

Latitudes: A campus campaign seeks to add a foreign language. Yes, add.

1 message

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Latitudes

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Students push to expand foreign-language offerings

It's the fourth most frequently spoken language in American households.

Yet Tagalog, one of the primary languages of the Philippines, is not commonly taught in colleges. Just 31 colleges reported enrollments in Filipino/Pilipino/Tagalog in fall of 2021, according to the [Modern Language Association](#). (The MLA uses the combined term, and 2021 is the most recent census.)

But a group of students at Brown University are urging the college to add Tagalog to the two-dozen foreign languages it offers. More than 1,000 students, professors, alumni, and staff members have signed a [petition](#) started by Brown's Filipino Alliance to establish Tagalog language courses.

Vietnamese is the only Southeast Asian language currently offered at Brown.

"It's a matter of representation," said Alexa Theodoropoulos, a junior and one of the leaders of the Tagalog@Brown campaign. "It demonstrates the university's commitment to students of our background." There are about 4.6 million [Filipino Americans](#), and the population has doubled over the past two decades.

Without a formal language program, Tagalog is only taught at Brown when students organize a course themselves, through what the university calls Group Independent Study Projects (GISP). But the onus is on students to propose the course, create the curriculum, and collaboratively teach the classes, said Anna Zulueta, a co-leader of the campaign. (A sponsoring faculty member does the grading.)

"Continuing to use GISP isn't sustainable in the long term," Zulueta, a senior, said. Because Tagalog is not part of the regular curriculum, each cohort of students has to design and propose a new group project.

Theodoropoulos and Zulueta said there are other drawbacks to the current approach. Students are not allowed to repeat GISPs on the same or similar subjects for credit, so they don't have the opportunity to improve their proficiency. And students leading classes don't have the same pedagogy or skills as trained instructors and linguists, Zulueta said. "Being fluent in a language and teaching a language are two different things."

The Brown effort stands in contrast to broader trends in foreign-language learning at American colleges. Language programs have increasingly been on the chopping block as institutions deal with budget shortfalls — [West Virginia University](#) even proposed replacing in-person language instructors with an online app. (In the end, the university eliminated [foreign-language majors](#) but retained a handful of faculty members.)

Enrollments in foreign-language programs [fell](#) 17 percent between 2016 and 2021, according to the MLA, the largest drop since the organization began its tracking.

There are similar campaigns for Tagalog at the other Ivy League campuses. [Harvard University](#) began offering Tagalog instruction in the 2023 academic year. Courses started at [Yale University](#) this fall.

Jeremy Lehn, director of Brown's Center for Language Studies, said he was supportive of the students' efforts but that it is "important to build a sustainable program that will generate the interest and enrollments necessary for continuation." As an example, he pointed to the process for offering Vietnamese — Brown hired a full-time instructor only after students built support for the program, starting a GISP and engaging with faculty members in different disciplines.

"Linguistic diversity on campus is an important core value that many of our students care about deeply," Lehn said.

Zulueta and Theodoropoulos acknowledge there will be hurdles, especially in a time of belt tightening. They hope to attract alumni support and donations.

Teaching Tagalog would be particularly appropriate given Brown's legacy, they argue. A Brown alumnus, John Hay, was secretary of state when the United States colonized the Philippines in 1898, calling the conflict a "[splendid little war](#)." Under American control, English was the language of instruction in Filipino schools.

Zulueta didn't learn Filipino history in her high school in Apex, N.C., where she was the lone Filipino student. Like many young Filipino Americans, she didn't grow up speaking Tagalog or other native languages. Language classes would allow Filipino students to connect with their heritage and for others to learn about their culture.

"Language is culture," Zulueta said.

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Push to exempt students from travel ban

Higher-education groups want foreign students and scholars exempt from a [presidential order](#) that bars travelers from a dozen countries — and from future travel restrictions.

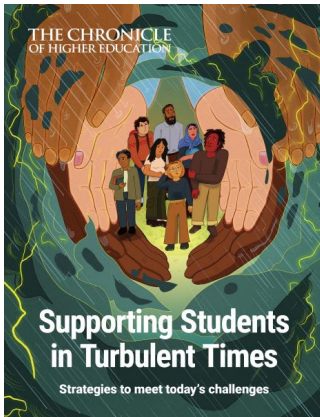
International students already go through enhanced security screening and vetting, including a social-media review, more than 30 organizations argue in a [letter](#) to Secretary of State Marco Rubio. Preventing certain students from studying in the United States could be both an academic and an economic blow.

A previous travel ban, during President Trump's first term, [exempted](#) some student-visa holders, the letter points out.

The current ban, announced in June, limits travel from another seven countries. Iran has the most significant foreign-student footprint of the countries covered by the existing ban; its 12,500 students disproportionately study at the graduate level and in critical STEM fields.

