

Latitudes: Are postgraduate-work programs the next target in immigration policy?

1 message

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Latitudes

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**Government is investigating fraud in work
program for foreign students**

A popular work program for recent international graduates of American colleges may be pulled into the Trump administration's immigration crackdown.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security said it has conducted site visits to employers who hire international students on optional practical training, probing what it says is fraud in the postgraduate work program.

In a [press release](#), Homeland Security said investigators had found "initial" evidence of noncompliance or potential fraud during an investigation in northern Virginia, including "nonfunctional or staged" work sites and supervisors at information-technology service companies who lacked knowledge of laws and regulations related to employing foreign students. In one case, an employer who had hired dozens of students on OPT reported a home in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., as its place of business.

In addition to northern Virginia, OPT was also part of broader immigration-enforcement efforts in Minnesota in September. Investigators in Minneapolis and St. Paul conducted site visits, looking into abuse of F-1 student visas, forged documents, and "people claiming to work at businesses that can't be found," Joseph Edlow, director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, said during a [press conference](#).

Authorities have also visited some OPT participants at home, not at their workplace, said Dan Berger, an immigration lawyer.

The Department of Homeland Security did not respond to questions from *The Chronicle* about arrests or other outcomes of the investigations, whether they would be conducted in other parts of the country, or what prompted the officials to focus on OPT. (Although most federal employees have been furloughed during the government shutdown, the department has regularly issued press releases about

its immigration dragnet, highlighting arrests of what it calls the “worst of the worst.”)

During the [first Trump administration](#), officials canceled more than 700 student visas and arrested 15 students as part of an investigation into OPT compliance. Homeland Security also threatened to revoke college administrators’ student-visa certification for “willful ignorance or a level of neglect,” although it’s unclear if those penalties were ever enforced.

During his confirmation hearing this spring, Edlow said he wanted to [do away with](#) the work program, which allows graduates to remain in the United States for one to three years after earning their degrees.

Berger, the immigration lawyer, said he expected more OPT investigations in other parts of the country, given the resources the administration has put toward immigration enforcement. It’s important to review the formal training plan, known as an I-193, that students and employers sign as part of the application for OPT and update it with any changes, he said. “The employee should be doing what it says, where it says, for the salary listed.”

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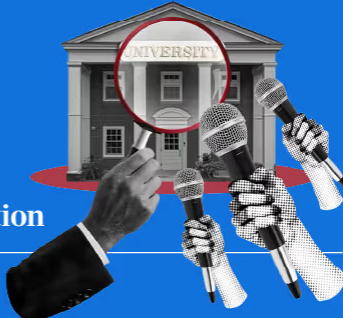
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More Chinese students = more American students

Rather than crowding out Americans, recent growth in international students from China had positive spillover effects, increasing overall enrollment, a new National Bureau of Economic Research [working paper](#) found.

China's rapid expansion of its own higher-education system over the past two decades led to more students seeking to further their education overseas, with 3.6 Chinese students enrolling in advanced-degree programs in the United States for every 100 additional graduates from colleges in China.

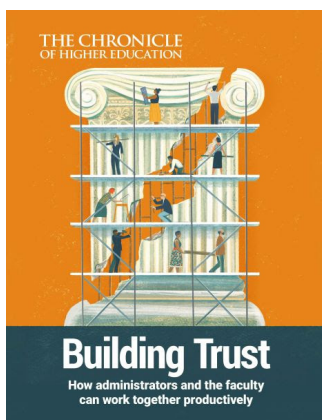
That led to more students from the United States and other countries, researchers found: Every four additional Chinese master's students were associated with about one extra American master's student, one more international undergraduate, and two new international master's students. The effects were especially pronounced in STEM fields and at large public research universities.

The rise in Chinese students may encourage colleges to expand international-student services and increase program offerings, the paper's authors, from Stanford University and the University of

California at San Diego, conclude. By generating additional tuition revenue, the influx of such students “helps support the broader academic ecosystem.”

But more Chinese master’s students did displace some international students at the doctoral level, likely because of limited enrollment capacity in those academic programs, the researchers write.

