
Latitudes: The international-enrollment picture remains hazy. Why?

1 message

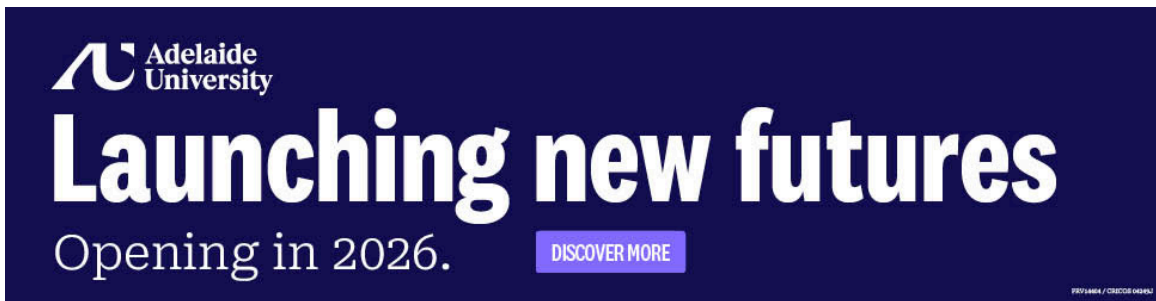
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Latitudes

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An incomplete enrollment picture

Data on international students this fall are trickling out. But rather than providing clarity about the impact of [visa delays](#) and [travel restrictions](#)

on enrollments, the different figures paint a confusing and sometimes contradictory picture. Let's break the new information down:

The data point: Four in 10 colleges in a [Council of Graduate Schools survey](#) said acceptances of admission to master's degree programs decreased among international students. About half pinpointed concerns about the visa process as the cause.

- **What it tells us:** Enrollment in master's programs has [surged](#) since the pandemic, so it makes sense to pay attention to this population. Many of these students come from India, which has been especially hard hit by visa logjams.
- **Why it isn't the full picture:** Even after classes began, many students were still trying to get visa appointments. The survey, conducted in June and July, may be an undercount, missing students who did accept offers but were [unable to make it campus](#).

The data point: The number of international students arriving in the United States in August dropped 20 percent compared to the previous year, the [largest decline outside of the pandemic](#).

- **What it tells us:** August is typically the busiest travel time for international students, ahead of the start of the semester. In the past, *The New York Times* [notes](#), August arrivals have been a pretty good indicator of fall enrollments.
- **Why it isn't the full picture:** The arrivals data do not distinguish between new students and existing students who went home over the summer. This year, many current international students [opted not to travel abroad](#) during the break, concerned that shifting policies could prevent them from returning to the country. It's likely the downturn in arrivals reflects, in part, fewer departures.

The data point: A [database](#) run by the Department of Homeland Security shows that there were 1,231,470 student-visa holders in the United States in September, 9,233 more than a year ago.

- **What it tells us:** An increase of less than 1 percent isn't exactly something to cheer about — but for colleges, it's far better than the [15-percent nosedive](#) in enrollments predicted over the summer.
- **Why it isn't the full picture:** Like the arrivals stats, the database is a measure of total international students, not just newcomers. What's more, it includes college graduates who have stayed in the country on a program known as optional practical training. On his blog, [Distributed Progress](#), Chris Glass, a Boston College professor, argues that OPT numbers would have to skyrocket to offset the projected decline. But the wave of new Indian master's students since the pandemic — precisely the population that has the highest participation in OPT — is now graduating and qualifying for the program. Without more detailed information, it's hard to know how many of those 1.2 million visa holders are actually tuition-paying students.

What would complete the picture: Data on actual visa issuances to new students. The Department of State typically posts close-to-real-time reports, but the [website](#) has not been updated since May, before the visa freeze. With the government shutdown, don't expect these figures anytime soon.

