
Latitudes: Why the economic case for foreign enrollments lost traction

1 message

Karin Fischer <newsletter@newsletter.chronicle.com>

Wed, Aug 6,
2025 at 11:01
AM

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

ADVERTISEMENT



SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY
25 years of impact
An inspired journey

A trailblazer in education, nurturing highly sought-after, industry-ready graduates.

EXPERIENCE SMU ▶

SMU

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](#).

How the dollars-and-cents argument for international ed fell flat

There's one industry with which the United States has a trade surplus with almost every country in the world: education.

College degrees are a multibillion-dollar [export](#), about equal to what American carmakers earn overseas. Given President Trump's high-profile campaign against trade deficits, the government would want to encourage more international students to study in the United States, right?

Yet during its first six months, the administration has taken a number of steps — including [suspending student-visa interviews](#), [screening the social media of all incoming foreign students](#), and [threatening to deport campus activists](#) — that many fear will drive down international enrollments. NAFSA: Association of International Educators [warns](#) that visa backlogs could lead to 150,000 fewer international students this fall, a potential hit of \$7 billion.

In a [recent article](#), I examine why the economic case for international students, seemingly tailor-made for the country's businessman-in-chief, has lost favor with politicians and the public. All readers who sign up for a [free Chronicle account](#) can access a limited number of free articles each month, but here are some takeaways:

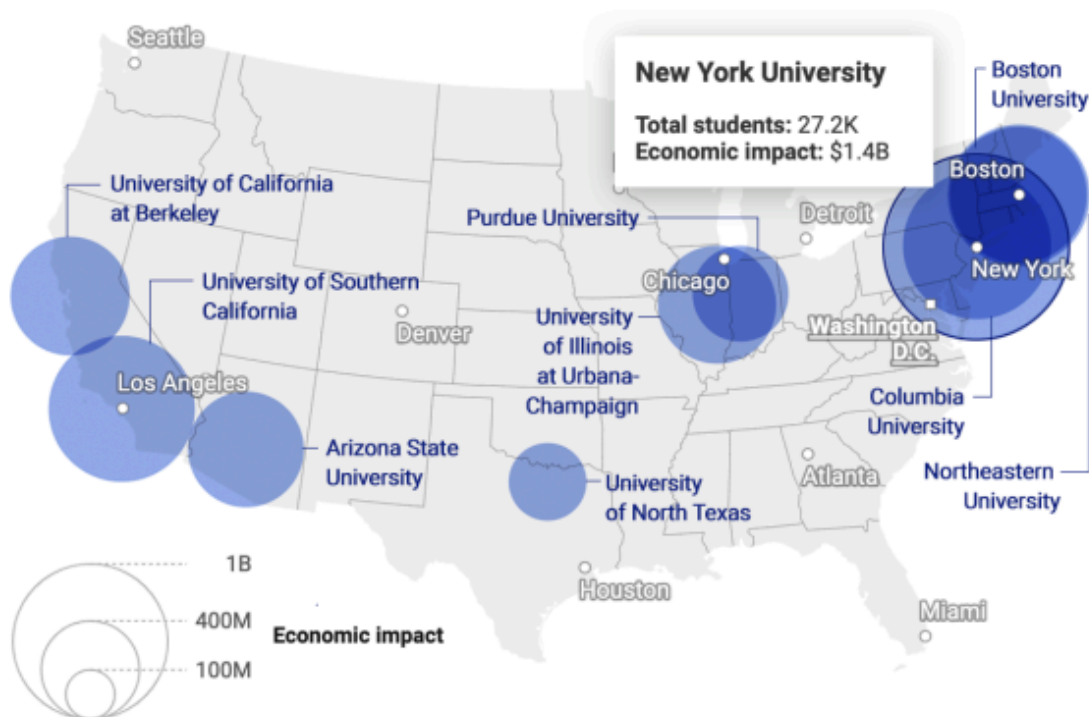
The Trump administration has painted colleges' advocacy of international students as self-interested. Institutions like Harvard and Columbia Universities are after foreign students' tuition dollars, government officials have [argued](#). Columbia's [settlement](#) with the government requires it to “take steps to reduce its financial dependence” on foreign students. And the Trump administration sought to [ban](#) Harvard from enrolling foreign students.

At a [Heritage Foundation event](#) on Tuesday morning, the day after my article published, another Trump administration official made the same case: Paul Moore, chief investigative counsel for the U.S. Department of Education, called American colleges “international conglomerates”

because of the funding they get from overseas. He pledged to conduct additional investigations of their foreign ties.

The 1.1 million international students, and their economic impact, aren't distributed evenly across the United States. Of the 10 colleges with the largest international populations, two each are in Boston and New York City, with two more in California. Only three are in states won by Trump last year.

Students from overseas at New York University, which has both the highest enrollments of such students and the greatest economic impact from them, generated more dollars than all but eight states.



The argument for the aggregate economic impact of foreign students can be too abstract. International students have a \$44-billion annual effect, but that may be muddled in an economy as large and diverse as the United States'. By comparison, education is among the top five exports in Australia, where about a third of all university students are from overseas.

