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Fewer International Students Came to the U.S. This Fall

Nearly a year into the Trump administration's crackdown on immigration and visas, data reveals that new international student enrollment is down 17 percent since last fall.

By Kathryn Palmer



Graduate students are driving the decline in international enrollment.

Photo illustration by Justin Morrison/Inside Higher Ed | Getty Images

One week after President Donald Trump contradicted his own policies by stressing how important international

students are to sustaining university finances, there's new evidence that his administration's crackdown on visas and immigration is hurting international student enrollment and the American economy.

While overall international student enrollment has declined only 1 percent since fall 2024, new enrollment has declined 17 percent, according to fall 2025 snapshot data in the annual Open Doors report, published Monday by the Institute for International Education. The 825 U.S.-based higher learning institutions that responded to the fall snapshot survey host more than half of all international students in the country.

"It gives us good insight into what is happening on campuses as of this fall," Mirka Martel, head of research, evaluation and learning at IIE, said on a press call last week. "Some of the changes we're seeing in new enrollment may be related to some of the more recent factors related to international students."

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Fewer New Graduate Students

Those factors include cuts to federal research funding, which has historically helped support graduate students. Although graduate students made up roughly 40 percent of the 1.2 million total international students studying in the U.S during the 2024–25 academic year, they’re now driving the enrollment decline—a trend that started before Trump retook the White House.

While the total number of new international students fell by 7 percent last academic year, new graduate enrollment dropped by 15 percent, according to the Open Doors report—a decline that was partially offset by new undergraduate enrollment, which grew by 5 percent.

The fall 2025 snapshot data shows that pattern continuing.

Colleges and universities reported a 2 percent increase in undergraduate students, a 14 percent increase in Optional Practical Training students and a 12 percent decrease in graduate students.

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The 2024–25 Open Doors report also includes more details about international students during the last academic year—broken down by country of origin, field of study and primary funding sources—though that data reflects trends from last fall, before Trump took office and initiated restrictions that experts believe have deterred some international students.

It shows that international enrollment in the United States jumped 5 percent between fall 2023 and fall 2024, continuing to rebound from a 15 percent pandemic-induced drop during the 2020–21 academic year. That’s in line with the fall 2024 snapshot data, which indicated 3 percent growth in international student totals.

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However, the majority (57 percent) of colleges and universities that responded to IIE's fall 2025 snapshot survey reported a decline in new international enrollment. And 96 percent of them cited visa concerns, while 68 percent named travel restrictions as the reason for the drop.

Meanwhile, 29 percent of institutions reported an increase in new international enrollment and 14 percent reported stable enrollment. For those institutions that saw an uptick this fall, 71 percent attributed the growth to active recruitment initiatives, and 54 percent cited outreach to admitted students.

The Open Doors data also confirms earlier projections from NAFSA: Association of International Educators and recent analyses from *The New York Times* and *Inside Higher Ed* about the Trump administration's immigration policies leading to falling international student enrollment, as well as hardship for university budgets and the broader national economy.

According to the report, international students accounted for 6 percent of the total population enrolled in a higher education institution last academic year and contributed nearly \$55 billion to the U.S. economy in 2024.

“International students come to the United States to advance their education and contribute to U.S. colleges and communities,” Jason Czyz, president and CEO of IIE, said in a news release. “This data highlights the impact international students have in driving innovation, advancing scholarship, and strengthening cross-cultural understanding.”

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Trump's Changing Stance

But since Trump took office in January, his administration has cast international students—the majority (57 percent) of whom come to the U.S. to study in high-demand STEM fields—as threats to national security and opportunity for American-born students rather than economic stimulants.

International university students attending wealthy, selective universities are “not just bad for national security,” Vice President JD Vance said in March. “[They’re] bad for the American dream for a lot of kids who want to go to a nice university and can’t because their spot was taken by a foreign student.”

But as the Open Doors data shows, it’s not just wealthy, private institutions that host international students. During the 2024–25 academic year, 59 percent attended public institutions. Meanwhile, among all institution types, community colleges experienced the fastest rate of international student growth, at 8 percent.