Upcoming Professional Development Program



Our Mental Health Forum is returning this fall to help staff and faculty better support their students through difficult times. This unique virtual workshop offers insights on the student loneliness epidemic and increasing anxiety on campus, and provides practical methods to cultivate positive mindsets. [Learn more and register today.](#)

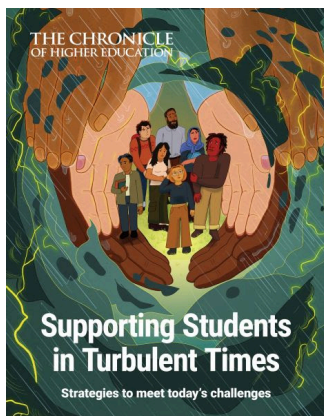
What a White House ‘compact’ would mean for international education

Colleges that sign on to a “compact” proposed by the Trump administration would agree to cap international students at 15 percent of undergraduate enrollment as part of the deal.

A draft agreement shared with several high-profile colleges last week offers “federal benefits” to institutions in exchange for a commitment to the administration’s priorities in admissions, campus speech, foreign engagement, and other areas.

My *Chronicle* colleagues and I [broke down the details of the proposal](#) and its potential implications.

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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.

Report finds studying abroad boosts salaries

Education-abroad advocates are touting research findings that show recent graduates who studied overseas earn higher starting salaries, part of a dollars-and-cents approach to winning support for international education.

A [study](#) by the Forum on Education Abroad found that business-school graduates who studied abroad earned on average \$4,159 more than their classmates who stayed on campus, a 6.3-percent pay differential.

All students who went overseas, not just those getting straight A's, saw a salary bump. Differentials were found regardless of program type — whether students studied abroad for a semester or just a few weeks, went to Paris or Peru, or chose a faculty-led trip or an internship in a foreign city.

Making the case for education abroad has taken on new urgency: Although overseas study has rebounded since the [pandemic](#), it has not fully recovered. The Trump administration has sought to [cut federal funding](#) for exchanges and other global-education

programming. And despite longstanding efforts to [increase and diversify participation](#), just a small fraction of American undergraduates go abroad.

Focusing on study abroad's potential to boost salaries makes sense at a time when students rank getting a better job as the single most important reason for earning a college degree, said Melissa Torres, president of the Forum on Education Abroad.

"Higher ed talks about return on investment, but education abroad has never meaningfully been a part of that conversation," Torres said. While "career impact is not the only or the most valuable thing students get," it's important to talk about education abroad's benefits in ways that students, parents, employers, and college leaders find relevant, she said.

That's a shift from advocates' historical emphasis on the cultural and linguistic gains of going overseas. More recently, supporters have pointed to its [academic returns](#), including higher grades and better college-completion rates.

But is switching up the framing going to do the trick? After all, higher education's attempt to make an [economic case for enrolling international students](#) has struggled to resonate.

Torres argues that focusing on the salary bump for graduates is more tangible to the public than aggregate economic impact. "It has a direct link to the future for you, or for the student you most care about," she said.

The forum drew on five years of data on undergraduate business majors at four large public universities, examining multiple years to ensure that the findings were not affected by economic shifts or anomalies related to a particular graduating class.

One in five students who go abroad are [studying business](#), but researchers hope to examine the impact on other majors and pursue questions like whether the involvement of the career office in such programming matters.

Around the globe

A union representing 40,000 higher-education workers said that the Trump administration has made international students and scholars at Harvard University “collateral damage” in its effort to the [revoke](#) the university’s academic-visa certification. The United Automobile Workers filed a [brief](#) in support of a lawsuit brought by Harvard.

The American Association of University Professors is among the plaintiffs [suing](#) to stop a new \$100,00 fee for [skilled-worker visas](#).

Surprise site checks on OPT students are part of the Trump administration’s stepped-up immigration enforcement, according to Indian media [reports](#).

Are colleges downplaying their [international-student data](#) online?

The British government is considering a [fee increase](#) for foreign students to provide more local need-based aid.

Students in Switzerland protested proposed [budget cuts](#) to education.

Videos also show campus protests in [Iran](#).

And finally ...

Singapore, known for its prohibition against chewing gum in public and spitting, is taking on what it sees as another scourge: [vaping](#).

Singaporean colleges will do their part to get tough on e-cigarettes, levying fines, kicking students out of campus housing, and conducting bag checks and security patrols to cut down on vaping. Some institutions are even forbidding students from vaping off campus if they are in a position, such as at a job or internship, that represents the university.

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](#).

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