
Latitudes: Congress restores international-ed funding

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Latitudes



By *Karin Fischer*

In this week's Latitudes: A new interagency partnership to monitor foreign-funds reporting. Pakistan requires AI courses. Odds and ends from AIEA. But first ...

A TURNAROUND?

Congress has restored funding for international-education and foreign-language programs that had been slashed by the Trump administration and moved to block the executive branch from making unilateral cuts to spending.

Guardrails included in a State Department appropriations bill passed earlier this month require administration officials to update Congress on the disbursement of

allocated funds and to notify lawmakers of “any substantive modifications” to existing programs. The language is intended to prevent a repeat of the administration’s hold on already-approved funding for two dozen academic- and cultural-exchange programs last summer, an effective veto of spending with which budget officials disagree.

In an email to *The Chronicle*, Mark Overmann, executive director at the Alliance for International Exchange, called the language “unprecedented,” and “a clear and forceful reaction to the Office of Management and Budget’s (OMB) efforts last year to prevent congressionally authorized funds from being spent.” In addition, the bill includes a list of earmarked programs that the State Department is required to fund, including some that were blocked last year, “a direct statement saying, ‘We expect you to fund those programs that were held last year.’”

Lawmakers also reversed the [elimination](#) of funding for critical and less commonly taught languages, area studies, and global-business education. The programs — which the Trump administration has said “don’t advance American interests or values” — were previously run by the U.S. Department of Education and will now be overseen by the Department of State.

Support from Congress was welcome news in a year when international education, and higher education in general, often found itself on its back foot. “It’s clear Congress wants to see these programs continue,” said Sarah Spreitzer, vice president for government relations at the American Council on Education.

Although appropriations for the 2026 fiscal year were lower than in the previous budget, deep cuts were averted. Funding for educational and cultural exchanges fell from \$741 million to \$667 million, far less than the 93-percent reduction originally proposed by President Trump. Language and area-studies programs, previously administered by the Education Department, received \$80.6 million, down from \$85.7 million.

Still, the renewal of funding doesn’t undo the impact of the past year’s uncertainty, including delays of travel and research, campus-program cuts, and layoffs. Funding approved in 2025 has still not been released by the White House budget office, Overmann said. And Spreitzer said administration officials will have the latitude to change program priorities.

In addition to the increased oversight of spending, lawmakers also required the Education Department to regularly brief Congress on plans to shift management of many of its programs to other federal agencies.

Transferring some of the department's core functions to other parts of the government is seen as part of an effort to dismantle the cabinet agency. On Monday, the administration publicized two new interagency agreements, including one with the State Department to jointly manage the tracking of foreign gifts and contracts to American colleges.

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NEW PARTNERSHIP TO MONITOR FOREIGN FUNDS

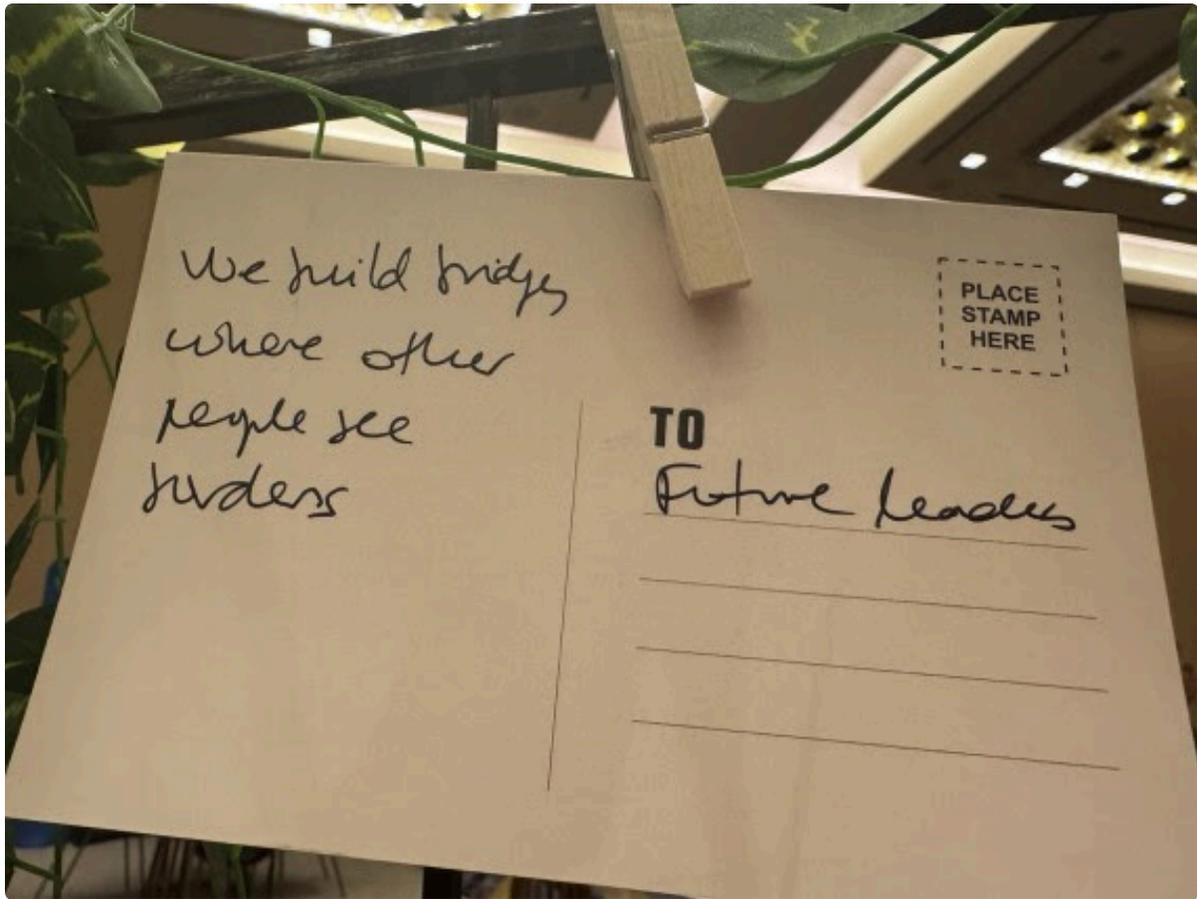
The collaboration with the State Department will “improve the accuracy and transparency” of reporting on foreign funds to American colleges, the Education Department said in a [news release](#).

