

# Latitudes: Is the sky falling for international enrollment?

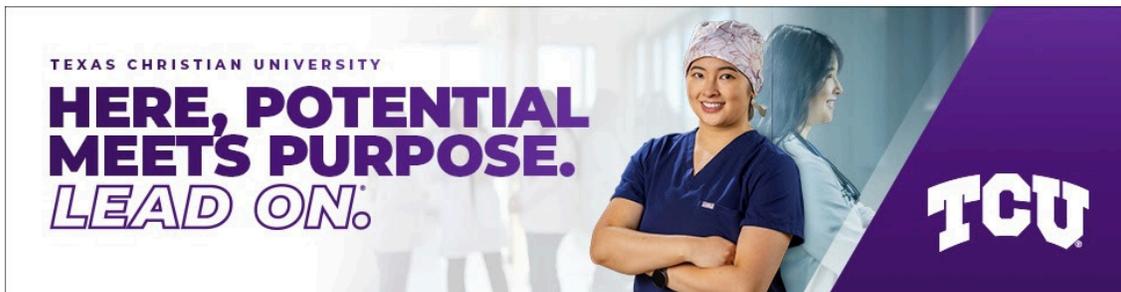
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## Latitudes



By *Karin Fischer*

**In this week's Latitudes:** Another state takes on colleges' foreign hiring. Calls for more oversight of Chinese student groups. A new Homeland Security secretary. But first ...

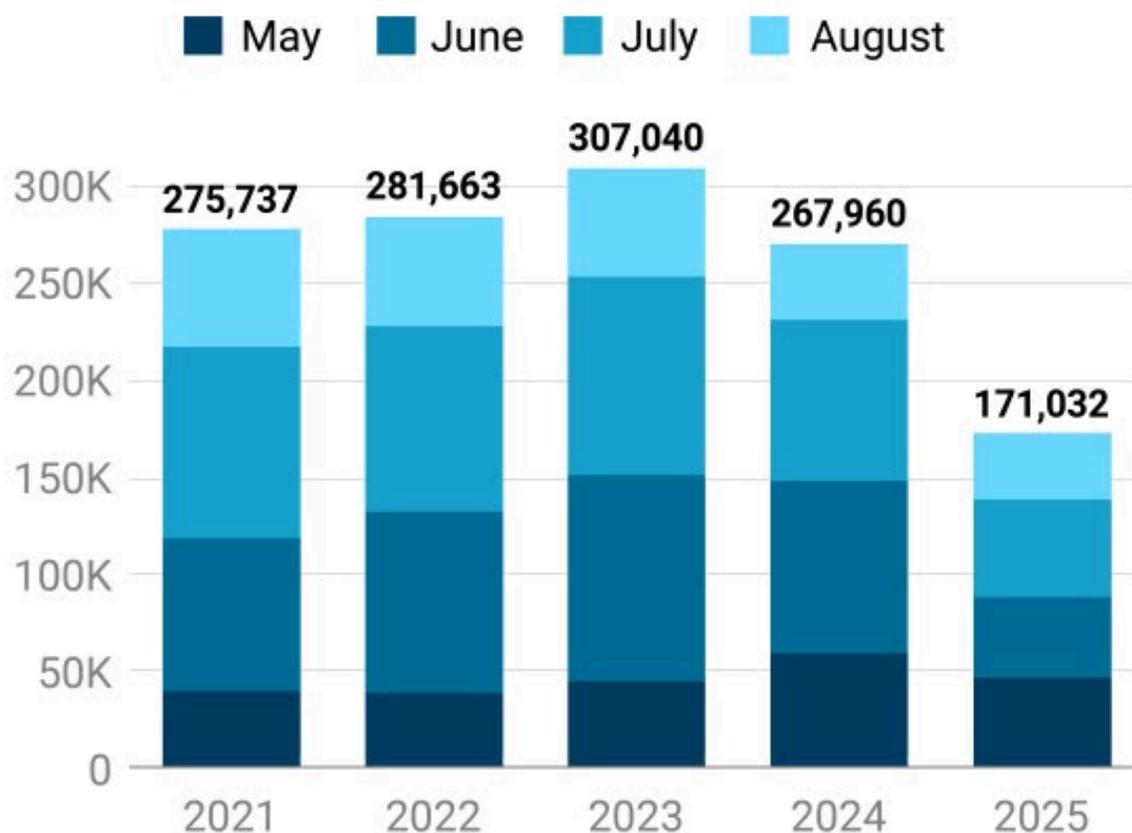
### FOREIGN ENROLLMENTS PLUNGE

In the end, NAFSA: Association of International Educators has the dubious distinction of being right.

