

Latitudes: Another round of retroactive cuts hits international education

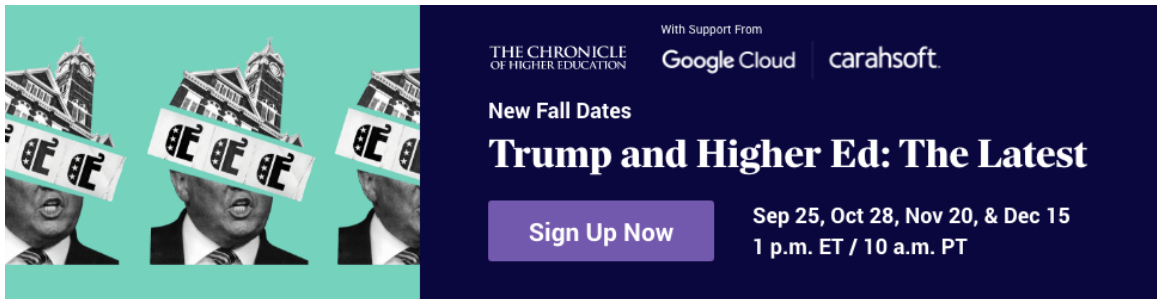
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Karin Fischer <newsletter@newsletter.chronicle.com>

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Latitudes

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Colleges are told their programs don't "advance American interests"

The U.S. Department of Education has eliminated funding for critical and less commonly taught languages, area studies, and global-business education, telling colleges that “their awards aren’t in the interest of the federal government” and “don’t advance American interests or values.”

It’s the latest instance of the Trump administration unilaterally canceling already-allocated grants, raising questions about the future of federal support for international-education programming under the current president.

Among those losing funding are programs to expand language instruction at community colleges and give students hands-on experience consulting with small businesses trying to expand into global markets.

The suggestion that they are out-of-step with American priorities has dumbfounded program directors. The U.S. government funded their work, they point out, specifically in response to Cold War concerns about national security and global competitiveness.

National Resource Centers and Centers for International Business Education and Research, all of which are campus based, received “noncontinuation” notices in September. Also affected are Foreign Language and Area Studies fellowships for graduate and undergraduate students.

While colleges were given the opportunity to appeal, none have reported that funding was restored.

The programs have produced generations of international experts for the federal government, academe, business, and nongovernmental organizations, with deep knowledge and fluency.

The cuts run counter to the imperative to prepare students for careers in a globally interconnected world, and other countries, like China,

aren't slowing down investment in such efforts, said Mark Ballam, who recently retired as director of San Diego State University's international-business center, or CIBER. "It's shortsighted."

In some cases, the cuts could threaten the teaching of certain languages. The University of Hawaii, which hosts a center on Pacific Islands studies, has the only Tahitian language program outside of Tahiti.

The programs are national resource centers in mission as well as in name, meaning that while they are based on individual campuses, they build capacity for international education throughout higher education. Some institutions have used funding to digitize one-of-a-kind library collections, allowing them to be shared.

They also work to improve language instruction at public schools, authoring textbooks and offering teacher training. The University of Hawaii, for example, developed online modules for teaching Indonesian.

The Institute for Language Education in Transcultural Context at the City University of New York has worked with community colleges and minority-serving institutions, where faculty members have heavy course loads and little access to professional development, in areas such as how to engage critically with information in a foreign language, said Alberta Gatti, the center's director.

CUNY conducts research into language learning among less affluent or bilingual populations, studying challenges such groups face as well as special abilities they have that may be overlooked. In fact, CUNY was in the middle of two multiyear research projects that will now be halted in midstream because of the cuts. Researchers have collected classroom data but no longer have the funds to analyze the information, Gatti said. "It's painful."

The last-minute notifications, sent after the start of the academic year, have left colleges scrambling to find alternative sources of funding, from outside donors or their institutions.

