can't leave the U.S.

Macalester College, in Minnesota, wants its international students to feel at home on campus over the summer. The liberal-arts institution raised nearly \$400,000 to provide housing, meals, and stipends for students who were apprehensive about leaving the United States over

the academic break because of shifting visa rules under the Trump administration.

A blitz of federal policy changes — most recently, the announcement of [mandatory social-media screening](#) for all student-visa holders — has left foreign students across the country fearful that they might not be able to return to the United States for the fall semester.

At Macalester, 93 students took the college up on its offer to stay this summer, more than a third of all returning international students. About 15 percent of Macalester's student body is from overseas.

As the spring semester wound down and more students shared their anxiety, administrators realized they needed a plan, said Suzanne Rivera, the college's president. While some students could move in with American relatives, many had no place to stay. Internships had been snapped up long ago, and because of visa restrictions on off-campus work, foreign students couldn't just get a part-time job at a clothing boutique or ice-cream parlor.

The pandemic provided a template. When Covid-19 abruptly closed campuses, Macalester and other colleges offered [emergency housing](#) to students, many of them international, who were unable to travel.

This time, the college juggled employees' vacation plans in order to keep the dining hall and other campus amenities open with limited hours. The Idea Lab, a space for makers and entrepreneurs, has held drop-in hours and offered programming.

More than 230 alumni responded to an appeal from Rivera to underwrite the unexpected costs. Students needed more than a roof over their heads, she said. "We don't want them to feel like they're just stranded here."

Faculty and staff members, graduates, parents, and neighbors have pitched in. They organized game nights, day trips, karaoke, and

outings to baseball games. They hosted backyard picnics and prepared home-cooked meals, taught students how to garden, and gave art lessons. One person donated five bicycles, enabling the students, few of whom have cars, to get around the Twin Cities.

“It wasn’t the summer they had planned,” said Jen Guyer-Wood, association vice president for life design and innovation. “But we wanted them to have a good summer.”

Macalester isn’t alone in stepping in to aid international students. Whitman College, in Washington State, also started an [emergency fund](#) for foreign students. Arizona State University opened up summer housing, usually reserved for those taking classes, and found more jobs on campus. Central Michigan University’s international office planned weekly activities, such as potlucks, movie screenings, and visits to Mackinac Island, a popular vacation spot. “We want to take care of our current students,” said Ling Zhang, executive director of international affairs and graduate recruitment.

Students’ decision not to travel also disrupted their plans for summer work. Many had counted on a job or internship to help pay expenses for the fall semester or as a way to gain critical hands-on experience.

In her note to alumni and others, Rivera asked for employers who could offer internship opportunities at a late date. Among those who responded was Katie McCarthy, a 2022 graduate and a communications and community engagement coordinator for Accountable Now, a group that supports nonprofit and civil-society groups.

Because Accountable Now works worldwide, an international background is a plus. McCarthy drew up a job description, and within a few weeks, she had been matched with a student with Spanish language skills and a data-science background. (Because of the current political climate, *The Chronicle* is not identifying the students.)

Macalester has always had a reputation as a globally minded institution, McCarthy said. With the challenges facing international students, “I find it so encouraging to find that Macalester walks the walk,” she said.

Peter Rachleff also saw Rivera’s solicitation. Since retiring from Macalester, Rachleff, a professor emeritus of history, co-founded the East Side Freedom Library, focused on the labor, immigration, and civil-justice history of his Saint Paul neighborhood.

