

U.S.

U.S. student applications to colleges in Europe, U.K. and Asia jump amid rising costs and political turmoil

By **Cara Tabachnick**

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Genevieve Smith spent her summer compiling an application to study at a university in the Netherlands – a vague goal now solidified, she says, due to rising costs and political turmoil in the U.S. The California-based student spent two years studying at Santa Rosa Junior College after graduating high school, all the while plotting her next steps to complete her higher education.

At the top of her list was affordability. The 19-year-old said she had initially considered attending UC Santa Cruz, but after reviewing the costs and not exactly knowing what she wanted to do, she decided to live at home, study and save money. After the 2024 election, she said, she began to worry about her safety and that of her friends in the U.S.

She decided to leap. Smith searched for four-year colleges abroad and then, after narrowing her career

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focus to international law, she decided to study in Europe. She said she's preparing applications for programs in Leiden University at The Hague and Utrecht University in Utrecht.

"I feel as though going overseas, I can make a bigger difference," she said, adding that she wants to use an international perspective as a lawyer to combat future potential harms.

Political landscape shifts interest in colleges abroad

Smith joins a growing number of American students applying to colleges in Europe, the United Kingdom, Asia and beyond amid rising costs and political turmoil at U.S. universities.

Data collected by the International Institute of Education show a steady rise in U.S. students studying abroad over the past five years - from about 50,000 students in 2019 to more than 90,000 in 2024, the last year their numbers were available.

The rise can be attributed mostly to costs, experts say, but also to the political landscape. Campuses across the country have been rocked by protests. Thousands of international student visas have been canceled, and universities and the Trump administration have been embroiled in litigation.

James Edge, owner of Beyond the States, a consultancy and online resource helping students who want to study abroad, whose company worked

with Smith, said interest has skyrocketed since the election.

"The shift is striking both in volume and in the kinds of families reaching out," Edge wrote to CBS News.

He said from November 2024 through July 2025, website visits went from 600,990 to 1,534,929 and strategy calls went from 2,215 to 29,373 in the same period.

American student applications to the United Kingdom rose 14% this year, according to UCAS, the UK's shared admissions service for higher education. This was the largest increase since UCAS started collecting the data in 2006.

Mounting costs and student debt shift focus

Other students were focused on costs – one in six Americans has federal student debt, which now exceeds \$1.6 trillion, according to Congress. The median tuition rate in Europe and the U.K. costs roughly \$9,000 per year, while in the U.S., tuition for a four-year public university averages \$11,000 - \$30,000.

Jyslodet Davis told CBS News her main motivation for studying abroad was that she didn't want to pay "exorbitant fees for a degree."

"I feel like education should be free and accessible," Davis, 21, said, when she latched onto the idea after viewing a video on TikTok.

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She didn't know anyone in her high school interested in studying abroad, but since she grew up in a military family and moved around a lot, the leap didn't feel insurmountable. She said she found Beyond the States after viewing a TikTok video and doing some research and used their database to search for schools.

She applied to and chose the Anglo-American University in Prague to study business, arriving in August 2023. Davis said she paid for her studies via a grant for military families, savings and some scholarships.

Davis said since she began university, she has experienced other cultures, and her best friends are from Brazil, Japan and all around the world.

"I've traveled to 21 countries total," she said since moving to Prague.

She also spent a semester abroad at Sophia University in Tokyo, which she said, "ruined Europe for me, once I saw what school was like in Japan."

Now in her senior year, Davis cautioned others on some of the downsides of studying abroad. She detailed the hassles of visas, international bureaucracy, and being far from family.

But her biggest concern was not feeling prepared to enter the U.S. job market without an American education, internships and networking opportunities - which so many of her friends who attended school in the U.S. had.

Watch CBS News Davis said she felt her education in business marketing and communication was not "on par" with American schools, and she might have had more opportunities if she had studied international relations. She said she wasn't sure if she was going to return to the U.S. or stay abroad for some time.

Regardless, Davis said she had "no regrets" about attending school in Prague and Japan and she would encourage other prospective students to explore a similar path.

"Definitely go for it a billion percent - you can always go further when you are younger," she said.

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