In July, the organization released an [analysis](#), conducted with the research firm JB International, that warned that the number of new international students coming to the United States could fall by 30 to 40 percent if visa backlogs were not resolved. Now, after months of delays, we have the U.S. Department of State [data](#) on visa issuances during the critical summer months of May to August 2025.

The actual decline in new foreign students: 36 percent.

Only once have incoming overseas enrollments contracted as much or more — during the Covid pandemic.



This time, the precipitating event was the decision by the State Department to shut down the scheduling of student-visa interviews for nearly all of June — one of the busiest months for student applications.

The State Department publishes issuance totals only, making it difficult to determine the role of different factors, including a slowdown in applications and an uptick in visa denials. But the decision to stop new interviews, which the department said was needed to put social-media vetting in place, was almost certainly not the only cause.

Visa numbers were down, by 14 percent, in the months leading up to interview freeze, suggesting a slide had already begun. The pause had the effect, in the words

of Chris R. Glass, a professor of educational leadership and higher education at Boston College, of turning a bad situation “catastrophic.”

Even after the stoppage was lifted, the consular apparatus was slow to gear back up. Visa issuances in July and August were down more than 30 percent from the prior year. (The State Department has not released data for the fall months.)

Another possible reason for the laggardly recovery: Social-media screening may have caused denials to rise.

Here are a few other takeaways ...

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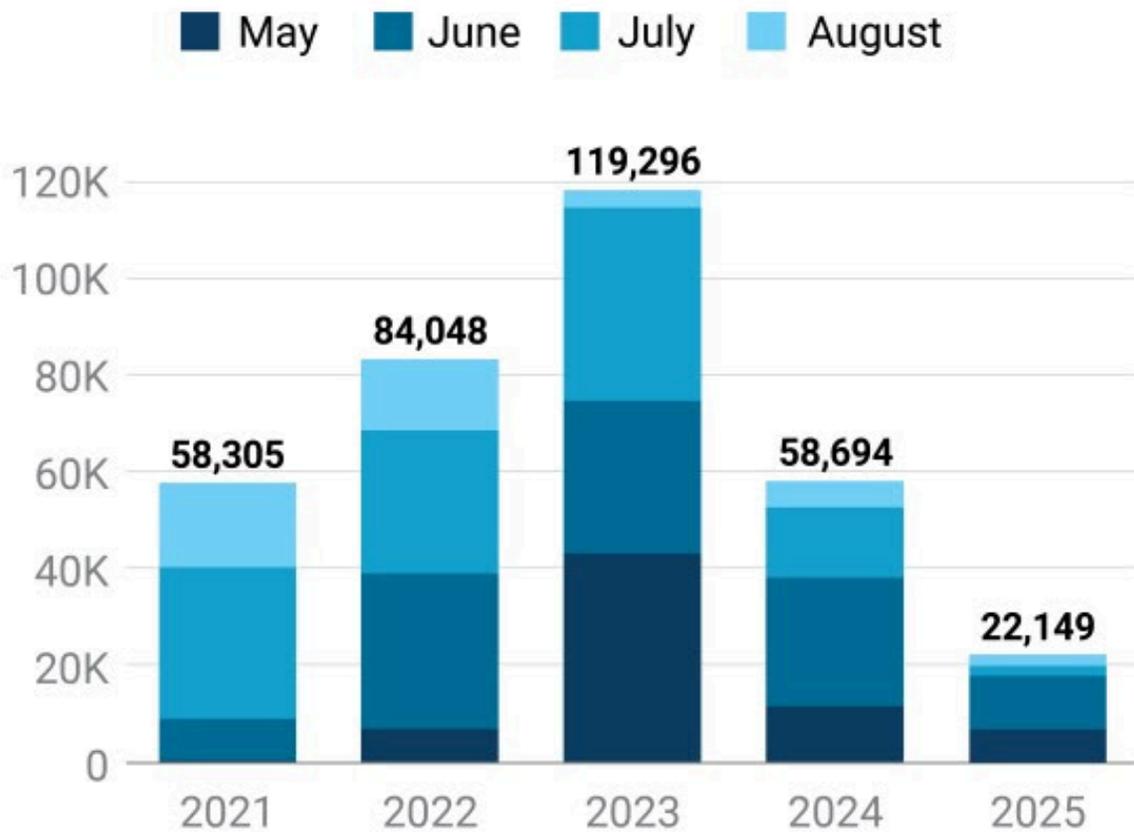


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## COUNTRIES WITH GREATEST GROWTH SAW BIGGEST DROPS

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Visa issuances in India, the post-pandemic engine of international-enrollment growth, plummeted by 62 percent, as shown in the chart below. Nepal and Nigeria saw even steeper drops.



