

Visa concerns blamed as new overseas students fall by fifth in US

Snapshot figures from more than 800 institutions show more than half suffering from declining enrolments

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The number of new international students arriving in the US has fallen by almost a fifth, with institutions blaming concerns around visa applications and new travel restrictions, snapshot figures suggest.

While the Trump administration has initiated travel bans

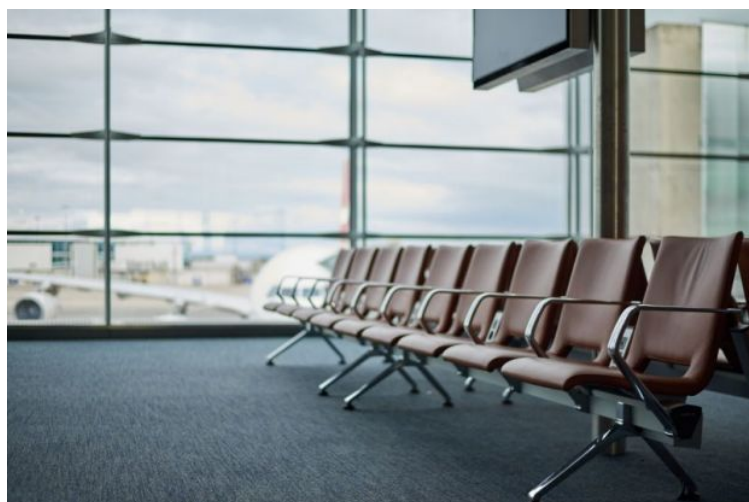
(<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/us-travel-bans-would-hurt-reputation-among-students-survey-finds>) on some overseas students and attempted to cap numbers across

(<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/c>

ompact-shows-empowered-trump-plans-divide-and-conquer) the sector, recent reports

(<https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2025/11/11/despite-claims-foreign-students-have-not-yet-been-put-off-america>) suggested the volume of arrivals had not fallen by much.

However, new figures released as part of the Open Doors survey show that higher education institutions reported a 1 per cent decline in total international student numbers for 2025-26 (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/us-universities-international-recruitment-back-reverse>) – a 2 per cent rise for undergraduate students but a 12 per cent drop for postgraduate enrolments.



Source: iStock/Denys Yelmanov

And the snapshot data from more than 825 institutions found that new enrolments fell by 17 per cent on last year – which at the time was the first fall in four years.

Almost all (96 per cent) of the institutions reporting declining numbers of new arrivals cited visa application concerns as a reason, (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/visa-curbs-drive-historic-change-global-student-flows>) while 68 per cent said travel restrictions were to blame.

The data, from the Institute of International Education (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/institute-international-education>) (IIE) and the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, show that 29 per cent of institutions reported an increase in new international enrolment, 14 per cent had stable numbers, and 57 per cent saw a decrease.

A majority of institutions with rising numbers cited active recruitment initiatives (71 per cent) and outreach to admitted students (54 per cent) as the primary drivers of growth.

Donald Trump recently emphasised the importance of international students to the US, telling *Fox News* (<https://www.foxnews.com/politics/trump-doubles-down-plan-600000-chinese-student-visas-despite-maga-backlash>) that colleges and universities would “go out of business” if he curbed their numbers.

The snapshot figures were released alongside the complete Open Doors data, which show that the total number of new international students in 2024-25 fell 7 per cent. This mirrored last year's snapshot figures which found a similar drop.

Overall, the data show that the US remains the top destination for international students globally, with a total of 1.2 million in the 2024-2025 academic year.

“International students come to the United States to advance their education and contribute to US colleges and communities,” said Jason Czyz, IIE president and chief executive. “This data highlights the impact international students have in driving innovation, advancing scholarship, and strengthening cross-cultural understanding.”

Trump has also recently promised to grant visas to 600,000 Chinese students, which may have been a reaction to concerns demand was falling. The Open Doors figures show a 4 per cent drop among Chinese students last year – the fifth successive fall in a row and a total decline of 29 per cent from their 2019-20 peak.

This meant that India remains the top source country for international students – increasing its share 10 per cent to a record 363,019. This was more than double the number in 2020-21.

The report also revealed study abroad figures for the 2023-24 academic year. It found that 298,180 US students studied abroad – 6 per cent more than the year before. Italy, Spain, the UK, and France remained the leading host destinations, with nearly half (45 per cent) of all students studying in these four countries.

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