
Latitudes: 3 big questions

1 message

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THE
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Latitudes



By *Karin Fischer*

In this week's Latitudes: The United States is a magnet for visiting researchers in STEM. An international student on the chilling effect of social-media vetting. More lawsuits against the Trump administration. But first ...

WHAT TO WATCH FOR AT AIEA

Last year's mood: shellshocked. What will be the tenor of the upcoming annual conference of the Association of International Education Administrators?

That's one of the questions I've got leading up to the meeting of global-education leaders next week in Washington, D.C. Here's what's also on my mind:

What will turnout be like? When campus budgets are tight, travel, especially to conferences, can be reduced. And I've had several people from overseas tell me they're thinking twice about coming to the United States because of social-media vetting of foreign visitors and the broader political climate.

That said, AIEA members tend to work at institutions able and willing to support international-office infrastructure, and such meetings are a rare opportunity to trade notes with peers grappling with similar issues. A survey of academic and professional associations by [Science](#) found that only a handful saw big drops in attendance at U.S.-based meetings in 2025.

Can international education shed its defensive posture? Foreign students and the colleges that support them have absorbed policy blows in the past year. In fact, the first day of the field's last major national conference coincided with an announcement by the U.S. Department of State that it was [suspending student-visa appointments](#), a pause that lasted nearly a month.

Not to spout aphorisms, but sometimes the best defense is a good offense. Will there be discussion of the affirmative case for global education, not just bracing for more rule changes and executive orders? An annual meeting seems like an appropriate venue, given the increasingly prominent public role assumed by associations like AIEA at a time when individual colleges feel politically vulnerable.

Will the focus extend beyond the international office to the college as a whole?

Certainly, there are many issues particular to the field, and a number of government actions of the past year have been squarely aimed at international education. But the sector has also been buffeted by broader attacks on higher education. Will there be space to think about the spillover effects of higher-education policy changes, particularly the implications of the crackdown on diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and threats to research?

What questions are you asking ahead of AIEA? And are there don't-miss sessions I ought to attend? Email me at karin.fischer@chronicle.com.

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CONNECT WITH LATITUDES AT AIEA

Speaking of AIEA, you can catch me at a few conference sessions next week:

- Bring those big questions to **Real Talk About the State of International Education**, a roundtable I'll be hosting with Kara Godwin of Pomona College, on Wednesday, February 18, at 9:15 a.m. We mean for this to be a forum for candid conversation about the most timely and pressing issues facing international education.
- Also on Wednesday, at 10:30 a.m., I'll be part of a panel, **Universities as Engines of American Competitiveness: Advancing Global at the Local Level**. My co-presenters, Kiki Caruson of the University of South Florida and Barbara Stephenson of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, will share examples from their own institutions of working with state and local officials on international engagement.
- Finally, I am the moderator for the afternoon plenary, **Leading the Way in Volatile Times**, at 3:45 p.m. on Wednesday. I'll be joined by a group of global thinkers to discuss what comes next for international education and the role of educators in leading change.

THE SILENCING OF STUDENT-VISA HOLDERS

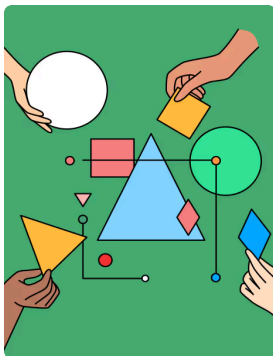
“Free speech risks becoming a right defined not by principle but by immigration status.”

— Maëline Eray, an international student at Columbia University

Social-media vetting by the State Department can lead international students to self-censor out of fear, Eray writes in a [Chronicle essay](#). Because the U.S. government has never released guidelines about what it considers “concerning” or “hostile,” she argues that many students overcomply by wiping their digital histories and carefully considering what they say, both online and in the classroom.

Student-visa applicants were the first group to be subject to the screenings, starting last summer.