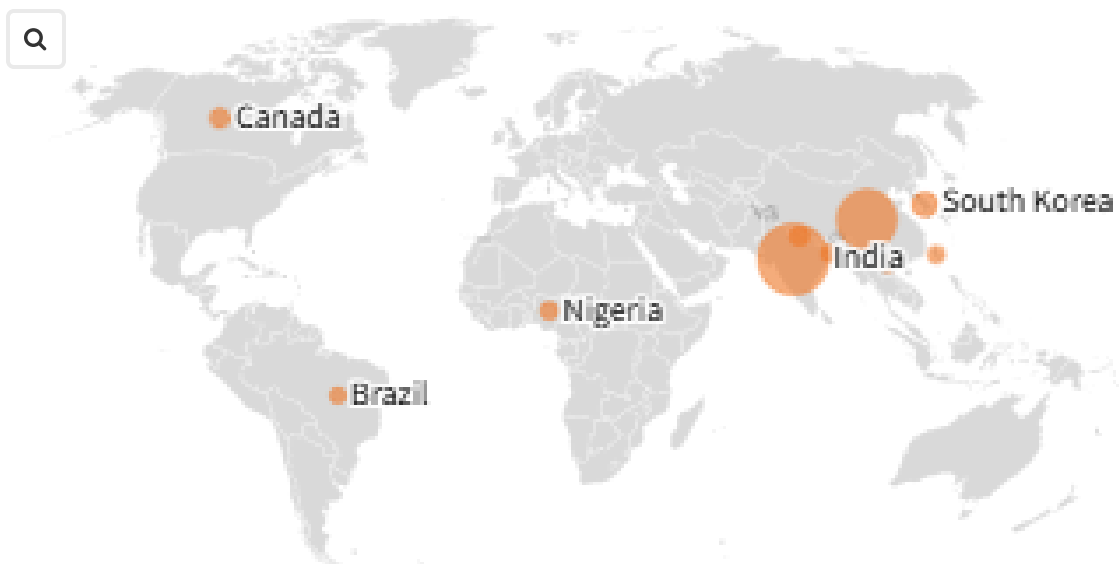
And that’s despite the Trump administration’s concerted effort to deter them. So far this year, the federal government has detained foreign student activists, stripped students’ SEVIS statuses and visas, implemented social media vetting processes, paused new visa issuances, and moved to limit how long students can stay in the country.

In May, Secretary of State Marco Rubio threatened to “aggressively revoke” Chinese students’ visas, including those “with connections to the Chinese Communist Party or studying in critical fields.”

Although the Open Doors report shows that enrollment among Chinese students declined 4 percent between the 2023–24 and 2024–25 academic years, China is still the second-most-popular country of origin for international students, making up 23 percent of all international students; India—which surpassed China as the No. 1 source in 2023—produced 31 percent of all international students living in the U.S. during the 2024–25 academic year.

Leading Countries of Origin of International Students, 2024–25

India, China and South Korea remain the top three countries of origin of international students.



Source: [The Open Doors Report on International Education Exchange](#)

But as of late, Trump has walked back some of his hostility toward international students. Over the summer, he proposed allowing 600,000 Chinese students into the country. And last week, he defended the economic benefit of international students during an interview with *Fox News*' Laura Ingraham.

“We take in trillions of dollars from students,” he said. “You know, the students pay more than double when they come in from most foreign countries. I want to see our school system thrive. And it’s not that I want them, but I view it as a business.”

Economic Consequences

According to the Open Doors Report, roughly half (52 percent) of international students funded their education primarily with their own money during the 2024–25 academic year. And the 17 percent drop in new international enrollment this fall translates into more than \$1.1 billion in lost revenue and nearly 23,000 fewer jobs, according to a new analysis from NAFSA, also published Monday.

The report explained that the reasons for that vary but may be tied in part to the disproportionate decline in international graduate student enrollment and uptick in OPT students.

The decline in graduate students on college campuses is “cutting into higher-spending populations that typically contribute more through tuition, living costs, and

accompanying dependents,” the report said. Meanwhile, “the increased share of students pursuing OPT (up 14 percent) reduced the amount of campus-based spending [on] tuition, housing and dining.”

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