The State Department will use its national-security expertise to review colleges' compliance and identify potential threats based on the data. It's one of nine such arrangements, including an earlier agreement by the State Department to take over administration of other international-education programming, including the [Fulbright-Hays program](#).

Federal-disclosure requirements have been on the books since 1986, although critics at times have dinged both colleges' compliance and Education Department enforcement.

A new dashboard to track foreign funding has detractors: An “overpromised, contextless mess,” Ryan M. Allen, an associate professor at Soka University of America, wrote in a [blog post](#). My own analysis of the public database is [here](#).

A STRATEGY FOR INTERNATIONAL ED: HOPE



International educators should embrace hope, not optimism, said Chris R. Glass, a professor of educational leadership and higher education at Boston College.

Optimism is wishful thinking, Glass said during a plenary panel at last week's conference of the Association of International Education Administrators. Hope is about confronting hard truths, marshaling data, and looking for opportunities rather than lamenting disruption, he said. Hope "comes from looking more closely than anyone else at evidence that reveals not just what is breaking but what is becoming possible."

Glass was part of an engaging discussion I moderated on where international education goes from here. Glass and his fellow panelists — Lynn Pasquerella, president of the American Association of Colleges and Universities, and Ben Webb, executive director for the Americas at QS Quacquarelli Symonds — gave me a lot to think about, as did the attendees I spoke with during the meeting.

All this conferencing seeded many ideas for future coverage. For now, here are a few more observations from my notebook:

Steal that metaphor: Jessica Sandberg, vice president for external affairs at IDP Education, likened the environment for international education to a "crisis sandwich":

an unfriendly administration followed by a global pandemic and the return of an unfriendly administration.

Not a typo: The final event on Wednesday's schedule: a rock concert. Paulo Zagalo-Melo, AIEA's outgoing president and an extracurricular bassist, played a gig with his aptly named band, Time Zones, as conferencegoers fanboyed and girdled. Their Modern English cover wasn't bad at all.

Messages for the future: New this year, organizers set up a reflection space in the exhibit hall where attendees could jot down their thoughts about the challenges for international education, support for colleagues, or hopes for the field. Two postcards (it's an *international* conference) addressed to future leaders jumped out at me: "We build bridges where others see borders," one urged. The other said simply, "This too shall pass."

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AROUND THE GLOBE

Lawmakers in several states have proposed [bills](#) that would limit the amount of financial aid public colleges can provide to international and undocumented students.

A cap on the time that international graduate students and postdoctoral researchers can spend at the National Institute of Standards and Technology could [disrupt](#) research at the federal lab and prevent foreign doctoral students from completing their Ph.D. work there.

Universities in Pakistan will have to offer a required course in [artificial intelligence](#) to all students by this fall.

Three Japanese institutions will be permitted to accept international students above their [enrollment caps](#) as part of an effort to attract global talent.

American colleges overseas and in U.S. territories have to comply with federal laws and accreditation standards but have fewer resources and little input into the policies that govern them, a former president of Northern Marianas College [writes](#) in *The Chronicle*.

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