

Latitudes: Following the (foreign) money

1 message

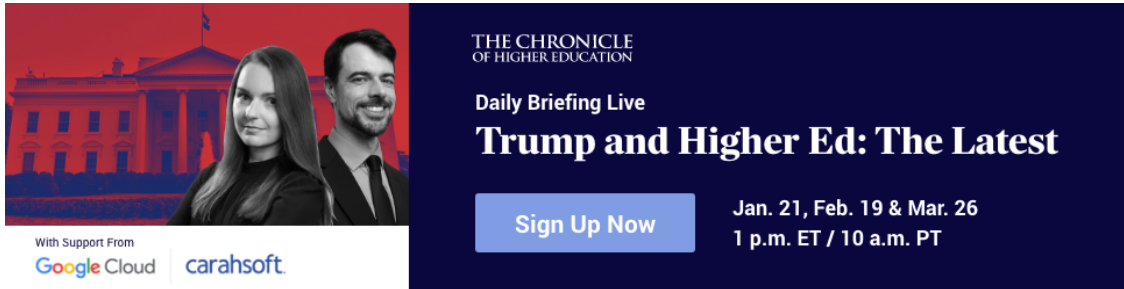
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THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION **Latitudes**



By *Karin Fischer*

In this week's Latitudes: An effort to revive the China Initiative fails. Graduate assistants want the University of California to start a legal fund for international students. Visa revocations. But first ...

WHICH COUNTRIES GIVE TO U.S. COLLEGES?

Although it's at the center of debates over transparency in foreign spending at American colleges, China ranks fourth in sources of overseas gifts and contracts, according to a new [public database](#) from the U.S. Department of Education. The largest donor country, Qatar, gave or awarded nearly \$6.6 billion to higher-education institutions, \$2.5 billion more than Chinese sources.

But Qatar is not among seven "countries of concern" that lawmakers, both in Congress and in the states, have sought to more strictly [police](#). Neither are the two other countries that outpaced China in funding, Germany and England. Meanwhile,

Iran and Russia, which are also considered adversarial nations, don't crack the top 10.

China is the largest source of foreign funds for just one institution that ranks among the largest recipients of overseas funding — Columbia University.

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Biggest source of overseas revenue</u>	<u>Total, gifts and contracts from all foreign sources</u>
Harvard U.	 England	\$4,007,178,451
Cornell U.	 Qatar	\$3,043,850,533
Carnegie Mellon U.	 Qatar	\$2,910,470,124
U. of Pennsylvania	 Germany	\$2,660,604,567
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	 Singapore	\$2,559,416,979
Stanford U.	 Switzerland	\$2,089,014,224
Johns Hopkins U.	 England	\$1,554,340,096
Yale U.	 Germany	\$1,521,548,490
Georgetown U.	 Qatar	\$1,346,671,602
Columbia U.	 China	\$1,236,168,079

Does that mean lawmakers' vigilance on China is misplaced? One major shortcoming of the database is that it reports accumulated funding since federal disclosure requirements became law in 1986, rather than annual amounts. As a result, it's impossible to tell if China has been a disproportionate source of money in higher education in recent years as its government has sought to become a scientific superpower. (It feels safe to assume that four decades ago China wasn't a major funding source, given its developing economy then.)

Another drawback to the database is that it doesn't distinguish between foreign governments and private sources. And the Trump administration itself has accused colleges of doing a poor job in meeting federal reporting requirements, which higher-education groups have disputed.

Now that I've cataloged its limitations, here are a few takeaways from the data:

Foreign money is steered toward private institutions. The public college that received the most from abroad, the University of California at San Francisco, a medical campus, is 11th. The top foreign-fund recipients don't look all that different from the list of colleges with the largest endowments.

That said, **three-quarters of the funds are in the form of contracts.** Gifts account for \$16.5 billion of the \$62.4 billion in total funding reported.

Overseas branch campuses drive spending. Qatar was the largest source for three of the top institutions, Cornell, Carnegie Mellon, and Georgetown Universities. All three have [campuses in the Persian Gulf country](#).