Another 36 countries could also face [full or partial travel restrictions](#) unless their governments crack down on fraud and visa overstays within 60 days, a deadline that has passed. The list includes [African countries](#), like Ghana and Nigeria, that have had big increases in the number of students they send to the United States.

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Congress wants to bring back the China Initiative

A new report levies fresh criticism at American colleges' partnerships with China, while lawmakers try, again, to revive the China Initiative, the federal investigation of academic and economic ties to China.

A [spending bill](#) approved last week by the U.S. House Appropriations Committee included a plan to reinstate the [probe](#) from the first Trump term, which had been shut down by the Biden administration. Some 80 Asian American, free-speech, and higher-education groups signed a [letter](#) condemning the provision.

Another appropriations bill, for the U.S. Department of Education, would [cut all funding](#) for the department's programs to strengthen foreign languages, area studies, and international education.

Meanwhile, congressional Republicans released a [joint report](#) charging that the "Chinese Communist Party exploits U.S. universities to fuel its military and technological rise." The report, from the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party and the Committee on Education and the Workforce, singled out academic

partnerships such as research on submarine engineering between the University of Houston and Dalian Maritime University and a dual-degree program in aircraft power engineering between Shenyang Aerospace University and Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

In the wake of a similar report last fall, a number of American institutions, including the Universities of Georgia, Michigan, and California at Berkeley, [cut](#) some longstanding academic and research ties with Chinese counterparts.

A provision sponsored by the committees' chairmen, John Moolenaar and Tim Walberg, both Michigan Republicans, was included in just-passed [defense reauthorization legislation](#). It would block federal research spending from going to colleges or researchers that collaborate with Chinese universities that have ties to that country's military or national security. The measure also requires reporting of all ties to "foreign adversary entities, funding, or activities." The Senate must still agree on a final version of the bill.

Trump administration wants UCLA to reduce foreign enrollment as part of deal

The Trump administration is asking the University of California at Los Angeles to pledge to reduce its financial reliance on foreign tuition as part of a proposed settlement over claims of antisemitism on campus. The university would also [agree](#) not to admit "anti-Western" international students and to "socialize" those it does enroll on free inquiry and open debate in exchange for restoring federal research funding.

The provisions, listed among other stipulations, are similar to requirements federal officials included in an agreement with [Columbia University](#) — another instance of the administration’s use of international students as a bargaining chip with colleges.

The University of California Board of Regents was to discuss the proposal during a two-day meeting that ends Wednesday.

Also in California, public colleges and other institutions eligible for the state financial-aid program would be required to issue a campuswide notification if federal immigration officers are confirmed on campus, under a [bill](#) approved by state legislators. Gov. Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, has not said whether he will sign the measure.

Around the globe

Two-thirds of college presidents are “extremely” or “moderately” concerned about the impact of immigration restrictions or visa revocations on higher education. The [survey](#) by the American Council on Education found that just 5 percent of college leaders said they were “not at all concerned” about such policies.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said that visa revocations are “underway” for visa holders who “celebrate the death” of conservative activist Charlie Cook. “If you are here on a visa and cheering on the public assassination of a political figure, prepare to be deported. You are not welcome in this country,” Rubio wrote on [social media](#).

The Department of Education told National Resource Center grantees that “their awards are not in the best interest of the federal government” and won’t be continued, a spokesperson said. Among the grantees affected are [Cornell University](#) programs in infrequently

taught languages like Burmese, Indonesian, and Nepali and centers at [Indiana University](#) for the study of the Middle East and Russia. In a written statement, the spokesperson said the funds are “being immediately reinvested into high-quality programs that better serve students.”

A Chinese scholar at the University of Michigan was [sentenced](#) to time served after spending three months in jail for illegally shipping biological material into the United States.

International-education offices are dealing with high turnover and feel underresourced, especially at public colleges, according to a [survey](#) of staff members by Terra Dotta.

Hong Kong will increase its [quota for nonlocal college students](#) to meet growing demand, particularly from mainland China.

China wants better and faster [alignment](#) between higher education and national economic and strategic priorities.

Ghana’s government has [refunded](#) tuition payments for 120,000 students, part of an effort to make a college education more affordable.

Enrollments in English-language programs worldwide remain 25 percent below [pre-pandemic levels](#).

More than 5 million students are studying in other countries, according to the [latest figures](#) from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

The number of degree-seeking American students studying at [European universities](#) has more than doubled since 2001.

The United States earned the highest score in a new [global-student satisfaction survey](#), getting top marks in areas like career development and teacher-student interaction.

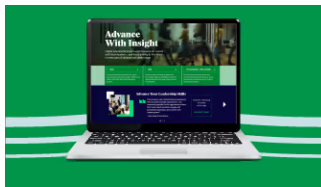
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