The Trump administration used a similar approach to [pull funding](#) from two-dozen academic- and cultural-exchange programs run by the Department of State. The Education Department office that oversaw international-education programming was eliminated in [departmentwide restructuring](#) in March.

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Cuts to global-business education questioned

The CIBER programs focus on improving international-business education, supporting language learning, and creating opportunities to study, research, and intern abroad. The global skills that business students are looking for are distinct — for instance, foreign-language instruction for the workplace will help them communicate and understand cultural nuance in day-to-day exchanges, said Anna Helm, who directs George Washington University's center.

The GW center offers a global-business professional certificate. Helm said the hands-on experience has helped recent graduates directly land positions in international business or consulting, rather than taking a more circuitous path to build up skills on the job.

San Diego State used its first CIBER grant 35 years ago to create an academically rigorous international-business program that included requirements to study a language and go abroad. As a Hispanic-serving institution with a large share of first-generation students, it wouldn't have been able to do that on its own, Ballam said.

Although institutions like San Diego State have had centers for decades, the reapplication process every four years required colleges to demonstrate how they were innovating and making improvements to their curriculum, he said.

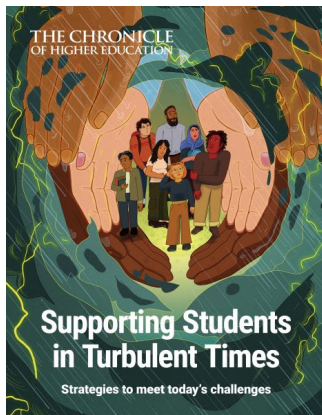
The demand for international expertise is only growing, said Rebecca L. Bellinger, executive director of the Center for Global Business at the University of Maryland. In a [recent survey](#) of more than 1,200 companies, 84 percent said they expected that having international competence would become more critical to their employees' jobs over the next decade. Nearly all said that their businesses would improve if they had more international expertise on staff.

Bellinger said she fears that the cuts in Education Department funding are "leading to an unprepared work force. There's a disconnect."

The University of Maryland and other institutions also provide more immediate benefits, through a program that pairs students with local companies as consultants to tackle specific international-business challenges such as analyses of foreign markets or guidance on export readiness. A small agriculture-technology company in Maryland was able to land a \$1-million contract in Australia thanks to a student project, Bellinger said.

That program is likely to be discontinued.

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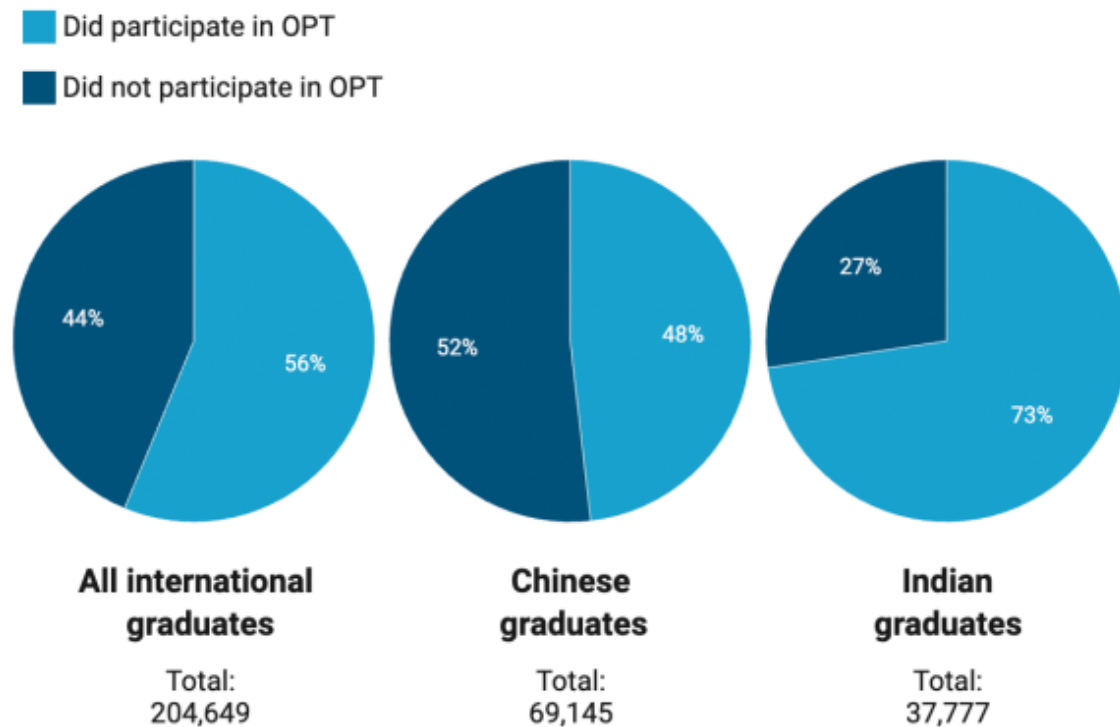
Supporting Students in Turbulent Times