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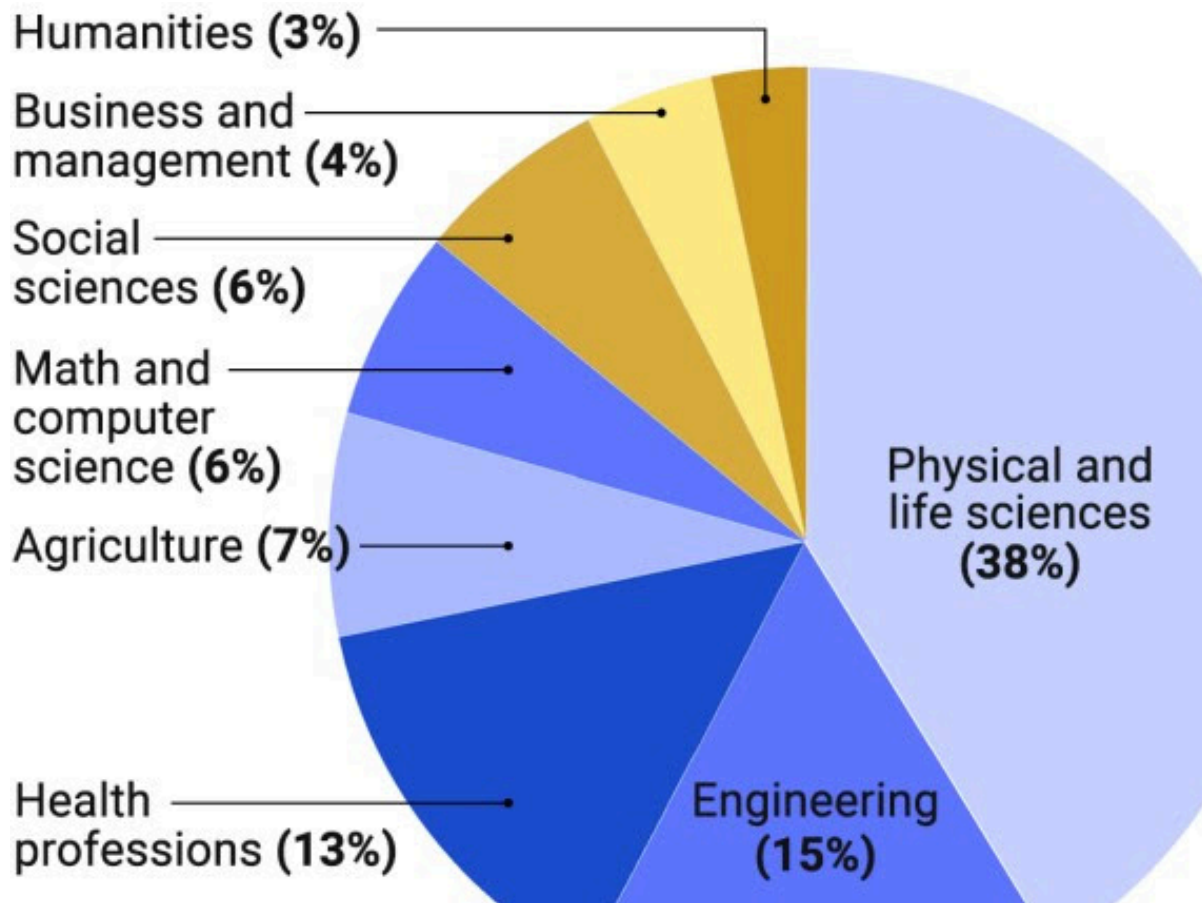


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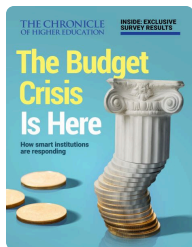
VISITING RESEARCHERS OVERWHELMINGLY FOCUS ON STEM

More than three-quarters of the international scholars that come to the United States for short-term research or teaching are focused on STEM fields, according to [data](#) released by the Institute of International Education.



Physical and life sciences were the most common disciplines among nonimmigrant visa holders, followed by engineering. The total number of visiting scholars increased by 4 percent in the 2024 academic year but has not fully rebounded to pre-pandemic levels.

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Colleges find themselves in budgetary turmoil. How can they respond? [Order this report](#) to learn how innovative institutions are adapting to a new financial reality and finding ways to thrive despite headwinds.

AROUND THE GLOBE

An immigration court dropped a [case](#) against a Tufts University graduate student who was detained and threatened with deportation over an article in the campus newspaper critical of support for Israel.

The Trump administration said it would not issue a [student visa](#) to a Babson College student it mistakenly deported last fall.

The American Association of University Professors is [challenging](#) the creation of a “gold card” visa program, saying that the plan to award visas to wealthy immigrants rather than based on talent is counter to federal law.

A union that represents employees at Minnesota’s public colleges is among the plaintiffs in a [lawsuit](#) seeking to block immigration enforcement on campuses.

Administrators at the University of New Haven are blaming an “[international cliff](#)” for falling enrollments that will prompt deep budget cuts.

India’s government plans to fund the development of [five university clusters](#) to jump-start research innovation, collaboration between institutions, and links with industry partners.

Students in Hong Kong have disbanded a longstanding [pro-democracy group](#), citing “increasingly severe pressures.”

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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