If you don't live in a hub for international students, "the economic argument loses its salience," said Alan Ruby, a senior fellow at the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania.

The economic message might be more persuasive from another messenger. For example, community and business leaders could be more effective in making the case about the off-campus economic benefits. And that may be happening — *The Harvard Crimson* reports that the City of Cambridge plans to file a brief in support of the university's lawsuit challenging the administration's attempt to revoke its authorization to enroll foreign students.

ADVERTISEMENT

Upcoming Professional Development Program



The Chronicle is excited to partner with experienced academic leaders at Dever Justice LLC and leading research experts at Ithaka S+R to host an innovative new workshop for deans. This unique virtual program will include skill-building accelerator seminars, strategy workshops, and opportunities for networking that will help you navigate today's turbulence and drive institutional success. [Learn more and register today.](#)

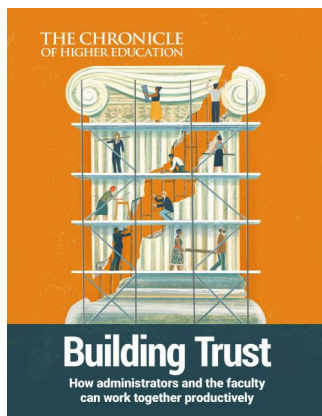
Report highlights contributions by and challenges facing undocumented immigrants

Almost 8 in 10 young undocumented immigrants say they wouldn't have had educational opportunities without Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, the federal program that provides them with temporary legal status.

But with the program being challenged in court and [under fire politically](#), many recipients fear deportation or separation from their families, a [survey](#) released on Monday shows. They are also reluctant to report crimes, even when they are the victims, and to engage with public services and financial institutions that require personal information.

Ninety-five percent of DACA recipients are either employed or enrolled in school or college. On average, their hourly wage has tripled since they first enrolled in the program.

From the Chronicle Store



Building Trust

Building trust between college leaders and faculty members can be difficult even in ordinary times, but higher ed continues to face an extraordinary set of challenges. [Order this report](#) for insights on forging stronger, more productive relationships.

To discourage overstays, some travelers will be required to pay bonds

Some foreign visitors will be required to pay bonds of up to \$15,000 to ensure they do not overstay their visas as part of a federal pilot program.

The 12-month test, [announced](#) this week by the U.S. Department of State, would apply to travelers on business and tourist visas. Those who leave the country before their visa expires would get back their money, while those who don't would forfeit their deposits.

In a rule published in the *Federal Register*, the State Department said the requirement was needed on national-security grounds and would also apply to people from countries where screening and vetting information is deficient. The rule did not list the countries.

The pilot program will not apply to students but is worth noting as the Trump administration considers new restrictions on student visas. Much like a [draft plan](#) to cap the amount of time international students can study in the United States, the bond program was initially proposed during the first Trump presidency but not implemented.

Around the globe

Brigham Young University is the latest American college to be [blocked](#) by the Russian government from operating in the country.

A Republican senator is proposing [sweeping changes](#) to the student-visa system, including barring international students from transferring or changing their majors and prohibiting students from “adversarial countries” like China and Iran from studying in the United States.

Key committee chairmen in the U.S. House are pressing Harvard University for detailed information about any “[formal or informal collaboration](#)” between the institution and any entity controlled by or subordinate to the Chinese government.

A bill introduced in the U.S. Senate would end an [exemption](#) for colleges from caps on skilled-worker visas, a companion to legislation proposed in the House.

Eight academic institutes or programs in China operated jointly by American and Chinese universities have [terminated partnerships or suspended enrollments](#), about 20 percent of all such programs.

Faculty members at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have started a [program](#) that offers sabbaticals and fellowships to Israeli academics, an effort to keep relationships with individual scholars from deteriorating amid tensions over the Israeli government’s treatment of Palestinians.

Harvard announced it would start a similar fellowship for Israeli postdocs at its medical school as well as a new undergraduate [study-abroad program](#) at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

A South Korean student at Purdue University who was detained when she appeared at a visa hearing was [released](#) from federal custody.

South Africa will offer [emergency funding](#) to local researchers whose projects were disrupted by American funding cuts.

Canada capped the number of student visas. International enrollments [declined](#) even more.

Government rules can hinder American efforts to be a strong international partner in research, [undermining scientific diplomacy](#), a former State Department official writes.

ADVERTISEMENT



And finally ...

For college graduates competing for China's much-coveted civil-service jobs, studying abroad could be a [black mark](#).

Chinese students and their families have long seen a foreign degree as an [edge](#) in a crowded job market. But a number of provinces have removed overseas colleges from lists of favored institutions from which they hire. One province, Liaoning, disqualifies people who have lived overseas for more than six months from government jobs. Only Shanghai now explicitly accepts graduates of foreign universities for a select civil-service leadership track.

Many government employees are also required to get approval for any overseas travel or are barred from going abroad. Travel restrictions for civil servants are increasing even as the Chinese government seeks to [attract more young Americans](#) to study there.

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](#), [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](#).