All had been seen as potential offsets to a slowdown in Chinese students.

**Expect additional enrollment challenges.** Nigeria is among countries included in an expanded travel ban ordered by President Trump — with student and academic-exchange visa holders specifically barred from entering the United States.

Other possible enrollment hurdles include a proposed rule to put a time limit on student visas and anticipated reforms to a federal program that allows recent foreign graduates to work here for up to three years. And the aftereffects of the past year’s disruptions could become baked in, influencing prospective students’ perceptions of American study.

<u>Country</u>	<u>Change, 2024 to 2025</u>	<u>Percent change, 2024 to 2025</u>
 India	-36,545	-62.3%
 China	-21,041	-34.5%
 Nepal	-4,611	-71.7%
 Vietnam	-3,237	-25.1%
 Ghana	-2,312	-34.2%
 South Korea	-2,059	-20.7%
 Nigeria	-1,941	-69.9%
 Japan	-1,722	-34.4%
 Bangladesh	-1,286	-37.5%
 Pakistan	-1,059	-38.4%

**The real impact might not be felt for another year or two.** The post-pandemic surge is still working its way through colleges, meaning that larger previous cohorts of students are masking the impact of declines in new students, keeping overall international enrollments stable. For now.

**Read more:** I broke the news — and break down the data — in this *Chronicle* [article](#).

## ANOTHER STATE TAKES AIM AT H-1B HIRING

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Iowa is the latest state to try to restrict colleges' use of H-1B skilled-worker visas, which institutions have typically used to hire professors and researchers with specialized expertise. The Iowa House approved legislation last week that would prevent public colleges [from hiring](#) new workers from “foreign adversary” countries, including China, Russia, and Iran.

Florida and Texas have also put [moratoriums](#) on H-1B hiring, although those states' temporary pauses apply to all new international hires, not just those from certain countries.

*Chronicle* reporters are tracking policy developments at the state level, including those that affect international education. Follow our [state live updates page](#).

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## CONGRESS WANTS MORE OVERSIGHT OF CHINESE-STUDENT GROUPS

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Several congressional committee chairmen are asking the U.S. State Department to designate the Chinese Students and Scholars Association as a “foreign mission” of the Chinese government. The designation would require American government approval of all public events as well as prior notification of all meetings between chapters and local governments and universities.

“These nominally student-led groups on U.S. college campuses are receiving direction and funding from China while also engaging in harmful and disruptive activities that chill free expression, undermine academic freedom, and raise serious national security concerns,” the Republican House members [wrote](#) in a letter to Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

There have been allegations that Chinese-student groups have coordinated with embassy officials to disrupt campus speakers whose views are critical of Chinese government policies, raising concerns about the reach of [transnational repression](#) at American colleges.

At the same time, it's unclear how notification requirements would work for campus-based student groups that have a presence at a large number of American institutions and routinely hold on-campus events.

The signatories include lawmakers who lead committees on education and foreign affairs as well as a select committee on China.

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## AROUND THE GLOBE

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**President Trump's pick to lead** the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Sen. Markwayne Mullin, an Oklahoma Republican, is a [supporter](#) of the administration's immigration policies but has little record on issues specific to international students. Trump removed Kristi Noem, who had been criticized for her handling of immigration raids and emergency-response funds.

**A bill introduced** in California would allow professors at community colleges to keep teaching if they are [deported](#) or prevented from reentering the United States.

**Some Serbian academics have** been [fired](#) because of their support of pro-democracy student demonstrators.

**The Russian military has** stepped up a campus-based [recruitment campaign](#) aimed at students.

**Turkey seeks** to become a [higher-education hub](#) for Muslim students from around the globe.

**China is reforming** vocational education to train students in [artificial intelligence](#) and other emerging fields.

**In last week's newsletter**, I should have clarified that provisions in federal student financial-aid law that forbid incentive compensation apply only to the recruitment of American students and do not apply to international students.

Thanks for reading. I always welcome your feedback and ideas for future reporting, so drop me a line at [karin.fischer@chronicle.com](mailto: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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