And finally, **foreign funding to American colleges is dwarfed by domestic sources.** In fiscal year 2024, colleges reported receiving \$63.5 billion in private gifts and contracts. That's more than 40 years of overseas funding combined.

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GRAD STUDENTS PRESS FOR LEGAL FUND

“One of the things that has allowed the University of California to be a world leader in education and research is the fact that we welcome people from all over the world.”

— *Tanzil Chowdhury, a doctoral student at the University of California at Berkeley*

A union representing graduate teaching and research assistants at the University of California is asking the university system for money to support a [legal fund](#) for international students as part of contract negotiations.

Chowdhury, who is a lead negotiator, said the group decided to make international graduate students, researchers, and postdocs a priority in its next agreement because of the pressure and uncertainty they face. In addition to a \$750,000 fund, the union is asking that the university continue to pay researchers who are stranded outside the United States because of visa issues.

About 40 percent of the union's members are from other countries.

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STATE DEPT. STRIPPED THOUSANDS OF STUDENT VISAS

The U.S. Department of State announced in a [social-media post](#) that it has revoked 8,000 student visas, part of the 100,000 visas canceled under President Trump.



Department of State
@StateDept

...

 **BREAKING:** The State Department has now revoked over 100,000 visas, including some 8,000 student visas and 2,500 specialized visas for individuals who had encounters with U.S. law enforcement for criminal activity.

We will continue to deport these thugs to keep America safe.



The post did not specify why international students lost their visas, but a State Department spokesman told [Al Jazeera](#) that the four leading causes of revocations were overstays, driving under the influence, assault, and theft. Total visa cancellations increased by 150 percent from 2024, according to the department.



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READERS ON ONLINE STUDY ABROAD

After I [wrote last week](#) about a study-abroad program that uses online education to reduce curricular barriers to going overseas, a number of readers responded.

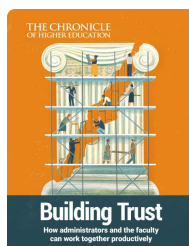
Caroline Ideus, a former study-abroad coordinator, wrote about her concern that by taking courses online, students' "only connection with their host country is surface level, at best. I see it as an extended vacation, not a true study-abroad experience."

Dawn Edmiston, a professor at William & Mary, reflected on her experience helping to create her institution's minor in global business, which combines online coursework with a summer at University College Dublin. The hybrid model allows for time for learning firsthand about local business culture, said Edmiston, and students have used the program as a springboard to pursue internships, go on other study-abroad programs, and graduate early.

And Adam Freed, a researcher and global-engagement program manager at the University of Michigan, argued that while virtual and hybrid options would give students with curricular logjams more flexibility, such programs would not tackle underlying hurdles to study-abroad participation like cost and complexity. "By removing the student from the local educational context, it robs the learner of those opportunities to engage," he wrote. "Taking online courses in your room and then going out for tapas is not the same as studying at a Spanish institution."

Got thoughts? Send them to me karin.fischer@chronicle.com.

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Building Trust

Building trust between college leaders and faculty members can be difficult even in ordinary times, but higher ed continues to face an extraordinary set of challenges. [Order this report](#) for insights on forging stronger, more productive relationships.

AROUND THE GLOBE

Efforts to insert a provision restarting the [China Initiative](#), a federal investigation of research ties with China under the first Trump administration, in an congressional spending bill were stymied.

Protests that began among students and shopkeepers have spread throughout [Iran](#).

A dozen students at Birzeit University were hospitalized after Israeli forces conducted a [raid](#) on the West Bank institution.

Chinese scientists are now [outpacing](#) their American counterparts in the number of journal articles published.

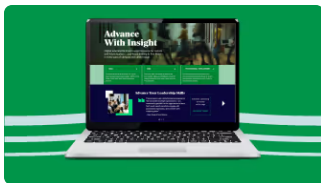
The Association of International Education Administrators and Intead hope to recruit at least 100 colleges to a [research project](#) that will lead to a comprehensive global-education benchmarking report.

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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