

Latitudes: Proposed regulatory changes could mean headaches for English programs

1 message

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Latitudes

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Another test for language study

Online learning, overseas competition, and a slow recovery from the pandemic have made for a bumpy few years for programs that offer

English-language instruction.

Now they face a new challenge: A [proposed rule](#) that would impose fixed periods of admission on international students, a shift away from open-ended study.

There is [opposition](#) among higher-education groups to the regulatory changes, which would also limit transfers and give the federal government greater authority to determine academic progress. The Trump administration has said more oversight of the student-visa system is needed to cut down on overstays and safety risks.

The impact on intensive English programs could be especially significant, however. The regulation singles out language study, capping it at 24 months. More fundamentally, some fear it could undercut the role of English-language institutes and other preparatory programs as a pathway to pursuing a college degree, while making the United States less attractive to those who simply want to learn a new language.

“It would be an enormous shift in the way we operate as an industry,” said Daryl Bish, an executive-board member for EnglishUSA, a professional association for English-language programs. (Bish is also assistant director of the English-language institute at the University of Florida but emphasized that he was not speaking in his institutional capacity.)

About 70,000 students were [enrolled](#) in English programs in 2024. While their numbers have been slowly growing, there are only about half as many as a decade ago.

Under the proposal — which is open for public comment through Monday — students would be admitted to the United States with a fixed expiration date, either their program end date or after four years, whichever is shorter. That means most language students who want to continue on to earn a degree would have to apply to extend their

stay, a process that could be expensive and, based on the government's slow processing of visa-related documents, lengthy.

Forty-three percent of students at college-affiliated English-language programs plan additional study, according to the Institute of International Education.

The draft rule would also lock students into their original institution and program for their first year. That provision is intended to cut down on students entering the United States on a visa for one college and then immediately transferring out, a practice many institutions find frustrating and time consuming. Intensive English students, who spend, on average, less than 13 weeks in [language study](#), would be unable to switch programs or move on to study for a degree.

Programs would have to provide more early advising to deal with the changes, Bish said. As a student, he asked, would you still want to study here “with the limitations, extra steps, anticipated costs, and uncertainty under the proposed rule?”

Students in degree programs also couldn't re-enroll in language study because the regulation prohibits “reverse matriculation,” pursuing another program at the same or lower educational level. Students going into graduate study sometimes seek short refresher courses to master more advanced technical language or to prepare to write their dissertation, Cheryl Delk-Le Good, EnglishUSA's executive director, said.

Compared to other countries, the United States attracts more students who see language preparation as the entry point for further academic study. The proposed restrictions could undercut that competitive edge, said Jacqueline McCafferty, another EnglishUSA board member and director of the Center for American Language and Culture at Temple University.

At the same time, the changes “lump” all language students together when they may have very different needs and goals when studying English, for academic, professional, or personal reasons, she said. “It would take away our opportunity to be nimble.”

Upcoming Professional Development Program



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A big fee hike for H-1B visas could affect colleges

A new \$100,000 fee for skilled-worker visas could squeeze the pipeline of talent to American colleges.

The fee hike on H-1B visas, [announced](#) by President Trump on Friday, could affect higher education in two ways: The potential to stay and work in the United States is a draw for many international students, and limits on post-graduate employment could diminish the value of an American degree.

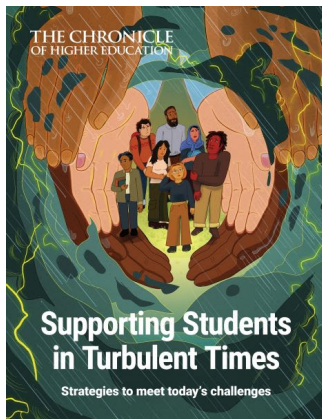
And colleges themselves use the temporary visas to hire foreign professors, researchers, and other staff members with specialized skills, particularly in critical science and technology roles. [Stanford University](#), for instance, had petitions approved for 500 H-1B visas so far this year. The enormous fee increases — most employers now pay \$5,000 or less per application, depending on size — could make hiring foreign talent cost prohibitive for many institutions.

The administration has said the changes are needed to protect jobs for American workers and to combat abuse of the visa system.

The policy's messy rollout caused confusion — current visa holders who were abroad scrambled to return to the United States until the administration clarified the fee increases would only apply to new applications.

Still, as my colleague Ellie Davis [writes](#), critical questions remain unanswered. For one, will the policy apply to employers, like universities, that are currently exempt from a nationwide cap on H-1Bs?

Another uncertainty: The [presidential action](#) cites a law governing the entry of people into the United States. But more than half of H-1B visas approved in 2024 went to applicants [already in the country](#), and of those, 70 percent went to student-visa holders. Could students who remain in the United States and change their visa status avoid the fee?



Supporting Students in Turbulent Times

For vulnerable students, it is harder than ever to navigate the path to and through college. [Order this report](#) for expert insights on the steps colleges can take to support these students emotionally, financially, and logistically.

Poll says Americans support international students

Most Americans favor the enrollment of international students — but with caveats.

Nearly 80 percent of respondents in a [Pew Research Center survey](#) agreed that it's good for colleges to admit foreign students, a view that cuts across party lines. Still, half said they would support restrictions on students from China. Four in 10 backed limits on students from other top-sending countries, including India, Nigeria, and South Korea.

And 42 percent said the U.S. government should be able to cancel the visas of students who criticize American foreign policy, something the Trump administration has sought to do.

Week highlighting international education will continue

International-education groups said they would continue to celebrate International Education Week despite a loss of federal support.

The Departments of State and Education had co-sponsored the week recognizing the benefits of international education and global exchange and engagement for 25 years. But the Trump administration has pulled support for such programming.

In a [joint statement](#), international-education organizations said they would hold events, slated for November 17-21, as a way to “amplify” attention on the impact of global education.

Around the globe

Congressional Republicans accused the Biden administration of inadequately enforcing [visa rules](#) by allowing Chinese students who studied at universities with military and intelligence ties to come to the United States.

The University of Pittsburgh has [ended](#) a decade-long partnership with Sichuan University, in China.

The Chinese government has approved a slew of educational [programs](#) offered jointly with foreign institutions.

Vietnam hopes to build several [world-class universities](#) in the next two years.

The Taliban has banned teaching books by [female authors](#) at Afghan universities.

The Russian government is forbidding schools from using the [International Baccalaureate curriculum](#), a college-preparatory program recognized by colleges around the world.

Argentinian lawmakers blocked President Javier Milei's [veto](#) of a bill to fund higher education.

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