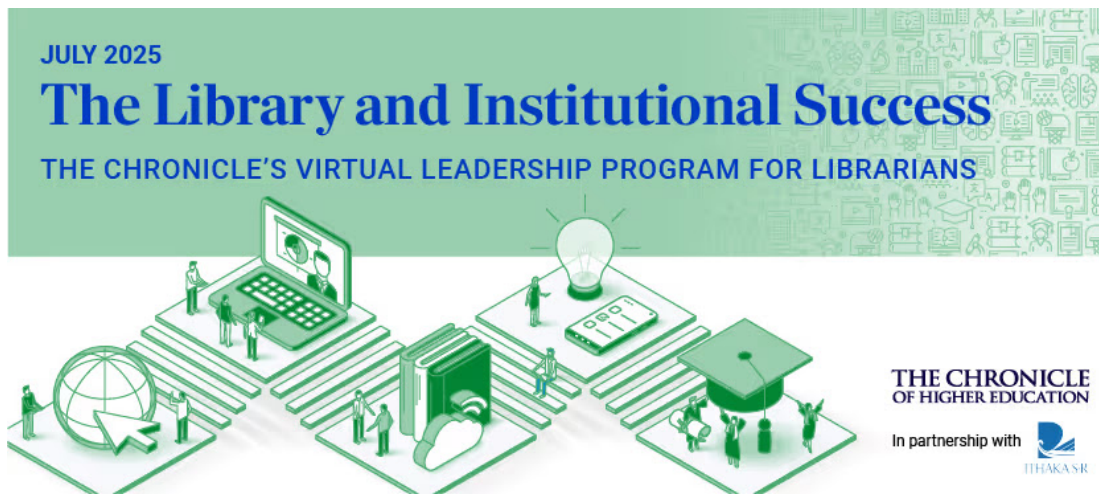
While Rachleff enjoys working with students, the library hasn’t had the money to pay interns. Donations, however, enabled Macalester to offer stipends to students interning at nonprofit organizations like the library. Rachleff now has two interns, from the Netherlands and Tibet.

Not all the support is local. Margaret Spottswood, a 2002 graduate, hired an international student to work for the Vermont Consultation and Psychiatry Access Center, which helps children in that state get mental-health care. It seemed important, she said, “to pitch in to help in any little way I could.”

The student, from Zimbabwe, is working remotely from Minnesota, focusing on a project on cultural competency in mental-health care. During their regular check-ins, the student told Spottswood, the center’s medical director, that she feels supported by Macalester — but a little homesick.

Guyer-Wood, who oversees Macalester’s career center, said alumni and residents continue to offer support. “Everywhere I go, people mention it and ask, ‘Do you need anything?’” she said. “I’ve never seen anything like it.”

Upcoming Professional Development Program



The Chronicle and Ithaka S+R are partnering on a virtual leadership program that will provide librarians context on the external challenges, pressures, and opportunities that their libraries face in today's evolving economic and political climate, as well as opportunities to hone personal action plans based on their area of focus and the strategic needs of their institutions. [Learn more about the program and register today.](#)

Government crackdown on student activists relied on anonymous list

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security set up a special unit to scrutinize international student and scholar activists for possible violations of visa or immigration law, pulling analysts from investigations in areas such as counterterrorism and cyberterrorism to handle the workload.

The “Tiger Team,” or temporary specialized task force, used information posted on the Canary Mission website, an anonymously sourced database that documents people and groups it says are critics of Israel, as the basis of its probe, a government official testified

during a [trial](#) over the Trump administration's crackdown on foreign students and whether their free-speech rights have been curtailed.

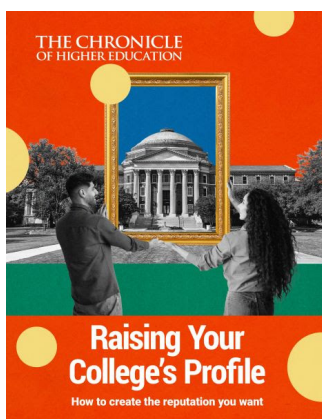
Peter J. Hatch, assistant director of the Homeland Security Investigations office, was the first government official to provide a window into a flurry of arrests in March of visa holders and legal residents involved in pro-Palestinian activism.