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.

Go behind the numbers on OPT

HeIIIIloooo, geeks: A new website from the Institute of Progress offers a more comprehensive look than ever before at data on optional practical training, the work program for foreign graduates. The [OPT Observatory](#) allows detailed exploration of trends — such as states' retention of students on work authorization and transition to other visas — that could give a better understanding of what's going on in international education.

For instance, take a look at the differences in OPT participation between what had previously been the largest group of international students, from China, and the current top sender, India:



The far-larger share of Indian students on OPT in 2022 illustrates why proposed changes to the program, including doing away with it altogether, could have an amplified effect on enrollments.

If you've been noodling around with the data, I'd like to hear about it. What patterns jumped out at you? Send me a note at karin.fischer@chronicle.com.



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Around the globe

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has sent a [message](#) reminding colleges that they must ensure international students comply with all visa regulations. The notice doesn't impose new rules, but its tone, linking student-visa oversight with national security and public safety, has raised eyebrows.

The State Department revoked the [visas](#) of six foreigners who it said had made derisive comments or made light of the killing of the conservative activist Charlie Kirk. The department did not say what types of visas those affected held.

A provision tucked inside a bill to reform skilled-worker visas would [eliminate OPT](#).

The Justice Department is calling for an [investigation](#) into a University of Nevada at Reno program that supports undocumented students, suggesting that the university is “using valuable resources to steer illegal aliens” toward financial aid and other resources in violation of federal law.

The Chinese government criticized the “[malicious actions](#)” of a congressional committee that released a report accusing it of exploiting American colleges to do military research.

The Saudi government has given the University of New Haven permission to open a [branch campus](#) in Riyadh, the first foreign institution to do so.

Nine in 10 education-abroad alumni said studying overseas helped them build job skills, according to a [survey](#) by the Forum on Education

Abroad. The group has been making the case for the [workplace benefits](#) of international education.

Enrollment growth in transnational education means that the number of students studying for a British degree in a foreign country could soon [overtake](#) the number of international students who come to the U.K.

And finally ...

If you're like me, you've probably read lots of stories recently about the impact of the brewing global trade war on soybean farmers and auto-parts manufacturers. Another group that has been collateral damage: [university libraries](#).

Tariffs imposed by the Trump administration have led some countries' mail services to stop shipments to and from the United States, preventing cross-border lending between libraries and stranding some books abroad. Another complication is the removal of an exemption from tariffs on items costing less than \$800 — there's confusion about how the rules affect interlibrary lending, which, of course, is free.

Even in today's digitized era, some books are only available in print or published in a just few countries. And certain libraries might have deep collections because of local connections or a faculty member with an area of particular expertise.

Scholars, maybe this is the time to argue that you need to draw on the travel budget to get some reading done.

Thanks for reading. I always welcome your feedback and ideas for future reporting, so drop me a line at karin.fischer@chronicle.com or