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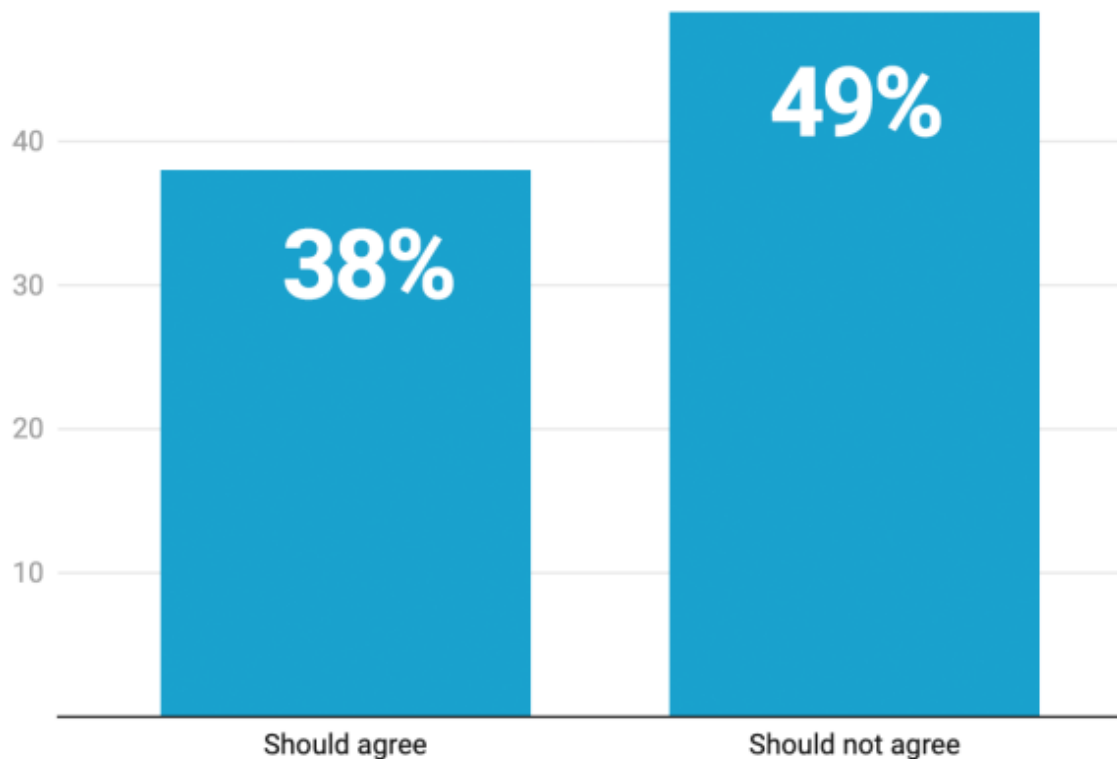
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Public split on international-student caps

The American public has mixed feelings about the Trump administration’s efforts to limit international enrollment as part of a proposed “[compact](#)” for higher education.

Forty-nine percent of Americans said colleges should not agree to restrict international students to 15 percent of undergraduate enrollments in exchange for more federal funding:



But a Quinnipiac University poll found stark partisan divides on the issue: Two-thirds of respondents who identified as Republican agreed with international-student caps, compared with 17 percent of Democrats and 36 percent of independents.

The Trump administration has also pushed for curbs on international enrollments in proposed settlements with individual colleges, most recently with the [University of California at Los Angeles](#).

[Read more](#) about public opinion on the compact. And my colleague Eric Kelderman [talked with experts](#) about what the poll says about Americans' views on White House efforts to impose greater oversight on colleges.

Around the globe

Higher-education groups are urging the Trump administration to [exempt colleges](#) from a new \$100,000 fee on [H-1B skilled-worker visas](#), arguing that the scientists and scholars they hire contribute to groundbreaking research and educate domestic students in areas of national need.

Only eight international undergraduate students chose to defer admission to [Harvard University](#) this fall, despite [attempts](#) by the U.S. government to revoke the college's ability to enroll students from overseas. International students made up 15 percent of the incoming class, slightly less than the previous year.

France has started a [fellowship program](#) in honor of the United States' 250th birthday to support the studies of 30 American master's students at French universities.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer of Britain has backed away from a goal to have half of all the country's young people earn college degrees, instead encouraging more to seek [vocational training](#) and apprenticeships.

Joint educational programs run by British universities in China are subject to "[pervasive censorship](#)" and "large-scale" interference from the Chinese government, a report said.

Private institutions in South Africa can now be officially recognized as [universities](#).

And finally ...

"Wake up! The World Series is in the 14th inning," my husband texted me just after 5 a.m. in London.

When I got up an hour later, the Toronto Blue Jays, my rooting interest, were still tied with the Los Angeles Dodgers. (Folks who follow me on [social media](#) know I also stan for the Washington Nationals, aka the ex-Montreal Expos.)

It's both displacing and grounding to watch events unfold back home during travel — I've been overseas during several presidential elections and saw Hurricane Katrina swamp New Orleans from a hotel lobby in Marrakech with a group of horrified fellow guests.

By the time you're reading this, baseball's fall classic may well be decided — the Dodgers won the World Series' longest game in the 18th inning with a walk-off home run to take a series lead. Until then, though, this [baseball geek](#) will be rooting for the Canadian team to become champions of America's pastime for the first time in three decades.

What are your memories of watching important events at home when you were overseas for work, study, or pleasure? Share your stories with me at karin.fischer@chronicle.com.

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