Separately, agents for the department testified that there was [nothing out of the ordinary](#) in the arrests. Agents are allowed to wear masks; there is no policy against it. "In the world of social media and doxxing, and for the safety of agents and their families, agents will wear masks to protect their identities," one testified.

The Chronicle will have ongoing coverage of the trial.

Relatedly, Mahmoud Khalil, a Columbia University graduate and a pro-Palestinian activist, is [suing](#) the federal government for \$20 million for false imprisonment and malicious prosecution.

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Yale blacklisted by Russia

The Russian government has blacklisted Yale University, blocking the Ivy League institution from operating in the country.

The Prosecutor General's Office last week designated Yale as an “[undesirable](#)” organization, saying that its activities “are aimed at undermining Russia's territorial integrity, supporting an international blockade of the country, destabilizing its economic foundations, and contributing to the deterioration of the socio-economic and political situation.”

It also accused the university of training Russian opposition leaders. The late activist Alexei Navalny studied at Yale as did some members of his Anti-Corruption Foundation.

The undesirable designation prevents Yale from all operations and activities within Russia. People found to be affiliated with such an organization can receive fines or be jailed.

Yale is not the first American college to be barred from Russia — [Bard College](#), a liberal-arts college in New York, was blacklisted in 2021.

A Yale spokesperson said that the university has not received official notification from the Russian government. “We are trying to learn more and cannot speculate at this time,” the spokesperson said in an email.



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Scanning for the Truth to Solve Crime

Dept. of Education opens investigation into U. of Michigan

The U.S. Department of Education said it would “[vigorously investigate](#)” gifts and contracts from foreign sources to the University of Michigan.

Paul Moore, the department’s chief investigative counsel, suggested that the university had been reporting overseas funding in an “untimely manner” and had “erroneously” identified some of the sources as nongovernmental entities when they had ties to foreign governments. Federal officials are requesting an extensive list of documents from Michigan, including tax records and all foreign contracts dating back to January 1, 2020.

The Education Department has also asked the university to identify all researchers and scholars involved in international-academic collaborations as well as college administrators responsible for overseeing student visas.

In a written statement, a spokeswoman said that Michigan “takes its responsibility to comply with the law extremely seriously.”

“We will cooperate fully with federal investigators,” said Colleen Mastony, assistant vice president for public affairs. “We strongly condemn any actions that seek to cause harm, threaten national security, or undermine the university’s critical public mission.”

The Trump administration sent a [similar letter](#) to Harvard University in April and later tried to strip the university’s [authority to enroll international students](#). It has also opened investigations into the University of California at Berkeley and the University of Pennsylvania.

The inquiries are a reprise of a tactic from President Trump's first term when officials [scrutinized foreign sources](#) of funding for 20 prominent colleges.

Federal law requires colleges to report foreign donations or other funds over \$250,000.

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Bipartisan [legislation](#) introduced in the House of Representatives would allow foreign graduates who earn doctorates in STEM disciplines to stay in United States and provide a pathway to legal status for undocumented immigrants brought to the country as children.

The Department of Education has rescinded guidance from the late 1990s that allowed [undocumented immigrants](#) to receive benefits for career, technical, and adult education.

Congressional Republicans have sent [letters](#) to seven colleges urging them to cut ties with a Chinese-backed scholarship program.

The institutions include Dartmouth College, Temple University, the University of Notre Dame, the University of Tennessee, and the University of California campuses in Davis, Irvine, and Riverside.

China has tripled its [research output](#) over the last decade.

Chinese hackers allegedly broke into the computers of two Texas colleges in the early days of the pandemic to [steal information](#) about vaccines and medical research.

Australian universities could lose funding if they do not do enough to combat [antisemitism](#), under a government proposal.

Experts say that “this is a period of considerable change, and quite likely [crisis](#), for the internationalization industry.”

Can America’s position as a research superpower be sustained in the face to attacks by the Trump administration? “It’s hard to build a reputation but easy to break one,” one science leader told me for a feature on the [future of American research](#).

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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